Lexicon PCM Native Bundle

The sounds that used to command such a premium in hardware are now available as a reverb plug-in bundle. GEORGE SHILLING dips into the presets and fiddles around a bit.

Lexicon's flagship hardware reverb units are deservedly revered, with their high price justified by the quality of their effects. I remember assisting on a session in 1985 when the producer was absolutely beside himself with excitement at the idea of being able to use a rented 224X that had been left behind by the previous session. Examples of this model, and its successors the 480L and 960L, are still in daily use and the design principles and algorithms have filtered down into many lower-priced units, such as the current PCM96.

Especially since the advent of convolution plug-ins, more users have turned to DAW-based reverb. Lexicon had a stab at a plug-in some years back with the now obsolete Lexiverb, but the company has returned to the plug-in market to recreate what appears to be essentially the PCM96 in software form.

The bundle comprises seven separate plug-ins, each dedicated to a particular basic algorithm. The plug-ins are iLok authorised and run as RTAS, AU or VST, and will run on Mac OSX 10.4.10 or later and Pro Tools 7.3 onwards. Windows XP onwards is also supported.

The plug-in window is similar for each of the algorithms, comprising a bank of 'faders' similar to those found on a LARC remote, with graphic displays and master Level and Filter controls arranged above.

On initial installation I dialled up a Room preset for drums on the mix I was doing, easily tweaked the reverb time with the fader and it sat there quite happily for the remainder of the mix — I barely gave it a second thought, and it sounded lovely! However, hoping to give it a big test to nestle alongside AIR Lyndhurst's natural reverb on a hugely complex classical recording, I dialled up a longer Concert Hall setting while compiling vocals and heard spiky clicks and pops, which went when I swapped it out for something else. I tried again when mixing but strangely, I found the reverb tails oddly clangy and metallic. I couldn't quickly find something that worked and abandoned the test for that mix. Returning later, I found an updated version of the plug-in to download that seemed to cure the problems, and I settled in for some enjoyable familiarisation time. With the updated version, I thankfully couldn't seem to replicate the mysterious clang I'd heard previously.

The seven plug-ins are Chamber, Concert Hall, Hall, Plate, Random Hall, Room and Vintage Plate. At the top of each plug-in are two drop-down menus. Category provides between three and five different folders or, in the case of the Room plug-in, there are eight. These often define the basic size, so you might get Small, Medium and Large in each case, plus other variants. Then alongside this is a menu of Presets. There are plenty of these within each Category, although very often I felt there could be more clues in their names as to what to expect. Small Live Room 1 is fine, but when there are also Small Live Rooms 2 to 8, you have to audition each one to find out that some are smaller or liver than others, and they don't seem to be in any particular order (*You're getting soft George. Ed*). The designer of some Room presets has actually had a bit of fun with this, with examples like At The Altar, Dracula's Tomb, Off Broadway and Restrooms 1-3 *(In decreasing order of size? Ed)*. It is also within the Room plug-in where you find some very smooth Reverse reverb effect settings.

The row of nine faders that you are presented with when you dial up a preset are essentially a 'best of', bringing the most important parameters to the fore for quick tweaks. In line with hardware units this is referred to as the Soft Row. These vary depending on the algorithm, but often include settings such as Predelay, Reverb Time, several Frequency response settings, Diffusion, Tail Width, Early reflections level and Mix. Changing which parameters appear in the row is achieved from drop down menus. Clicking Edit at the bottom reveals further bank selection buttons where enormously detailed parameters can be fiddled with. It's here that you can find various settings such as Spin, Wander, Tap Slope and Crossover points for the different frequency bands. The 480L's familiar Shape and Spread settings are present for some algorithms. If you want to turn up the Right Eko Feedback 2 Level setting, here is your opportunity, and useful Tool Tips are available to help explain such parameters.

I must confess I wasn't always convinced of the Lexicon sound within pop and rock music mixing for every mix. It sometimes has a hint of the metallic or bathroom about it, and can be overly-dense — a bit 80s. However, very often, it works beautifully in the mix, and the algorithms here certainly seem to live up to the name. BPM-related settings lock to the session settings without any fiddling, although their settings change if you put them in Absolute (time) mode. The new Hall algorithm is smooth, with less obvious density than Random Hall, but you can still hear the chorusing on the tail that gives the reverb that trademark Lexicon richness. Concert Hall settings with maximum Diffusion can oddly become a tiny bit whistly on the tail, but lowering that setting seems to cure that problem. Plate sounds great for vocals, and glorious in a suitable track, and it is especially satisfying to mix a big vocal ballad using this.

As well as clear input and output level metering, a real-time display can show multiband levels in a 3D mode, a 2D spectrum analyser display, or a moving level display in the style of a waveform. To the right are controls for level and filtering of the early reflection and tail outputs, with a graphic display of these. Variations of Lo-Pass, Hi-Pass, Notch and Bandpass can all be selected and tweaked separately.

Generally, the CPU usage was perfectly tolerable although inexplicably one instance of the City Street or City Sidewalk settings in the Room's Exteriors category both spiked off the RTAS usage meter's scale on my 8-core Intel Mac with no other RTAS plug-ins when using the Mono in, Stereo out version. It showed no problem with the stereo version. And saving Presets using the Pro Tools library menus caused an odd graphical bug. There is, however, a proprietary system for storing presets and all parameters appear to be automatable.

If I have one criticism, it would be the price. At £1,173.78 (inc. VAT) I would really want to know that this will still be working when I'm on Logic or Pro Tools versions 10, 11 or 12, or at least have a promise of an upgrade path at reasonable cost. It's cheaper to buy a used PCM91, and after all, that 224X still sounds just as good as it did 25 years ago. But this collection of plug-ins is certainly worthy of the Lexicon name, and if you are a fan of their boxes you'll certainly enjoy the luscious sound of these.

PROS Plug-ins sound as good as Lexicon hardware; interface feels familiar.

CONS Expensive; one or two bugs; it's a nuisance switching plug-ins for different algorithms.

EXTRAS The LXP Native Reverb Plug-In Bundle is a collection of Lexicon's four most popular reverbs available in an efficient, multi-platform native version.

Contact

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