



Sonible smart:EQ live

RUSSELL COTTIER tests an AI plug-in which analyses audio signals and optimises them in real-time

Smart:EQ live is an adaptive equaliser that continuously analyses input program material and claims to optimise it in real time. EQ live is a follow up to sonible's smart:EQ+ plugin, but is designed to work in a live context offering Waves MultiRack Native support, with Waves Sound Grid support planned soon. In a live situation we have all wanted to keep an eye on an ever-changing audio source such as a hand held vocal or changing keyboard patch but the many other simultaneous requirements placed on a live engineer get in the way.

The plug-in analyses incoming audio and aims to repair spectral imbalances in real time at zero latency. The GUI is attractive and well laid out, the centre section is dominated by an EQ graph that would be familiar to most users. Below are six parametric EQ bands with bell, shelf and filter options as one would expect. These are usefully colour-coded, and when hovered over, the EQ graph will not only show the curve with the centre highlighted but also tints the bandwidth range.

The top strip of the plug-in GUI offers three tabs, showing smart: filter, profiles and snapshots. Several controls are persistent throughout the three tabs, bypass, record, reset and auto-stop. These allow the plug-in to analyse incoming audio. To start analysis one would click the record button, if the auto-stop control is engaged the plug-in will listen for a period until it has an idea of the source audio spectrum. If you require continuous adaptation



for a shared microphone between two vocalists, or a guitarist with many pedals, then simply turn off auto-stop.

The smart: filter tab, shown by a magic wand icon, has a Threshold control (also present on the input meter) which sets a value below which learning will not occur. Next we have speeds for the three smart: filter bands fast, mid, slow or freeze. Actual time values for these can be altered in the settings page. These bands are clearly highlighted in blue as we roll over the controls in the top panel, and can be adjusted to tune the key frequency areas for your expected input source.

The Limit control is used to limit the overall maximum smart:response gain limit. Ideal for making sure that the plug-in doesn't send your mix into squealing feedback. A limit line is shown on the graph display in green. Next there are controls for the master bell curve for the smart: response weighting, this also shows as an orange curve in the graph and can be

dragged to choose how strong you want the filter to be applied. Dragging the bell left and right will bias towards high or low frequencies, and pulling up or down will increase or decrease strength, you can even drag below the zero point inverting the EQ curve to carve out a space in a mix.

Pick your instrument

The profiles tab sports a guitar icon and shows six slots for your favourite presets to be quickly accessed. Dropdown menus beneath each icon can store extra profiles too. It is here that you would pick your instrument before clicking the smart: filter learn button. Once the plug-in knows what to expect roughly it can fine-tune the EQ curve to suit. Of course as a mixer you will want to start creating your own custom profiles to teach the plug-in what you expect a guitar, bass, kick drum or vocal to sound like. The really clever feature is that, once you save a profile, the system doesn't just apply the parametric EQ the next time you load the preset, it resets the parametric EQ and then sets the overall sound as your target frequency response for that profile. Profiles can be edited and even colours selected with the right-click context menu to further customise your specific setup. The snapshots tab functions similarly to the profiles tab, allowing users to save a full setup of the plug-in, including the target EQ curve and applied parametric curve. These snapshots can be assigned to hotkeys, ideal if you work on a laptop next to your desk or if you are able to assign console buttons as keys.

Looking in more depth at the graphical area we see a few useful features, meters for input and output as well as an analyser trace of the audio that can be assigned pre or post processing. The smart:response curve is shown on the graph as a red curve and is of course adjusted additionally by the more static parametric EQ controls.

In use smart:EQ live is fast and effective and shows signs of only improving as the user adds more profiles, it might be nice to have a few more profiles on screen or perhaps profile banks for different groups of instruments. The fact that the plug-in manual is simple and clear is a testament to sonible's design philosophy and there is even a built in tutorial guide in the plug-in settings. There is a slightly cheaper alternative for studio use in the form of smart:EQ+. Smart:EQ live retails at €159.00 and is available in a 30 day trial mode. **T**

resolution/VERDICT

- PROS** Ergonomic and clear layout. Profiles learn how you want your instruments to sound in a mix.
- CONS** Limited number of profiles and snapshots visible in screen. Adaptation speed values hidden in settings menu unnecessarily.

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