

Audio Ease Altiverb 5

An originator of the 'convolution' reverb process that has now become relatively widespread, Altiverb has undergone a substantial upgrade. **GEORGE SHILLING** says the latest version puts it right back in the room.



AUDIO EASE BROUGHT convolution reverb to the masses with Altiverb, initially in the Digital Performer MAS plug-in format, then RTAS, VST and TDM and Audio Units. Although there is an HTDM version, all instances of Altiverb make use of the PowerPC's Altivec engine in the Macintosh's processor, so there are no PC versions, and I wonder what the Intel-based Mac future bodes for Altiverb. There have been no OS9 updates for some time now, with Version 2, as reviewed in *Resolution* over two years ago, being the last OS9 update.

The strength of any convolution reverb lies with the quality of the impulse responses (IRs), and Altiverb has always scored well — Audio Ease has a three-year head-start on the competition and Version 2 is still very usable due to the high quality of the samples. Registered users have always been able to acquire new IRs from the Audio Ease website as they were added, and these have trickled out every few weeks. In particular, a large library of postproduction spaces has been added since V2. Most impressive to me are the IRs of Allaire Studios, NY where I tracked an album over many weeks last year — using these responses genuinely made me feel nostalgic for this amazing studio.

That aside, in terms of parameter adjustment and editing, Altiverb had arguably fallen behind the competition that has sprouted in the last two years. Altiverb must now compete with Logic's free Space Designer, Waves' IR-1, IR360 and IR-L, Trillium Labs' TL Space, Tascam's GigaPulse and so on, and most of the competition has offered many more editing parameters. This is rectified with V5, and Altiverb now boasts some whizz-bang features to reclaim its crown. It also claims to be the most processor-efficient convolution reverb.

The interface still looks tidy, but is much bigger, and I resent giving up screen space to the rather pointless rack ears (*You tell 'em George. Ed*). The very slightly smaller Reverb Time knob now goes up to 150% as well as down. Four 'pages' of parameters share a lower panel, alternative IR graphic views

feature on a large pane above, including a lovely 3D moveable waterfall display to show frequency content through the decay. On the right, the IR info panel retains the ability to open individual pictures or VR movies in a separate window. 3D VR movies of many of the venues are included — purely eye-candy in most cases, but it is nice to get a sense of where you are pretending to locate things, even if it does make you wish you were holidaying at a European castle instead of stuck inside a studio.

In V2, loading settings was simply a matter of loading impulse responses. Now there are presets that use impulse responses; those can still be freely loaded separately on a drop-down list. RTAS/AudioSuite presets are dispensed with in favour of the proprietary preset drop-down list on the window itself, although saving your own presets using the RTAS function works perfectly well. Presets are categorised into useful and familiar categories with four groups of different sizes along with instrument and vocal specific types — the graphic of the mic positioning and room shape helpfully pops up next to the preset. As a subset of the impulse response list, a third drop-down list accesses the different recorded responses (different room positions or reverb parameters) of the selected response set (usually the location or reverb unit sampled). It all makes perfect sense in practice. Additionally, ten quickly accessible snapshot memories are provided, which are useful for automating changes particularly in postproduction work.

The Reverb Time knob is now accompanied by a Size knob for changing the dimensions of the space and there is a brief silence while the algorithm is recalculated when this parameter is changed, but changing other settings never results in clicks or pops. The reverb is calculated 'just in time' so that previous tails are retained, even as you adjust the reverb time. However, the reverb time frustratingly seems not to be automatable, so you must use snapshots for automated changes.

Dedicated versions of the plug-in can be selected for mono, stereo, quad, 5.0, and 5.1 — separate level control is available for front, rear, centre and LFE.

The central four-page panel allows control of the more detailed parameters, such as 3-band damping with adjustable crossovers, and separate delay and gain for early reflections and reverb tail. A powerful 4-band EQ is available and there are functions for saving CPU power, even though Altiverb claims to be up to four times more economical than the competition.

Perhaps the most noteworthy feature is a page for adjusting stage positions. Audio Ease has developed a clever algorithm based on experimentation in a real-world setting that allows you to move the source around a 2D stage. You simply drag the speaker or speakers around, backwards, forwards, left and right in a 3D representation of the stage area. Direct signal gain is disabled when this mode is used because part of the positioning effect is governed by the balance. So, by using multiple instantiations, you can set up a 'virtually' positioned ensemble within the selected space — and it works very convincingly indeed.

The Reverse function makes backwards reverb easier than ever, especially

when used in conjunction with the CPU-saving Tail Cut level knob, which sets the timing without changing the reverb character.

Altiverb (from US\$595) is an amazing tool. In the grand scheme of a rich and complex rock and roll mix you might doubt whether all this sophistication is really necessary, and often it is not. But depending on the production style and mix, a really great reverb can make the difference, especially in classical and acoustic music, and Altiverb is unquestionably a really great reverb. And for film, TV and radio postproduction, the comprehensive collection of small, unusual and outdoor spaces really comes into its own. ■

PROS	Altiverb is back on top; great presets; impressive stage positioning feature; stutter free parameter changing.
CONS	Processor hungry; not all settings automatable.
EXTRAS	The Audio Ease BarbaBatch batch audio file convertor is celebrating ten years with the release of V4, which offers sample rate and file format conversion for Mac OSX. It introduces resizable windows, tables displaying sound file information, unlimited undo and redo and conversion definitions can be shared by dragging them in and out of the conversion list together with an automatic conversion naming feature.

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