



WHAT IS IT?

Pitch correction plug-in software

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Excellent results with a wide variety of material
- 2 Simple to use, especially in Auto mode
- 3 'Note Objects' greatly improves Graphical Mode



Antares Auto Tune EVO | £280

Auto-Tune revolutionised the recording industry eleven years ago, but is it still the leader of the pitch correction pack in 2008? **Steve Hillier** investigates

Since its release in 1997, Auto-Tune has become the biggest selling audio plug-in of all time and rEvolutionised music production along the way. Its impact was as great as the advent of sampling, perhaps even as big as the invention of multi-track tape. For the first time producers knew that they had a 99% chance of getting something passable from a vocalist, whether they could sing in tune or not. You could record plenty of takes in your DAW, and sift through them later knowing that you no longer had to sacrifice a golden take

because the intonation was wrong – Auto-Tune would correct that for you. Production suddenly got a hell of a lot easier. The shockwaves from this revolution are still felt today. Auto-Tune and its competitor pitch correcting plug-ins are essential tools for every producer and are used on pretty much every commercial track you've heard since 1997. Vocals and instruments that are only slightly out of tune are often squeezed into line as a simple matter of course, much like compression is used to smooth dynamic changes in a mix.

Antares release Auto-Tune EVO this month, a new upgrade that takes advantage of the hugely more powerful computers that are now available to musicians. The user interface has been reorganised, and Antares claim that the pitch detection and correction algorithm has been substantially improved.

In Use

Auto-Tune EVO is available for download from the Antares website, and is also available as a boxed product if you like cardboard. It installs in a straightforward manner, but you will need your own iLok for permanent authorisation. Auto-Tune EVO loads into your DAW track as an insert plug-in and has two modes of operation. In Auto mode, you simply play your audio and Auto-Tune corrects the incoming intonation according to your settings. You have the traditional speed and tracking controls, plus 'humanise' and 'natural vibrato', which go some way to avoid the robot-voice that you often hear when Auto-Tune is used at extreme settings. The facility to correct the pitches to a specified key or selection of notes is here too, which helps to avoid Auto-Tune EVO choosing the wrong note to re-pitch to. It's essential that you take a few minutes to set it up though,

otherwise you could have your vocal parts warbling all over your mix. Once you've done this, you can leave Auto-Tune to do its magic. I'm pleased to report that this upgrade successfully tracked and corrected all but the most troublesome vocals I could throw at it. Previous versions often caused as many problems as they solved, mis-tracking and warbling as they struggled to find the right note, just like the offending vocalist! Those days are gone.

Graphical is the mode of choice for professionals, as it allows you to draw in the pitch changes you require, rather than depend solely on Auto-Tune's settings. This can give far subtler results than Auto mode, which often leaves your vocals very obviously 'Auto-Tuned'. The big advance with this version is the introduction of Note Objects. These are oblongs that appear in the graphical window that allow you to change the pitch of notes with one mouse stroke. This is similar to the approach used in Celemony's Melodyne, and is a huge time saver.

I was expecting there be a large hit on my CPUs using Auto-Tune EVO, but

The Legacy of Pitch Correction

Love it or loath it, pitch correction is not a new phenomenon – it's been with us since at least the early 1980s. Back then it was common practice for producers to adjust dodgy intonation in a hardware pitch shifter, manually adjusting the amount of pitch change by ear. This was laborious, mind-bendingly dull and it only worked with very small amounts of pitch shift. Still, it rescued many a troublesome vocal.

So it's little surprise that on its release in 1997,

Auto-Tune changed record production forever.

Producers were now able to use vocal takes that were previously unusable and Auto-Tune became ubiquitous. Today, the chance of hearing an out of tune vocal, bass line or saxophone on a Pop song is close to zero – anyone and everyone can appear to be singing in tune. And achieving that robot-like vocal effect used on Cher's *Believe* and countless other tracks is child's play – turn Auto-Tune to its fastest settings and you're

done – instant Cher. What's coming next?

The Holy Grail is polyphonic pitch correction – the ability to correct the pitch of a note inside a chord, or maybe even inside a finished mix. It's not here yet, but Celemony have been demonstrating a new technology called 'Direct Note Access' that promises just that and more. If they can pull that off, it will revolutionise music production again, just as Auto-Tune did in the 1990s.

anywhere close to CPU overload. I had good results on my 2.4GHz MacBook Pro too, achieving thirty instances before Logic choked under the strain. Your mileages with inevitably vary, but Auto-Tune EVO is definitely not a resource hog.

corrected with ease, and it does a superb job on musical instruments too. Auto-Tune EVO repitched my appalling fretless bass playing with ease – a task I wouldn't even consider letting Logic's Pitch Correction plug-in tackle.

Are the new facilities enough to

encourage an upgrade? The addition of Note Objects makes working in Graphic mode much easier than before – tasks that could take minutes in

In an A/B comparison with Melodyne, Auto-Tune EVO won hands-down for sound quality

this was not the case. Auto-Tune taxes my eight-core Mac only slightly higher than Logic's own Pitch Correction plug-in, which was a very pleasant surprise. I was able to load in more instances of the plug-in than I could ever possibly need without getting

Conclusion

Auto-Tune EVO does a terrific job of correcting errant intonation. If your singer has difficulty holding long sustained notes in tune, reach for Auto-Tune and the problem is solved. Faster passages are now tracked and

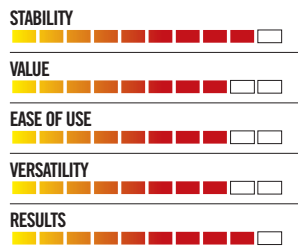
previous versions now take seconds.

The biggest surprise was just how little the quality of the source material is changed by the re-pitching process. The effect is not transparent, but it's pretty damn close. In an A/B comparison with Melodyne, Auto-Tune EVO won hands down in this respect, with Melodyne's results sounding strangely dull and lifeless. If sound quality is of primary concern, then you should upgrade. **FM**



The new notes objects are helpful in graphical mode

FutureMusic VERDICT

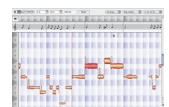


Auto-Tune Evo is an exceptional plug-in and keeps Antares at the top of the pitch correction pile.

SPECS

Supported Technology: TDM, RTAS, VST, AU
System Requirements: Mac: OS X 10.4.11 or later
 PC: Windows XP or Vista

ALTERNATIVES



Melodyne Plug-in by Celemony

£186
 Ultra-flexible pitch manipulation tool, Melodyne allows you to correct the timing of notes and much more. The next version, due next year, will include the ability to change pitches within a chord too.

celemony.com



Pitch Correction by Apple

£129 – Logic Express
 Not as aggressive or as flexible as Auto-Tune, but it does the job most of the time and is included as part of Logic 8.

apple.com/logicstudio