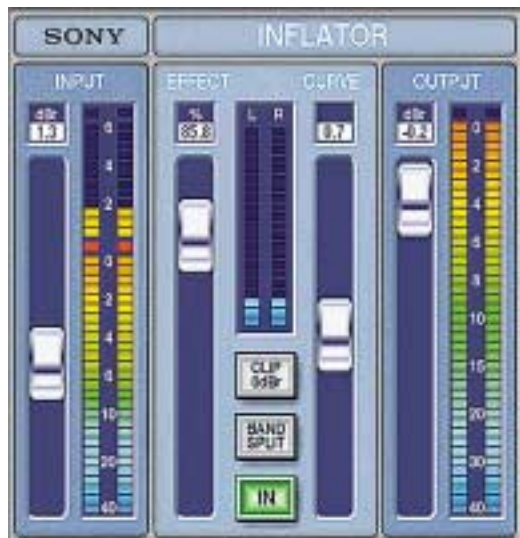


Sony Oxford Inflator and TransMod

Latest in the software company's distinguished line of plug-ins, these two original offerings have something different to offer.

We find **GEORGE SHILLING** in an underinflated mood and in need of modulating his transients.



THE INFLATOR'S WHOLE RAISON d'être is, perhaps, almost heretical, bearing in mind the last issue's editorial leader (V3.3 p4). The PDF manual starts off by boasting that it is designed primarily 'to address the current preference to produce the maximum apparent loudness from popular music mixes'. The Oxford team even claims that it makes full level white noise sound louder. I'll get my coat...

But before I do, let's take a look at the details. This is not simply a limiter or compressor, and the process avoids flattening percussive attacks. It works by increasing the perceived 'modulation density', and does this by 'changing the relative probability of the samples in the programme, such that there is a greater predominance and likelihood of larger values than the original signal.' So by definition, it seems to work by adding a certain amount of distortion.

Opening up the plug-in as insert, you are presented with simple controls. There are four sliders for Input, Effect, Curve and Output, three meters showing Input, Effect and Output, and just three buttons. The In button allows Bypass similar to the standard plug-in bypass, except that the Input and Output meters usefully continue to function. The Input slider has a range of -6.0dB to +12dB, and its associated meter has overload indicators at zero, and then continues upwards another 6dB before hitting a further set of overload indicators. The Output has a range of -12.0dB to 0.0dB. Effect has a range of 0 to 100%, while Curve ranges from -50 to +50. The sliders usefully follow Pro Tools convention of 'fine adjust' mode by holding the Command (Apple) key while sliding, and returning to default with an alt+click.

Feeding normalised programme through the Inflator and pushing the Effect up to 100% (as recommended) while leaving the other three sliders at zero instantly gives a perceived level increase of about 3dB with no discernable artefacts. Interestingly,

matching processed signal with unprocessed signal using the console meters, the 'Inflated' signal still sounded a dB or two louder. However, drive the Input fader up and much greater apparent level is achievable. The Clip 0dB button selects whether the input signal is limited to a maximum of digital zero before hitting the Inflator effect.

One important fact to understand is that without this selected, Inflator can handle up to 6dB more input level over and above digital zero by pushing up the Input slider. Additionally there is a Band Split mode available (no 'musical differences' jokes please). This splits the programme into three frequency bands and processes each separately, and can be useful in situations where there is a predominance of a particular frequency range in the material.

However, there is a danger of going over digital zero at the output, not to mention adversely affecting harmonic phase relationships. Louder results are usually possible without this mode. The Curve setting determines how dirty the effect is — positive values tend to bring up background mush, whereas negative values emphasise main drums, etc. The overall effect is most impressive — it is easily possible to generate programme as loud as commercially released CDs, and with little effort, minimise the adverse artefacts of the effect. Processing clean solo instruments can add a pleasant warm enhancement, but in the main this is a tool for boosting up those record company listening copies of your mixes.

Transient Modulator

This plug-in includes a daunting array of controls — many more than the two on the hardware SPL Transient Designer, which is of a similar ilk to a point. Consequently this provides more flexibility at the expense of complex setting up but this control enables the user to be more selective about the way transients are handled.

The graphic in the manual shows a Threshold control that seems to have been dispensed with in the latest version of the plug-in. The main control is Ratio — a positive value increases the attack while negative values diminish transients. A detector algorithm constantly tracks the rate of volume change, and the value derived is used to effect changes to transients. The Overshoot setting determines how much of the transient is affected, time-wise. Short settings mean that only the very start of the transient is enhanced (or reduced), while longer settings create more of an effect on longer transients, and produce more pumping with negative ratios and more crunching with positive ratios.

The Deadband setting creates a range from zero to 6dB where transients remain unaffected. Another way of reducing unwanted effects is by increasing the Recovery time, which stops a series of closely following transients from being altered, depending on the setting. The Rise Time additionally allows adjustment of a time value where transients shorter than the value are ignored. Finally an Overdrive slider is provided as a neat way of handling the potentially enormous level increases generated by positive ratios. The wide-ranging Gain slider is also useful in compensating for the effect when it is being used dramatically.

This plug-in can be astonishingly creative, enhancing many individual instruments, and especially useful for the manipulation of percussion. Squashy drum loops can be spruced up and made snappier with positive ratios, and spiky sounds can be easily calmed with negative values. Using negative values it is also possible to tame programme for a louder overall level in a quasi-limiting manner — it works pretty well, although if you don't want to hear altered transients then the Inflator is the tool of choice for this job. ■

PROS Unique, professional quality effects.

CONS None.

EXTRAS INFLATOR: ProTools HD
Accel/HD/MIX/RTAS/Audiosuite
Macintosh. Price: UK£290.00.

PowerCore/Macintosh and Windows
Price: UK£220.00

ProTools LE. Price: UK£145.00

TRANSMOD: ProTools HD
Accel/HD/MIX/RTAS/Audiosuite
Macintosh. Price: UK£290.00

ProTools LE. Price: UK£145.00

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