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Eventide Octavox Harmonizer TDM Plug-In

FIELD TEST

by Barry Rudolph

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If you're a Pro Tools user, I'm certain one question has been on your mind: Why isn't there a good Harmonizer plug-in? Eventide has answered the question with the creation of Octavox, an 8-voice Harmonizer plug-in that uses the same algorithms as Eventide's flagship processor, Orville.

Octavox is a mono input effect and will instantiate into either mono or stereo audio tracks and outputs in stereo to accommodate the onboard, stereo voice mixer. All eight voices (outputs) of Octavox are identical and provide time-based, diatonic pitch shifting. All notes are found in a user-designated major or minor key and scale, and each voice can be delayed up to 2.4

seconds. Diatonic shifts up to +/- 2 octaves, micro-pitch shifting, feedback effects, complex stacked harmonies, wide choirs and musical rhythmic sequences--all popular with the famed Eventide Harmonizer hardware units are possible.

THE GUI VOICE MIXER

Octavox could be a complicated plug-in if it weren't for the excellent single-page GUI. The interface is broken down into a comprehensive voice mixer, Master level and Wet/Dry mix faders, Pitch Setup and the Notation Grid. Also included is a Snapshot manager: a 32-slot patch memory in which you can click (or use MIDI Program Change) and instantly change your favorite factory or tweaked-up saved patches rather than searching and loading from the long list of the 64 included presets.

For control of each voice, the mixer offers level control, a Mute button, panpot, data-entry windows for voice delay time and feedback amount, voice pitch interval (expressed in musical intervals of +/- second, third, fourth, fifth, seventh or octave) and fine-tuning in cents. The Input and Output level faders have large meters and +12 dB of extra gain. All 67 parameters and controls of Octavox are fully automatable.

PITCH SETUP

The Pitch Setup module determines the overall quality and performance of any pitch shifting. Eventide has done a lot research on pitch changing and it is best to start by pulling down the Instrument window to tell the plug-in what the input source will be: general, guitar, bass guitar, piano/synth, tenor and alto sax, and bass, baritone, tenor, alto or soprano singing voices. Once the selection's been made, all of the parameters are optimized for that source. The parameters (available for tweaking and that I could not materially improve on) are: Low Note, which helps pitch detection with fewer false notes from unwanted low frequencies; Crossfade, which sets the window of splicing during the pitch-shift process; Randomize, which introduces, like the H969, a pseudo-random micro-pitch change to all voices; and Glide Speed, which sets the amount of time it takes to "slew" to a new output pitch after detecting a change in the incoming audio's pitch.

NOTATION GRID

The Notation Grid is a graphic of one bar of music notation with both treble and bass clef staves. Song keys and time signatures automatically change to values entered in the setup boxes. There are boxes for the key of the song; the scale such as Major, Minor, Lydian, Dorian etc.; Master Tune if you are off the standard 440Hz default; Tempo for entering your song's BPM or click Session Tempo to clock Octavox from PT (ver 6.2 up), and the Meter box for setting time signatures. Entering the correct scale and key defines the universe of pitches available for generating Western-style harmonic structures.

On the Notation Grid, Octavox graphically represents all eight voices by color-coding and numbering them 1 through 8. You can click, grab and move any voice to any quantized note and any delay time quantized to the nearest 16th note. You can also elect to "go off the grid" by holding the Command key and dragging.

Loop Delay and Loop Feedback are for repeating a 'sequence' of voices from any spot on the Notation Grid. This is Octavox's musical instrument side in which, for example, the user could set up eight notes in a harmony sequence to play out for the length of one measure. Setting Loop Delay to one measure and Loop Feedback to 100 percent will cause those eight notes to repeat endlessly.

IN THE STUDIO

After installing Octavox in a 933MHz G4 running OS 10.3.5 and Pro Tools V. 6.4, I went through the iLok dongle authorization using the supplied chip. It all worked the first time and checking DSP usage, I found Octavox uses 100 percent of a chip for each instance.

I immediately pulled up an electric guitar track in need of dire help. I set up two voices in unison, no delay, panned left and right and with +3 and -3 cents of micro-pitch change, and two more voices, panned closer in with +/- 5 cents each and 20 ms of delay. Adjusting the individual voice levels and the wet/dry with the track playing, I dialed in a very beautiful chorus effect. This is a 'wet' sound that disguised the guitar's pitchiness without reverb--just perfect for the dreamy ballad I was mixing.

Bass guitar and kick drum tracks are excellent candidates for octave-down shifts. Octavox does this with as much subsonic as your mix and subwoofer can take. Guitar harmony parts, a la *Queen's* Brian May, are a lot of fun with Octavox. I set up four voices and generated simultaneous three-part harmonies including a high octave. Using automation, I changed the key, internal voice blend and panning to suit two different sections in the song.

I also tried Octavox on the reverb returns of an ordinary-sounding reverb. This created a very glamorous reverb for atonal instruments such as drums and percussion. I micro-pitch shifted all eight voices at unison and added a touch of feedback.

Octavox's sound quality is excellent--every bit as good as the Eventide hardware units. I found myself thinking more musically when editing in Octavox--the interface surely evokes the mathematical relationships in music, but without getting geeky about it. An upscale and very useful addition to any plug-in collection, Octavox is $595 and works with TDM (V. 5.1.3 or later) systems, OS 9 or OS X and Windows PC.

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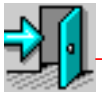

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