



Waves Studio Classics

Not called 'classics' for nothing, GREG MARSHALL listens to the vintage tones of Waves' Classics collection.

The studio classic bundle takes the most renowned, highly regarded, and favourite elements of EQ and Dynamics from three iconic console manufacturers: API, SSL, and Neve. What Waves appears to have done is to try and create plug-ins that not only sound like a piece of vintage kit, but actually behave like one. Literature promises the re-creation of 'every last nuance of actual behaviour,' so I guess that's why the manual, which in itself is well written, encourages 'all users to experiment' in order to understand that some of these processors will probably sound much more interesting when cranked to bonkers settings.

In the box you'll find three API EQs, the 550 A, B, and 560, plus the API 2500 bus compressor, The SSL 4000 G series EQ, G- and E-Series channel strips, and the G-Series buss compressor. You also get three- and four-band Neve EQs including the superb 1081, and the V-Comp based on the Neve 2254 bus compressor. Installation is by the standard Waves account route.

All the plug-ins feature an analogue in/out switch. You can, if you want, switch in or out the added noise and harmonics that the analogue-modelling algorithm brings. I'm not sure why you would actively choose one of these Waves plug-ins, designed to replicate classic studio gear, to then switch out all the analogue goodness. If you want a super-clean processor, why not choose something different from your plug-in list?

550A, 550B, And 560

Designed in the late 1960s by Saul Walker, founder of API, the 550 is in its own right a legendary equaliser module. The Waves API 550 consists of both the A and B versions; the A being a three-band parametric equaliser with five fixed frequencies per band, and the API 550B, a four-band parametric equaliser with seven fixed frequencies per band. Each band has up to 12dB of cut or boost, and the upper and lower bands are switchable between peak

and shelving. Both modules are available in mono and stereo configurations.

The plug-in layout is distinctly API, with the gain and frequency select presented as either three or five dual-centric controls. Using the actual API hardware EQ feels intuitive, but navigating the same controls on screen was a bit of a pain, as one control is essentially on top of each other. Using the mouse to change settings meant I kept picking up the wrong control with the pointer. I decided to move over to our D-Command and use the console's rotary encoders. The 550B worked fine, but the 550A bizarrely had only the top and bottom bands on the first 'page' with the middle band and output gain on page two.

I found using the 550A worked better in broad strokes, sweetening and playing with an overall picture rather than attempting to use this type of EQ for fixing, whereas the 550B allowed me to get further into the signal with more cut off points. The EQ is definitely usable for fixing – I called up some roughly recorded dialogue and managed to perform a decent 'clean-up' with some successful treatment of typical problematic clip and boom recording.

The Waves API 550 also effectively models 'Proportional Q', whereby the Q is narrowed the more gain you put into the band preventing too much interference with the EQ bands on either side. This is of course the API sound, which was still smooth under extreme cut and boost situations.

Sonically, these EQs are excellent and sound incredibly like the real thing. I loved the description in the manual to "feel free to push the API 550 harder than you normally would". Although they sounded nice and delicate, almost 'pretty' at normal levels, they sounded even better pushed to the limit. On the other hand I know a lot of people choose the 550s for mastering, so the ability to have perfectly matched pairs opens up more possibilities. It's a shame that the gain is fixed in 2-3dB steps as a version with 0.5dB steps like the real 550m (modified) version would give more control in a mastering scenario.



THE REVIEWER

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► We shouldn't forget the third EQ in the API collection, the API 560. Originally introduced by API in 1967, this 10-band graphic equaliser also features API's unique 'Proportional Q', and I found myself getting favourable results very easily. The 560 is incredibly quick to set up, especially if you're used to more graph-based EQ displays. The equaliser is split into one-octave bands with the same +/- 12dB found on the other EQ modules. The applications for this graphic definitely lean more towards global processing, and I found it worked well on the music stems I was working on.

“The 2500 is massively versatile and I managed to get a wide range of compression effects very quickly.”

API 2500

Modelled on the 1U API 2500 buss compressor, the API 2500 plug-in can function as both a stereo compressor or as a dual mono compressor via a single compression setting. This link is fully adjustable and benefits high, low, and band pass filters to prevent unwanted compression between vastly differing signal types.

I opened this plug-in on score, and sub mixed down onto a stereo track. I can only describe the result as delightful. I actually thought, "God I like this". We only have a mono API 525 here in the studio, mainly used for voice, so I was very much looking forward to playing around in stereo. The 2500 is massively versatile and I managed to get a wide range of compression effects very quickly. Unlike the concentric layout of the EQs, the plug-in is fast to navigate with the mouse.

This is an awesome sounding compressor, but it's the tone section that really brings it to life. This section comprises of three components controlling knee, thrust, and compression type.



The API 2500 – stereo and dual mono compressor.

The threshold knee is split into hard, medium, and soft, with the manual describing the latter two as 'slight-fade' and 'even more gradual fade'. I like that kind of manual terminology. The thrust filter reduces compression response to lower frequencies while applying additional compression to higher frequencies. I liked that too. But it's the compression type control where the results are most dramatic. By being able to move the position in the signal chain where the RMS detector sits, the 2500 produces the sound of both old and new VCA driven compressors. The new 'feed forward' setting sounds precise and clean, but flick it over to the 'feed back' setting and the 2500 perks up into a much fatter compressor with loads of punch and drive.

Neve V-EQ3 & 4

The Waves V-EQ3 is based on a combination of highlights from both the 1073 and 1066 EQ

processors whilst the V-EQ4 is modelled on the classic 1081. Both EQs have up to 18dB of gain adjustment.

The V-EQ3 is a three-band equaliser with a high pass filter. It also boasts specific fixed cut off points associated with creating a fat, rich 70s sound. The first thing you notice when you start to adjust the V-EQ3 is the detail it provides in the midrange. Drive the HF and there's no brittleness there either, it just maintains that nice Neve richness. The subtle distortion and added noise as you'd expect to find in the original hardware is apparent as you drive the EQ harder. Again, this module is very much a broad strokes equaliser. I found it working much better in that type of role.

Call up the V-EQ's younger brother the V-EQ4,

and you see the clever relationship. Like the two API 550 modules you have a much more flexible EQ with the V-EQ4, and much more broad strokes with the V-EQ3. Almost like they thought about it. The V-EQ4 is a four-band equaliser with both high and low pass filters. It offers the same injection of subtle harmonic distortion and noise to make its sound with the added benefit of switchable Q and a greater number of frequency points – much easier to use on individual mix components.

V-Comp

The V-Comp differs hugely from the API bus compressor. Whereas slamming the hell out of the API worked wonders, I found the V-comp much more of a gentle beast. It has five fixed ratios from 1.5:1 through to 6:1, which indicates where it would be best suited. The manual offers guidelines to suggest that the most accurate 'vintage' results come when the input signal falls between -17 and -22dBFS; a million miles away from the 'finalised'



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- ▶ mastering levels we're used to. The sound is thick, rich, but far from transparent, and so didn't work well on the cinema advert I was working on in the theatre. It sounded too vintage. It's definitely very much a musical tool and with the exception of running this on music stems I couldn't really put it to much use on the work I was doing at the time of the review.

SSL 4000

The completion of the bundle is with the SSL 4000 series G and E plug-ins, apparently taking over a year for Waves to recreate the sonic characteristics of the consoles. The G and E series channel strips differ in the type of EQ module. The E series utilises the 242 EQ so called 'Black Knob' equaliser developed in the early 1980s with Producer George Martin, whereas the G uses the 383G EQ with a slightly broader Q. Both use the same dynamics section, consisting of a compressor/



The 'gentle beast', the V-Comp.

limiter and expander/gate. The dynamics can be switched either pre or post EQ.

As well as the channel strips, you also get the G series EQ and the G series bus compressor.

The compressor is so easy to set up with simple controls and really transparent compression characteristics, and the G series EQ, with wider curves to the E series, make it an ideal companion for insertion onto stems or in the mastering chain.

But out of all the plug-ins in the suite, it's the SSL channel strips that work best here in the theatre when dealing with the types of sonic repair work we face daily, so I set about testing this out on more dialogue. I like the sound of the SSL; it's clinical yet immensely pleasing to listen to with just the right amount of colour. I don't know why, but this EQ just sounds right; not really like a plug-in but more like a console than I imagined it would. As for comparisons, I had really loved the Sony's Oxford channel strip until this point, but to me this sounded so much better. Dynamic-wise, I was amazed to find an expander that really works. I have used expanders on the AMS Neve DFC to work gently around dialogues during film mixes, but had never found anything in the plug-in world that could get close. Everything I tried was far too crude. With the SSL, I found I could set global expansion parameters without any detriment to the dialogues, and by using the filters create a pretty convincing dialogue 'container'.

Conclusion

This is a very balanced and carefully considered bundle, and across the collection there is the right amount of broad and focused equalisers that range from the super-clean SSL, through to the warm and rich Neve. The buss compressors too, suited to individual instruments as well as mastering style applications, fit nicely into the bundle. They are, by the very nature of their ancestors, a very musical sounding collection, but given that a lot of these plug-ins work well as mastering style inserts, I put them to good use inserted on sub-mixed stems, utilising the full effect of the buss compressors and mix EQ to give overall shape and characteristic. Most of what I have read about the Waves approach to modelling the originals (including engineers at SSL not being able to tell the difference sonically) is probably true. I haven't personally used *all* of the original hardware but these plug-ins do sound incredibly like the ones I *do* have. 🎧

I N F O R M A T I O N

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