

TEST

WAVES MUSICIANS BUNDLE II

# WAVES Musicians Bundle II

The Musicians Bundle puts quality plug-ins within the grasp of everybody, but does version 2 raise the game, or is it more of the same? **Bob Dormon** finds out.



## MUSICIANS BUNDLE II

Manufacturer **Waves**

Cost **MTM offer: £149 (until 1 December); RRP: £199; MBI & MBII MTM offer: £249 (until 1 December).** See page 63 for details of our special offer.

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## METHOD SPOT

### Put a plug in it...

Arguably, Waves offers the most comprehensive platform and plug-in protocol support of any audio developer. So, even if you switch from PC to Mac, you can take your Waves plug-ins with you, as DirectX, VST, MAS, AU and RTAS plug-ins are supported in the Native bundles, with TDM options available, too.

The introduction of the Musicians Bundle earlier this year addressed the issue that not all potential Waves customers have lots of cash to spare. Comprising five unique and desirable Waves plug-ins, this collection was aimed at guitar-based recording setups and cost £199, considerably cheaper than the next available Waves bundle, the ever-popular Native Power Pack (£370).

Yet the mission of the new Musicians Bundle II is to deliver an all-round processing solution for project studios, although it's not radically different from the original Musicians Bundle, as only two out of the five plug-ins offered have changed: replacing MetaFlanger (vintage modulation effects) and Renaissance Axx (a simple, but effective, guitar compressor) are the Renaissance EQ and Compressor.

The unchanged offerings are SuperTap (delay effect), Renaissance Vox (simple vocal compressor) and Doubler (high-quality double-tracking effect). Waves offers two installation choices: a USB dongle or a challenge/response code. Registration is also required, which creates a user account.

Previously available only in the Renaissance Maxx Bundle (£475), the Renaissance Compressor and Equalizer provide software emulations of analogue circuitry. The Compressor has more functions than those found in Renaissance Vox, but it's still very simple to operate. Featuring 64-bit internal resolution, the Renaissance Compressor incorporates algorithms from the C1 compressor, L1 Ultramaximiser (limiter) and the ARC (auto release control) found in the L2. This combination produces a



▲ Renaissance Vox provides hassle-free dynamics control of vocals – and to spice things up, SuperTap's delay treatments will take you all the way from the stadium to the surreal.

dynamics processor that's well suited to both the recording and mastering processes.

## Looking for release?

The Renaissance Compressor has the usual Threshold, Ratio, Attack, Release and Gain controls, along with input, output and metering. The Release function is deactivated if the ARC is on. If the Ratio control is set to a figure below 1.00, then it functions as an expander instead of a compressor. The main output meters have a peak indicator that glows yellow when operating and turns red if extreme levels are encountered. The Opto and Electro options introduce particular types of behaviour when the gain reduction is above or below 3dB.

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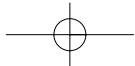
With Electro, the release time becomes slower above 3dB, but acts faster when the level drops below that threshold. Opto is the opposite, using slower release times below 3dB and higher ones above. While Electro mode's slower release times with a high gain input can act as a leveller, the Opto approach is more in line with vintage gear and is well worth experimenting with, on anything from drums to vocals.

Depending on the source material, the Smooth and Warm Character options may prove to be rather too subtle. Warm actually adds low-frequency harmonics as more compression is introduced to a signal, so it might not be your first choice for hi-hats. However, Smooth has a truer response as it doesn't add additional harmonics. Although the Renaissance Compressor pushes all the right buttons, it does lack a sidechain input option, which would expand its functionality considerably for tasks such as de-essing.

## Bell bottoms

The Renaissance Equalizer has six-, four- or two-band EQ options, so you can avoid sapping CPU strength with a multi-band plug-in if all you need is

a hi/low-shelving setup. Each band has Gain, Frequency and Q (bandwidth settings) controls, plus filter-type options. All bands have bell (parametric) and low-shelving (first three) or hi-shelving (last three) filtering. The first and last bands have the addition of high-pass and low-pass filters respectively. The EQ algorithms are modelled on analogue circuitry, with some of the responses apparently inspired by the time-honoured Pultec EQP-1A.



The EQ has an interactive graphical display of the equalisation curve created. You can drag a point on the curve to change the settings. The bell curve produced by a boosted frequency will not be the same shape if the frequency is cut. Instead, it roughly halves, narrowing the focus when erroneous frequencies are being attenuated by the EQ. This is extremely effective as, in general, more precision is desirable when cutting unwanted resonances than when boosting areas of the frequency spectrum.

Incidentally, if the equalizer is being used in stereo mode, the Link options enable it to be either chained (for identical changes on each side) or independent. With the latter, the left side is shown as a yellow curve and the right in red. In this mode, tweaks to stereo mic recordings, drum loops or even entire mixes can be achieved. The two EQ channels can then be relinked so that graphical display movements retain gain offsets. Overall, the Renaissance EQ is a plug-in you'd not want to live without. It's not because it does wild things, it's just because it enhances a track with such ease. There's no great agony when EQ'ing with this plug-in, it somehow manages to hit the spot every time.

### Performance enhancer

While the Renaissance Compressor is ideal for those willing to spend the time experimenting with it, if inspiration strikes – or you're just feeling lazy – then reach for Renaissance Vox. With only three controls (Gate, Compression and Gain), this dynamics effect does not have subtlety at its heart – there's no Ratio control, for example. Ratio is determined by how hard the Vox compressor is driven using the Compression function. This acts like a threshold control and governs the gain make-up, too. The Gate

### RELATED TECHNOLOGY

#### The original and best?

The original Musicians Bundle differs from MBII by the inclusion of Renaissance Axx and MetaFlanger. Both of these plug-ins are going to keep guitarists happy. Renaissance Axx is similar to Renaissance Vox both in its simplicity and in the fact that it has only three operational controls: Threshold, Attack and Gain. The Attack function is handy for guitars because a slow attack will let through some of the bite of a plucked string, leaving the compression to act on the sustained notes. The lack of a Release control is what blights RenAxx because it can be rather unsubtle on more expressive guitar phrases. While most phaser, flanger and chorus effects can be re-created with short delay times and a dab of modulation, the MetaFlanger plug-in incorporates the lot. It even has a tape-emulation mode as well as a comprehensive allocation of functions to suit taste and tempo alike.

Got Cubase SX3 and still wishing you had more than a four-band EQ? With the Renaissance Equalizer, you get six bands and a great sound to boot. And while you're at it, you might as well get the Renaissance Compressor running, too.



Besides real-time processing, Digital Performer can perform offline effects treatments on select audio regions. Here, Doubler is applied to an acoustic guitar part.

control functions as an expander: gently reducing, rather than muting, the level of signals below its threshold. The Gain control determines the final output, behaving more like a master fader. Overall, RenVox lacks a delicate touch, but its tough taming of wayward levels is ideal for broadcast announcers as well as delivering an 'in-er-face' sound for rappers and an evenness of output for inexperienced vocalists with lousy mic technique.

### Tap dancing

SuperTap offers just about every function you could wish for in a delay. With two or six tap options, this plug-in will also take a mono input and produce stereo output, as each of the delay voices has independent panning functions, as well as Gain, EQ and Delay Time controls. The actual position of the voices is shown graphically and each voice can be dragged across the stereo soundfield and moved higher or lower to change level. Tempo can be entered manually or with the Tap control, using the mouse. As each voice can be muted, you can choose how you want to arrange the voices – either as an echoing cascade or a blooming chorus of closely timed sounds – and SuperTap has feedback and modulation functions, too.

While giving six voices with delay times of up to four seconds each may prove to be overkill, flexibility is another aspect to SuperTap, as it can emulate classic analogue tape delays, too. If setting it up to make a sensible noise seems rather daunting at first, then check out the presets and see how time flies.

### Twin-track approach

Doubler has nothing like the delay time range of SuperTap – notching up a mere 100ms – yet its purpose is somewhat more refined. Doubler

is unique, as its detuning functions do not affect the overall length of the source material, so the double-tracking sounds particularly authentic. Doubler can have two or four voices and, like SuperTap, it has a similar array of controls for positioning, mixing and modulation, plus graphical interfaces for tuning and EQ. When using Doubler on vocals or acoustic guitar, the results are stunning, as its clean sound combined with the chorusing effects of the detuning are a dream. It can be used creatively, too – going beyond the inevitable Elvis impersonations – when the EQ is applied in extreme ways to provide atmospheric announcement voices.

By taking a few choice plug-ins from its more expensive products, Waves delivers an affordable taster of its chart-topping technology. It's a pity that the delights of the Renaissance Bass (a plug-in that puts the boom into the bottom end) or Renaissance Channel (a worthy compressor-and-EQ combination) are absent, with duplicated plug-ins offered instead. Maybe this is because we'll see more Musicians Bundles in the future. For now, though, the Musicians Bundle II is the best yet. **MTM**

### SUMMARY

#### MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

- PC Pentium III 500MHz, Windows 98/2000/XP, 256MB RAM
- Mac G4 500MHz, Mac OS 9.2.2, OSX 10.2.2 or higher, 256MB RAM

#### KEY FEATURES

- Vocal compressor/expander
- Comprehensive compressor functions
- Versatile equalizer effect
- Unique double-tracking effect
- Flexible multi-tap delay line

#### WHY BUY

- Easy to use
- Splendid EQ and versatile compressor
- Creative multi-tap delay effect
- High-quality double-tracking effect
- Supports popular plug-in protocols

#### WALK ON BY

- No reverb effect
- No sidechain on compressor
- Vocal dynamics processing effect unsubtle

### VERDICT

The Musicians Bundle II is an excellent processing solution for project studios. If it was available to all at our special-offer price, it would be a ten-star package.

