IK Multimedia MixBox

> MixBox is a custom channel strip plugin that lets you build a rack of effects from a single plugin screen. Many channel strip plugins concentrate on a standard combo of EQ and compression. IK's heritage in modelling more music gear means you also get studio effects like delay, reverb and modulation, plus guitar amp elements such as cabinets. All of this makes it a versatile, creative effect-hosting unit that will appeal to musicians as well as just producers and mixing engineers. Let's open the lunchbox on this tasty Italian collection of mixing effects, with its huge set of devices, resizeable interface, and standalone mode that lets you load eight separate racks of eight devices, all at the same time…

Starting the stack >

We'll use MixBox over a synth part to start off with. When we open the plugin up the rack is empty, but there's a world of possibility here. We start off by loading a British EQ into the first slot, and using this SSL-style parametric device to reduce the lows, provide a broad boost to the mids, and notch out some harsh frequencies around 3kHz. We can choose a new unit for the chain from the top of the second slot. Next we'll tame the sound a little with a compressor…

Comparing compressors <

We load up MixBox's generic 'Compressor' in the second slot, dialling in the usual settings and turning up the Drive to really get things cooking. There are more compressor models to try here, though. We load up a 'Black 76' into the third slot to see how a FET compressor reacts to our synth signal. There's more control here, with the potential for super-fast attack times while keeping the signal clean and true to its original state. We can bypass either compressor in the top bar to compare models and make a choice.

Adding some modulation >

MixBox doesn't just do a good line in workaday compressors and EQs. There are plenty of creative effects here, thanks to IK's experience in amp modeling and other plugin processors. We whip out a Phaser as the next device in the chain, keeping settings subtle by dialing back Depth control. We'll stop here, but MixBox lets you expand the rack to show all eight slots, and also resize the interface as you like it with a drag in the lower-right corner.

What's in the Box?

With IK's experience in modeling more than just compressors and EQs, MixBox comes with more than 70 effects to put into your chain of eight. Nine Amp selections have choices from basic Preamp to British Tube Lead types; three types of delay include Tape Echo, Digital Delay and the interesting Reverb Delay; distortion like Distortion, Lo-fi, bitCrushing, Overdrive and tube screamer; a large choice of EQs are available in the EQ and Channel Strip categories; ten types of filter take in legendary options such as Moog-style, formant filtering and wah pedal models; the modulation category includes a huge number of creative effects from flangers to rotaries and plenty more in between; nine types of reverb take in almost all the algorithms you could possibly dream of; and the three saturators include some interesting vintage options.

< Drum bus processing

Now to build a channel strip for use on a drum bus. Start with a Sat X device on a subtle, clean distortion setting, and make light adjustments with MixBox's generic Parametric EQ unit – warming up some low-mid frequencies and backing off some highs. Next comes a Room Reverb unit, for the most essential reverb controls. You can load up a preset on any device from the bottom strip, but you must activate this bottom strip first by using the button in the very bottom-left of the interface.

Bus compression >

What's missing? Some SSL-style drum bus compression! Dialling in a fairly fast Attack, a medium Release and a gentle Ratio of 2, we have a subtle impact on our drums, but one that helps to emphasise their transients while giving the whole mix of sounds a better sense of cohesion. Setting the Sidechain Hi Pass to 150Hz keeps the kick from taking over the compression action, while activating the Grit light switches in some extra saturation to give things even more character – use it wisely.

< Backside controls

We can flip the entire mix rack around to reveal a few more controls hiding at the back. Here, along the bottom, every effect has its own Dry/Wet slider to control its depth. Though we've already set the Reverb to 20% Wet, the slider here acts as a second blend control, remaining 100% Wet itself. Here also, a sidechain control appears at the back of our Bus Compressor module, offering a way to reduce/disable the sidechain signal if one has been routed to MixBox in our DAW.

Standalone version >

MixBox also comes as a standalone app, with the software intended for live mixing duties. Running MixBox in this mode gets you not just one rack but eight, helping you route multiple interface inputs into processors and then back out. Switching between the different racks is easy, and you also get a back view where you can quickly select new units for every single slot, quickly mix your different channels, and bypass and audition entire racks too. **FM**