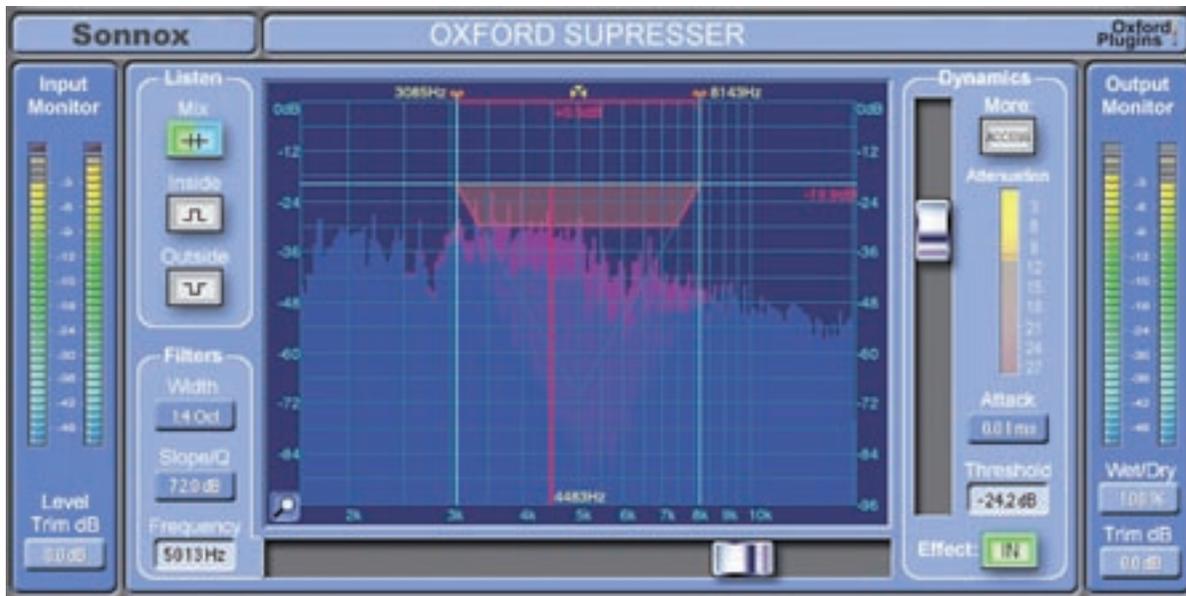


Sonnox Oxford SuprEsser

There has been something of a rash of plug-ins concerning themselves with the management of uttered plosives. **GEORGE SHILLING** is especially impressed with this de-esser.



New from Sonnox is the Oxford SuprEsser, designed to be 'the last word' in De-Essing. A number of plug-in designers have recently turned their attention to de-essing, and there are some excellent alternatives, but Sonnox's new release avails the user of more control parameters than any rival. The busy plug-in window features a whizzy real-time graph display; there is a 'More' button revealing extra parameters, and a further hidden preference menu. Unlike traditional hardware de-essers, the full audio frequency range is selectable, resulting in the possible application of this plug-in for all kinds of frequency-conscious or broadband dynamic processing.

The SuprEsser comes as a native-only plug-in in VST, Audio Units and RTAS formats. There is no TDM or PowerCore version, nor is there planned to be. Sonnox is at pains to point out that this is not a policy decision signalling the end of TDM or PowerCore support, but merely a technical decision as the processing used by the SuprEsser is too complex to implement on fixed-point DSP.

Three versions of the plug-in are installed, each set up to use varying Kernel sizes. The linear phase filters require a processing time — an 'Impulse Response Kernel' to model the filter response. So there is a trade-off between the accuracy of the low frequency processing and the plug-in delay. The three different versions of the plug-in have different preset kernel sizes, so it is up to the user to choose the appropriate setting. The standard version uses a kernel size of 2048 samples, and it is recommended to use a similar sized buffer to lower the plug-in delay. Lowering the buffer too much is claimed to cause problems as the plug-in won't have big enough blocks of audio to process, but in practice I didn't find a huge problem with lowering the buffer, although a 'Warning!' indicator appeared at the top of the plug-in.

The standard version is suitable for working on the entire frequency range at 44.1kHz, but for high sample rates the high resolution version is recommended, which exhibits an enormous kernel size of 8192

samples. There is also a 'low latency' version that is set for 512 samples. However, this is unsuitable for low frequency accuracy below 400Hz. The other problem caused by such sophisticated processing is that the SuprEsser uses an enormous amount of CPU power, so depending on your computer and what else is taxing the CPU, you might be limited in the number of instances or which of the three versions you can use, or find that you need to further increase the buffer... This soon leads to the high resolution version causing the accumulated delay to go beyond the capabilities of the Pro Tools delay compensation engine, although the actual delay is accurately reported in the track delay information.

SuprEsser uses the excellent Oxford Dynamics processor, adding two linear phase crossover filters to enable complete control of a particular area of the frequency range. The signal is split into the band to be processed and the surrounding bands that are not processed, then these are re-merged with appropriate delay compensation within the plug-in, and you can select monitoring of either path ('Inside' or 'Outside') separately for checking purposes, as well as the intended mixed output.

Despite the processing complexity, it is fairly easy to set the de-esser for normal function thanks to the excellent moving graph display that shows spectrum analysis. 'Esses' are pinpointed on the fly with a vertical line and a frequency readout, so watching a few go by will soon show you the range where they are most problematic. A horizontal slider at the bottom allows you to centre the frequency to be targeted, and the band can be narrowed by dragging a point at the top downwards or adjusting the Filter Width setting on the left numerically or by dragging, causing the vertical boundary lines to narrow. This can be set down to 0.2 octaves, or as wide as 10 octaves (full range if centred). Fainter lines show the slope that can also be adjusted from a numerical display on the left of the graph — normally this is set at a remarkable 72dB per octave, which, thanks to the linear phase filtering, causes no problems.

The vertical slider at the right then sets the threshold in conventional fashion. However, the threshold moves dynamically thanks to continuous level tracking, and the resulting de-essing is natural and seems consistent with differing levels of sibilance. There is also an Attack time setting, but for general de-essing, I found no need to fiddle further. The graph can be zoomed in either direction by dragging the mouse logically from one point at the bottom left corner, but it scrolls automatically when setting the frequency, if one is zoomed in.

Other bonus items on the display are tall LED-style meters for input and output, with corresponding Trim settings, and a Wet/Dry mix setting. An Access button ('More') opens up further setting options, with Hold and Release to accompany the Attack setting, and a Ratio control with unnecessarily odd scaling in degrees. Further, there is Level Tracking On/Off and Damping setting. And here, the Trigger sensor and the Audio modes can be switched from the Band setting to Wide mode, opening up further processing options.

Sonnox has introduced its own Waves-style preset manager with this plug-in, allowing users to dial up the same settings across differing platforms if, say tracking in Logic and mixing in Pro Tools. This part of the window is hidden by default, and its view setting is one of the options viewed by clicking the Sonnox logo, where you can also choose the default view (Easy/More), Clip light settings, and so on. Sonnox supplies a number of presets as starting points for different situations, and these are provided in the native host's normal library as well as in the proprietary menu. But you won't generally need them, such is the ease with which areas can be identified and processed using the graph display. 'Ess' and 'Sh' sounds are dealt with exceptionally well, and with minimal tweaking, effective de-essing is achieved with no loss of brightness. For other uses such as reducing instrument harshness or resonances, or de-popping, results are very good indeed, and made all the easier with the excellent graph display. The only downer is the processing overhead and latency but the initially daunting interface soon becomes familiar and the results are excellent. ■

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| PROS | Unquestionably the de-esser with the most parameters; phenomenal control. |
| CONS | No TDM version; large latency of all versions but especially the HR version. |
| EXTRAS | The first wave of Oxford SuprEsser purchasers will get 10% off the purchase price of UK£180 (+ VAT) if they buy before 30 June 2008. A fully functioning 15-day demo can be downloaded from the Sonnox website. |

Contact

SONNOX, UK:
Website: www.sonnoxplugins.com