PRESET BROWSER
Click here to access the preset library

INPUT GAIN
Drive the preamp into distortion with output level compensation

FILTERS
TridA-Pre features stackable LP/HP filterbanks

PHASE INVERT
All three plugins include phase flipping

MID-SIDE
Switch between L/R and M/S routing

STEREO LINK
Operate each channel independently or link them together

TRANSFORMER MODELS
1973-Pre has two sonic flavours

SWEEPABLE FILTERS
More versatile than the stepped originals

EQUALISER
Each plugin has its own style of EQ

Arturia
3 Preamps €299 PC MAC

This triple-pack of classic channel strips marks an intriguing change in direction for one of the industry's leading softsynth developers

> The sibling bundle to 3 Filters You'll Actually Use (see p94), 3 Preamps You'll Actually Use (yes, that's the full title, born of a rather limp marketing message that says something about Arturia "feeling our pain" at the sheer number of effects plugins out there, etc) is a compilation of three vintage console channel strip emulation plugins (VST/AU/AAX). Along with 3 Filters, they represent the Grenoble-based developer's first focused foray into software effects, and while we really hope they'll drop the awful 'You'll Actually Use' suffix for subsequent releases, it's truly great news that they've elected to apply their vaunted TAE (True Analog Emulation) technology – as found in their exceptional line of softsynths – to the field of signal processing.

The three strips comprise 1973-Pre (emulating the Neve 1073), TridA-Pre (the Trident A-Range) and V76-Pre (the Telefunken V76 and V612). As well as modelling the named preamp, each also includes its associated EQ – with a

couple of modern twists – and features separate but linkable controls for the left/right or mid/side channels (see *Common ground*). They're also available to buy individually for $149 apiece.

1973-Pre
With its always-pleasing sound and foolproof three-band EQ, the transistor-based Neve 1073 is

"Like its forebear, 1973-Pre is an effortlessly effective improver of any instrumental or vocal signal"

about iconic as channel strips get. The 1973-Pre includes all the controls found on the real thing, albeit with the Input Gain pot ranging from -20dB to -80dB, rather than being divided into Mic and Line halves to cater to the separate inputs of the hardware; and separate knobs for EQ frequencies and gains, rather than dual-concentric ones. We're delighted that Arturia have made the bell-shaped mid-range band, low shelving band and high-pass filter sweepable, instead of only offering the fixed sets of frequencies imposed by the hardware – although purists might call such a change sacrilegious. There's also a second 'Marinair' transformer model option in addition to the original 'Carnill' model, which gives a very subtly different sound.

Like its real-world forebear, 1973-Pre is an effortlessly effective improver of any instrumental or vocal signal. The preamp works its way up through sumptuous harmonic

> "Valve warmth, low-end solidity and a sense of liveliness are the orders of the day with this one"

enhancement to all-out distortion, and making broad tonal adjustments is a snap with that famously medicinal EQ.

TridA-Pre

Also eschewing valves in favour of transistors, the ultra-rare Trident A-Range console (of which only 13 were built) achieved legendary status in the 70s for the unique sound of its preamps and the quirky design of its EQ.

TridA-Pre is essentially an exact copy of the glorious real deal, with the addition of the features described in *Common ground*. Unlike 1973-Pre, the four-band EQ (low- and high-mid bells, high and low shelves) has been kept switchable between four discrete frequencies per band (50Hz to 15kHz), as the interactions and overlaps between them are key to the whole device and its particular sound. And those fabulous triple low- and high-pass filter banks are in place, too, of course, for versatile attenuation shaping at the top and bottom.

TridA-Pre is the 'fun-loving' member of the gang, with saturation that's crunchier than that of its siblings and a touch less tolerant at extreme levels, and a sterling virtual take on one of the most musical EQs ever made.
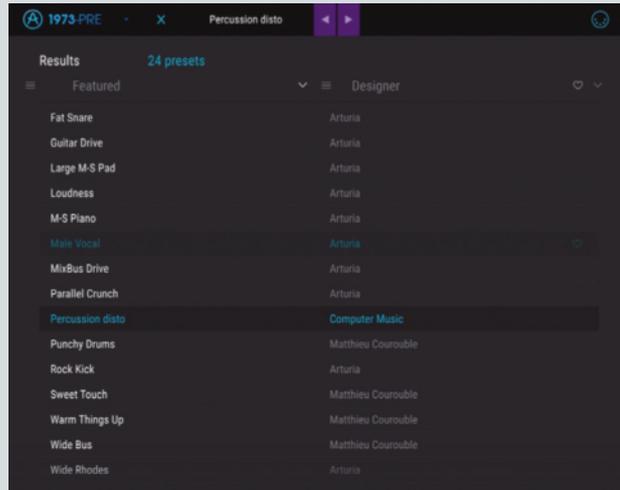
V76-Pre

The 'oldest' and more functionally basic of the bunch, V76-Pre recreates the valve-driven sound of Telefunken's V76/80 preamp and V612 two-band EQ, as immortalised by Abbey Road's REDD consoles of the 60s. The preamp offers up to 76dB of gain (continuous, unlike the original), and the EQ is a two-band Baxandall setup, with the low shelf cornering at 100Hz and the high shelf at 5kHz, supplemented with a high-pass filter at 80Hz, 300Hz or 80+300Hz.

Valve warmth, low-end solidity and a general sense of liveliness are the orders of the day with this one, and although that rudimentary EQ is the least versatile of the lot, it's good for gentle sweetening and bass boosting.

TridA-Pre's idiosyncratic four-band EQ doesn't mess with the brilliant setup of the real hardware

Arturia's preset browser gets the job done without any fuss

Common ground

Besides 1973-Pre's sweepable filters and V76-Pre's continuous input gain controls, all three Preamps share a number of features that weren't on offer in the original hardware – all of the kind we're more than used to seeing in effects plugins these days.

Chief among them is adjustable stereo routing. The twin channel-strips of each plugin can be assigned to left and right for conventional stereo processing, or mid and side for separate manipulation of mono and stereo components, and operated independently or linked. Related to this (but not exclusive to the software), phase invert switches are in place on every channel, too. Then there's automatic gain compensation, which maintains a consistent output level as input gains are raised, thereby doing away with any unnecessary level balancing. Needless to say, this only applies to the preamps, not the EQs.

Lastly, there's all the usual functional gubbins seen in Arturia's other plugins, including the dedicated file browser, one-click MIDI learn system and GUI resizing options.

As with 3 Filters, the default size setting on a Retina/HiDPI display (13" MacBook Pro in our case) is hilariously small, so you'll want to set that last one to 200%.

The magic number

As unassuming a thing as it might appear to the uninitiated, the experienced engineer knows that a good analogue-style preamp is a powerful tool for distortion, dynamic shaping and tonal improvement, adding – to quote Arturia again – a certain *je ne sais quoi* to the source material. 3 Preamps not only captures that aspect of its trio of classic channel strips absolutely beautifully, but also – more importantly – their EQs. The 1973-Pre and TridA-Pre are the most useful in that regard, offering two different takes on equalisation that are as relevant now as ever – a workflow-liberating alternative to the surgical precision and cold technical perfection of modern EQ plugins. V76-Pre is the least compelling of the three, then, but its tube saturation is quite delicious nonetheless.

Ironically, the pricing of the individual preamps, and thus the three-for-two bundle, feels better judged here than with 3 Filters You'll Actually Use, despite the fact that it's higher. Preamp and EQ emulations are generally pretty expensive, and these are unarguably up there with the best of them. Even though you might not need all three (we'd buy them in the order presented in this review if we had to choose), at $299, they're not bad value at all. **cm**

Alternatively

**Universal Audio Neve 1073 Preamp & EQ Collection
cm208 » 10/10 » £229**
Stunning 1073 emulation, but only for UAD-2/Apollo hardware

**Softube Trident A-Range
cm151 » 9/10 » $199**
Another native virtual A-Range that (rightly) sticks slavishly to the original specification

Verdict

For Superb preamp and EQ emulations
Sweepable 1973-Pre EQ is more flexible than the original hardware
Mid/side routing
Automatic preamp gain compensation

Against V76-Pre's EQ is very basic, yet it costs the same as the other two

Three superlative vintage channel strip emulations that deliver a good range of saturation styles and EQ configurations

9/10