

Sony Oxford Dynamics and R3 EQ

They've been around for a while but sport impeccable lineage and an individual twist on tonal shaping and gain reduction.

GEORGE SHILLING returns to Oxford.



THE SONY OXFORD R3 EQ and Dynamics plug-ins are directly modelled on the Oxford OXF-R3 console's respective sections, and are available for Pro Tools LE and TDM, as well as for TC Powercore.

The EQ comprises five bands of fully parametric EQ, with top and bottom bands switchable to shelving function, plus high- and low-pass filters. There are four types of EQ available, mysteriously labelled Type 1, Type 2, etc. Everything else about the appearance makes the function fairly obvious, with each band including conventional Cut/Boost, Frequency and Q controls. As soon as the mouse is hovered over a control, the value appears as a 'tooltip' in text form. There is an option for these numeric values to display on all knobs at all times, and with the rather shallow

plot graph, I preferred this, despite the semi-obliviation of the pointers.

Unfortunately there is no way to enter numbers directly. When the plug-in is instantiated, twiddling the knobs does absolutely nothing initially; each band includes an 'In' button that must be clicked first — the default is bypass. In the centre are A and B buttons for storing two different overall EQ setups for comparison, although there was no way I could copy settings from A to B or B to A, even using copy and paste, as that copied the A or B setting too.

An overall level attenuation knob is useful for avoiding clipping when boosting loud signals. Here also is the Type selector, where you can nudge up and down the list before clicking the In button to activate.

The bands have big 20dB ranges, and enormous frequency overlaps. Type 1 is the most clinical, with minimal 'Gain/Q dependency' — this does what it says on the tin, seeming similar in character to Waves Renaissance EQ or McDSP FilterBank.

Type 2 has a similar boost characteristic, but in cut retains constant Q, useful for more precise notching out, particularly when tweaking drums. Type 3 makes the Q narrower at higher cut/boost levels, and so sounds more 'musical', and Type 4 takes this even further, where when increasing gain it's more akin to the Waves Paragraphic plug-ins. Shelf bands use the Q knob to vary the undershoot/overshoot at the turnover frequency, and are unaffected by the Type selected. Filters are variable from 6dB/octave up to

36dB/octave. With more gain/cut available than the competition, and the sheer range of available characteristics, the package is extremely flexible, and sonically excellent, if a little ergonomically lacking.

The Dynamics plug-in includes simultaneous Gate, Expander, Compressor, Limiter, Sidechain EQ and Warmth sections, each with their own dedicated control page and bypass button. The compressor section in particular is comprehensively featured, with five different knee settings where you can lower the onset of compression below the threshold point in steps of 5dB. Another interesting feature is the implementation of a Hold knob, which delays the release part of the compressor effect, enabling some very smooth programme compression.

The Limiter section features similar timing controls that have large ranges — for example, Release goes right down to 0.005S and up to over 3S. These timings can be controlled by three different modes. Normal generates logarithmic timings and the Classic mode is similar but fixes time settings to emulate the dbx 160. There is also a Linear mode that provides a constant rate of gain change, which can generate dynamic sound effects.

The Compressor's Ratio control also boasts enormous range, but sensibly the 2:1 position is half way round. The Compressor is extremely versatile, and in some ways similar to an analogue dbx in its precision. Perhaps slightly bland compared to vintage models, this deficiency is partially addressed by the Warmth section where a variable control adds some pseudo-valve richness and depth which is particularly enjoyable on vocals.

The Limiter is astonishingly good with a built-in look-ahead function that keeps things very well tamed without any unpleasant artefacts. The very effective Gate and Expander sections both include Threshold, Attack, Hold, Release and Range knobs, with the Expander additionally providing a Ratio. The Side-Chain EQ is a powerful 2-band parametric/shelving section that can be switched to the dynamics side chain or even into the main signal path.

An enormous graph shows very clearly the combined theoretical effect of all active sections on the gain curve. This is a fixed display, while virtual LED meters show input and output levels, plus gain reduction separately for each section. These meters are small and could have benefited from a little more resolution. The Dynamics plug-in additionally offers a 16-bit dithering mode for mastering situations — normal audio resolution is 24 bit, of course.

In conclusion, both plug-ins are extremely versatile, thoroughly designed and boast supreme sonic integrity (TDM EQ: UK550 + VAT; TDM Dynamics: UK£550 + VAT). These are Rolls-Royce models, and the downside of their powerful performance and flexibility is that they use slightly more processing power than some of the competition. There are no 'cut-down' options of, say, instantiating just the Compressor section of the Dynamics plug-in, although there are versions of the EQ with fewer bands in the TDM version. It could be argued that the GUI designs of both are a little fiddly — precision mouse-work is required. Their overall sonic character is refined, dry and slightly bland compared to vintage valve outboard. However, these are plug-ins and sonically the best of their kind. ■

PROS

Fantastic sound quality and flexibility.

CONS

CPU load can be high; fiddly graphics.

EXTRAS

Sony Oxford has launched its Oxford Reverb plug-in. Designed as a flexible stereo reverberation generator it has presets and complete control of its many parameters, including a comprehensive early reflections section and integrated 5-band EQ. It is compatible with ProTools HD and ProTools LE.



Contact

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