

# Tape Op GEAR REVIEWS



## Universal Audio UAD-2 Powered Plug-Ins

When I recently wiped the system disk of my primary music computer to replace Windows XP Pro with Windows 7 Ultimate 64-bit, I installed only the applications that I knew I'd be using regularly. Similarly, I didn't bother adding any plug-ins or accessories that I didn't find essential to my own projects. That meant I could pull out some PCIe cards, keep some USB and FireWire devices unplugged, and forgo most of the hassle (and cost) of upgrading everything for Win7 64-bit compatibility. But one product that I did make sure to install was my *UAD-2 QUAD DSP Accelerator Card* along with all of its plug-ins. As you've read in these pages, the *UAD* platform is popular with the *Tape Op* staff. JB and LC wrote reviews of the PCIe and laptop versions of the *UAD-2* in previous issues (*Tape Op* #67, #73), and a couple years ago, *Tape Op* contributor Neil McLellan and I wrote about our favorite plug-ins for the *UAD-1* platform (#63). Now that Neil has a *UAD-2 DUO*, I asked him to tell us which plug-ins he's currently relying on. I also asked senior contributor Dana Gumbiner, who recently added a *UAD-2 SOLO/Laptop* to his toolbox, to give us his comments. Dana's comments are first. —AH

So a while back, Andy asked me to pick a few favorites from the latest batch of Universal Audio's *Powered Plug-In* platform. This has to be one of the more challenging tasks given to me from the *Tape Op* High Command, simply because it's hard to pick just a few — they're all pretty awesome!

The *UAD* plug-ins all run with UA's PCIe accelerator cards (which are available in scaled processor strengths) or with a neat ExpressCard-based laptop solution. I opted for the laptop card for a degree of portability, and I was also curious to see what kind of mixes I could build on my rapidly aging Intel Core 2 Duo MacBook Pro (running 10.6). VST, AU, and RTAS formats are all supported by the *UAD*, and my primary DAWs for testing were Logic 9 (*Tape Op* #74), Ableton Live 8.1 (#72), and Pro Tools LE 7.4 and 8 (#72).

I quickly found that, while I could instantiate a fairly generous allotment of the *UAD* plug-ins, I longed for more horsepower! These plug-ins sound huge, but the DSP price of that rich sound has an equally significant footprint. I need a *UAD-2 DUO* or *QUAD* card in my studio Mac Pro tower, stat! Regardless, it's great to have the ability to run out the door with mix options in my bag and the *SOLO/Laptop* card works like a champ. Plus, it can be used with third-party PCIe-to-ExpressCard adapters, allowing the super-convenient switch between desktop and laptop, if needed.

On to the plug-ins themselves — here are just a few of my favorites.

The Neve 1073 and 1081 Equalizer emulations are stellar and sound crisp and smooth, even at the extreme edges. They can't be beat for a little top-end hype — especially nice on drum overheads or snare.

The *UAD* Precision series, particularly the Multiband Compressor/Expander/Gate, are rock-solid bus tools that destroy similar competitors. Efficient, clear controls and amazing fidelity — I could see these being a mastering engineer's secret weapons.

The Little Labs IBP ("In-Between Phase") is modeled after the popular fix-it or fuck-with-it tool, and having the software version has made me wonder how I got by without it all these years.

The Roland RE-201 sounds pretty damn close to my real Space Echo, even when pushing the input and rolling the repeat-rate quickly to create the dreaded "Bela Lugosi's Dead" feedback effects.

And finally, the Fairchild 670. I've only had a chance to truly mess with the hardware once or twice, in Eric Valentine's BareFoot Recording. He always referred to it as the "Goddamn forty-thousand dollar compressor!" — and it has been supremely satisfying to have a small army of goddamn \$40,000 compressors in my laptop.

I also really like the way UA has implemented their Control Panel software; it's clear, simple, and makes for easy authorization, updates, and latency reporting. An Info pane under the Configuration tab offers great tool-tip-style pointers straight out of the manual, too.

All of UA's emulations follow the "photo-realism" school of GUI design, which is to say that they look like what they are built to sound like. For the most part, this is fine, but it would be nice to have dedicated text-entry boxes on every plug-in interface; mousing over knobs isn't always the most accurate method of parameter entry. The manual states that values can be modified with text entry, but I didn't see that option on the vintage emulations like 1176 or Neve EQs, etc. Most DAWs have some alternate plug-in display, so this is a minor gripe, of course. All-in-all, *UAD-2* seems like the platform to beat.

—Dana Gumbiner, [www.stationtostationrecording.com](http://www.stationtostationrecording.com)

I'd been rocking my *UAD-Xpander* with my laptop for some years now, so when I upgraded my Mac tower at home last year, it was only natural to upgrade to a *UAD-2 DUO* for many times the processing power. With the new card, depending on the plug-ins, I can get 2-10x the number of plug-ins going as I could on my *UAD-1*-based *Xpander*.

My favorite of all the plug-ins is the VCA VU Compressor/Limiter (based on the dbx 160). I love it so much. It's absolutely unbelievable. I introduced it to Matt Robertson (who has contributed to *Tape Op* in the past). Matt sold his real dbx 160s because the plug-ins are that good. I map its controls to knobs on my remote keyboard so I can really have at it — just like keeping the real hardware in front me.

I'm also amazed with the Little Labs IBP Phase Alignment Tool. I use it to bring multi-mic'd instruments in focus. I recently did some work with my friend Damian Taylor (Björk's music director) and aligned all of his drums up with the IBP.

In that situation, when you're sitting there making important decisions that will have an extended effect down the line, you need your decisions to be very concrete before you move on. The IBP is so simple to use; you can just click the button, move the knob, and use your ears. There's not a great deal of looking at waveforms and shifting or moving them. When you're making those kinds of decisions, you have to use and trust your ears — not the pictures on the screen. I just tweak it gently, and it keeps the production moving forward without any second-guessing, whether I'm aligning something recorded to two mics or I'm going for a chorusing effect.

I've been using tons of Pultec Pro. It mimics the sound of the Pultecs literally. I can sit there and feel like I'm in a mastering session with both the midrange and program EQs, and I can do those wonderful things to my stems that only a Pultec can do. You have to mind yourself because 1 db is a lot — just like on the real thing.

Please check out the Moog Multimode Filter. It's so musical — one of the most musical effects going. For example, if you have a synth line going that's rising and repeating, and you want to add a delay to it, put this after the delay. You'll get some absolutely wonderful textures out of it.

The Precision Limiter is an amazing bit of kit. I'm using it when I'm working on music for adverts. It's a brick wall, and it won't let you come up for air; it just slams everything. Whatever they have on the output curve, it just does amazing things without it taking away the energy of the track; it keeps the tension, especially if I need something for the first 20 seconds of a spot without it sounding unnatural. It gives Waves a run for the money, without a shadow of a doubt.

Two plug-ins that I'm really fond of, because the hardware is from my era, are the Roland RE-201 Space Echo and Dimension D Chorus. I've had more real ones than one could shake a stick at. And these are as good as one could imagine them to be. If you listen to a real Dimension, the tail gets tinny, and that's part of its charm. It's not shy — the plug-in is not afraid of the tail.

The Neve 88RS Channel Strip is wicked — really proper. I know the Neve 88 boards really well — inside out. For example, they've got the tail of the built-in channel compression right. If you bring the release down too far, it has a little bit of "tchitt" — perhaps chatter is a good description of it — just like the real thing. And I love the EQ too. If I had only this plug-in on every channel, I'd be good to go. Similar raves for the Neve 33609 Compressor — I've spent plenty of years with the real thing. On the last Prodigy album, I used this plug-in across whole drum groups as well as the mix bus. And on the EQ front, I still love the sound of the Neve 1081; the plug-in sounds great, and you really can't go wrong with it.

I've also had lots of experience with the real LA-3A, and this nails it. Same with the EMT Plate 140 — it does exactly what it says on the tin. I love the Fairchild 670 Compressor, and the FATS0 Jr/Sr Analog Tape Simulator & Compressor is absolutely brilliant. I've used the rack full of real FATS0s in Andy's studio — and I know the FATS0 tape emulation is an essential part of his recording chain — but the new controls in the plug-in's Senior mode really take the compression to another level. Really, really wicked.

The Trident A-Range Classic Console EQ — do I really like it or is it because it has sliders? I'm not sure yet. [*The actual Trident A-Range modeled was Elliott Smith's, which is still in the New Monkey studio he built.* —LC] The Helios Type 69 EQ — I don't know the sound of the original very well. It sounds like a good EQ; but my time on the real thing is very limited. The Precision De-Esser — it's very simple, it does its thing very nicely, and this is a fucking good thing. I know there are a lot of expensive de-essers out there with all sorts of fiddly controls, but this one just works.

Overall, there's so much to choose from, and the *UAD-2* takes all the DSP onto the card — it's an amazingly well thought out kit. I've recommended the *UAD* platform to all my friends, and once they heard it, there was no looking back. Liam Howlett (The Prodigy) loves it and wonders how he ever did without it. Carl Cox — it totally rocks his world. He's on the road 280 days a year, making beats out of hotel rooms and intercontinental jets and rocking it in the clubs and venues. His new *UAD-2 SOLO/Laptop* works everywhere. As Carl told me, "With all the traveling I do, I needed a system that would not clog up my laptop processing. I do a lot of mixes on the road, and the availability of world-class plug-ins that don't suck the life out of my system is invaluable." (*Bundles start at \$400 street; [www.uaudio.com](http://www.uaudio.com)*)

—Neil McLellan, [www.thelodge.com](http://www.thelodge.com)