Sonnox PC MAC

COMPUTER MUSIC PERFORMANCE Award

Oxford SuprEsser £212

cm DVD
ON THE DVD
AUDIO DEMOS
Check out the audio demos and explanatory text file to find out what SuprEsser can do

There are plenty of de-esser plug-ins, but few really deliver. Can DSP heavyweights Sonnox take the hiss once and for all?

> It's been over a year since the launch of the Sonnox plug-ins in native form, and we've really heard very little from them since. They've not been resting on their laurels, though, and the Oxford SuprEsser aims to redress the balance by offering not just top quality de-essing, but also linear phase dynamic equalisation (think of it as frequency-conscious compression).

With the underlying dynamics processing culled from the existing Sonnox Dynamics plug-in, performance should be top-drawer. But this is no 'point and shoot' processor, and they've included a host of advanced features. Top of the list has to be Automatic Level Tracking, which maintains a constant level of gain reduction irrespective of signal level. This is the default setting, and when combined with Threshold, Frequency, Width (ie, bandwidth), Attack and an adjustable knee shape and wet/dry balance, you have instant frequency-specific compression.

Instant access

For the more hardcore user, the Access button enables you to bring a bunch of additional parameters into play. These include settings for level reduction (Hold, Release and Ratio). Here you can also deactivate the Automatic Level Tracking or change its response time. Significantly, you can also choose between Wide modes for both the trigger and audio signals. This gives SuprEsser four behavioural characteristics, including band-specific dynamics or full-band compression.

The plug-in window is dominated by the FFT frequency display, which you can use to make adjustments very quickly with the mouse. With audio coming through, the FFT display comes into its own. The waveform shows the full signal and any gain reduction, which is explicitly flagged in the reduction indicator – the solid red section within the band. You can audition it, and the Mix button gives the full, processed signal.

For a fundamentally complex processor, SuprEsser is really easy to use, and a quick scoot through the presets indicates uses beyond de-essing. We found it could also remove vocal plosives and even suppress specific frequencies in a bass sound. You have to keep reminding yourself that it's a single-band processor, though, as ultimately this means one centre frequency.

As explained in greater detail in the *Big buffer* boxout, the three different versions on offer each affect quality, latency and performance differently, and having to consider your DAW's buffer settings could prove annoying.

Additionally, it's worth noting that SuprEsser is native-only – Sonnox say that TDM and PowerCore versions will not be produced because the plug-in uses complex algorithms that would be difficult to port to the fixed-point architecture used by such systems. It's also currently Mac-only (Windows support will follow) and none too cheap. But aside from these niggles, SuprEsser is another great addition to the Sonnox stable. **cm**

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Big buffer

As mentioned above, SuprEsser comes in three versions: low-latency, standard and high-resolution. These use 512-, 1024- and 8192-sample fixed kernel sizes respectively.

There are a number of reasons for this, including stability issues and, with larger sizes, improved processing of low frequencies. The downside is that the larger the kernel size, the larger the latency.

In practice, SuprEsser works best with the DAW buffer size set to the same as or larger than the plug-in kernel size. Failure to do this means a higher processor hit and potential signal break-up.

We carefully auditioned all three plug-ins, and found that low frequencies exhibited fewer artifacts using the high-resolution version of the plug-in. That said, we also found that DAWs varied in how well they handle the buffers, with Logic proving most reliable at a 1024 setting, irrespective of which of the three plug-ins we loaded up.

System requirements

Mac 1GB RAM, OS X 10.4, RTAS/AU/VST host, iLok key

Test system

Mac Apple Mac Pro Dual 3GHz, 3GB RAM, OS X 10.4.11

Alternatively

Universal Audio UAD Precision De-Esser
N/A >> N/A >> $99
Requires you to buy into the UAD platform, but is one of the better de-esser plug-ins around

Eiosis E2Deesser
N/A >> N/A >> €150
With Eiosis' reputation, the E2Deesser is worth checking out

Verdict

For Excellent de-esser
Instant 'easy' option
Interactive display
Advanced parameters if needed
Good preset bank

Against Requires careful buffer setting
It's a bit pricey

Not merely a super de-esser (get it?), there's more to this plug-in than the name suggests, and the quality is first-rate

9/10