

TEST

WAVES TRANSFORM 2 (NATIVE)

WAVES

Transform 2 (Native)

FOR MAC & PC

Waves has always been a pioneering force in the audio plug-in market, but does its new Transform 2 still have what it takes to wow us? **Bob Dormon** makes Waves...



MUSIC TECH MAGAZINE
Recommended

TRANSFORM 2 (NATIVE)

Manufacturer **Waves**

Price **£1,052**

Free upgrade from version 1.x

Contact

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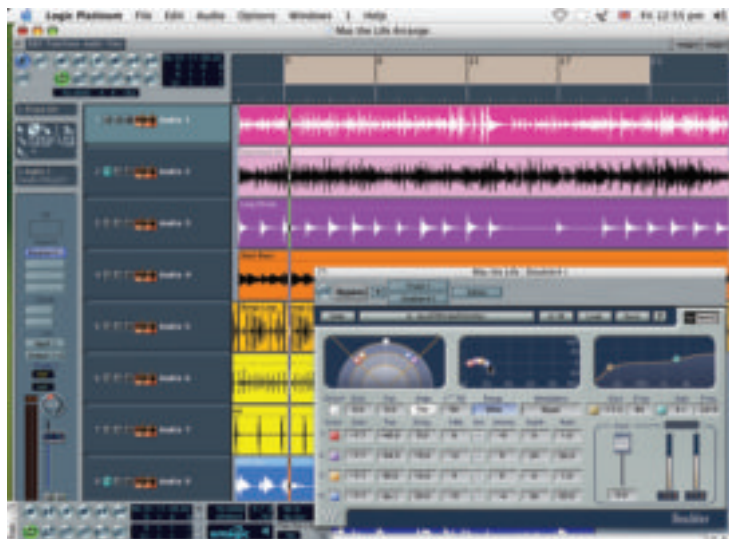
When it comes to enticing punters to part with their cash, manufacturers either have to think up something new or do the same again, but better. The new Waves Transform 2 plug-in bundle actually combines both options in a collection of four plug-ins that, on the surface, may seem old hat, but dig a little deeper and you'll find both quality and innovation.

The Transform bundle consists of Soundshifter (a time- and pitch-changing tool), Doubler (a high-quality double-tracking effect), Trans-X (a unique transient processor) and Morphoder (a vocoder-style effect that can morph two signals into one). A USB dongle is used for authorisation and installation creates distinct Waveshell plug-ins compatible with most popular audio protocols.

Trans-X action

Here you go: a plug-in that caters for wayward transients. How exciting. But wait... The Trans-X is a lot more interesting than you think. It comes in two forms: Trans-X Wide, and Trans-X Multi, with mono or stereo versions of both. Unlike a compressor or limiter, this process is not designed for use on mixes, but works best with solo instruments and drums. In fact, you may find it very difficult to detect what's going on if you try it on a mix.

Need to sharpen up or smooth out a sound? Here, the Multi version uses frequency to determine the action in Spark XL.



Adding a touch of class to an acoustic guitar track in Logic is Waves Doubler. The sound quality of this plug-in takes some beating.

Trans-X shapes the transient attacks to alter the impact of a signal to either increase or reduce its punchiness. Waves even goes so far as to claim that it behaves as if it can control the microphone position. This sounds pretty far-fetched until you try it (a bass drum provides the most obvious demonstration of this effect).

There are presets available if you're not sure what to fiddle with, but overall, adjusting the Range control using Trans-X Wide does the trick as it specifies the span of the transient gain adjustments. Raise it above the threshold and the drum sounds more intimate and 'in yer face'; lower the Range level and it sounds like it's being played next door. The latter effect can also be applied to bass guitar to take the punch out of it and to make it sound more like a fretless instrument.

Besides Range, the other controls are Sensitivity (to set the amplitude of attacks to be processed), Duration (to determine attack time or velocity to be shaped), Release (to change gain recovery time) and Trim (to alter output level).

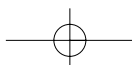
The controls interact well, although more subtly on some instruments than others – which is

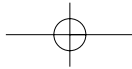
where Trans-X Multi comes into play. Multi enables the processing to be applied to four specific areas of the frequency spectrum and, given that it's all about transients, it comes as no surprise that it is particularly effective on drum kits, crispening up hi-hats and percussion loops. Using its frequency controls, it's worth experimenting on other instruments, too (picked guitar, for example), as it can change an instrument's presence in the mix without drastically colouring the sound.

Double time

Is there room in the world for another digital delay – especially one that only goes up to 100ms? Well, Doubler has two or four voices, each with separate controls for Gain, Pan, Delay, Feedback, Octaver, Detune, Depth, and Rate. There's a modulation section thrown in, plus the Direct channel with a high-pass filter, a basic two-band EQ, and Master gain control.

But don't you get all that with Waves UltraPitch? There is a similarity, but Doubler sounds a lot better. Rather than providing warbling harmonies, Doubler's pitch shifting is a subtle affair, only moving up or down by a semitone (apart from the





Here, the basic SoundShifter Pitch plug-in is used in Digital Performer 4.1



SoundShifter Parametric is an off-line plug-in. Here, it's running in Nuendo 2.0.



Morphoder can create interesting sounds but needs development regarding routing.

Octaver function, which drops a voice down by 12 semitones and burbles away quite happily).

Octaver aside, it sounds very clean and colourful, providing a good thickener for just about any instrument or vocals. You can experiment with creating your own chorus of crooners, or use the delay for a touch of slapback echo. Waves claims that Doubler maintains its edge over other pitch/modulation/delay effects in its use of a detuning processing that doesn't alter the audio duration, which is why it works well for double tracking.

It's probably fair to say that SoundShifter is where all the money has gone in this bundle. It can shift the pitch or duration of audio – nothing new there – but it's very transparent in operation. Often, this type of processing places a limit on what's acceptable, but with SoundShifter that's not an issue. Waves suggests using 'modest ratios' for a clean output, but in tests, even drastic changes produced relatively flawless results.

Using SoundShifter Graphic in Nuendo, Cubase SX, and Pro Tools was very intuitive. Against a backdrop

routing using busses being Pro Tools only, there'll be a lot of bouncing going on to stitch together a track with chords played from this plug-in.

Morphoder definitely has potential, and no doubt future updates will make it more accessible to a wider range of users. For those seeking an edge when it comes to defining instruments in the mix, Trans-X is a tool worth investigating. While it might not be your first choice of plug-in purchase, once you've heard the likes of SoundShifter and Doubler, you'll be drawn to the Waves Transform Bundle. **MTM**

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It's also perfect for guitars and can be configured as a phaser or flanger. If you thought that there's nothing new to offer in this area of processing, then try out Doubler. It really is a breath of fresh air, fattening up vocals and delivering luscious tonal colour to guitars, basses and synths.

Moving Waves

The SoundShifter plug-in has three forms: Pitch (a basic plug-in that can function in real time); Graphic (enabling time or pitch changes to be applied by drawing); and Parametric (a basic data-entry version of Graphic). The latter two are off-line processors and currently don't function as Audio Units plug-ins. On Mac OSX, Graphic and Parametric work with Pro Tools (RTAS), Cubase SX 2, and Nuendo 2 (VST). A Preview feature is used to check on the edits before processing. Tests revealed that Spark XL 2.82 can also utilise these VST plug-ins, but can't preview the processing, so you're working in the dark. Waves told us that TC Electronic will support the Preview feature in a forthcoming update.

of the audio waveform, a zoomable beats and bar scale (with other timescale options) shifts in time according to the changes in duration. This simplifies plotting out both timing and pitch, which can be as extreme or as subtle as necessary.

The Preview function enables you to hear the ramping up or slowing down of sections, as well as portamento pitch effects. The Parametric version is less exciting, and is intended for 'media pros' who simply want to change the length of music cues for film or TV.

Georgio Morphoder?

The Morphoder plug-in combines two signals: a modulator (such as a vocal) and carrier (instrument) to produce the classic talking synth sound. An eight-voice stereo synth (with virtual keyboard) is included for this purpose. According to the manual, Morphoder can be controlled via MIDI, too, but Waves confessed that this feature has not been implemented yet.

With a bit of fiddling Morphoder can churn out some impressive noises, but without any obvious MIDI support and access to the input

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According to Waves, there are no hard-and-fast rules for using Trans-X, its transient shaping effects processor. It is a dynamics processor, but it works in a different way from conventional compressors and limiters. These operate on signal levels which exceed a predetermined threshold, whereas Trans-X detects rapidly rising changes in gain in relation to a reference signal velocity and applies its processing based on the speed of the transient. Due to the different nature of its dynamics adjustments, it can work alongside other dynamics processors anywhere in the signal path and still be effective.

Trans-X Wide is less CPU-intensive than the multi-band version and is a good all-rounder. For greater flexibility, use Multi. It features the same crossover design as the Waves C4 four-band compressor, although it lacks the Solo feature (which is shame, as it would be interesting to hear the processing of each stage in isolation).

SUMMARY

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

- PC Pentium III 733MHz, Windows XP, 256MB RAM
- Mac G4 733MHz, OS9.2.2, OSX 10.2.5 or higher 256MB RAM (G4 400MHz if you don't require real-time SoundShifter preview)

FORMATS

- Digidesign Audiosuite, RTAS (Real Time Audiosuite)
- MAS (MOTU Audio System) support (Mac only)
- VST (Virtual Studio Technology) support
- DirectX support (PC only)
- AU (Audio Units) support (OSX only)
- TDM version also available

WHY BUY

- Unique and expressive dynamics processing
- Versatile pitch and time-stretch functions
- Luscious double-tracking modulation effects
- Creative vocoder features

WALK ON BY

- Some SoundShifter functions unavailable for MAS and AU
- Real-time Soundshifter demands fast CPU
- Morphoder MIDI input unimplemented
- Access to Morphoder input routing Pro Tools only

VERDICT

Transform is a seductive package offering terrifically high quality. Remember that when your credit card bill arrives...



SPOT METHOD Size matters

The technology behind SoundShifter can also be used in the background in Pro Tools. In the application's Preferences menu is the option to choose Waves Time Shifter as the default Time Compression/Expansion processor. So, when region resizing tasks that involve timestretch are performed, the superior Waves algorithm will be used.

