

**MATCH EQ**  
Now a fully fledged module in its own right, with range adjustment

**IMAGER**  
More transparent widening with Stereoize II mode

**MASTER ASSISTANT**  
Give your masters a retro sound with Vintage mode

**MASTER REBALANCE**  
Tweak the levels of Vocals, Bass or Drums in the mix - game changing!

**LOW END FOCUS**  
Bring punch and clarity to muddy low frequencies

**DYNAMIC EQ**  
Band controls for the 'modern' EQs are now overlaid on their spectrograms

**SPECTRUM ANALYZER**  
The spectrum of the Master Rebalance Focus is blue; everything else is grey

**FOCUS**  
Select a mix element for adjustment in Master Rebalance

**FOCUS GAIN**  
Dial in up to 8dB of boost or attenuation of Master Rebalance's Focus element

**RESIZABLE GUI**  
Drag this corner to make the interface much bigger



# iZotope Ozone 9 Advanced

£444



Two years on from the last, another Ozone - and the latest version brings killer new features alongside a GUI overhaul and more

> Versions 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 of iZotope's Ozone mastering suite all scored 10 in their yearly **cm** reviews. This isn't hugely surprising, as there's no denying the sonic and functional excellence of this amazing application, which has become the de facto software mastering standard in pro and home studios alike. It also, of course, makes the conclusion of this review somewhat predictable, as, unless iZotope have actually downgraded anything or really messed up the new stuff, realistically, Ozone 9 can't fail to maintain its 'essential' status.

Before we get started on those new features, though, a summary of the basics is in order for those new to this particular game. Ozone is a standalone app and plugin, into which one each of a wide range of processing modules (Dynamics, Equalizer, Spectral Shaper, Exciter, etc) are instantiated in series to create the ideal mastering chain for your track. As of version 8

(10/10, **cm251**), it also includes the AI-driven Master Assistant, which creates genre-targeted 'starting point' presets for you, based on analysis of the input signal or a reference track.

## Rebalancing act

As with previous versions, Ozone 9 is available

"It all looks and feels fabulous, and CPU usage has also been reduced in comparison to Ozone 8"

in three versions: Advanced (reviewed here), and the cut-down Standard (£222) and Elements (£115). One of the main differences is that only the Advanced version also includes all the Ozone modules as separate plugins, but see the iZotope website for a run-down of the rest. The upgrade from v5-8 Advanced to Ozone 9 Advanced costs £177, incidentally.

The first thing upgrading users will notice is that the GUI has been overhauled for visual and workflow parity with stablemates Neutron 3 (9/10, **cm265**) and Nectar 3 (9/10, **cm265**). That means EQ control panels overlaid on the main display rather than racked up below (but with the All Bands view still available to the main and Post EQs, which are now called Equalizer 1 and 2), much smoother spectrograms, and - yay! - free 'corner-drag' resizing. It all looks and feels fabulous, and CPU usage has also been quite appreciably reduced in comparison to Ozone 8.

“It just works, without any detrimental effect on the surrounding material”

The two (Advanced-only) headline features this time round are a pair of very straightforward new spectral processing modules designed to give effortless control over specific elements of the mix. Master Rebalance is the most impressive of the two: simply click the Vocals, Bass or Drums button to target that component within your full mix, and slide the slider to apply up to 8dB of cut or boost to it. It just works, *every time*, making it genuinely possible to bring out undermixed parts or suppress overly dominant ones to a greater degree than you might expect, without any detrimental effect on the surrounding material. Truly spectacular, and we look forward to more instrumentation options in Ozone 10.

The other new module, Low End Focus, is intended for emphasising or blunting transients between 20Hz and anywhere from 49-300Hz, as determined by the adjustable crossover. Two base algorithms, Punchy and Smooth, govern the general aggressiveness of the effect, while the Contrast slider brings it to bear, attenuating non-transient elements when raised and pushing transients down when lowered. The Listen function solos the difference between input and output, so you can hear exactly what the process is doing; and in Mid/Side mode, the controls are doubled up for independent processing of the mid and side channels. Although not as jaw-dropping as Master Rebalance, Low End Focus works very well indeed, providing an intuitive and effective tool for restoring low-frequency definition and impact, or reining in excessive transient peaks.

### Fine Vintage

Master Assistant has been improved in Ozone 9 with the addition of a, er, new Vintage mode, which draws on the Vintage EQ, Comp and Limiter modules rather than their modern equivalents. Producers of rock, jazz and other 'live' genres will certainly appreciate that, and the results are every bit as good as they are in what's now called Modern mode. You can also now choose from LUFS targets in Streaming mode as well as CD mode.

We're not sure how much under-the-hood work has gone into Master Assistant in terms of the choices it makes and its confidence in them,



Master Assistant now uses Ozone's excellent Vintage modules for a more 'analogue' mastering vibe



Hone in on problem areas with the liberated Match EQ

### Match EQ and Imager improvements

In previous versions, Match EQ - which manipulates over 8000 linear-phase bands in order to match the spectral profile of your mix to that of a recorded reference curve from another track - was a mode in the Equalizer and Post EQ modules, but Ozone 9 promotes it to being a module and (Advanced-only) plugin in its own right, complete with a handy menu of target spectrum presets to which you can add your own captured curves. Matching can also now be narrowed down to a specific frequency range by dragging high and low boundary markers left and right. Using this, you could, for example, energise just a lacking mid-range, or

utilise Match EQ like a complex high or low shelving filter.

Meanwhile, the Imager module - facilitating four bands of stereo width adjustment - sees the addition of a second mode to its mono-compatible Stereoize process. Previously, Stereoize employed a standard take on the Haas effect, applying a tiny time offset between the left and right channels to increase perceived width. Stereoize II offers a more transparent alternative with a tuned algorithm that iZotope call "Velvet-Noise decorrelation". We don't know how this works but it certainly sounds more natural than the original mode.

but the configurations it arrives at seem to be less... conservative than in Ozone 8, and perhaps even a bit more conclusive.

Ozone 9 also includes version 2 of the Tonal Balance plugin, which brings together the EQ controls of all running instances of Ozone 9, Neutron 3 and Nectar 3, and displays the spectral distribution of your mix relative to a mastering curve based on analysis of thousands of commercial tracks. Nine genre-based reference targets have been added (for 12 in total), output gains of linked modules are now accessible, and the GUI is resizable.

### Ninth wonder

As predicted, we have no hesitation in once again awarding top marks to iZotope's incredible mastering system. Master Balance is one of the most powerful spectral processors we've ever used; Low End Focus is useful; the Master Assistant, Imager and Match EQ improvements are great; and none of the 'unimproved' tools have lost any of their lustre in the last year.

In summary, for mastering in the box, nothing else comes close to Ozone 9's dazzling combination of user-friendliness, depth, feature-richness, and - most importantly - knockout sound. **cm**

Web [izotope.com](http://izotope.com)

### Alternatively

**Newfangled Audio Elevate Bundle cm253 » 10/10 » \$199**  
Featuring the mind-blowing Elevate limiter, based on 'auditory filter bank' technology

**IK Multimedia T-Rack5 cm252 » 9/10 » From €180**  
Comprehensive effects rack with plenty of mastering options

### Verdict

**For** Master Rebalance is witchcraft!  
Low End Focus works very well  
Improved Master Assistant  
Match EQ becomes more versatile  
Resizable and sexier GUI

**Against** No great incentive for Standard and Elements upgrades

Almost worth the upgrade fee for Master Rebalance alone, Ozone 9 Advanced easily retains its crown as the ultimate all-in-one ITB mastering solution

**10/10**