

# Acustica Ruby EQ and Ebony plug-in suite

Convolution makes a come-back: **NIGEL JOPSON** enjoys a realistic analogue sound



A broad Q 10kHz gentle lift generated a fine velum of top-end on cymbals and Fender Rhodes, rather than the tiresome sandpaper top-end delivered from many plug-ins. The most funky boostification was at the low end, however. Presumably

The plug-in emulations of analogue devices we use in 2018 are mostly created by 'modelling' techniques, which attempt to simulate the behaviour of individual components or circuit elements. In video game terms, this is comparable to simulating a car engine sound with many software oscillators, harmonic generators and modulation sequencers to suggest clutch, accelerator, road camber and so on. Acustica Audio have long championed an alternative approach called convolution — similar to simulating a car engine by multi-sampling real vehicle engines. Convolution involves sending a series of impulses or sine sweeps through the gear being sampled (many thousands in Acustica's case), at different settings and signal levels, and then convolving the resulting library impulse responses with input audio to recreate those settings.

Ruby is an official endorsement and a "faithful representation" of the D.W. Fearn valve/tube VT-5 equaliser. The hardware uses passive LC circuitry with class-A triode tube stages for the input and output, with the choice of boost/cut frequencies somewhat echoing the well-known Pultec. Usefully, on the Fearn there are two separate frequency selectors for LF boost and cut, allowing welcome extra flexibility in sculpting a peak boost. The HF boost has eight fixed frequencies from 1.5kHz to 16kHz, with five Q positions from 0.6 to 1.7. There are six frequencies for mid-cut and four for high-cut, and the power lamp on the plug-in engages a 'tube' gain stage. The \$5,400 hardware VT-4 is a luxurious-sounding EQ: as the owner of a couple of original EQP-1As, I know the sound of this type of hardware is as much about the transformers as the tubes, so I was keen to hear whether Acustica had managed to capture the vibe.

I'm happy to report the €235 Ruby EQ has the nicest HF boost I have ever heard from a plug-in.

some form of inductor saturation in the hardware EQ means you can add quite generous amounts of low boost without drastically affecting the output level, and Acustica's sampling has captured this effect nicely. I found myself boosting around 8dB, while cutting 2-4dB an octave lower, for a lovely rounded low end thump. The Ruby replicates that wonderful 'smiley face' thing we all love from this sort of analogue EQ, and once you've heard the high end from Ruby you'll be chary about HF boost from any other plug-in. The mid cut from Ruby is, in keeping with the rest of EQ, a very broad curve. It proved ideal for gently attenuating those boxy frequencies around 400Hz.

## Ebony plug-in suite with plate reverb

Utilising the same Acqua engine as Ruby, Ebony is a plug-in suite which "comprises accurate software emulations of a number of different mixing consoles and processors built between the '60s and the '70s by German and Dutch companies." The modules can either be instantiated individually, or as a frankly rather bizarre-looking channel strip. The EQ modules, which are styled somewhat like vintage EMT danner cassettes, have a nice 'pokey' sound to the mid and high range. If you want to move a control and hear that authentic edgy sound, these are for you. The nearest-sounding software equivalent is the Soundtoys Sie-Q, a modelled version of vintage Siemens W295b hardware. Nice.

The jewel in the Ebony crown (for me) is the plate reverb. It sounds nothing like modelled plug-in plates. The Ebony plate reminds me of a particular EMT 240 gold foil I once used; 240s normally sound a lot darker (and less interesting) than their massive progenitor the 140, but this particular 240 had a bite and klang to it that everyone liked on snare, and the Ebony has a similar aggressive crack. It is perfect for when you want a plate you can



really 'hear' in a mix, and the pre-delay, decay (reverb time) and early/late controls allow tonality and timing to be perfectly tuned to an instrument. The only caveat is that there's a brief hiatus in sound when controls are changed, and the maximum decay is nearer 4s than the 5 seconds indicated. The reverb alone is worth the €199 price for this plug-in, a fairly useful compressor and the realistic analogue-sounding EQs make it a snip.

I found I could instantiate more Acustica plug-ins than I anticipated on my modest 2.3 GHz Core i7 laptop: I had 2 Rubies, 4 Ebony EQs, 1 Ebony channel and an Ebony reverb (on a send) going before I had to increase the i/o buffer size from 128 samples. The install for Ruby is 1.9GB, the AU component itself is only 30MB, but there are 521 files varying between 1.5MB and 54MB — presumably IRs which are loaded as required.

I approached this review with my sceptic's hat on after reading that "Core 11" (which powers Ruby) has an "Implementation of High Efficiency Symmetric & Asymmetric Saturation Modeling (SASM)". After using Ruby and Ebony, I would recommend any production pro who hankers after analogue hardware, or anyone who has sworn never to buy another plug-in, to try the Acustica products. They're different, in a very good way. 🎧

## resolution/VERDICT

**PROS** Ruby has a fantastic-sounding top end, and comes very, very close to sounding like an analogue EQ: it would make a great mastering tool. Ebony suite has a very useful plate reverb.

**CONS** Controls can be automated, but choose a moment in the mix when there is no audio, as there can be slight glitching.

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