ADVANCED OPTIONS
Including noise gate,
high- and low-pass
filters and amplifier
power soak

C45 AND SAT
Use these switches to
engage the two
custom circuits for the
distortion channels

RECORDING CHAINS
Select from 66 cabinet
and mic combinations

CHANNEL SELECT
Switch between Clean,
distorted (BE) and
heavily distorted
(HBE) channels

PAN
Set pan positions
for the neck and
body mics

**OVERDRIVE
AND TONE**
Use these to conjure
up heavily saturated
or more subtle tones

SOUND MACHINE
Select a size-specific
guitar voicing from
the 16 options

NECK AND BODY
Set levels for the neck
and body mics

OUTPUT
Each of the three distortion
plugins includes an additional
output level control

Universal Audio
UAD 8.0 PC MAC

The leading powered-plugin platform continues to forge ahead with new plugins and features, but is it leaving those without Thunderbolt behind?

> Universal Audio's UAD hardware/software platform has become the de facto standard for DSP-powered effects plugins, boasting a who's-who of endorsed classic processors. In recent years, UA's Apollo devices have added high-quality audio interfacing to the system, with the ability to run UAD plugins live on the input stages. 2014 saw this extended further with the introduction of Unison, bringing software control of Apollo preamp circuitry to the party.

A game of two halves
UAD v8.0 (VST/RTAS/AU/AAX) is the latest free update to the software that forms the heart of the UAD system, including new plugins (available as demos until unlocked in the UAD Store) and a revamp of the Apollo mixing and monitoring software, Console.

That's the good news. The bad news is that Console 2.0, initially only supports Thunderbolt devices (see *Thunderbolt expansion*). Firewire

users will get the update, but not 'til autumn of this year.

On the plugins front, the three new additions in UAD v8.0 are all about guitars: Distortion Essentials, Friedman Amplifier Collection and Sound Machine Wood Works. Distortion Essentials ($249) is a Unison-enabled bundle of three separate plugin emulations: Ibanez

> "UAD v8.0 is the latest free update to the software that forms the heart of the UAD system"

Tube Screamer TS808, Bermuda Triangle (a Big Muff-style distortion) and Raw Distortion (based on the famous Pro Co Rat pedal). The Tube Screamer is also available on its own ($129).

Friedman Amplifier Collection ($249) includes two guitar amp emulations, based on the boutique customisations of Dave Friedman and developed by Brainworx. Based on the original Marshall Plexi and JTM45 models, respectively, BE-100 and DS-40 offer two classic amp head emulations with a host of modifications and extras, including power and preamp bypassing, power soak emulation and a delay effect. Rather than let you choose your own cabinet and mic combos, the raw amp sound is then transformed using any of 66 'hardwired' and uneditable 'via desk' recording-chain convolution processing setups, which combine mic type, cabinet type and – in some cases – EQ.

"The Console 2.0 upgrade, with its improved features and graphics, is superb"

Sound Machine Wood Works ($299) is a multi-faceted processor for transforming piezo and DI acoustic guitar tracks into virtually 'miked' recordings. It features a simple parameter set, with the main Voicings control applying one of 16 presets based on the resonance and acoustic properties of three typical guitar body shapes: Jumbo, Dreadnought and Studio. Two microphones (Neck and Body) are provided, each with pan control, input and output level controls (-inf to +12dB), and an output level meter. Although not Unison enabled, Wood Works can of course be used and recorded in-line, as well as in more typical mixing and re-miking scenarios.

Six strings

Much like the original amps that inspired them, Friedman's BE-100 and DS-40 have quite distinct sounds, and the DS-40 can't achieve quite the same level of edgy rock distortion as the BE-100, being more earthy and less fizzy when driven. However, the BE-100 actually includes three distinct channel circuits – Clean, distorted (BE) and heavily distorted (HBE) – and while we love the two distorted ones, it's the Clean channel that really caught our ear. Great for chiming guitars and blessed with both Treble and Bass controls, plus three-way Bright setting, it sounds excellent.

Both amps include a number of deep settings – the Noise Gate and Amp Filters (with individual pre and post switching) are particularly handy – and the cabinet Recording Chains, although limited in terms of flexibility, do sound very good.

The three distortion pedals each have their own character, with the slightly woolly saturation tones of the Tube Screamer very well emulated. By contrast, Raw delivers the classic transistor-style distortion, with its low-pass filter proving very useful for taming harsh high frequencies. At extremes, Bermuda Triangle is the brashest of the three pedals, but at more conservative settings, it can sound wonderfully fat. There are a handful of presets for each, and these encourage alternative uses, such as drum or vocal processing.

Sound Machine Wood Works looks very simple, but the 16 voicings deliver a great deal of variety. Our favourite feature is the pannable twin mics, which can truly transform lacklustre mono source recordings. Although designed for
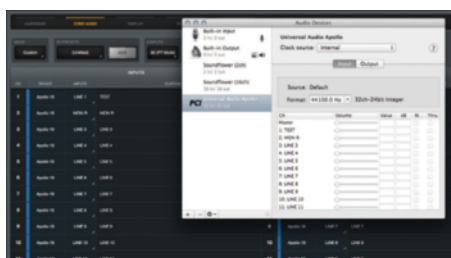
Console 2.0's Core Audio input and output names are reflected within OS X's Audio MIDI Setup

The Console 2.0 mixer now has floating sends and a better UI

Thunderbolt expansion

Console 2.0 is just one element of the new and improved set of Apollo features that Universal Audio are calling 'Apollo Expanded', which also includes mix and match support for up to four Apollo devices and six UAD devices of all kinds. Apollo devices are connected in series using Thunderbolt cables and aggregated within Console 2.0. The Console 2.0 app also includes Flex Driver, which allows custom I/O routing and naming at Core Audio driver level, with names visible in your DAW and throughout OS X. Custom routing can be particularly useful when configuring multiple Apollo devices to suit your DAW setup.

Console 2.0 also stands as a considerable visual upgrade, being Retina optimised with more photo-realistic graphics, and works in many user-requested features. Plugin selection is much improved, with categorised preset menus, preset audition, and drag and drop of plugins between channels. All of the inserts on a channel can now be saved as Channel Presets – a collection of 'celeb' (Tony Maserati, Steve Levine, Andrew Scheps et al) library patches is included; plugin record and monitor status can be adjusted at channel level as well as globally; and multi-level undo is in place. Resizing of the Console 2.0 window itself is slicker, too, with automatic panel adjustment, and individual Channels can be hidden. Finally, in the Settings page, the number of Cue buses (up to four) and Alt Monitor outputs (up to two) can be changed.

DI'd sources, Wood Works is in fact a useful plugin for any acoustic guitar recording.

Great 8?

UAD version 8.0 is a pretty extensive update, introducing some worthwhile new features and filling an obvious gap in the platform's range of plugins. However, Universal Audio's eager adoption of Thunderbolt already has many PC and non-Thunderbolt Mac Apollo owners feeling mildly concerned, and the initial arrival of Console 2.0 as Thunderbolt-only won't help with that. Furthermore – if we're being picky – plugin pricing remains steep. In particular, $129 feels excessive for a single pedal emulation.

Ultimately though, the Console 2.0 upgrade, with its improved features and graphics, as well as the new device aggregation and improved Core Audio implementation, is superb. UAD version 8 marks another step forward for Universal Audio's stellar DSP-powered plugins platform, making it even more tempting for those yet to get involved, and a little bit worrying for those still on FireWire and PCI-X systems. **cm**

Alternatively

IK Multimedia AmpliTube CS
N/A » N/A » FREE, with IAP
Pick and mix amp and pedal emulations from an online store

Waves Maserati ACG
N/A » N/A » $125
Great acoustic guitar processor

Verdict

For Slicker, more powerful console
Two feature-rich amp emulations
Simple & potent acoustic guitar processor
Cross-section of classic distortion pedals
Far better Apollo device aggregation

Against Plugins are still expensive
Console 2.0 yet to come for Firewire users

The improved Console software and new guitar-orientated plugins make UAD 8.0 a no-brainer, particularly for Apollo owners

Distortion Essentials 9/10
Friedman Amps 9/10
Wood Works 8/10