WHAT IS IT?

A range of plug-ins that cover EQ, compression, modulation and tape emulation

CONTACT

Who: Yamaha
Tel: +49 (0)404 223 6115
Web: www.steinberg.net

HIGHLIGHTS

1 Stomp box effects have sonic depth
2 Compressors provide have a subtle vintage flavour
3 Open Deck adds subtle analogue colour

Yamaha Vintage Collection Plug-ins

from £149

Bruce Aisher wonders if Yamaha can give other developers a run for their money in the 'vintage' plug-in stakes?

PRICING

Vintage Channel Strip bundle:
£320 (or individually for £149)

Vintage Open Deck bundle:
£168

Vintage Stomp Pack bundle:
£168

Despite their longstanding place at the commercial leading-edge of digital sound technology, Yamaha are viewed primarily as a hardware company. The reality of course is that inside all their digital synths, mixers and effects is a considerable amount of signal processing software. It shouldn't be forgotten that Yamaha also own Steinberg, makers of Cubase, Wavelab and range of software instruments.

This brings us to the Yamaha Vintage Plug-in Collection – a series of plug-in bundles consisting of the Vintage Channel Strip, Vintage Open Deck and Vintage Stomp Pack – and come hot on the heels of the Steinberg RND Portico products endorsed by audio legend Rupert Neve (and with premium prices to match). All of these are based on Yamaha's Virtual Circuit Modelling (VCM) technology (see the box on the next page for more), and come in both VST2, VST3 and AU flavours. A USB e-Licenser dongle is required (but not included).

Channel crossing

The Vintage Channel Strip is made up of an EQ and two compressor plug-ins, with each alluding to – but falling short of naming – the look and feel of the 'classic' units on which they are based. The EQ 601 has a rather, '70s-era, Neve appearance, while the 276 looks like a UREI 1176.

EQ601 is a six-band EQ, with two shelving-filters and four fully parametric bands. There is also a Drive/Clean switch for adding 'more analogue' flavour. I found this EQ easy to use, and sonically competent, but not especially 'special'. The 276 compressor (just like the original UREI 1176) has a somewhat unusual control system. The Input and Output knobs are used to adjust the amount of compression – the Input knob is a bit like the conventional threshold control in reverse. There is also a switch for managing the make-up gain automatically and a sidechain high-pass filter option, that minimises pumping on bass-heavy material.

Incidentally, the VST3 version of this plug-in makes its sidechain input available to a suitable host DAW. I tested this functionality in Cubase, and everything worked as expected. I liked the 276 plug-in, especially when pushed a little hard in the compression stakes. It certainly has the broad sonic feel of the 1176 on which it is clearly-based, though I would definitely fall short of calling it a like-for-like clone – like many of these Yamaha plug-ins it lies to the more 'polite' end of the spectrum. I did find it both useful and fun to use, though I don't think it would be my first choice for this type of compression. The 260 has a more conventional layout and adds a different, and quite pleasing, compression flavour to the proceedings

Reeling in the years

The Vintage Open Deck plug-in is a tape-recording and playback emulator that clearly doffs its hat to old Ampex and Studer analogue machines. The plug-in divides processing into Recording and Reproduction sections, with one of the four machine models selectable independently for each. Controls are provided for high and low frequency gain, bias and recording/playback level as well as tape speed

and type (old or new). I was particularly excited about trying out this tape emulator plug-in, especially with my burgeoning love affair with a certain competing product.

The best word to describe Open Deck is 'polite', and if you attempt to push the plug-in into obvious tape saturation territory the transition isn't particularly satisfying. Unlike the Universal Audio Studer A800 plug-in that allows you to conjure-up a wide range of tones, and with some very nice detail in sonics as the input level is pushed up, Open Deck left me feeling a little cold. I've no doubt that using one on every channel would have

VCM and the 'Vintage' Sound

All these 'new' plug-ins have their origins in the 'Virtual Circuit Modelling' (VCM) technology that Yamaha developed as an offshoot of their research into physical modelling nearly twenty years ago. The principle behind VCM is that the circuit – rather than just the resulting sound – is modelled in order to emulate a given hardware device. Interestingly, this isn't the first time these Yamaha plug-ins have seen the light of day. In 2005 Yamaha offered users of their DM-range of mixers the ability to update the onboard processing with the AE011 Channel Strip, AE021 Master Strip and AE051 Vintage Stomp Box packages – all looking very similar to those under review. I was not able to do a side-by-side comparison

of the old and new, but Yamaha have made no play of suggesting that the current plugs are any better than those on their digital mixers. This could lead to confusion, but does explain the pricing. It does raise questions about the nature of 'vintage' plugs, the quality of their emulation, and what we should expect in visual, sonic and functional terms.

> " I liked the 276 plug-in, especially when pushed a little hard in the compression stakes "

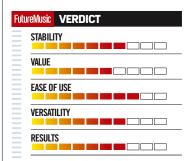a positive effect on your mixes, but I would have liked more in the way of tonal-shaping possibilities.

Step on

The Vintage Stomp Pack is a collection of three different phasers, a flanger, and a wah – all effects with a strong guitar-based following, though equally useful on other sources. All of these owe a debt to MXR and Electro-Harmonix pedals of the past, providing a range of decent modulation flavours.

These effects have a certain warmth and depth, though arguably they do lack the outright grit and nuance of some competing products. A wider range of effects would have made this bundle a more ballsy and coherent 'stomp box' plug collection,

with chorus and distortion being particular omissions.

Plug and play?

Ultimately, for me the Yamaha plug-ins on offer here are a mixed bag. They are all competent, but few of them offer anything radically different from other more interesting competing products. I would probably feel differently if they were half the price, but the truth is that both Universal Audio and Waves, to name but two, provide Yamaha with some very strong competition. Surprisingly also, there appear to be no built-in factory presets. If only to get you started, presets are a useful inclusion, and this only reinforces the impression that little effort has gone into the 'added-value' aspect of these

plug-ins. On the plus side however, no additional hardware is required and the CPU load in general is quite low, allowing you to use many plug-ins concurrently.

I would encourage you try out the downloadable demos on the Steinberg website and decide for yourself if they help resurrect the 'vintage sound'. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT

STABILITY

VALUE

EASE OF USE

VERSATILITY

RESULTS

A mixed bag of mostly decent plug-ins that don't quite set the studio alight with vintage passion.

ALTERNATIVES

Waves

from $49

Waves have been in the software game for a long time, with plug-ins covering all kinds of processors both 'real' and imagined.

www.waves.com

Universal Audio UAD Plug-ins

from $79

UA plug-ins require the use of additional DSP hardware, but garner consistently good reviews including the recent Studer A800 plug-in.

www.uaudio.com

Variety Of Sound

£Free

At the other end of the money spectrum, you'll find Variety Of Sound, who make some very good, and very free plug-ins, like their excellent FerricTDS 'Tape Dynamics Simulator'.

www.varietyofsound. wordpress.com