

Serato Rane Series

Equalisation and dynamic control is the mainstay of DAW functionality and is ably supported by a wide selection of plug-ins that would offer variety and flavour. **GEORGE SHILLING** — who tells us he is by nature a cutter rather than a booster — looks in on a three plugs from a live production background.

WASHINGTON STATE-BASED hardware company Rane have been widely praised for its live sound products since the early 1980s, and has previously co-operated with New Zealand software company Serato on the Scratch Live and MP4 DJ hardware products.

Here they come together again in a rather different way, simulating Rane hardware with software plug-ins. Their development presumably motivated by the introduction of Digidesign's Venue live console, the plugs will run either on Venue or Pro Tools HD, and comprise three products (£446 + VAT each). There's the Graphic EQ, Parametric EQ and Dynamics, although the last of these comprises two distinct plug-in modules, imaginatively named Compressor and Gate but symbolic of a no-nonsense approach. The only vital part of the boxed versions of these is the serial number that enables iLok authorisation. Also included are waffle-free manuals, installer CDs that are identical (all contain every plug-in), and plenty of hollow cardboard box (*More practical than the solid cardboard box type. Ed*).

The Graphic EQ emulates the Rane DEQ 60/60L, providing the traditional 31 bands of graphic EQ. However, the hardware model is anything but traditional; it is in fact digital, although with one knob per function and analogue audio connections only, you might not initially spot that. This model includes Rane's switchable 'Perfect-Q' technology, which uses DSP to eliminate interaction between adjacent bands. This makes the shape of the sliders' arrangement resemble more closely the actual EQ applied, and the hardware unit is highly regarded for its performance in this respect. The plug-in version looks pretty much like a mono version of the stereo hardware unit, albeit with a few small detail differences. On the plug-in, some sliders have been graphically represented as knobs, and as with all these plug-ins there is an area at the bottom for displaying or entering the currently adjusted and adjacent controls' settings.

Rotary controls comprise broad 3-band EQ for general shaping of High, Mid and Low, and Low and High Cut Filters. These two sections feature bypass 'toggles' not apparent on the hardware. The only other difference is a meter toggle for dBFS/dBVU, accompanying the virtual LEDs. The graphics are elegantly rendered, and the window size is large without being excessive — you want to see a graphic EQ properly, after all. I immediately wanted to draw shapes with my mouse, of course, but normally, only one slider can be moved at a time; holding the Shift key enabled drawing to commence, and I soon started enjoying the flexibility of working with so many individual instantly accessible bands.

Because there is no band interaction, the 6dB mode seems very subtle. Flicking to 12dB does the trick, but being by nature a cutter rather than a booster, I quite enjoyed the ability to switch to Cut Only for the full scale of whatever EQ had been set to behave as if I was scooping the bits out, rather than piling on more gain. A line is displayed superimposed on the graphic, showing not only the achieved EQ curve, but also using colour shading to



show varying leading or trailing phase shifts at all frequencies.

The Parametric EQ is modelled on Rane's PEQ 55, again an analogue controlled digital box. There are 10 bands of EQ here, and each band can be switched to high or low shelf, or bell-curve. There is, of course, individual bypass for each band, but also, interestingly, you can link bands together for simultaneous dragging around of bands, and these don't have to be adjacent. Boost/Cut and Frequency can be achieved using axis sliders or by dragging the numbered bands around on the graph, but

bandwidth uses a slider up at the top right. Where most EQs use a Q setting, here there is a Bandwidth slider with the scale going the opposite way. This is a little inconveniently placed, and I had to reference the manual to find out the modifier key to enable editing on the graph. When shelving, the slope shape is fixed.

Other features are similar to the Graphic EQ — tone controls, filters and metering, plus the superimposed EQ/Phase graph. This is a simple and neutral sounding EQ, with a subtlety that means that larger boosts are needed to equate to similar settings on other EQ plugs. There is little doubt that this EQ is achieving the displayed settings, but because it sounds so smooth, you can sometimes find it frustratingly benign in extreme settings. However, with 10 bands and plenty of headroom, it is easy to double-up on frequencies. The graph is clear, and the sheer number of tone controls provides immense flexibility.

The Compressor part of the Dynamics plug-in features a parametric bell-curve EQ band sidechain, and will also operate in Dynamic EQ mode for knocking out particular nasty frequencies or de-essing. A post-compression Peak Limiter is also provided, as is External Keying. The display is extremely comprehensive with an astonishing complement of meters and graphs. The 'Relative Key Level' meter display is particularly useful, with a central yellow Threshold indicator. Compression is controlled by knobs and sliders, all bringing up temporary editable numeric displays at the bottom of the window. This is a smooth sounding compressor, although the Auto timing mode is rather lethargic, perhaps like an old Neve, and tends to be choking for drums. Set manually, the faster settings don't seem quite as fast as the numbers suggest, and even small amounts of compression are generally fairly audible in a dbx 160 kind of way.

The Gate features Drawmer-style High and Low Cut Filters, Key Listen, and Gate, Expand or Ducking modes, with External Keying available. Again, a dynamic graph indicates the gain reduction, along with plenty of meters. In Expand mode, the Depth knob becomes a Ratio control. This is probably the most comprehensive dedicated noise gate plug. It works elegantly and clearly displays all you need to know, although the numeric displays could do with an extra decimal place for the shortest settings. ■

PROS Simple to use; Venue-compatible; clear displays; reliable; smooth sounding.

CONS Low Cut filters could have a higher upper frequency; no RTAS; no AudioSuite.

Contact

SERATO, NEW ZEALAND:
Website: www.serato.com
UK, SCV London: +44 208 418 1470