

# PICK OF THE FREE PLUG-INS

Getting a great sound need not cost the earth, in fact sometimes it costs nothing at all. Hollin Jones explores the best free options out there...

Ever since plug-ins were invented there has been a thriving market for free or donationware instruments and effects. When the internet took off, so did the number of people developing freebies, as they could now distribute them without having to use things like coverdisks. As software has improved, the number of people building their own plugs has increased. Developers release SDKs – Software Development Kits – to help this

process, and applications like NI's Reaktor and Max MSP let you build and save your own plug-ins as apps. The quality of free stuff is variable, but on the whole it has improved markedly and a lot of producers have at least a couple of free tools installed. Some people even make a virtue of producing music using only freeware.

Among instruments it tends to be synths that are most frequently modelled for free because they are relatively easy to program compared to pianos or other sample-based instruments. Some of the first VST plug-ins

were recreations of Roland 303 and 808 synths and drum machines because the technology used in those hardware units was simple compared to more modern synths. In terms of effects you have more variety – you will find all manner of reverbs, dynamics, delays and more outlandish stuff such as vocoders, tape simulation and rotary speaker simulations all available for free. There's a bit of a bias towards the VST format on Mac and PC since this is the oldest and most widely used, but Apple's AU format is increasingly supported as well.

## REVERB AND ECHO Add some space to your sounds with these great free reverbs and echo units



**MIDA DUBDELAY**  
MDA bundled together a load of great free plug-ins that you can still download from its website, and despite their being a few years old they still seem to work really well. They don't have particularly flashy GUIs – some in fact don't have any at all. They do sound great however and the DubDelay is one of the best. Regular delay units – of which there is one bundled as well – tend to be more conventional but for dub effects you need your echoes to change in amplitude as they occur, and to become thinner, just like on the classic Roland Space Echo. With this plug-in you can achieve that effect.

PLATFORM  
Mac and PC  
DOWNLOAD  
<http://mda.smartelectronix.com>



**FREEVERB**  
Freeverb 3 is a convolution reverb that uses sampled sound impulses to place your sound sources into a virtual space. It's not especially exciting to look at but it provides a great way to use convolution reverb in your projects, when some DAWs still use more regular digital reverb models. There are some presets and controls for room size, damping and width as well as a wet and dry mix to govern the size and character of the reverb effect. Freeverb 3 is available for Mac and PC and there's an AU port available from DestroyFX's website so that Mac users can run it in AU on hosts like Logic and GarageBand.

PLATFORM  
Mac and PC  
DOWNLOAD  
<http://freeverb3.sourceforge.net>



**TAL DUB 3**  
Part of the very well regarded TAL range of free plug-ins, the TAL Dub 3 is an easy-to-use dub delay and echo plug-in with an alias-free saturation stage, low pass and high pass filters, an input knob that enables you to drive the saturation level and a delay time of up to four seconds. There's the MIDI learn for each of its controls as well as the ability to create infinite delays with the feedback knob. Sync'd delays with presets for divisions of a beat make it easy to sync up the effect with your host DAW. It's available for both Mac and PC.

PLATFORM  
Mac and PC  
DOWNLOAD  
<http://kunz.cornput.ch>

## COMPRESSORS AND DYNAMICS Take control of your productions with these dynamic effects



**MCOMPRESSOR**  
MELDAProduction makes quite a few great free plug-ins, one of which is the MCompressor, an accomplished effect for controlling audio signal. As well as using shapes to help you draw in compression ratios for effects like expansion, gating or rhythmic pumping of the sound, it has signal maximization for mastering purposes, hard, linear and smooth knee shapes, sidechaining, randomization and the ability to process eight channels of surround sound. There's also MIDI Learn and up to 4x sampling for extremely high quality. It's available as part of a bundle for free; a small fee will unlock 'professional' mode.

PLATFORM  
Mac and PC  
DOWNLOAD  
[www.meldaproduction.com](http://www.meldaproduction.com)



**KJAEHRUS CLASSIC COMPRESSOR**  
Once again part of an excellent bundle, now discontinued but still available to download, the Kjaerhus Classic Compressor is a classic analogue-style VST compressor plug-in with a lot of warmth and punch functions. It's designed to be used on individual instruments and vocals, but is also useable on your final mixes. It only works on Windows as a VST plug-in and technically it is only supported as far as Windows XP, though a lot of people find that actually means they work right up to the latest version of Windows 7.

PLATFORM  
PC  
DOWNLOAD  
[www.brothersoft.com/publisher/kjaerhus-audio.html](http://www.brothersoft.com/publisher/kjaerhus-audio.html)



**MDA MULTIBAND**  
Another constituent of the excellent MDA plug-in bundle for Windows and Mac, the MDA Multiband is a multiband compressor that lets you selectively compress up to three bands – low, mid and high. This is especially useful for mastering tasks, when you might need to apply different levels of compression to different frequency bands instead of using one catch-all setting for the whole signal. It's also a useful trick to know about when you're working with sources like drums. You can also affect the stereo width of a signal with this plug-in for good measure.

PLATFORM  
Mac and PC  
DOWNLOAD  
<http://mda.smartelectronix.com>