

**WHAT IS IT?**

An incremental update that introduces the Rack Extension plug-in format allowing third-party developers access to Reason's world at last.

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**HIGHLIGHTS**

- 1 Rack Extensions. Yes!
- 2 The Propellerhead store
- 3 Pulsar. A great all purpose modulation box



# Propellerhead Reason 6.5 | €405

Reason 6 introduced multi-track audio recording. Now Rack Extensions introduce plugs to Reason's world. **Bruce Aisher** ponders its bold new moves

**R**eason 6 was highly significant in that it introduced hard-disk audio recording for the first time.

Although 6.5 appears to offer less on paper it may prove to be the making (or remaking) of Reason for many people for many reasons.

Clearly the full integration of audio recording meant that, at last, it could actually be called a DAW (rather than just a sequencer), but there was still the lack of third-party plug-ins with which to contend. While other DAWs enjoyed all kinds of new and wonderful add-ons, Reason users were stuck with only those Instruments and effects provided by Propellerhead. The big question in

music technology circles, was not if but *when* some form of plug-in integration might arrive. This was usually followed by the observation that this might undermine Reason's reputation for CPU efficiency and stability, resulting in a stalemate. Well the stand-off is over with Propellerhead finally allowing plug-ins on board – albeit in their own special way...

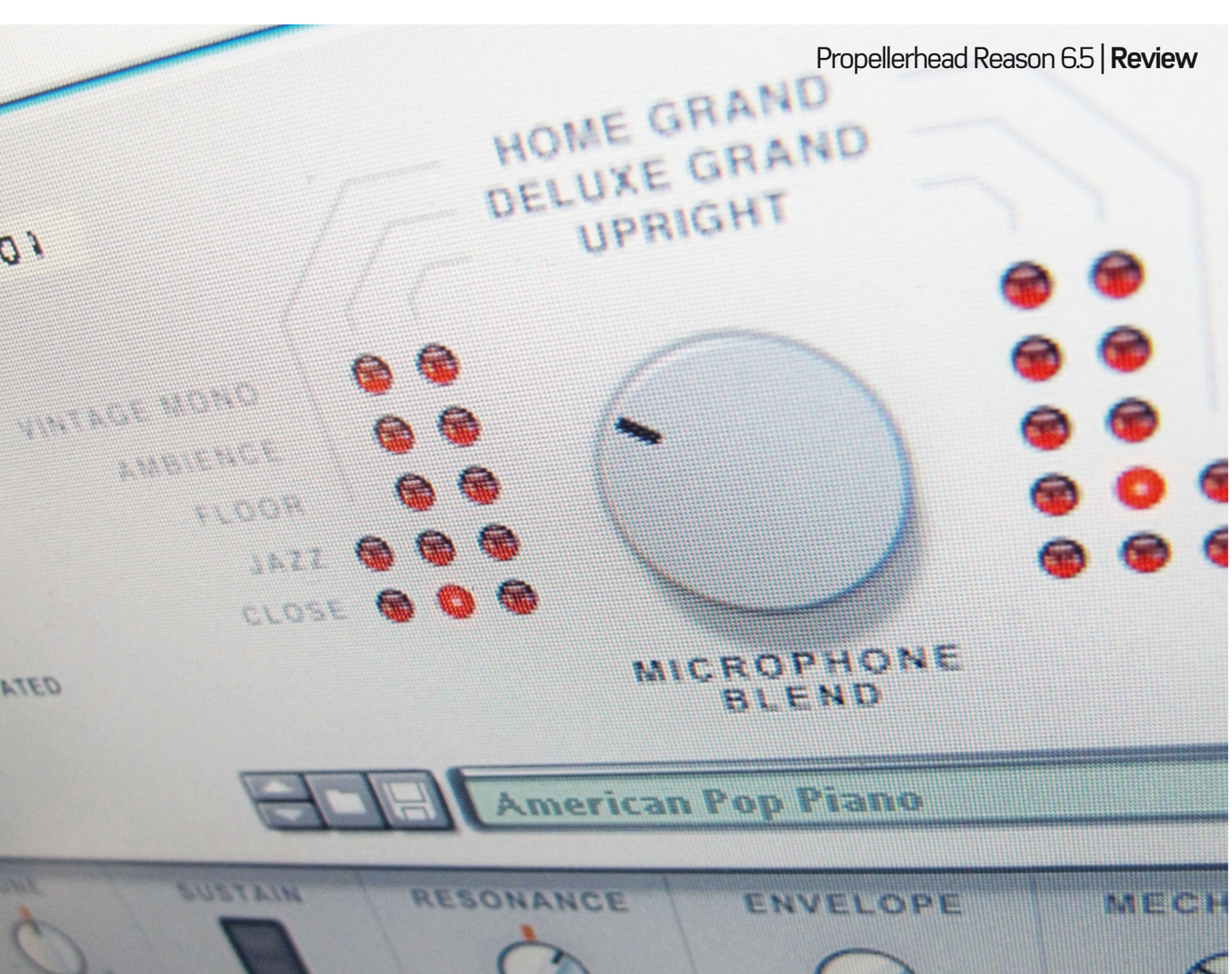
Reason 6.5 introduces a new plug-in format – Rack Extensions – that allow developers to quickly port their existing plugs and get them on board. In fact, Rack Extensions go much further than the rather limited input and output methodologies of existing plug-in systems such as VST, RTAS and

AudioUnits, and as such provides a level of integration that none of them can match. Reason has always been famous for its patching functionality – pressing the Tab key flips the rack around to gain access to all the audio and control inputs and outputs of each device. This is appealing in that it mimics a real-world cable, plug and socket scenario, where one can follow the audio signal chain quite easily, and provides a level of cross-patching of which other DAWs can only dream.

**It's all gone Apple-shaped**

In order to realise this continued 'look' and level of integration, and in an effort to manage certain quality concerns, Propellerhead maintain control over the purchase and installation of their own, and third-party, Re's by taking the Apple 'App Store' approach. So Re's are only available via the Propellerhead Shop where they can be trialed for 30 days or bought outright. This conveniently takes care of all licensing issues through one login to your Propellerhead account. For those who have yet to make the leap to Reason 6, you might be interested to know that licensing of the main application can now be handled by the Ignition key USB dongle or online and I suspect this approach will become increasingly prevalent.

Although it could be argued that this Apple-style gatekeeper approach is restrictive for those developers who wish



## Reason 6.5: Rack Extension Selection

Looking for new features? There really is only one game in town with this update - Rack Extensions - and these are all premium additions. We've selected the ones most likely to tempt you to click...



### Softube TSAR-1 Reverb | 119Euros

Swedish developer Softube are perhaps best known for their plug-in emulations of vintage EQs and compressors, some of which have already made their way into the Re format. Something I always felt was missing from Reason was a truly great-sounding reverb, and TSAR-1 definitely ticks that box. It's one of the more higher priced Rack Extensions, but in terms of what it can add to your mixes, I would consider it money very well spent. Inside Reason it's a must-have in my book.



### Korg PolySix | 39Euros

Originally released as part of Korg's Legacy plug-in collection. This is a recreation of their simple, but effective, early 80s polyphonic analogue 'synth for the masses'. PolySix doesn't offer hundreds of waveforms, LFOs or Envelope's, but it does capture the spirit of its hardware forbear (and I've owned both). Although, Reason has always been quite strong in the synth department, it is great to see the range of 'flavours' expanding, and at just 39Euros this represents a bargain in my book.



### Ozone Maximizer | 65Euros

Here we have the loudness maximizer section from iZotope's Ozone mastering package. It's basically a look-ahead dynamic limiter on steroids then distilled into a Rack Extension. Although something to use with caution, a maximizer is a great way of adding some extra punch and authority to your mixes. This one from iZotope offers a wide range of parameter tweaking options as well as a well-specified dither section.



### Polar | 55Euros

Propellerhead haven't just left Rack Extensions to third-party developers. Polar is a pitch-shifting effect which draws its influences from vintage harmonizer technology and features two independent pitch shifters, delay, filtering, auto-pan, and a wide range of other modulation options. More importantly, it sounds great, and has plenty of back-panel sockets to keep über-nerds happy.



### Pulsar | Free

Another Propellerhead Rack Extension, and this time it's free (well until October this year anyway). Pulsar consists of two advanced multi-waveform LFOs with a wide range of sync, time-shift, wave-shaping and modulation options. The back-panel is chock full of inputs and outputs for connecting Pulsar to synths and effects. This is very useful all-purpose modulation engine and is a classic example of where Reason excels.

**SPECS**

**System Requirements:**  
**Mac:** Intel Mac (multiple cores highly recommended), Mac OS X 10.5.8 or later, CoreAudio compliant audio interface or built-in audio hardware

**PC:** Intel Pentium 4 / AMD Opteron or better (multiple cores highly recommended), Windows XP SP3, Vista or Windows 7 (Vista or Windows 7 required for 64-bit), A 16 bit Windows compatible audio card, preferably with an ASIO driver

**Both:** At least 2GB RAM recommended, 3 GB free hard disk space (program may use up to 20 GB scratch disk space), Monitor with 1024x768 resolution or larger, A MIDI interface and a MIDI keyboard recommended, Internet connection for registration, Free USB port for Ignition Key

**ALTERNATIVES**



**Ableton Live Suite 8**  
 from £299

Ableton, although always something of a hybrid DAW, has proved popular with experimental and performance based musicians due to its flexibility.

[www.ableton.com](http://www.ableton.com)



**Apple Logic Studio 9**  
 £139

Logic comes with a huge array of effects, instruments and loop-based content, and is now extremely good value. Though you will need to buy a Mac to run it.

[www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)



**Cubase 6.5**  
 £500

Well-established DAW often to be found Rewired to Reason, though this is likely to change over the coming months. A solid performer from the inventors of the VST format.

[www.steinberg.net](http://www.steinberg.net)



Just one of the tempting in-app brand-new Propellerhead developed plugs for you to trial for 30-days free (and hopefully buy on a whim)

to have free access to the Reason 'engine', I suspect that gains on their part will outweigh this issue as those impulsive single-click purchase moments are now a lucrative possibility. And it seems that many developers have been keen to get in on the action – Rob Papen, Korg, u-he, FXpansion, Sugar Bytes, Sonic Charge, Softube,

Reason patching approach, allowing you back-panel access to a much wider range of input/output options.

Unfortunately, none of this helps unify the plug-in landscape, with ANOTHER format for developers to work for. Meanwhile Avid's AAX similarly fixes problems, increases ease of use and seeks support. It seems that there's

place it in the same sphere as Logic, Cubase or Pro Tools, but in many respects this is to its advantage. As a way to learn about production, and get your hands dirty with 'how kit is plugged together in the real world', Reason has always been a great platform. Rack Extensions have the potential to take this much further, and negate the need

# Reason has always been a great platform... Rack Extensions have the potential to take it much further

to Rewire or export tracks to another DAW system for the 'final mix'.

Clearly, the large third-party developer take-up demonstrates the degree of fondness

AudioRealism, iZotope, Synapse Audio, PEFF, and Audio Damage. What is of particular interest is that way that, although some of these plug-ins are, on the face of it, almost direct ports of their 'normal' plug-in counterparts, in most instances they fully adopt the

never been so many demands on over-stretched developer's time, attention span and cash.

## So what's the patch?

But all things considered, this is great step forward for Reason. It doesn't

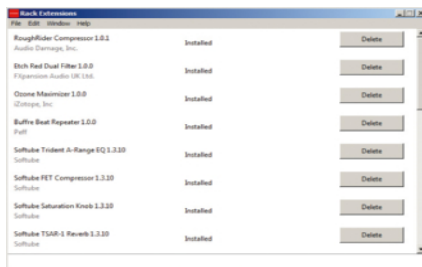
and regard with which Propellerhead is seen and seeing famous plugs appearing in fresh, even-more-patchable and easy-to-use form is superb.

Propellerhead still need to address navigation and usage issues with the large mixer (introduced in 6.0), and the sequencing lacks sophistication in some areas. However, this shouldn't undermine the power now available within Reason. I suspect other DAW manufacturers will be keeping a keen eye on what happens next. **FM**

## Rack Extensions: More than just another format

Rack Extensions do offer a number of advantages over other systems. As with previous incarnations of Reason it is possible to undo any rack-based parameter changes. Brilliant! Shouldn't all DAWs work this way?

Interestingly, if an Re crashes it won't bring done the rest of Reason with it. You get a sensible request to save the project, and you can choose to keep on working or restart, meaning a minimal loss of work.



Propellerhead also appear to have found a solution to 'the missing plug-in syndrome' encountered when transferring projects between users. Any

missing Re can be simply clicked-on and trialled for the session or bought there on the spot – a convenient by-product of Propellerhead's 'app store'-style approach.

**FutureMusic VERDICT**

**BUILD**  
 [Progress bar: 10/10]

**VALUE**  
 [Progress bar: 10/10]

**EASE OF USE**  
 [Progress bar: 10/10]

**VERSATILITY**  
 [Progress bar: 10/10]

**RESULTS**  
 [Progress bar: 10/10]

Although this update only adds one thing – Rack Extensions – for this alone it is essential.