IK Multimedia's T-RackS – First Observations

By Aaron Hill / July 21, 2009

If IK Multimedia's T-RackS is the first out-of-the-box collection an engineer buys, Aaron Hill thinks they'll be quite happy with what they get.

For my first review for **Inside the Recording Studio**, I'm starting with a very popular effects package from IK Multimedia called *T-RackS 3 Deluxe*. What follows are my starting observations after experimenting and mastering an audio example with several of the processors in IK Multimedia's T-Racks Effects Package. At the end of the review you'll find a before-and-after mix I created. Screenshots below are of those plugins within T-RackS I used for the review.

OVERALL PROGRAM DESIGN

I really like the graphic layout of the processors. They're very straightforward and easy to use. The metering system is very accurate, and the placement of the meters allows you to reference them very quickly, without interrupting your workflow.

The style of Phase Meter lends itself greatly to a "give it a glance and continue working" type of monitoring. Being able to see your effects chain gives you a realistic studio kind of visualization, which makes it more practical for those who are used to working with analog equipment.

I'm not a fan of having dozens of knobs on a virtual plugin because it makes the interface hard to manage, and the bigger picture of the processing hard to see. So I think IK Multimedia did a really good job in keeping the interface uncluttered, and really smooth (especially with the combination of dark and radiant colors). As such, the T-RackS plugins are very attractive with a to-the-point look and feel.

THE LINEAR PHASE EQ

A Linear Phase EQ is an equalizer that lets you make changes to frequencies without affecting the other bands around an adjusted band. It's known for its clean sound, precision and transparency. The T-RackS Linear Phase is very user friendly and straightforward with four parametric bands, plus two others that can be used for pass or parametric filters. Your entire frequency range is more than covered. Their use of large circled numbers lets you see your band points very clearly. This EQ has a very transparent and crisp sound which for me makes it a favorite when mastering with T-RackS.

THE OPTO COMPRESSOR

The Opto Compressor is a standard dynamic controlling compressor plugin that's modeled after a hardware compressor. The thing that really surprised me about this plugin, is that even when pushed hard, and set to a very aggressive setting, the audio quality wasn't totally destroyed. Even after experimenting with a level 10 compression and a 9:1 ratio, you still couldn't hear an annoying pumping sound!!

The Opto Compressor is transparent.

At first, I had to get used to having a compression knob which is different from most compressors. I really just had to figure out what effect it had in the chain of knobs. One of the best ways to use the Opto Compressor is to use it in succession with another instance of the plugin afterward to divide the compression duties between the two. Since the Opto Compressor is so transparent, having two compressors to compress lightly has a really natural effect on the audio. I really think that the Opto Compressor is a very accurate plugin.

THE MULTI BAND LIMITER

A Limiter is a device which allows an audio signal to go up to a certain amount of decibels before being forced to stay below a manually set volume called a threshold.

T-RackS Multi Band Limiter works well with fine tuning certain frequency ranges as far as compression. I'd prefer an interface similar to the Linear Phase EQ to really see the bands that you are working with though. With this plugin you're really imagining the range in your mind while tweaking it. It's good at narrowing down ranges to compress, and has a nice overload knob which lets you both drive the plugin more and add color to the output of the sound.

THE BRICK WALL LIMITER

This limiter is called a Brick Wall Limiter, because it deals really well with catching peaks in audio before crossing the manually set threshold. It lets you boost the perceived level of your recordings without squashing the dynamics out of your audio. I really liked the effect of this limiter. On the test recording, it really boosted the sound well while still remaining transparent.

STYLE PRESETS
Another added feature is the style presets which give you some different colors to experiment with. And you just might come up with something that you weren't expecting which you really like. It adds a twist to the standard limit-and-move-on approach.

MY OPINION FOR WORKING WITH T-TrackS INSIDE THE RECORDING STUDIO:
Overall, I think that these processors and the T-RackS Suite as a whole are a valuable asset and an excellent next step for those mostly working with the plugins that come with their sequencing program, especially for the colors each plugin offers. If T-RackS is the first out-of-the-box collection an engineer buys, I think they'll be quite happy with the results they'll achieve, especially when you consider what you get for the price. I know I would.

TEST PIECE
This is a before and after piece done in light Gospel/Jazz format.

Before T-RackS
Gospel Jazz – Light MP3, Copyright ©2009 Aaron Hill All Rights Reserved
holy-w-out-tracks.mp3

With T-RackS
Gospel Jazz – Light MP3, Copyright ©2009 Aaron Hill All Rights Reserved
holy-with-t-racks.mp3

Aaron Hill produces and engineers for his company, Fruition Music. Hear more of Aaron's work at The Fruition Experience website.

This article was previously published at the SonicControl website.