

McDSP Chrome Tone

The plug-in revolution has spread inevitably towards the realm of the guitar processor with many choices now available. McDSP has chosen an unusual and highly flexible approach to the task. Guitar God **GEORGE SHILLING** straps on an axe and pulls on the spandex.



LIKE SOME OTHER MCDSP plug-ins, Chrome Tone comprises a suite of several related modules for Pro Tools, current versions of which are for Mac OSX only. There are four main components, which may be used separately or all together in Stack mode, and in mono or stereo versions for TDM and AudioSuite. The latest version works as RTAS also and therefore on LE systems.

Chrome Tone models guitar amplifiers and enhanced pedal effects. The four components are Wah, Tremolo, Amp and Chorus, and each of these is graphically and processing-wise divided into several sections. Stack mode presents all four intertwined logically together, with quick access to each effect's page, and all individual bypasses available from any page.

The Amp page comprises Distortion, a four-knob (but no Range control) Noise Gate, an excellent 3-band EQ, Low Cut Filter, flexible Compression, and an output section with selection for Direct Mode or four different Cabinets with Close or Room miking, a rich Spring Reverb, Phase Switch and Out Level. There is a choice of five distortion modes, each one more distorting than its predecessor, plus a Band-Pass mode. In terms of emulative modelling this is good but not as specific as on rivals Amp Farm or Amplitude; a wide range of different characters is achievable, although the different cabinets seem to be different EQs, rather than sounding like physically different cabs.

The three effects plug-ins share a number of similar features. Unique controls to each are described first: Wah provides a huge flip menu of Wah filter types, plus a selection of 'Phasor' types. There are knobs for Frequency, Q and Range. Tremolo includes Mix and

Range knobs, while Chorus provides a choice of Flange and two Chorus types, and in Stack mode an additional Tape Delay mode, all modes using Delay, Feedback, Mix and Range knobs.

All three 'effect' plug-ins can be manipulated with their own Dynamic modulation section, which can use the main signal, a sidechain input, or MIDI note, velocity or continuous controller. Additionally they each feature an Auto (LFO) modulation panel, with a range of different shapes and a knob to blend between two chosen shapes, and a method of syncing to MIDI beat clock using the Pro Tools MIDI functions. These modulation possibilities are where Chrome Tone particularly appeals — the range of control options is unique.

The Dynamic section can modulate the Auto LFO's Shape, Rate or Depth, and the MIDI control is enormous fun — sending a MIDI hi-hat part with dynamic velocities to control the Chorus modulation provides some very unusual sounds, often something akin to a wobbly analogue tape machine, as if someone is fingering the tape. In the Auto section there is a hidden (why?) slider labelled Groove that, despite its name, is a time-offset control for the MIDI beat clock control. A flip-menu provides a large number of different note-values for various rhythmic possibilities. The Chorus sounds gorgeous, and the Wah's Phasor settings can be absolutely ripping. Set off by MIDI timings, some bizarre yet useable rhythmic patterns can be created with any of these three effects.

Inserted across an aux input, you can, of course, record through these effects as if the Died guitarist really were using a miked amp with pedals. Latency is

astonishingly low and the presets for each configuration get you started, although some tweaking will often provide more convincing and exciting sounds. But this is near-instant gratification.

However, there are operational niggles. On my LE installation, the Stack and Wah failed to appear in the AudioSuite menu, and there were no mono-to-stereo versions provided whatsoever, so I had to insert another bypassed mono-to-stereo plug-in above to enable use of the stereo versions of Chrome Tone — and there are some great mono-to-stereo effects achievable when doing this, such as Rhodes-style Tremolo, and wide chorusing. All three effects include a fantastic panning Dynamic Split mode and a useful Spread knob in the Auto section. In Stack mode it is not possible to load presets created for the individual plug-ins, despite controls being identical. When loading presets, these are in subfolders in the same parent folder; irritatingly, you must first select the correct plug-in type on the way to choosing the preset.

And why are the Factory Default settings just a blank canvas, with a thin amp tone and no discernable wah, tremolo, distortion or chorus provided initially? Compared to the excellent FilterBank, Chrome Tone's graphics, while rather stylish, are a little fussy and impractical. Some of the buttons are tiny, requiring mouse clicks in a screen area of only a few millimetres — very fiddly indeed. However, most of these criticisms are surely update-fixable, and McDSP has not been shy of providing bug-fixes previously. And I love the sounds achievable with Chrome Tone.

Overall, the effects are of very high quality. The Chorus, Tremolo and Wah sounding rich, close in quality and potentially more unusual than examples of the old-fashioned 'real thing'. They are especially inspiring when used with the MIDI-controlled modulations, which is something you can't so easily do with your old pedal effects. Sure, the Amp modelling is a poor relation to a real guitar amp set-up, but this is a useful manipulation tool to have in the arsenal, even if you already have Amp Farm or Amplitude. ■

PROS

Convenient Amp modelling; flexible and fun-sounding effects; comprehensive modulation options; exceptionally low latency.

CONS

Can't load individual effect presets into Stack; fiddly graphics; more specific amp modelling available elsewhere.

EXTRAS

The popular McDSP Synthesizer One is now also available for OSX RTAS/LE.

Contact

McDSP, US:
Website: www.mcdsp.com
UK, Unity Audio: +44 1440 785843