



Waves PC MAC CLA MixDown \$99

Want a ready-made master bus chain to push you a little further over the cliff? How about a box full of Chris Lord-Alge's mixing wisdom?

> Waves CLA MixDown is the latest signature series plugin developed in collaboration with top mixer Chris Lord-Alge (Muse, Green Day, Deftones, etc.). Much like his other Waves CLA plugins (Drums, Guitars, Unplugged and bestseller Vocals) it's based on his own processing chains, providing a simple 'set and forget' design with just a handful of key controls. This time around, the target is the mix bus, and the three processes at hand are EQ (Bass and Treble), compression (Glue) and desk saturation (Drive). With the controls arranged over just four key faders, and a choice of two styles for Glue, it's not meant to be an in-depth mastering plugin.

Each fader offers more/less style scaling (+/- 10), and each processor can be bypassed to A/B its effect. Inter-processing gain is handled automatically by the plugin, and ideal operating levels are set using the handy multicolour sensitivity LED above the Input fader (yellow indicates a suitable level). Input and output levels can be further viewed using multipart peak- and VU-style needle meters, with the latter also switchable to gain reduction.

Starting point

MixDown's four faders are calibrated to add some processing at the default zero position, and our tests confirmed a gentle and broad 2dB boost centred around 100Hz and 3.5kHz. What's more, a test tone at -14dBFS achieves 1dB of gain reduction for both compressor

settings and some low-level odd and even harmonic distortions from the Drive process. While analysing the frequency response, we also noticed that all four processors introduced some high-frequency tail-off above 15kHz.

Sonically, this starting point - with faders at zero and the level turning the input LED yellow (as suggested in the manual) - adds gentle sweetening, presence and that desirable 'glue'. Further testing revealed that at maximum settings, EQ boost is no more than 6dB, with cut no more than 3dB. Meanwhile, the Drive process remains dominated by the first three harmonics as its fader is raised to the max. This reveals MixDown to be a subtle rather than radical processor, a fact further reflected by the handful of presets, the majority of which do not use maximum settings.

In practice, we found the biggest decision to make when using MixDown was which - if any - of its Glue settings to use. The two flavours are snappy (setting 1) and more laid back (setting 2), both of which add glue and enhance presence, even with minimal gain reduction. With no detailed settings to adjust, we found picking one simply boiled down to whichever works best in the given situation. We noticed that EQ settings don't influence compression, indicating that either the EQ is placed after the compressor or two are run in parallel. The Drive is influenced by both, so is clearly placed post EQ and compression.

Ultimately, CLA MixDown successfully achieves its aim of providing point-and-shoot mix bus processing, with a sonic signature that matches its famous endorsee. You *can* achieve near identical results with separate plugins, of course, but as a time-saving tool for quick DIY masters, this comes highly recommended. **cm**

Web www.waves.com

Alternatively

Klanghelm SDRR
cm199 » 9/10 » £23

Four modes of drive, compression and EQ to add to a stereo source

iZotope Neutron
cm238 » 9/10 » £155

Dynamics, EQ, transients and exciter modules make up this intelligent mixing assistant

Verdict

For Set and forget simplicity

Great for subtle to moderate mix enhancement

LED indicator to help set operating level
Signature CLA presets

Bypass of each processing slider

Against No limiter or width adjustment

High frequency tail-off won't appeal to everyone

Waves' ludicrously simple master bus processor is great for that final sheen and mix glue, and adds another quick-fire option to their successful CLA range

9/10

Under the hood

Waves haven't disclosed what actual outboard has been emulated to create CLA MixDown, but Monsieur Lord-Alge's hardware preferences have been reasonably well documented in interviews. He's known to be a fan of SSL's classic 4000 series console, not only for the powerful channel EQ and dynamics but also for the sprightly behaviour of the bus compressor, and he's also been known to favour its saturation.

On his mix buss, our man Lord-Alge is a fan of Focusrite's Red 3 Compressor/Limiter and Pultec's EQP-1A, apparently preferring to set the latter around 60Hz or 100Hz for natural low-end roundness, and in the midrange for presence. Putting these pieces together, we can see where CLA MixDown's processing is coming from. Nevertheless, the details of which parameters change as you move the sliders remain a bit of a mystery.