

EQ NODES
Grab these to make changes and use the arrow slider for the low-cut filter

GRAPHIC DB SCALE
Choose between four options for the display gain scaling

BALANCE
Adjust left and right levels - we've made left more dominant using the Pre Balance

WIDTH
Change the overall width of your stereo image

MULTIBAND SOLO AND BYPASS
Each band can be soloed or bypassed to help with making adjustments

INVERSE
Adjusts threshold and gain in opposite directions for all four bands

COLOUR
Choose the type of harmonics added - minimum gives even, while maximum only odd

FREQUENCY
Dictates the point above which harmonics will be added by the Exciter

OPTO
Also found on the Compressor, this switches to an optical release characteristic

COMPUTER MUSIC PERFORMANCE Award

cmDVD ON THE DVD
You'll find our audio demos and the Vienna Suite quick-guide on the disc

VSL **PC** **MAC** Vienna Suite £375

Best known for their orchestral instruments, VSL make the move into effects. Is this debut bundle worthy of a standing ovation?

System requirements

PC Intel P4 or AMD 64 CPU, Windows XP/Vista/7 (32- and 64-bit), VST host

Mac G5 CPU (note that reverb requires Intel CPU), OS X 10.4, VST/AU/RTAS host

> The Vienna Suite is something of a departure from VSL's usual multisampled orchestral instruments, being a bundle of mixing effects. It debuted earlier this year but has already been expanded with an additional convolution reverb, taking the plug-in count up to nine. The full list reads thus: Equalizer, Master Equalizer, Limiter, Compressor, Multiband Limiter, Powerpan, Exciter, Analyzer and Convolution Reverb. On the **cm DVD**, you'll find a PDF explaining the specifics of each, and the VSL website also has some great demo videos.

Vienna Suite operates at up to 96kHz and uses internal 64-bit processing, in VST format for PC, and VST, AU and RTAS formats for Mac. Vienna Suite also works in VSL's own multi-instrument host, Ensemble Pro. The only curveball is that the Convolution Reverb requires an Intel Mac.

Nine-pack

The Master Equalizer is essentially a fancier version of the standard Equalizer, but with a choice of three peaking types, high- and low-shelf filters and 4x oversampling. Both EQs

include an onboard analyser, zoomable dB display and graphic editing, and modifiers keys let you lock gain and/or Q for easy adjustment.

The Compressor and Limiter feature real-time colour-coded waveform displays showing pre- and post-processing, and on the latter, you can also display gain reduction as a line graph. On the Compressor, you'll also find Opto and Fat (tape-style) compression modes, and a sidechain filter with three fixed options. The Multiband Limiter also boasts an Opto mode, individual band soloing and neat global controls for Threshold, Gain, Attack and Release.

Powerpan is a 'stereo' pan pot - that is, it doesn't only change the level of the left and right channels (ie, balance) but pans them, too. You can thus adjust perceived stereo position whilst retaining the existing stereo information. Again, this plug-in includes its own real-time signal graphic and is rounded off with input and output L/R balance faders for overall control.

For dedicated visualisation, there's the Analyzer - amongst its many features, we found its ability to display the dominant note with accompanying MIDI note number very useful.

“This bundle offers a serious upgrade for the outlay, and overall we’re very impressed”

The Convolution Reverb boasts a number of cool features, including options to reverse and stretch the impulse response (x0.25 to x4). There’s also a de-correlation control for adding width to narrow impulses. The most powerful feature is that you can draw envelopes for volume, pan, de-correlation, high-pass and low-pass to fully tailor the impulse over time – see the boxout for more on this.

Patchwork

The first thing you’ll noticed when using Vienna Suite is that the preset library is heavily weighted towards orchestral instruments. This is particularly apparent with the EQ, which even includes specific presets for VSL’s Appassionata Strings library. However, there are some more general presets and, in the case of the Equalizer, a bunch of ‘resonance’ presets that load up with suggested frequency, gain and Q settings.

Sonically, both the Equalizer and Compressor are very impressive, and the simple interface (reminiscent of Logic and Waves plug-ins) is clean and non-distracting. The compressor has good scaling on the attack and release times, and it’s possible to achieve aggressive results, particularly in Fat mode. The Equalizer’s maximum Q setting isn’t that sharp, although there’s plenty there to carve out frequencies, and it’s a little surprising that the standard EQ doesn’t have any shelving options. In fact, the Master Equalizer is the one that really delivers, although it doesn’t have as many presets.

The Multiband Limiter delivers the same fast attack and release capabilities as the Compressor. However, for typical mastering or mix bus applications, we found gentler settings more helpful, with the Opto release setting particularly useful for mix ‘glue’. The single-band Limiter is good, if not outstanding, and when deliberately pushed hard it can be made to produce some flavoursome distortion.

Of the EQ-type processors, the Exciter is the most surprising. When set to odd harmonics, it adds a sweet top-end sheen without sounding harsh. But shift the colour back to zero (even harmonics only) and the frequency cutoff to it’s lowest (400Hz) and you get a great thickening effect for snare drums and bass. The Powerpan



As well as sounding superb, the Suite’s Compressor offers easily digestible visual feedback



Here we’re applying a number of wild envelopes to an otherwise conventional IR

Reverb envelopes

Although Vienna Suite’s Convolution Reverb doesn’t include an enormous library of impulse responses, it does offer some excellent tools for manipulating them, not least of which are the envelopes. The five parameters you can modify using these are volume, low- and high-pass filter, de-correlation (essentially stereo width) and pan, each of which can follow multi-node curves for the duration of the impulse.

With an impulse or preset loaded, head for the six buttons just below the display (you can ignore the sixth as it’s for static EQ settings). Clicking on a parameter highlights its curve. These all start out as straight lines, but adding

extra breakpoints enables you to create complex curves. You’ll notice as you do this that the impulse waveform updates to reflect the changes, and if you don’t like the results, you can easily reset one or all of the parameters.

From an editing perspective, you can use this feature to modify volume levels or apply a gradual low-pass filter. But getting a bit more creative with the pan, or changing the stereo de-correlation can produce more movement in the effect. Finally, as well as reversing the impulse response, you can also reverse the currently selected envelope using the Reverse button just below the display.

is nothing special, but it does provides an easy option for repositioning of stereo signals.

As explained in the boxout, the Convolution Reverb has some useful features, and we had great fun adding dynamics to the impulses using pan and filter envelopes. The inclusion of VSL’s five Vienna Konzerthaus impulses is highly attractive to those after big, expansive sounds. There are only 26 impulses in total, but at least you can import impulses in FLAC and WAV, as well as VSL’s VCI, formats.

Suite dreams?

There’s no doubt that anyone who uses VSL’s instruments will love the bespoke nature of Vienna Suite’s presets, but what you’ve actually got here is a wonderful set of plug-ins, irrespective of VSL’s orchestral slant. They’re easily on a par with similar designs from the likes of Waves and Sonnox, and all at a more affordable price point. At £375, they’re still not exactly cheap, but if your DAW-bundled plug-ins aren’t delivering any more, this bundle offers a serious upgrade for the outlay, and overall we’re very impressed. **cm**

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.vsl.co.at

Alternatively

Sonnox Elite Collection

N/A >> N/A >> £744

Seven-plug-in bundle with excellent EQ, dynamics and reverb

Waves Silver Bundle

N/A >> N/A >> \$900

16 tried and tested essentials from Waves’ massive line of plug-ins

Verdict

For Sonically excellent

Most plug-ins have signal displays

Flexible reverb envelopes

Master EQ is powerful

Great Exciter

Against Too few impulse responses

Presets lean to orchestral instruments

This fine collection of processors proves that VSL can deliver the goods in the studio as well as the orchestra pit

9/10