UNDO/REDO
Made a mistake? Turn the clock back right here

EQ BAND PANEL
Now with Bypass and Delete buttons, and menu access

FILTER NODES
Create and drag EQ filter nodes to shape the response

BRICKWALL MODE
New for the Low and High Cut filters

FILTER SHAPE
Choose from nine shapes, including the new Flat Tilt

OUTPUT
Adjust output level and pan, gain scale and more

ANALYZER
Set up the spectrum display and view masking frequencies

DYNAMIC EQ
Set the ratio for compression or upward expansion

PROCESS MODE
Zero Latency, Natural Phase or Linear Phase

STEREO MODE
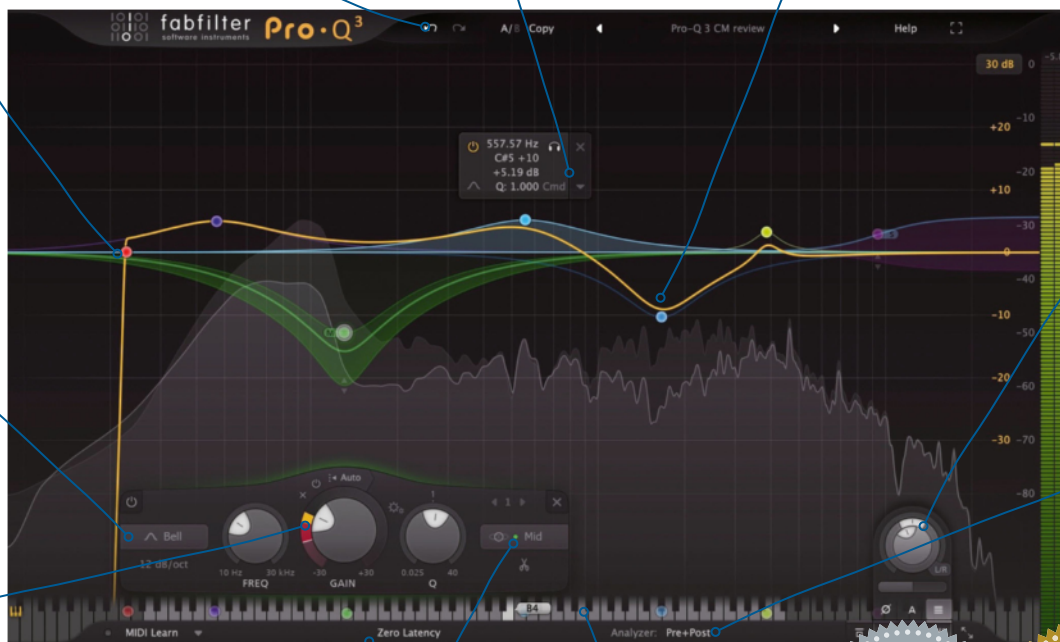Every band can now work in Left/Right or Mid/Side mode

PIANO KEYBOARD
Set your EQ using note names as well as frequencies

FabFilter
Pro-Q 3 £134 PC MAC

The next stage in the ongoing evolution of this justifiably popular EQ plugin introduces a dynamic mode, surround sound and more

> FabFilter's Pro-Q has been one of our go-to EQ plugins ever since its launch at the end of 2009 (9/10, cm148), thanks to its smooth, accessible interface and endless versatility. The latest version, Pro-Q 3 (VST/AU/AAX), adds a dynamic EQ mode, enabling compression and expansion of discrete frequency bands, alongside a number of other enhancements . Before we get into all that, though, let's run through the fundamentals for the uninitiated.

Pro-Q is a highly configurable EQ plugin that does everything it can to make designing your ideal response curve as easy as possible. Up to 24 bands are added and adjusted directly in the main display through a cleverly conceived combination of mouse movements and modifier keys, although a pop-up control panel also lays out Frequency, Q, Gain, etc, as knobs, should you prefer that way of working. Every band offers the same choice of filter types (Bell, Low Shelf, High Cut, etc) within its Band (right-click) menu

and the control panel, as well as six roll-off slopes from 12 to 96dB/octave. Introduced in Pro-Q 2 (10/10, cm211), the ingenious Spectrum Grab feature lets you drag any point on the post-EQ spectrum itself up and down to adjust the volume level at that frequency, automatically setting up the requisite EQ filter in the background. V2 also added EQ Match to Pro-Q's

"Dynamic EQ isn't a new concept by any means, but Pro-Q 3's implementation of it is supremely elegant"

arsenal, via which the spectral profile of an external signal is imposed on the source signal to put it in the same sonic ballpark. Throw in the Piano display mode (showing filter frequencies as musical notes), a choice of processing modes (Linear Phase, Zero Latency and the unique Natural Phase) a full screen option and more, and you have an EQ that already takes some beating. Say hello, nonetheless, to Pro-Q 3...

Expanding horizons
Dynamic EQ isn't a new concept by any means, but Pro-Q 3's implementation of it is supremely elegant. Any bell or shelf can be switched to Dynamic EQ mode, The Dynamic Range (ie, ratio) is set by adjusting the collar that appears around the Gain knob, dragging the up/down arrows that appear in the band's coloured gain curve, or Alt-mousewheeling over the node. When it's below the gain setting, compression is applied, lowering the volume of the louder parts

"Dynamic EQ mode, collision detection and per-band stereo configuration make this a must-upgrade"

of the signal; and when it's above, expansion takes place, boosting them. The threshold defaults to Auto mode, but deactivating this pops up a slider for manual adjustment. The resulting gain changes are metered within the collar control and animated in the display. No control is given over the attack, release or knee, however – FabFilter say they've tweaked these to optimise them for program-dependent behaviour. While there are situations in which access to said parameters would certainly be useful, we've yet to find ourselves bemoaning their absence too heavily, and we can kind of understand FabFilter's reasoning behind keeping them behind-the-scenes in the interest of simplicity. What matters most is that Dynamic EQ mode provides an effortless means by which to apply cuts and boosts to specific frequency ranges in response to volume changes. It's hugely useful for suppressing harsh peaks without detracting from quieter sections (de-essing, hi-hat taming, etc) or emphasising particular frequencies in the louder parts of a signal, and it works in every one of Pro-Q 3's Stereo Placement modes – Left, Right, Stereo, Mid and Side – as well as in Linear Phase mode.

Channel tunnel

Pro-Q 3 waves its arms at movie and videogame producers with support for surround formats up to Dolby Atmos 7.1.2. With the plugin loaded on a surround channel, the output meters expand accordingly, and the Stereo panel for each band allows selection of individual or multiple channels for processing, while also retaining the Left/Right/Mid/Side options for each one.

While we're talking about stereo processing, although Pro-Q 2 could be flipped between global left/right or mid/side processing, Pro-Q 3 offers the same choice on a per-band basis. Therefore, using a single instance, you could, for example add top-end air to the sides of a frequency-rich pad and centralise an off-centre mid-range component.

See the Analyzers of every Pro-Q 3 in your project, and any masking taking place

Collision course

Taking a leaf out of iZotope's book, FabFilter have implemented the facility for multiple instances of Pro-Q 3 to communicate with each other, sharing their spectrum analysers for unified visual referencing and the prevention of auditory masking.

Pro-Q 2's Analyzer popup simply enabled switching on and off of the pre-processing, post-processing and sidechain spectra in the main display, but in Pro-Q 3 it also houses thumbnails of the post-processing spectra from all other instances of the plugin in the project. Clicking one of these thumbnails puts that external spectrum in the main display as a red outline, alongside the pre and post spectra of the 'host' Pro-Q 3. Frequency ranges that are causing masking – ie, clashes that may or may not be obvious to the ear – between the host instance and the selected external one are highlighted with a red glow in the main display, while masking frequencies in all the other instances are similarly indicated in their thumbnail graphics. This makes it easy to adjust for the masking in whichever instance the mix dictates to be the most effective, although we were hoping you'd be able to access the controls of each instance from the host plugin, as well as their analysers, which you currently can't.

Pro-Q 2's eight filter types are joined by Flat Tilt – a full-frequency linear tilting EQ – and the Low and High Cut filters now include a super steep Brickwall Slope. Spectrum Grab and EQ Match have been enhanced, too, with frequency/note labels attached to the most prominent peaks in the former, and matching to the output of another Pro-Q 3 instance for the latter. And finally, the EQ panel now affords access to the Shape and Band menus, and incorporates Bypass and Delete buttons; and the Band menu sees the addition of an Invert Gain function.

Pro, no cons

Pro-Q 3 represents almost as monolithic a milestone as its predecessor did at the time with its gamechanging Spectrum Grab. The new Dynamic EQ mode, collision detection feature and per-band stereo configuration make this a must-upgrade for any serious mixing and/or mastering engineer already toting v2, while surround support will endear it greatly to media producers. And for those who don't own a previous version, Pro-Q 3 is unarguably one of the finest EQ plugins around, whether it's for getting surgical on individual instruments within a mix, massaging a master or anything in between. Outstanding. **cm**

Spectrum Grab now displays frequency/note handles on the most prominent peaks in the signal

Web fabfilter.com

Alternatively

DMG Audio EQuilibrium
cm192 » 10/10 » £150
Another superb and equally unmissable EQ plugin

Sound Radix SurferEQ 2
cm237 » 9/10 » £389
Five-band dynamic EQ with pitch-tracking via monophonic input signal, MIDI or sidechain

Verdict

| For | Dynamic EQ is beautifully done |
| Good surround support |
| Collision detection is neat |
| Per-band L/R or M/S setting |

| Against | No Dynamic EQ attack and release controls |
| No surround panner |

Adding significantly to the feature set without compromising its famously zippy workflow, Pro-Q 3 is an exemplar of modern software EQ design

10/10