



Blue Cat Audio Late Replies

€129

PC

MAC

Reaching far beyond its central remit as a multitap feedback delay, this epic-scale effect invites your whole plugins folder to the party

> The last year or so has seen a glut of superlative delay plugins hit the market, but it would probably be fair to say that none of them have been quite as conceptually ambitious as the latest from Parisian developer Blue Cat Audio. Late Replies (VST/AU/AAX) would be an exceptional delay for its core architecture and workflow alone, but factor in the ability to host a wide variety of other built-in processors, and even VST/AU plugins, at multiple points in its signal flow, and you have what can only be described as a multi-effects powerhouse.

RSVP

In terms of the fundamentals, Late Replies is a stereo delay effect with up to eight independently adjustable taps; two programmable parallel echo feedback circuits with crossfeed; effects inserts, dry/wet mix controls and bypass switches at every stage; and a built-in ducker. The GUI has Blue Cat's usual 'deep but approachable'

vibe, with input (Pre FX) and output (Post FX) sections on the left and right, flanking the delay (Pattern) and feedback (Feedback Loops) sections, and various utilities and an enormous preset library accessed in the top bar.

In the Pre FX section, the Base Delay control sets the global delay time from which every delay and feedback tap is offset. It can be set in milliseconds (1-8000ms), or synced to host or a manually set tempo between 50 and 300bpm. Unusually, the synced timings are expressed in beats and half beats - '1.00 beats', '1.5 beats', etc, up to '8.00 beats'. The Inertia knob governs the time taken for changes to delay times to take effect, from 1-1000ms, with longer values creating tape delay-style pitchshifting effects.

Pre FX is also the first stage in Late Replies at which up to four of the plugin's internal effects and/or third-party VST/AU plugins can be inserted, processing the input signal prior to hitting the delay lines. It's every bit as cool as it

sounds, although external plugins are loaded via the host operating system's file dialog unless previously saved into the 'favourites' menu, which is a minor rough edge.

Better Late than never

The real action begins in the Pattern section, where up to eight delay taps - or 'Replies' - are arranged in a vertical stack and adjusted by placing their colour coded delay time sliders on the timeline between 0 (left) and the Base Delay time (right, expressed in beats or milliseconds), freely or snapped to grid. Unfolding below, the Pattern Mixer features Level and Pan controls for each tap, as well as level meters and... four more effects insert points - per tap! At this point, Late Replies' creative enormity really starts to become apparent: even used with restraint - a touch of EQ on a couple of taps, a wave shaper on the next, a pitchshifter on another, etc - the sound design potential is clearly endless.

“At this point, Late Replies’ creative enormity really starts to become apparent”

Patterns can be saved discretely and a handy library of preset examples is included, complete with Mixer settings and insert effects. There’s also a useful randomise function, for scrambling the delay times, levels and pan, or all of the above plus phase inversion.

The Feedback Loops section offers the same degree of control over Late Replies’ two echo generators, with the start and end points of bars on a Base Delay-defined timeline setting the pre-delay and delay times, snapped to grid or not. Level and Pan knobs determine the amount and positioning of feedback, and while the two Loops run entirely independently, each is mixed into the other via the Crossfeed knobs. The Freeze knob, meanwhile, goes a step further than the usual button of the same name, enabling the frozen loop to be blended with the input and crossfeed signals.

The Feedback Loop section and individual Loop modules all boast their own preset menus, and the latter each include a brickwall limiter for reining in excessive feedback swells. A graphical display does a splendid job of visualising the echoes, and yes, you guessed it: up to four effects/plugins can be inserted into each Loop. It’s enough to make your head spin.

Finally, the Post FX section houses a further four effects inserts (so that’s 48 in total across the whole plugin!), a Spread control for narrowing the signal from ‘fully wide’ down to mono if required, a very capable ducking compressor (for the wet signal, keyed off the input or an external sidechain) and a master limiter.

Feline groovy

Late Replies is so powerful it hurts. And we don’t say that with particular emphasis on the superb built-in effects and external plugin support. The Pattern and Feedback Loop sections are so brilliantly thought-out and implemented, so versatile and so much fun to lose yourself in that the whole thing would have been a winner had Blue Cat stopped there. Add those exponentially empowering inserts, and the rhythmic and high-feedback echoes, chorusing, flanging and other delay staples become mere starting points for your wildest flights of sonic fancy.



The Loops display gives great visual feedback on Late Replies two parallel, er, feedback circuits



Late Replies’ built-in effects modules are truly comprehensive

The Cat’s whiskers

You might be assuming that Late Replies’ roster of effects modules is just a tertiary add-on for basic processing, but no, this is a midly dazzling array of devices that would look quite at home bundled with a DAW, let alone a plugin. There are 25 of them, all told, every one packing its own library of presets and even a very brief PDF manual.

Dynamics control is covered by Compressor, Ducker and Gate, and an excellent seven-band EQ facilitates detailed frequency shaping, and multimode and Comb Filters deliver more heavy-handed timbral alteration.

Amusingly, there are even a couple of delay modules in the line-up -

MultiTap and Echo - not to mention Late Replies itself, should you fancy delaying your delays.

The Modulation category contains chorus, flanger, phaser, tremolo and an LFO-controlled filter. The chorus also serves as an LFO for delay line modulation when set to 100% wet.

Lastly, the FX category consists of Frequency, Phase and Pitch Shifters, Bitcrusher and Wave Shaper; and the Utils folder dishes up M/S encoding and decoding, levelling, panning and stereo spreading modules.

Of course, as pointed out, Late Replies can also load VST/AU plugins - even in non-VST/AU hosts. Sheesh!

Sure, we could suggest that certain processes (delay time modulation, filtering and pitchshifting, primarily) would be more conveniently baked into the main plugin than accessed via effects modules, but we’d feel slightly churlish doing so. All of these things and so much more are only a click or two away, and the minimal effort required to call them up is amply rewarded by the quality and depth of the modules themselves.

Essentially an expansive modular effects workstation wrapped up in one of the finest delay plugins ever devised, Early Replies is nothing short of essential. **cm**

Web www.bluecataudio.com

Alternatively

eaReckon EAREbound
cm192 » 9/10 » €99

Amazing 16-tap delay with saturation, filtering and modulation

D16 Group Tekturon
cm246 » 9/10 » €69

With per-tap feedback and processing, this ace multitap delay is as creative as it is affordable

Verdict

For Awesome multitap delays
Load VST/AU plugins and 25 native effects modules into every stage
Dual feedback circuits
Built-in ducker
Also works as a VST/AU wrapper

Against Inelegant initial plugin loading

Blue Cat have knocked it out of the park this time - Late Replies is their best plugin yet, and is an indisputable must-have!

10/10