Liquidsonics Seventh Heaven Professional

RUSSELL COTTIER evaluates a reverb plug-in with the ambitious aim of reproducing the most sought after hardware reverberation tool of a generation — the Bricasti M7.

Seventh Heaven is a new high-end reverb plug-in from Liquidsonics. Liquidsonics has been bringing advanced reverb plug-ins to the market for the best part of a decade. Based on Fusion-IR technology these are more than just convolution reverbs. The technology that made its name in Liquidsonics' Reverberate and Reverberate 2 plug-ins is the backbone of Seventh Heaven and uses separate IRs for early and late reflections along with complex modulation patterns to add that extra dimension.

Seventh Heaven comes in two flavours, a standard version that offers thirty classic presets, with a basic level of parameter control, and Seventh Heaven Professional. The Professional version, which we are look at here, offers deep control of parameters and nearly 10 GB of Fusion IRs, spanning three libraries each housing scores of presets. The plug-in is designed to bring the vibe of the Bricasti M7 to your DAW, and interestingly Bricasti has given full permission and encouragement for this.

The GUI is not a direct copy of the M7 but certainly invokes its look. Dark grey panelling surrounds a central area designed to look like the screen of the original unit. In the top left corner we have icons for Save, Load and a convenient Help button that toggles tooltips for each control. There is a Gear icon which brings up a settings window. Usefully there is a path selection for your data file location here — remember this plug-in is huge — with the basic version clocking in at over 2GB, with a further 8GB of additional libraries. The settings window also offers selection of the parameters that persist in value when presets are changed — so you can, for example, audition different styles of reverb with the same Decay. There are controls for default user interface size and a Low CPU mode that reduces latency.

Across the centre section there are three knobs that look similar to the original unit's rotary encoder, each with a glowing red surround to quickly and easily indicate the value at a glance. There are of course also text readouts beneath each of these showing the value, with something akin to the M7 LED display. The largest knob, Delay, controls the RT60 value of the reverb and can be cranked as far as 30 seconds for particularly ambient and artistic sounds. Next we have a slightly smaller knob for the Wet/Dry mix and finally a small Gain knob. This controls the make-up gain on the output stage, with a ±24 dB range.

The centre of the unit shows two rows of text. The upper lists the selected bank, and the lower shows the preset within that bank, arrows to either side can be used to cycle through presets. Simply clicking on the name will show the bank or preset list, which is a much easier selection method. As stock the plug-in comes with 10 banks of eight presets each. However there are two further preset expansion libraries that can be downloaded free from the Liquidsonics website.

To the right of this there are five horizontal LED VU meters, reminiscent of the vertical meters on the M7. The metering displays Input and Output levels as well as levels for Early and Late reflections and the Very Low Frequency reverb level. At the bottom of the central (screen) panel we have two horizontal sliders, again in the bright red glowing colour, one for VLF reverb level and another for a balance between early and late reflections. The VLF does not follow the decay times linearly, so frequencies below about 150Hz will behave quite differently and can have longer or shorter decay times than the Late reverb path. This is particularly interesting as it allows smaller rooms to be filled out and larger spaces to avoid muddiness. The relationships between VLF and the standard Decay settings are not explicitly stated for each preset and the sound is fairly subtle, however it definitely adds a level of depth and a measure of control to mixes.

There are options for two drop-down panels at the bottom of the GUI. The Advanced Control panel offers 10 controls as a row of knobs. Firstly we have a Reflections control which allows selection of 32 different early reflection patterns, the lower value pattern types have fewer reflections over a shorter time span, later patterns have more reflections over a longer time span. If you wish to add complexity to your reverb and emulate a larger room the higher numbered settings seem more effective and changing the pattern gives a very noticeable effect. Higher settings seem to work well on more sparse arrangements for instance acoustic country tracks. Next we have a Pre-Delay control which ranges up to 500ms, or by clicking the adjacent metronome icon you can set the control to sync to various tempo divisions. This delays the late reflections but not the early and allows the reverb tails to enter on the beat divisions, reducing smearing effects and adding a sense of coherence.

An additional delay of the dry signal is passed into the late reverb processor and is controlled with two knobs, Time and Level. Again this can be tempo synced and is particularly useful as it allows swelling reverbs to be created, offering everything from natural large room sounds to totally synthetic sounding reverbs. Next there is the Roll-Off section which has low pass filters for the Early relections and late Reverb processing, ranging from 20 kHz down to 80 Hz. These can be useful for pulling focus to and from the reverb within a mix, particularly in the harder walled hall settings.

Finally there are four controls for Frequency Dependent Decay Time. These are really effective for tailoring the specifics of your reverb voicing to make it sit nicely within your mix. Multipliers can be applied to the decay times of two frequency bands, Low and High. These are selected with a high-pass and low-pass filters with a 6dB/octave roll-off and fairly broad ranges frequency sweeps. Each band can have the decay multiplied by as much as 4x and as little as 0.2x. Lengthening the decay above 5kHz for instance can add an ethereal sparkle to acoustic guitars and supply a harmonic thickening sound, whilst shortening decay can be useful to free up more space in the vocal range for instance, to reduce masking. Extending the low frequency reverb can certainly add some element of power to mix.

The Master Equaliser is found on the second drop-down panel, a three band parametric equaliser with Low Cut and High Cut filters. Each of the three bands has Gain, Frequency and Q control. The EQ curve is applied only to the wet signal so it's possible to further manipulate the reverb voicing. Whilst this facility is useful for fine tuning, the effects can be quite subtle and it is easy to be tempted to over-boost certain frequencies but it is actually rarely necessary as the presets mostly sounds great to start.

In operation you would expect from the sheer size of the plug-in files that it would be a very taxing on the CPU. However the plug-in doesn't take too much CPU load and the controls respond very quickly considering this is a convolution reverb, parameter changes are generally smooth — unlike most other convolution reverbs — many can even be automated. The presets are all well selected and mirror the classic M7 choices. A little more processing is used for preset banks with the "2" suffix as these model the later M7 settings that include modulation of the late reverb. Despite the less realistic nature, the modulation they apply sounds smooth and lush. The plug-in has an incredibly professional sound and seems to impart a nice sheen to most sources. In comparison to the actual M7 there are some slight tonal differences but it does a very respectable job of supplying those expensive sounding reverbs.

At $299 Seventh Heaven Professional is not exactly a budget reverb but there is a free trial available if you have an iLok, and the less-well-specified sibling Seventh Heaven retails at only $69. The only drawback of the free trial is that if you try it ... you will probably want it! ■

PROS Deep control of parameters. Almost seamless parameter changes unlike standard convolution reverbs.

CONS Large file size might be an issue for some users. Easy to overdo the Master Equaliser.