

Mac PC What is it? Ultra-posh channel strip, EQ and compressor plug-ins **PRICE: £582**

CONTACT: Sonic Distribution, 01582 470260 WWW.waves.com INFO: TDM price, £1169

FILTERS
18dB/octave high-pass and 12dB/octave low-pass filters. These enable you to filter out high and low level signals such as rumble and hiss

SPLIT BUTTON
This places the filters before the Dynamics section in the signal chain

MAIN EQ
This features variable shelves and two fully parametric mids for fine and precise signal adjustment and track sweetening

EQ ROUTING
These switches enable you to bypass the EQ section or send it to the Dynamics section sidechain

ANALOGUE SWITCH
Available on all the plug-ins in the Collection, when disabled this reduces harmonic distortion at the expense of modelling accuracy

WAVES SYSTEM BAR
This is common to all Waves plug-ins. It offers useful undo and redo features, as well as proprietary storing and A/B-ing of presets

COMPRESSOR
A soft-knee compressor with Threshold, Release and either fast or program-dependant Attack time. Gain make-up is automatic

EXPANDER/GATE
This offers Threshold, Range (gain reduction) and Release controls, and either program-dependant or fast attack

DYNAMICS ROUTING
These switches enable you to bypass the dynamics section or place it post-EQ

MASTER SECTION
I/O metering, Phase and Gain controls, and a Digital Clip Indicator

On the DVD

AUDIO DEMOS
Hear the magical sound of the SSL 4000 Collection by checking out the **Audio Demos** folder

WAVES **computer music PERFORMANCE**

SSL 4000 Collection

Packing the character and sound of SSL's legendary hardware into three plug-ins is an ambitious goal. But if anyone can do it, Waves can...

- **SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**
Mac: G4 1.25GHz, 512MB RAM, OS X 10.4.3, TDM/RTAS/VST/MAS/AU host application, iLok key
PC: P4 1.7GHz/AMD Athlon XP 1800, 512MB RAM, TDM/RTAS/VST/DX host application, iLok key
- **TEST MACHINE**
PC: Athlon 2600+, 1GB RAM, Windows XP SP2

Waves and SSL are both names that need no introduction. They're major players in the worlds of digital and analogue pro audio respectively, and the SSL 4000 Collection is their first collaborative project. Before we start to consider the plug-ins that the Collection contains, we want you to close your eyes, then imagine that you've won the lottery

and spent around £100,000 on a Solid State Logic mixing console. Assuming the thing will actually fit in your house (unlikely), you'll have access to an EQ that offers unparalleled amounts of musical cut and boost (especially if you've gone for a G-Series model). The low end remains focused and present, while any top-end sculpting is miles ahead of what you can achieve using digital EQ. To put this in perspective, if

you've ever felt that boosting or cutting the high end on your digital EQ makes things sound brittle or dull, the equivalent tonal colours on the SSL are silky or muted. Moving on, the legendary SSL gates are powerful enough to transform drum performances; the E-Series compressor is a versatile all-rounder; and the aggressive signature of the G-Series Master Buss Compressor is

stamped all over modern music.

The SSL sound may not be to everyone's taste – some might consider it to be too overtly aggressive – but there's no denying the sonic imprint it's left on over two decades worth of music. The question, then, is whether Waves have managed to squeeze all this character into the SSL 4000 plug-ins...

long before we were doing double takes and wondering if we were listening to a plug-in or real hardware.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves – let's take a look at exactly what the SSL 4000 Collection offers.

Starting with the most complex of the three, the E-Channel is an EQ and dynamics plug-in that's modelled on the SSL 'black knob' series EQ and the

“IF YOU WANT THE BEST IN NATIVE DYNAMICS AND EQ PROCESSING, YOU NEED LOOK NO FURTHER THAN THIS”

On the money

From the moment you complete the simple software installation (an iLok protection key is required), you get the feeling that Waves have nailed it. Each of the three plug-ins looks the business and adheres to the same colour scheme and layout of its hardware counterpart. And the sound? Well, so convincing are the EQ and compressor emulations that it wasn't

SSL LS611E dynamics module. The left-hand side of the GUI is populated by a 4-band EQ and low-/high-cut filters, while the right-hand side contains the Dynamics section. This is made up of a compressor and gate as well as I/O metering. Several buttons give you additional flexibility – you can change the position of the EQ in the signal chain and send the EQ to the Dynamics sidechain (this lets you carry out frequency-dependant dynamics



▲ The G-Equalizer offers a distinctly different sound to the E-Channel

processing, such as de-essing).

On paper, the E-Channel appears to be a simple channel strip, but in reality, it's one of the most powerful EQ/dynamics plug-ins we've used. It's as much at home transforming a sound as it is fulfilling subtle mixing duties.

Hitting the G-spot

The E-channel is complemented by the SSL G-Series equaliser (modelled on the G-Series 292 EQ). This offers a similar EQ section to the E-Series but without the high cut and with a shallower 12db/octave low-pass filter, wider Q and more available cut and boost. The G-Series EQ also has a noticeably less 'pointy' sound than the E-Series model.

Whereas the E is best-suited to aggressive mix adjustments, the G is ideal for creative sound sculpting and adding final polish to a mix.

The G-Series Master Buss Compressor rounds up the trio; unsurprisingly, this is modelled on the SSL G-Master Buss Compressor. Strap this across your master outs and you'll soon realise why the hardware original became *the* compressor for final mix polishing. This emulation can sound strained if pushed hard, but when used typically, 99% of people will be unable to tell the difference.

Side by side

So how do these plug-ins compare to their hardware counterparts? In the cases of the EQs and the E-Series gate, Waves have got remarkably close, and for most apps, the G-Master Buss Compressor is as good as you could hope for. The E-Channel compressor doesn't quite have the punch of a real SSL, but it still boasts bags of character, and both compressors sound amazingly analogue.

These plug-ins aren't cheap, but when you consider that they're at least on a par with the equivalent DSP card effects, their high price becomes a lot more palatable. If you want the best in native dynamics and EQ processing, you need look no further than this. **cm**

▶ ALTERNATIVELY

URS Classic Console EQ and Compressor Bundle

cmN/A » N/A » \$800

Great sounding, these bundles feature a wide range of analogue models and should not be overlooked

Sonalksis SV-517 EQ and SV-315 compressor

cm75 » 9/10 » £150 each

These plug-ins don't emulate specific bits of hardware, but they're highly tweakable and enable you to create a range of analogue flavours

Back to the future

Whenever a plug-in developer emulates a piece of classic hardware and bases its interface on the layout of the original unit, one question is always asked: why? Why bother recreating an old hardware interface when you could create an exciting new plug-in with a Technicolor GUI and infinitely adjustable parameters?

In the case of the SSL 4000 Collection, we found it refreshing to have our choices limited and to have to rely more on our ears than on visual feedback. This is especially true where the EQ and compression are concerned: watching graphical representations of the parameters you're tweaking can often be misleading. An EQ boost may look too big, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it is.

In designing the SSL G-Master Buss Compressor plug-in, Waves clearly adopted an 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' philosophy. With just a couple of clicks you can access a wide range of different compression flavours, and the steps between each parameter value make a relatively large difference to the overall sound. This makes it easier to hear when you've dialled-in the 'right' setting. It feels liberating to be able to concentrate on making music as opposed to spending time continually re-adjusting plug-in settings.



▲ Waves haven't wasted time developing a flashy new interface for the G-Master Buss

VERDICT

FOR

- + Amazingly accurate models of SSL hardware
- + Easy to use, yet highly flexible
- + Efficient CPU consumption
- + Great looking and responsive GUIs

AGAINST

- Quite expensive
- iLok required, even for demo!

Emulating SSL's classic hardware was always going to be difficult, but Waves have captured 'that' sound superbly in these highly impressive plug-ins

RATING

