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3 new Plug-ins

Reviews : Software

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Universal Audio Dimension D

Formats: Mac & PC UAD1

Based on the legendary Roland Dimension D rack chorus processor, Universal Audio's plug-in of the same name brings this unique effect to their UAD1 platform, enabling Audio Units, VST, Direct X and RTAS hosts to run the plug-in on both the Mac and PC platforms as appropriate. The UAD1 card is inexpensive and that the bundled plug-ins are good, making it a cost-effective way to add plug-in horsepower to any computer with a free PCI slot. *Dimension D* is the second UA plug-in modelled on a Roland original with the full blessing of Roland Japan, following the *CE1* chorus, with a Space Echo tape modelling plug-in due some time in the next few months. To use the plug-in, you need to download version 4 or above of the UAD1 operating software, after which an authorisation can be bought from the UA web site enabling the plug-in to be activated for your particular UAD1 card. This authorisation can be freely copied or downloaded again from the UA web site but will only work with your particular UAD1 card, so moving computers is painless.

Considering that it was essentially a chorus device with just four preset buttons, the original Dimension D was both large (2U) and pretty expensive. Like many other delay devices of the time, it employed charge-coupled analogue delay lines, but the exact effect it created was a bit of a mystery, as it seemed to combine a very subtle but rich stereo chorus effect with stereo width enhancement or mono-to-stereo simulation. It worked well on synths and string pads without producing an over-obvious chorus-style modulation and also lent an attractive shimmer to the high end.



Roland's original design came onto the market back in 1979 and it became a firm favourite with recording engineers and producers. I recall playing with one at the time and wishing I could afford it! Universal Audio have clearly gone to great lengths to duplicate the analogue character of the unit, as the effect the plug-in produces is uncannily accurate. What is extraordinary about the Dimension D is that aside from a bypass button, it has only four push-button settings — though as users soon discovered, these could be used in combination to provide 16 effect permutations. Nobody was quite sure what the buttons did but the effect was subtly different from each and my guess is that they were based on different, closely spaced, delay taps so that when used in combination, they added complexity to the chorus sound. Whatever the trick, it works just as well today as it did back then, and of course the UAD1 plug-in version is also extremely quiet.

Tonally, I felt the plug-in came extremely close to the sound of the original, especially in the way it was able to provide a sense of stereo width and richness to otherwise bland, unmodulated synth pads. It doesn't produce the annoying churning sound of a traditional chorus effect — it's more like the results you get by layering two very slightly detuned sounds. Furthermore, unlike a conventional chorus, *Dimension D* doesn't seem to push the sound into the background or dilute its immediacy but instead makes it more interesting and spacious-sounding. While it is great on synths, it also performs well on guitars and even vocals.

Old Dimension D units are still changing hands for considerable sums, but for me the UA version is so close that I doubt if many people could detect a difference. The effect is as applicable today as it was a quarter of a century ago, and to make the deal more attractive, UA are offering a bundle deal where you save money by buying the *Dimension D* and *CE1* chorus together. When the Universal Audio guys set their mind to modelling something, they do it to the best of their ability and their efforts have paid off in this case too. I can't wait to hear their Space Echo! *Paul White*

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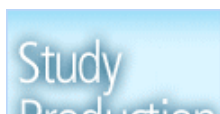
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► **GLOSSARY:** technical terms explained

Ugo Rez, Texture, String Theory & Motion

Formats: PC VST

New soft synths are as common these days as hurricanes in the Gulf Coast, but for one-stop VST Instrument shopping, it is hard to beat Ugo's collection of free synths. Not only are they more than just your typical S&S or virtual analogue synths, but their visual design gives the commercial companies a run for the money — which makes sense, since by day Ugo masquerades as a mild-mannered graphic artist.

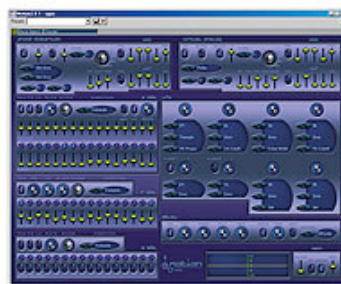
Ugo has four soft synths available for download. Each features a different approach to synthesis, although their sound and associated presets tend toward industrial music and sci-fi soundtracks. If you know some of the 'name' synth patch authors on the Web, you'll recognise them credited on these synths.

First up is *Rez*. The function of this synth is easy enough to conjure from the name: it's a fat monosynth with multiple, chained filters, which produces a very wet, squelchy sound. A sub-oscillator adds depth and can be detuned, while the main oscillator's pulse width can be modulated. The oscillator and the filter each have their own ADSR envelope, and the filter has a separate LFO for cutoff modulation. *Rez* also has a nice portamento/retrigger combination, and Ugo has hit the sweet spot for the control-fader travel. This allows one to easily find the perfect glissando rate for analogue-style swoops and dives, as well as quicker bleeps, and helps replicate the feel of old monosynths.

Texture is next up, and is also aptly named. It is a polyphonic instrument based around an oscillator which can produce multiple instances of the same waveform, which can be detuned over a wide range. Pulse-width and modulation controls are available for square waves. The oscillators then run through two filters. First is a band-pass, followed by a low-pass filter. Each has its own cutoff and resonance control, as well as separate LFOs for cutoff. Both amplitude and filter have their own ADSR, and the audio is then routed to the effects. Along with reverb and delay, Ugo includes a 'metal' effect. This is simply a super-fast delay unit which can add anything from an almost vocoder-like sheen to a clangorous tone on sound passing through it. Many delay units will do fast delays, of course, but often don't have fine enough calibration at this extreme setting to offer this level of control — more kudos for the feel factor. Between the band-pass filter, metal effect and a built-in sequencer, *Texture* excels at thick, moving textural soundscapes. All of Ugo's synths come with PDF help, and *Texture* includes a MIDI CC map.

String Theory eschews VA for physical modelling. Two wave/noise generators feed pitched delay units to form the base of the sound. Enveloped sound then passes through a selection of filters and on to the metal and delay units. *String Theory* includes dual phrase arpeggiators that can both run at the same time set to different speeds, ranges, directions and so on. It sounds the most subdued of the synths — until you play chords which arpeggiate up, down and all around like a sailor stumbling back to ship after fleet week.

The final synth is *Motion*, which combines VA with a Phase Distortion engine. Phase Distortion was Casio's answer to Yamaha's patented Frequency Modulation synthesis back in the dark ages of digital synthesis, and works by 'slewing' the wave shape to create additional harmonics. Each engine includes a choice of wave shape, filter with envelope and amplitude envelope, as well as other goodies which make each engine a synth by itself. There are eight assignable LFOs, as well as analogue-style sequencers for pitch and filter cutoff. A sequencer gate controls the first two, provoking even more sequencer stutter. The abundance of LFOs and sequencers provides the clue to the name, *Motion*. This was the only one of the synths I had a problem with: it took up almost all the screen space available on my 17-inch monitor. There are workarounds for this gigantism, but I ended up replacing my monitors with dual 19-inchers about the same time, which worked even better! There is more to all these synths than can be dealt with in this short review, but finding more about them is just a download away. Any or all are worthy additions to a more sober and tame S&S synth collection.



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By the time you read this, Ugo will also have released his first effects unit, called *Metallurgy*. It uses many tweaked effects from his synths, all strung together in a handy package. The audio first passes through a 'filth' effect (downsampling and distortion), into a metal section, then through parallel filters and into a second filth effect (in case you didn't get dirty enough the first time). The sound next goes through a sequenced gate, is processed by the dual delays and finally exits after an envelope follower. There are LFOs for most sections, randomisers, and three sequencers, including one for the gate. Enough to make even the most uptight sound let down its hair. *Metallurgy* is particularly wicked for vocals — show the lead singer who's his daddy when his delicate inflections come back sounding like Robbie the Robot gone to hell. *Metallurgy* is the only plug-in that Ugo asks payment for, and it's still only 20 dollars — not bad for a package of so many simultaneous effects, especially as it sounds good and wraps them up in an easy-to-use package. *Alan Tubbs*

☞ Synths are free; *Metallurgy* \$20.

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TC Electronic VSS3 Stereo Source Reverb

Formats: Mac & PC Powercore

TC's *VSS3 Stereo Source Reverb* for Powercore comprises algorithms ported directly from their flagship System 6000 processing system and represents an extremely sophisticated approach to algorithmic reverb generation. Apparently the idea was to make the algorithm reflect the chaotic properties of a real room, where the same source never produces exactly the same result twice.

While convolution reverbs are great for realism, they tend to be difficult to adjust in any significant way without the end result sounding unnatural, and unlike synthetic reverb, there's no way to incorporate modulation within the reverb generation algorithm. In *VSS3*, however, numerous modulation possibilities are available for detuning, chorusing, special effects and so on. All algorithmic reverbs are more complex than they appear on the surface, with far more adjustable parameters than the user ever sees — here there are approaching 800 internal parameters, but thankfully the user has to deal with considerably fewer! Indeed many users will manage perfectly happily by tweaking the large library of presets that come with the plug-in, many of which have already been heard on albums and in film soundtracks thanks to the proliferation of the System 6000 in those areas. *VSS3* is pretty DSP-hungry, but even the Powercore Element and Compact can run a single instance at 96kHz if need be.



The 'Stereo Source' part of the title reflects the fact that the early-reflection portion of the reverb pattern differs depending on the left/right placement of the original signal, so the sense of position on the final sound stage remains strong, even when a lot of reverb is added. Alternatively, the algorithm also handles traditional 'mono-in, stereo-out' perfectly effectively. Furthermore, because the System 6000 is used as much in film post-production as in music, you'll also find presets for unusual spaces such as car interiors and other popular film locations, plus a library of special effects presets. In all there are over 200 presets, which can be organised into subfolders to help you categorise them, and users of the *VSS3* algorithm for System 6000 or the *Reverb 4000* can export their patches to the plug-in via MIDI Sys Ex. The familiar A/B compare function allows two different setting configurations to be compared, but as usual, the A/B memory locations are temporary so you have save any changes you wish to keep.

VSS3 has the same look and feel as the hardware System 6000, with a user interface arranged as a series of pages with the parameter adjustments and value displays along the bottom. There are four main pages: Main, Early Reflections, Reverb and Modulation. Six main or 'focus' parameters are shown at the bottom of the plug-in window, and these can be customised to give direct access to whatever the user feels is most important. Focus fields are stored with the session and when you save your presets.

The reverb decay can be set from 0.1 to 20 seconds and though there are actually four bands of decay parameters, the Main page provides a simple way to adjust them all in one operation. Up to 200ms of reverb delay can be added to the diffuse field part of the reverb tail, while a conventional pre-delay of up to 100ms is available to offset the entire reverb part of the sound from the dry sound. Hi Cut can be used to take unwanted top end out of the signal prior to the audio being processed by the reverb engine while the Hi Decay acts as a multiplier in the usual way, extending or reducing the HF decay time relative to the other frequencies. Separate level controls are provided for the early reflections and the reverb tail and there's also a Dry Level value for when the reverb is not being used in a

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send/return loop. The plug-in can be locked into Dry Kill mode for wet-only operation. Output level is also adjustable, while numerous other parameters affecting the sound of the reverb are to be found on successive pages.

The Early page allows editing of the early-reflections part of the reverb and a choice of different types of room character. Early Color adjusts the high frequencies and is one of those apparently simple controls that alters a number of internal parameters at the same time. Early Pos selects between a close and a distant setting, creating the illusion that the listener is closer to or further away from the source without changing early-reflections patterns; not all early-reflection patterns have this option. The same applies to Early Size: some patterns offer a choice of Small, Medium or Large while others offer only one fixed size. The Lo Cut frequency for the Early Reflections can also be set, while Early Balance allows the pattern to be biased to one side or the other.

The Reverb page handles the reverb tail settings, including the crossover frequencies and decay-time multipliers for the four frequency bands. Modulation is dealt with on a page of its own where you can select a type of Space Modulation, then adjust the parameters, including rate, width and depth.

There's no denying that this is a seriously high-quality reverb that has a distinctly different character to the Powercore's existing *Classicverb* and *Mega Reverb*. Having the option of using a stereo source does produce a more definite sense of placement within the stereo field, but still in a very natural and convincing way. Unusually, you don't get all the familiar halls, rooms, plates and chambers as algorithmic starting points, though you can emulate all these environments by adjusting the parameters carefully. There's a respectable range of presets to get you started, though from what's included it is evident that this plug-in is aimed as much at the film and post-production market as it is at music — it's not often you'll want to mix a track to sound as though it's played in the back seat of a car, for example. The ability to place things in the mix both left/right and front/back can add a lot of perspective to a mix, so if you're into more experimental music this would be a good choice of reverb. In conventional pop music, I haven't found much that *Classicverb* and *Mega Reverb* wouldn't handle, but if you're into space exploration or need to post-produce sound for film and TV, VSS3 has much to commend it. *Paul White*

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