

TC Electronic Fabrik C and R

Many believe that while a lot of energy has gone into the development and harnessing of processing power, substantially less has been invested in the development of the interface. Now there are plug-ins with a difference and a certain minty freshness about **ROB JAMES**.



THE POWERCORE PREMISE is a simple one, the computer's CPU has quite enough to do without overloading it with processing plug-ins. So, provide extra DSP horsepower specifically for the purpose but present the results to the user as a normal plug-in. Although this extra power is only available to plug-ins specifically written for PowerCore, TC has kept its promise to provide a steady flow of quality plug-ins from its own and third-party-developers. This has helped to establish the PowerCore family as a force to be reckoned with.

The Fabrik plug-ins are just the latest in a long line from TC: Fabrik C is a plug-in channel strip with EQ, de-esser and compressor; Fabrik R is a reverb with four basic algorithms, Live, Hall Plate and Club. Both are thoroughly worthy and the army of TC fans will desire them for their characteristic sound. However, these Fabrik plug-ins bring something new to the party, presaging the long overdue dawn of a new age. An age where user interfaces do not rely solely on an on-screen simulacrum of knobs and faders, borrowed from ancient analogue technology.

TC has dubbed the new interface 'Meta Intuitive Navigation Technology' a MINT with a whole new approach to controlling processing parameters. Meta is one of those buzz words, much beloved by geeks and hackers. Although now in common use, it is less well understood than it should be. It comes from the Greek (*and should not be confused with feta, which is also from the Greek. Ed*) and has at least four meanings. Used as an adjective prefix it can denote a change of position/condition or after, beyond/behind, or, especially in anything to do with computers, meta can denote a higher level of description. Thus, meta language is language used to describe language. However, in the current argot, meta also has an existence as a noun meaning self-referential, often in the sense of parody. E.g. 'Star Trek is just so meta.'

It's a user interface Zen, but not as we know it. (*Rob you're just so meta. Ed*)

Laudably, TC has brought this innovation to market at the very reasonable price of UK£205 (+VAT) for each plug-in.

Fabrik R combines four new TC algorithms in a single reverb plug-in. The interface is roughly divided into four sections: Algorithm, Level, Tweak and meters. The Algorithm page gives you a choice of Live, Hall, Plate and Club. Each algorithm has a distinct character. Live is bight and breezy, Hall

adds space without imposing too much of its own character. Plate has the bright, diffuse sound of springs and plates. Club manages to add space while retaining intimacy.

The Tweak section is organised in four pages, accessed by clicking on the lettered buttons. Eschewing conventional knobs and faders per parameter, MINT presents groups of parameters attached to a single movable button. This takes account of the interactivity of certain controls and the need to adjust several using a conventional interface to achieve the desired results. Parameters can be changed by clicking and dragging the buttons, clicking in a parameter field and dragging up or down, or double clicking and entering a numeric value.

Reverb controls Decay and PreDelay, Modulation offers Rate and Depth, and Color affects the spectrum of the diffuse field with three parameters LoColor, HiColor and HiFactor. HiColor determines which frequency area is in focus and HiFactor boosts or cuts. Distance defines the balance between Dry, Early and Reverb levels. Of course there are factory and user presets and these can be organised into folders. Any section of the interface can be locked when a preset is recalled.

Fabrik C is a 4-band parametric EQ, simple de-esser and 3- or full-band compressor in a single plug-in — in effect all the building blocks of a channel strip in one. The EQ ranges from surgical notch filtering to gentle rolling slopes with a goodly choice of filter types. Here, TC has missed a trick and could better exploit the MINT aspects, for example by using right-click + drag for Q in the EQ graph. The De-esser is controlled by a single fader and is effective enough but not on all material. The compressor section uses the MINT principle to greater effect. Source selects the type of material to make settings of ratio, knee attack and release and in 3-band mode there are three pages of parameter Tweaks. Used in Full-Band mode the only control is Gain and this balances Input Gain and Gain Make-up. In 3-band this is accompanied by Compressor Control which balances the amount of compression between the three bands. Level compensation allows you to compensate for the effects of the Compressor Control settings.

The MINT benefit is most apparent with the reverb but also evident in the compressor section of the channel strip. By letting go of some preconceptions and simply tweaking by ear it is possible to achieve some eye opening effects quickly and painlessly. The

speed advantage should not be underestimated in either plug-in. The quicker adjustments are made, the less need there is to compensate for your hearing becoming too subjective. Initially, when inserted in Wavelab's master section, I cursed the Fabrik R roundly for not having a dedicated wet/dry mix fader. Later, once I became more familiar with the MINTerface, it all began to make sense.

We've been banging on about lack of innovation in the user interface for years. Despite the unconventional appearance, MINT is less radical than it looks but, although it won't warp the fabric of the entire universe, it is a somewhat cautious step in the right direction. TC has largely succeeded in producing an interface that allows the user to get results quickly and painlessly. The effect of the controls is instant and clearly audible, subtly shifting the emphasis in favour of listening. You can try things in an instant that would take considerable time to set up with a more conventional set of controls.

Of course, all of this would be pointless if the effects themselves were not of an extremely high standard. Fortunately, as you would expect from TC, they are well up to scratch. The reverbs and EQ are especially enticing. As users become familiar with this unconventional interface I hope TC and others will be encouraged to take the concept further. ■

PROS

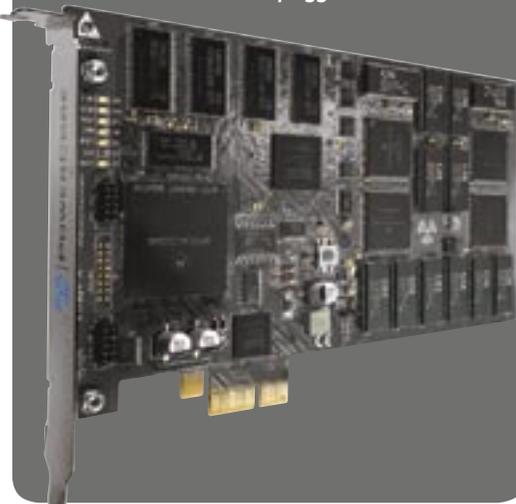
Instant gratification; great results with little effort; at last some original thinking.

CONS

If you want to get your hands dirty tweaking every possible parameter, look elsewhere; won't work for all material but at least you will discover this quickly; could be more radical.

EXTRAS

The PowerCore range has been expanded with a PCI Express (PCIe) version. TC will continue to offer the existing PowerCore PCI mkII and PowerCore Unplugged versions.



Contact

TC ELECTRONIC, DENMARK:
Website: www.tcelectronic.com