



Audio Ease Altiverb 7 £540 MAC



As convolution reverb plug-ins grow ever more sophisticated, has the latest version of the most famous of all got what it takes to stay ahead?

> A convolution reverb generates its effect using a recorded sample of the reverb characteristics of a real-world acoustic space. Called impulse responses, these samples are combined mathematically (ie, convolved) with the input signal to create the illusion of the sound being played in the sampled space. In fact, the same technique can reproduce artificial hardware reverb units too.

Altiverb developers Audio Ease certainly know a thing or two about convolution reverb: they've made it their mission for over a decade to build an impressive library of impulse responses of renowned opera houses, concert halls, cathedrals, recording studios and other environments from all over the world.

Long-awaited

Altiverb 7 was first previewed at the NAMM show over two years ago, so the fact that it's still currently Mac-only will no doubt cause a degree

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of consternation among PC users. The reason the company gives for this is simply that they decided not to postpone releasing the Mac version until the Windows version was ready. At the time of writing, there has been no indication of when the latter will arrive, so every purchase of Altiverb 7 currently includes a free download of Altiverb 6 for Windows, with the promise of a

free upgrade to version 7 when it becomes available (which they promise it will!).

Now fully 64-bit, Altiverb 7 comes in two versions. The Regular option retails at £540 and is a stereo VST/AU/RTAS/MAS plug-in that supports sample rates up to 96kHz. The top-tier XL version goes for £900 and includes a TDM version, 5.1 surround capability and support for sample rates up to 384kHz.

Firstly, let's take a look at the most important of considerations: the bundled impulse response library. This weighs in at over 3GB and covers an enormous range of spaces. Audio post-production professionals will find the selection of rooms, corridors, vehicles and outdoor ambiences useful, while music producers of all genres should appreciate the array of sampled reverb boxes on offer. These include the Yamaha REV7 and Lexicon 480L. IRs of some of the world's most renowned studio live rooms are also ready to hand.

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Version 7 sees the addition of several significant new features, perhaps the biggest of which is a completely redesigned interface. A slimmed-down vision in glossy black and shiny dark grey highlights, only the most frequently required parameters are on display, with secondary controls tucked away in hidden drawers that open at the click of a button. All presets are subject to adjustment via the standard parameters - namely reverb time, room size, brightness, EQ, damping, mix, pre-delay and attack time - while an array of selectors above the main display are used to select what it shows (various IR views, snapshots, a panoramic picture of the IR source, etc).

The same but different

The impulse response browser also has a completely new look, now in its own window. It makes full use of the images that accompany each preset, and features a new keyword search facility that makes finding sounds much quicker and easier. Also in the browser, the new Similar button brings up suggested alternative IRs with characteristics like the one currently selected.

Also making its debut is the News button, which grants access to new impulse responses that the company offers every month for free to registered users. Altiverb 7 also features regular host automation at last (including IR selection!), which replaces the old Snapshots system - although that’s still onboard for those who need it. The Stage Positioner, meanwhile, boasts over ten times more virtual space than before for more flexible source placement. Oh, and there’s now a gate onboard, should you feel like regressing back to the 1980s.

Another notable newcomer is the Brightness parameter. This control adds a layer of synthetic, algorithmic reverb to the convolution reverb, brightening up the overall sound. Audio Ease claim that its results cannot be had by merely boosting the treble with EQ, and we found this to be true: it produces a much silkier and more shimmering result. That said, if you do choose to use the EQ section while you’re working, you



Altiverb’s Stage Positioner lets you tailor the positioning of the effect by moving the sound around a virtual stage



Ever wondered what a drum kit would sound like in a Renault Kangoo? Now’s your chance to find out

Acting on impulse

Impulse responses are made by setting up some speakers in the environment whose acoustics are to be captured, playing a sound through them (a sweeping sine wave, in Audio Ease’s case) and recording the output, together with the ambience of the space. The recording is then processed to generate a virtual representation of how the acoustics of the space respond to sound across all frequencies in the audio spectrum. This is how, when you select the Sydney Opera House preset in Altiverb and pass the sound of a drum kit through it, you get as close a result as possible to what it would sound like if you’d set the drums up on

the stage of the real thing. It’s glorious to behold.

This doesn’t mean that Altiverb’s presets are limited to concert halls and cathedrals, however. Several famous recording studios are represented, as well as a good selection of retro reverb gear. There’s also no shortage of urban, underground and outdoor ambiances to choose from, together with vehicle interiors and domestic spaces. What’s more, Altiverb 7’s new drag-and-drop IR import feature makes it easy to create unique effects from any audio file just by dragging it in from the Finder. In older versions, an import dialog box had to be negotiated to do this.

can now adjust it with the mouse in the graphical display, as well as using the knobs.

On reflection

The new interface design manages to convey an air of quality before you even hear the thing in action, but how a plug-in looks is ultimately secondary to how it sounds. In this respect, Altiverb 7 definitely delivers. The included impulse responses have an undeniable air of authenticity, and the quality is of the level you’d expect from such a premium product.

It could be argued that Altiverb is expensive when compared to some of its peers. Aside from the quality of its effects, though, what you’re paying for is the time and effort that has gone into producing the extensive library of impulse responses, which are sampled from some of the most desirable recording locations the planet has to offer. A reverb of this calibre is something that you’ll turn to time and again for years to come, so we’d say that it’s an investment worth making for anyone serious about their ambience. **cm**

Web www.audioease.com

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Info Altiverb 7 Regular £540; XL £900. Upgrade from Altiverb 6 £139; free if bought in 2010 or 2011

Alternatively

EastWest Quantum Leap Spaces **cm165** » 8/10 » £225

Minimal sound-shaping options, but the impulses are high quality

Waves IR-1

N/A » N/A » £213

An oldie but a goodie, Waves’ convolution reverb still stands up

Verdict

For Slick, approachable new interface
Enormous impulse response library
Drag-and-drop IR import
Stunningly authentic sound
Total recall automation

Against No Windows version yet

After a couple of years in the wilderness, Altiverb is back with a sumptuously reverberant bang

9/10