



McDSP 6030 Ultimate Compressor

Part of the selection of goodies introduced with McDSP's recent V5 supertweak, this compressor plug-in offers something for everyone and more than most. **GEORGE SHILLING** feels curiously unlimited...

This all-new plug-in (US\$449 TDM, \$249 Native) has been launched alongside the V5 spruce-up of the Classic Pack, and is currently available for OSX 10.5 and 10.6 in Pro Tools HD and Native version, along with Audio Units for Intel Macs (not Power PC). Windows versions will be along later in the year. This isn't intended to replace the Compressor Bank plug-in, but as with the other Classic Pack plug-ins, that collection has been streamlined, with the CB4 version abolished.

The 6030 window comprises three sections in a design style that seems to be inspired by colourful real-world 500 Series modules. On the left column is a series of cryptically named buttons that select different compressor algorithms. As each one is selected, a wholly different interface window appears on the right pane with compression controls and gain reduction metering, with various garish colour schemes and styles emulating some obvious and some less obvious hardware originals, along with some of McDSP's own creations. The centre panel stays constant, displaying meters for In and Out levels, an Output make-up gain knob with up to 48dBs of gain, and Key select and Listen buttons for the use of a sidechain signal.

At the top of the list are the more transparent-sounding and softer compressors, and at the bottom are the more aggressive ones. Unlike the approach of many other plug-in developers, McDSP has not slavishly copied hardware units, but instead taken their characteristics and tweaked them in ways the company felt appropriate.

The U670 is modelled after a Fairchild 670, but McDSP has modified the attack ballistics to have a little more 'grab' compared to the modelled unit. Instead of the six preset time constants, there is a continuously variable knob labelled simply on a scale from 0 to 10 — fast to slow. The only other control is a similarly scaled Threshold knob, and there's a Fairchild-style gain reduction meter. It sounds pretty smooth, as do some of the other models, lacking a bit of the graininess you sometimes experience with original Fairchilds. I'd have liked a slightly faster release than the range covers, another small problem I found with some other models. It sounds big and smooth, if a little less characterful and crunchy than the UAD Fairchild, but imparts pleasant warmth and glue to the sound.

Moo Tube is a thinly disguised graphical representation of a Manley Vari-Mu, the controls

comprising Threshold, Attack and Recovery. It rides the curves beautifully, but again, doesn't have quite as much grain as I recall on the Manley, and like the U670 won't release quickly enough for my taste [*Not everyone will agree. Ed*]. It's a little less 'limiter' sounding than the U670, with even huge gain reductions sounding relatively invisible once the gain is made up. But it sounds pretty weighty on drums, if you don't mind the sometimes audible slow pumping.

The iComp is an all-original McDSP invention that worked remarkably well on drums despite the paucity of control. This bright blue module simply provides uncalibrated Threshold and Ratio knobs, with auto attack and release characteristics. It is fairly transparent, and the auto times work extremely well across a dynamic mix to even things out smoothly.

The Opto-C and Opto-L modules are optical style compressor and limiter modules, the names suggesting they are modelled on the two modes of either LA-2A or LA-3A hardware. These are both very good, even the 'L' version working fairly invisibly to tame bass in a very pleasing manner, and making male vocals glow nicely, compared to the darker tones of the U670.

The British C is modelled after the Neve 33609 or 2254E compressors and is clean, rounded and warm even when set fast, just like a real one. I generally prefer Neves on a very low ratio and this one is no exception, but it seems a fairly close approximation and is great for injecting a bit of smooth warmth into an acoustic piano or floating across a mix to smooth it. It has a comprehensive selection of controls.

The Over EZ is modelled on the dbx 165 and has an aggressive, slightly rubbery VCA type of sound, but is immensely flexible with the Comp control covering the ratio from 1:1 all the way up to infinity, along with wide-ranging Attack and Release controls.

The SST '76 is a solid state compressor, seemingly based on the 1176, but with a Threshold knob rather than a fixed threshold with input knob. Unlike an 1176, the Ratio is continuously variable from 2:1 to 20:1, and Attack and Release knobs, although scaled from 1-7, actually work the opposite way round to an 1176 so that 1 is fast and 7 is slow. This isn't as illogical as it seems as in this configuration they match similar controls on other modules within the 6030. This sounds really good, with the smooth thrusting compression of the 1176 nicely emulated. There's no all-buttons-in mode, but although much-hyped, it's not something I use often.

The FRG 444 is referred to by McDSP as The Frog. This is a fairly feisty compressor that goes into some nice crunchy distortion when pushed hard. It has similar controls to the SST '76, and if the Release would go a tiny bit faster then it wouldn't be far off the missing all-buttons-in mode of the previous module. But if it's distortion you want, then the D357 includes a variable Crush control — the button last seen on the SSL-based Alan Smart C2 — but this also possibly takes inspiration from the Distressor. It certainly crunches when pushed, sounding great on drums and drum ambience for a big bashy sound.

Flipping between modules — where there are corresponding controls — then the settings are broadly retained between the different models, although, of course, the same threshold setting will produce more compression on the Opto-L as compared with the Opto-C, for example. But the central settings stay the same, so it's pretty easy to make quick comparisons.

There is a very useful variety of compressors available here, and they're easy to set with a maximum of four knobs (plus output gain) to contend with, and good metering. I like the approach of keeping things simple, it makes for faster working. But talking of fast, I'd have liked another few millimetres of rotation to the left of some of the Release knobs, which don't always go fast enough for me. And perhaps some of the tonal effects are too subtle — it's all fairly smooth. I would also have liked a numerical readout of the Output level knob value, as it is pretty coarse (with a range of 48dB), and it can be difficult to make small adjustments. The workaround for critical tweaks is to automate the control and use Pro Tools' automation display. But these quibbles aside the sound is smooth and classy throughout all algorithms, DSP usage is efficient, latency is incredibly tiny (just a 3 samples), and for rapid gratification when setting up during recording or for the mix, the 6030 is indeed perhaps the Ultimate Compressor. ■

PROS

A big variety of compressor algorithms in one handy plug-in; smooth sound; ultra-low latency; fun interface design.

CONS

No VST versions; no ownership transfer allowed; no phase reverse button.

Contact

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