

INCLUDES AUDIO

WHAT IS IT?

Six-module channel strip plug-in

CONTACT

Who: iZotope

Web: www.timespace.com

HIGHLIGHTS

1 Multiband Transient Master is awesome...

2 ...As is the Overview window

3 Excellent global and module presets



FutureMusic

Platinum Award

iZotope Alloy 2 | £139

Packing six powerful mix processors into one plug-in, iZotope's lauded virtual channel strip just got even better, reports **Ronan Macdonald**

I Zotope's Alloy channel strip plug-in made its debut a couple of years ago, slipping comfortably into the range alongside their popular

Ozone mastering suite. With Ozone now standing at a positively venerable version 5, the arrival of Alloy 2 comes as no surprise, but have iZotope managed to work in enough improvements to make it worth the upgrade price?

Alloy 2 presents the same six processing modules as its predecessor: EQ, Transient Shaper, Harmonic Exciter, Dynamics (of which you actually get two identical instances), De-Esser and Limiter. The signal flow is freely configured in the Graph page by dragging the modules around, and the two Dynamics modules, each of which comprise a compressor and a gate/expander, can be arranged in parallel for simultaneous downward and upward

compression (thanks to Ratios of less than 1:1 now being possible), or flexible New York compression. The Dynamics modules also offer a choice of single or multiband (up to three bands) operation, as do the Exciter and – most impressively – the Transient Shaper.

Global changes

All of the modules have been improved to a greater or lesser extent for v2, but there are also a number of 'global' enhancements, some of which are pretty major. Most obviously, the GUI has been redesigned – it's bigger and, in my opinion, easier on the eye. More significant than that, though, the new Overview window summarises all active processors in one window, enabling adjustment of the vast majority of their controls, including the interactive EQ display (minus numerical frequency/gain axes but with the spectrum

analyser), and catering for multiband mode with band selection buttons. Once you've got your EQ filter types, compression knee and a few other things set up, you could well find yourself not needing to go beyond the Overview for a given channel.

The Dynamics, Limiter and De-Esser modules now feature nifty combination threshold faders and input gain/gain reduction meters, and (also on the Transient Shaper) graphical Gain Trace Meters that show the signal level over time superimposed on a scrolling waveform – great for tweaking attack and release times.

Lastly, Alloy is now 64-bit compatible, and if you also have Ozone 5 Advanced, every Alloy 2 plug-in inserted shows up in its 2D and 3D spectrographs for visual monitoring.

On to the individual modules, then, starting with the EQ. Still rocking up to eight bands, it now offers a far wider range of filter models, including Vintage and Resonant shelves, Flat and Brickwall high and low-pass, a Vintage Bell and Baxandall Bass and Treble, the last going rather beyond the original Baxandall design with its adjustable shelving frequencies. The spectral analyser can now be zoomed on both axes, with the gain scale zooming independently of the EQ gain scale.

The Transient Shaper has been completely redesigned and now features

an Integrated Gain Meter that shows attack and sustain boost/attenuation separately, as well as the aforementioned Gain Trace Meter, which in this case represents attack and sustain independently of each other.

The Harmonic Exciter has also been entirely remade, with a much prettier X/Y pad that now mixes between four saturation algorithms – Tape, Tube, Warm and Retro (transistor) – rather than the levels and distribution of odd and even harmonics, as it used to.

The biggest changes to the Dynamics module are the new Detection Filter and the sub-1:1 ratios. The Detection Filter comprises high and low-pass filters for tailoring the input signal before it hits the detection circuit. As well as using this to pull frequencies out of the detection circuit, the fact that the filters have resonance

Template Library

Despite being pretty easy to use (particularly considering that it comprises seven discrete processors), Alloy 2 comes with a library of task-orientated factory presets that serve as great templates. Presented in a detachable browser with basic file management features and a Compare button for A/Bing your edits with the last selected preset's default state, the 180+ presets are divided into categorised folders. As well as fulfilling their titular remit well, the



presets serve an educational purpose too, giving the novice the opportunity to learn the broad strokes of channel strip setup for all manner of situations. This is only enhanced by the Overview window, which helpfully only ever shows the

modules in use in the current preset. New in Alloy 2 are Module presets, which are simply saved settings for each of the six modules. There are 60, and they're just as well designed as the global presets – I just wish there were more of them!

Of course, it's the sound that really matters, though, and on that score none of Alloy 2's modules disappoint

Indeed, the Transient Shaper is possibly the best of its kind that I've yet heard in software. The Dynamics and EQ modules are no

controls means you can also use them to overemphasise the response to specific frequencies.

Finally, the Limiter and De-esser have seen only minor tweaks. The Limiter can now limit the left and right channels independently, for finer control of wonky stereo material, while apart from the new combination faders/meters mentioned and the Gain Trace Meter, the De-esser stays the same.

In answer to my question at the end of the first paragraph, of course they have, yes. In fact, even at full price, Alloy 2 is a bargain. As we've come to expect from iZotope, the interface is as

straightforward and enjoyable to use as it is good looking – although a feature-packed and fairly complicated plug-in, even without the excellent Overview window, it would still be easy to get around. And far from being mere upgrade-baiting gimmicks, features like the new threshold controls/meters and Gain Trace Meters are genuinely useful.

Of course, it's the sound that really matters, though, and on that score none of Alloy 2's modules disappoint. Its predecessor already sounded amazing, and with the new EQ types and improved algorithms throughout, v2 is noticeably better and more versatile.

less impressive, delivering superb signal control and quality (the Dynamics modules' 'crosschaining' function, enabling each band in multiband mode to key the sidechains of the other bands, is noteworthy, as is the EQ's ALT-Solo mode, where holding down the Alt key and clicking in the EQ display solos a narrow band around that frequency), and such a broad spectrum of sonic flavouring that either could easily become go-to processors, even if you never used the rest of the plug-in.

All in all, then, Alloy 2 is a convenient, efficient, well-equipped and great-sounding mixing toolbox that no producer of any kind of music could fail to fall in love with. And at this price, it's an absolute steal. **FM**



Version 2 of iZotope's impressive plug-in adds a redesigned GUI and a new Overview window

SPECS

System Requirements:
PC: Windows XP (32-bit)/Vista (64-bit)/7 (32/64-bit), VST/VST 3/RTAS/AAX/DirectX host
Mac: Intel CPU, OS X 10.5.8 or later, AU/VST/VST 3/RTAS/AAX host

ALTERNATIVES



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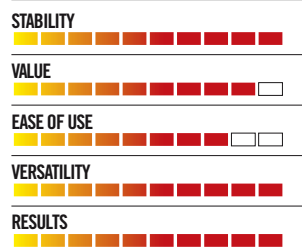
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Wave Arts
TrackPlug 5
\$149.95

Comprising a very similar array of processors to Alloy 2 (everything but the Transient Shaper), TrackPlug 5 is another fine channel strip.
www.wavearts.com

FutureMusic VERDICT



Another fab plug-in from iZotope, Alloy 2 is a musical life-changer that you shouldn't be without.