

SCENIC HYBRID INSTRUMENT

This soundscape/ambient instrument looks simple, but behind the scenes it's deep

GLOBAL RACK CONTROLS

Flip the rack and undo/redo changes



REASON

Yes, that's the Reason rack running in Live. You can now load the Reason Rack Plugin in any VST3- or AU-hosting DAW

SWEeper

A draw-your-own LFO controlling phasing, flanging or filtering. You can trigger it with audio too

CHANNEL DEVICES

The SSL processors from Reason's Mixer (EQ, Dynamics and Master Bus) are now available in the Rack

QUARTET

A comprehensive take on chorusing with four types of algorithm

LAYER INSTRUMENTS

RR plugin goes on a single channel, so you can layer instruments from the same MIDI track in your DAW

Reason Studios Reason 11 £499



The much-loved virtual studio returns with a renamed owner, three new devices and a plugin version for integration into other DAWs

> Since the world first fell in love with Reason in 2000, one thing has defined this most virtual studio-ish of virtual studios: its fully patchable Rack, boasting a wealth of devices and an infinite supply of virtual patch cables with which to connect them. With the popularity of Reason as a DAW now arguably dwindling, it's not a huge surprise that its developers - who recently changed name from Propellerhead Software to Reason Studios - have unshackled the Reason Rack, with all the additions of the last 19 years, as a plugin for use in other DAWs.

By buying any copy of Reason 11 (Intro, £69; Standard, £309; Suite, £499), which still functions as a standalone DAW, of course, you'll get the snappily-named Reason Rack Plugin and Reason Rack Plugin Effect installed to your plugin folder, giving you instruments-and-effects or effects-only versions of the Reason Rack. Nearly all the non-VST instruments, effects, utilities, players and Rack Extensions

you have access to in the full Reason are available here as well.

New in the rack

If you're all caught up on recent updates since version 10.4 six months ago (The Monotone Bass Synthesizer and Rytmik Drum Machine), Scenic (available only in the Suite edition or as a

"The front page makes things very simple, but the Edit button takes you to a far more in-depth interface"

separate purchase) will be the only new instrument for you to check out this time around. Specialising in ambient tones and soundscapes, Scenic provides two sound sources ('Engines') with a choice of 91 sounds for both. The front page makes things abundantly simple, but hitting the Edit button takes you to a far more in-depth interface with per-Engine sample behaviour editing, insert effects controls, and delay and reverb settings, all alongside the now-familiar Reason-style mod matrix and LFOs, plus a new addition: an extremely cool Pulse LFO geared up for animated tremolo sounds.

Reason 11's Sweeper Modulation Effect (Standard edition and upwards) has a draw-your-own modulator that can hook up to some great-sounding Phaser, Flanger or Filter effects. Thanks to both LFO modulation and audio triggering, you can drive the effect based on the amplitude of incoming notes, creating filter

“Reason continues to look like an aging relic that’s somehow both too cluttered and too empty”

envelope effects, or, indeed, classic phasing and flanging, thoroughly replacing the original Reason Phaser and Flanger devices.

Quartet Chorus Ensemble (Standard edition and upwards) also goes further than the original modulation devices from nearly two decades ago, with four types of algorithm - Chorus, BBD, FFT and Grain. If you really want a chorus processor with 19 controls, you’ll be happy with this one. And before you ask, the three included ‘Uno Chorus’ presets *do* provide that sought-after classic Roland effect, and a very good imitation it is too.

Hold on, there’s more. Reason’s plugin version does away with the onboard SSL mixer (all hail the return of the classic 14:2 and 6:2 mixer devices), but that doesn’t mean its sounds are gone. The analogue-style Channel EQ, Channel Dynamics and Master Bus Compressor have had their DSP plumbed into three so-named Rack devices. Front-panel controls are very much the same, but interestingly, all have CV features added around the back, allowing you to route signals like gain reduction out and pipe in filter frequency and gain controls.

Reason as a DAW

As a DAW, Reason continues to play catchup with the rest of the industry. Version 11 plugs some holes in the feature list with automation curves, easy crossfading of overlapping clips, better vertical zoom, a mute tool for MIDI notes, a new pencil tool for ‘painting’ multiple notes at the current quantisation setting, and a few more welcome additions.

Putting this lip service to progress aside, Reason unfortunately continues to look like an ageing relic that’s somehow both too cluttered and too empty, with vital real estate still wasted in the interface. And it has a take on project navigation that’s idiosyncratic at best and frustrating at worst.

Reason as a plugin

The Reason Rack Plugin and Reason Rack Plugin Effect... er, plugins, feel like a ground-up build of



Open tabs in Scenic and access advanced granular sampling controls for each layer



Reason still doesn't load VST3 or AU plugins, so you'll miss out on software from new developers

Two steps forward, three steps back

Reason has a long and chequered history with formats. First it connected to other DAWs using the Propellerhead-developed ReWire; next was the introduction of Rack Extensions in v6.5; and then, finally, Reason 9.5 did the previously unthinkable and introduced VST2 support back in 2016.

Reason 11 still has no support for VST3 and Audio Units plugins, but the Reason Rack Plugin is available *only* in VST3 and AU formats for use in other DAWs - not the classic VST2 format. This could be due to a licensing issue after the company's name change, but

it's no problem, you can still run the Reason Rack Plugin in almost every other DAW that exists... apart from one: Reason 11.

That's right, two main updates after the introduction of VST2 support, Reason 11 is still only able to host VST2 plugins, which are quickly going out of fashion thanks to Steinberg no longer granting new licenses.

Without the addition of VST3 and/or AU support, it's only really a matter of time until Reason, once again, finds itself unable to load some of the world's favourite plugins.

Reason for VST and AU (coming soon) formats. The window is resizable, and everything functions and feels just like you're using the rack in the full DAW. The legendary Reason stability is in evidence when using the plugin, although instantiating it has thrown up a couple of crashes in some DAWs.

The Browser is here, alongside all the devices that you would get with your non-plugin version of the software, including any Rack Extensions you own. Gone is the Tab control for flipping the rack, depending on your DAW, and so are the Undo/Redo keyboard shortcuts. That's more down to the plugin formats than it is Reason itself, and these functions have been assigned buttons at the top of the interface. One key deficit is the loss of the External MIDI Instrument - the Reason Rack Plugin can't send MIDI out into your DAW.

While the Reason Rack Plugin is the headline of this update, there's not much more to be said about it that we haven't fully covered over the years. It's sure to up the appeal of Reason to experienced users keen to put a nostalgic item back into their bag of tricks, especially considering the generous 'from any version' upgrade pricing, perhaps a resurgence for this historic software is on the cards. **cm**

Web reasonstudios.com

Alternatively

kiloHearts Snap Heap
NA » NA » €299

Want a new effects rack? This has 27 processors to snap together in any order, with modulation on tap

Ableton Live 10
cm255 » 9/10 » From £69

If you haven't tried Live's to-the-point interface, it's a slick alternative to Reason as a DAW

Verdict

For Using the Reason Rack as a plugin is a pleasant blast from the past
Mixer DSP available as Rack devices with novel CV in/out options
Scenic, Sweeper and Quartet devices

Against No VST3/AU support
Reason as a DAW remains untended

A usable, fun addition to your plugin folder, Reason 11's new devices are impressive - but the DAW needs a rethink

8/10