



TOP 30 PLUGINS AND BUNDLES FOR MUSIC PRODUCTION, MIXING & MASTERING

Buyer's Guide 2020

Choosing which plugins to add to your creative arsenal can feel overwhelming. We've compiled a "buyer's guide" of user favorites to help you find the essentials for your productions and mixes.

VOCALS

Waves has various vocal specialty plugins, designed specifically for vocals. Here are the essentials:

[Vocal Rider](#)

Adjusts the volume of your vocal automatically. This is a time-saving plugin which can be used instead of (and without the artefacts of) compression, or simply as an end-of-chain gain riding tool to keep the singer under control and on top of the mix.

[Waves Tune Real-Time](#)

Tune your vocal performance quickly without too much thought or effort, while leaving it sounding natural. It can also be used for a heavy pitch-corrected hip-hop "T-Pain" effect. Its real-time design lets you dial it in super-quickly in the studio, or even live on stage.

[Renaissance Vox \(R-Vox\)](#)

This is the most efficient and effective plugin for compressing your vocals and making them sit in the mix, period. There are only 3 controls for gating, compressing and output level, and there's literally no catch; it just sounds good every time. Try it. Also included as part of the comprehensive [Renaissance Maxx](#) bundle.

[Reel ADT](#)

The original "ADT" (Automatic Double Tracking) vocal effect, modeled from Abbey Road Studios' original setup for doubling the Beatles' vocals. If your lead vocal is sounding a little flat or lifeless on its own, this will give you the sound and excitement of real natural backing vocals, modulating in time and pitch. It also adds a tape-driven sound for extra effect. Also available in the complete [Abbey Road Collection](#).

[CLA Vocals](#)

This is an all-in-one vocal processing palette that's super-quick and easy to use, curated by Chris Lord-Alge himself. Different colors of EQ, compression, reverb, delay and vocal doubling can be added and tweaked to perfection for your vocal tracks. Also available in the [CLA Signature Series](#) bundle.



[Sibilance](#)

The most transparent de-esser on the market: removes any harsh “s” sounds from the vocals, without any artefacts. Once you engage Sibilance, you can use an EQ to give the vocal as much high-frequency ‘shine’ and sparkle as you want, without worrying about harshness. Also included in the comprehensive [Gold](#) bundle.

[OVox Vocal ReSynthesis](#)

A next-generation voice-controlled synth and vocal effects processor with the ability to transform your vocal productions in limitless ways. Includes a palette of vocal morphing, tuning, harmonizing, vocoder & talkbox effects and more. Can be used as a plugin or standalone app, and is included in the [Inspire](#) virtual instruments collection.

EQs

[F6 Floating-Band Dynamic EQ](#)

A surgical EQ which acts dynamically based on the input and sources which change over time. This plugin will allow you to tame a singer’s tone that varies from a close-mic’d, intimate performance to a belting chorus in the one take. The EQ cuts and boosts are threshold dependent and will respond only when a problem arises.

[PuigTec EQs](#)

An iconic tube passive-EQ, known for its musical abilities in broad-stroke boosting and cutting on both individual tracks and the master bus. A classic trick is to cut and boost at the same frequency, creating a clean resonant shelf that never sounds bad. If you need a “smiley face” curve on your mix, this should be your go-to solution.

COMPRESSORS

[CLA-76](#)

A model of one of the most famous analog compressors of all time, this plugin delivers the aggressive and “forward” sound of the original unit. Incredible on lead vocals, drums, guitars and pretty much anything else that needs a little energy. The plugin includes 2 character-variations of the original unit; black-face and blue-face.

[CLA-2A](#)

The legendary slow-attack compressor that has few rivals when it comes to vocal compression on a ballad or crooning voice. Like the original tube-powered unit, this plugin adds a smooth harmonic saturation to the source, and shines on bass and guitars as well.

These two compressors are available as part of the [CLA Classic Compressors](#) bundle.



[API 2500](#)

An analog model of a super versatile compressor, the 2500 is favored for its punchiness on drums and superior transient shaping abilities with powerful attack and release settings. Designed as a buss compressor, this can also instill serious character on drums and any individual track in the mix.

REVERBS & DELAYS

[H-Reverb](#)

One of the most versatile reverb plugins on the market. If you could only use one reverb, H-Reverb might be your best option. It has a rich bank of sounds based on Finite Impulse Response technology, and in-built processing for EQ, compression, modulation, BPM sync, and just about every other control you need to shape an interesting FX tail.

[H-Delay](#)

This is an old-school style analog delay plugin that is renowned for its simplicity, ease-of-use and great sound. Pull it up, dial in a sound. It has modulation and lo-fi options for even grittier tones. Try it, it's easy to see why this is the go-to delay plugin for musicians and engineers all around the world.

[Abbey Road Reverb Plates](#)

Plate reverb is pretty much a go-to for pop vocals and anything that needs "shine." These are accurately modeled plates from Abbey Road Studios and instill an uncanny thickening effect on whatever you put them on. The effect can be subtle or drastic, but always sounds beautiful.

[Abbey Road Chambers](#)

This is a special sounding reverb which provides a unique "flavor" that can't be found anywhere else. It models the actual reverb chamber from Abbey Road studios used on *many* classic recordings, as well as a few other vintage rooms. It also doubles up as a delay plugin with its S.T.E.E.D. setting, another '60s technique. Hard to beat on rock drums and hip-hop vocals.

These two essential Abbey Road reverbs are also part of the [Abbey Road Collection](#).

CHANNEL STRIPS

[SSL E-Channel](#)

Accurate model of the classic Solid State Logic 4000-series console. Extremely musical sounding EQ and a tight and punchy compressor and gate. This channel strip plugin can comfortably handle the majority of your mix processing. Also available in the [SSL 4000 Collection](#).



[Scheps Omni Channel](#)

An all-in-one channel strip plugin crafted from Grammy-winning mixer Andrew Scheps' choice of processors. Based on an assortment of analog units, the plugin offers different flavors of pre-amp saturation and compression, a gate, EQ, two de-essers and a limiter. This is like 8 amazing-sounding plugins in one.

[CLA MixHub](#)

This plugin captures both the rich console sound and workflow of Grammy-winning mixer Chris Lord-Alge. You get an accurate model of his SSL console channel strip with input drive, EQ, two types of compression and gating. As a serious bonus, you also get the ability to mix in a "bucket" workflow, where you can process multiple channels side by side, from a single window.

MIX BUS & MASTERING

[J37 Tape](#)

A model of the classic reel-to-reel tape machine used at Abbey Road Studios. With numerous tape saturation settings, wow, flutter and even a delay built in, this is more than a one-trick pony. Put this on the mix bus to glue the song together or add it to any track to give it vintage warmth and depth.

[SSL G-Master Buss Compressor](#)

Probably the most famous mix bus compressor of all time, this plugin responds the same way as the original hardware with its uncanny ability to "glue" all the elements of a mix together and add some serious punch. If you don't yet have a compressor dedicated for your master channel, this would be a great choice. Also available in the [SSL 4000 Collection](#).

[L2 Ultramaximizer](#)

The legendary brickwall limiter—probably used on the master bus of more pro sessions than any other limiter around. If you need a limiter to bring up the loudness of your mix without clipping, this solution is the original and the greatest.

[Abbey Road TG Mastering Chain](#)

A modular-style mastering suite modeled after the original EMI TG12410 transfer console from Abbey Road's mastering rooms. Provides you tools for input level and tone shaping, EQ, compression/limiting and stereo spreading—everything you need for a warm and punchy mix bus and master in one plugin.

DRUM-SPECIFIC PLUGINS

[Torque](#)

Torque enhances your drum tone by pitch-shifting individual elements, always maintaining the original timbre of the instrument. Try this on a real snare, sampled kick or even toms. The natural attack and resonance of the drum will remain, while the pitch can be adjusted to suit the key of the song.



[Smack Attack](#)

A transient shaper which allows you to quickly add serious impact to your drum and percussion sounds without using compression. This plugin lets you shape the attack and sustain envelope of the drum hits in a static fashion, unaffected by input level. If your drums are feeling a little flat, this would be perfect.

SPECIALTY FX & UTILITIES

[Renaissance Bass \(R-Bass\)](#)

This is a one-stop shop to both fatten and tighten your low-end information. By producing a harmonic series from the fundamental of your bass or kick drum, R-Bass allows these instruments to be heard on consumer playback devices that can't reproduce low frequencies. The result on any system is a richer, deeper low end.

[Brauer Motion](#)

This can add panning and automation in 3 dimensions of the mix without you having to manually write it in. A super simple and creative technique to add some life and depth to different elements in the mix.

[Aphex Vintage Aural Exciter](#)

This is a unique-sounding tube unit which has the ability to enhance the presence, energy and vibrancy from vocal and instrumental tracks without the use of EQ. It's a special kind of brightness on the track that can't be achieved any other way.

[Abbey Road Studio 3](#)

Recreates the realistic acoustic environment of Abbey Road Studio 3—on any set of headphones, using psychoacoustic Nx technology. If you don't have an acoustically well-treated mix room, this plugin is your solution. It's also a great reference environment for your mixes, no matter what room you have. It helps you better predict on headphones how your mixes will sound in physical environments with speakers. The additional Nx head tracker makes this experience even more realistic.

BUNDLES

Often the best bang for your buck is a bundle, which gives you an entire collection of plugins for a significantly lower price. Here are a few of the most popular, unique and useful ones:

[Gold](#)

The most popular Waves bundle available, Gold contains 40 "bread and butter" plugins you need to get started producing, mixing and mastering—covering every plugin 'family' from compression to EQ to creative effects. Highlights include Renaissance plugins, H-Delay, C4 multiband compressor, popular vocal production plugins such as Doubler and Sibalance, the vintage Neve-based V-plugins, and much more.



[Horizon](#)

If you want to up your game from Gold, you have several larger premium bundles, including the popular [Platinum](#). But Horizon is an especially value-packed bundle with 80 plugins. In addition to the plugins included in Gold, it also has many analog models such as all the CLA Compressors, Kramer Master Tape, the Fairchild-modeled PuigChild compressor, and plenty more. It also has the entire L series (L2, L3, etc.) for both basic and advanced mastering.

[Mercury](#)

The largest, most comprehensive plugin bundle on the market, period. Over 170 plugins.

Bonus bundle recommendations:

[Abbey Road Collection](#)

This bundle gives you the complete package of analog-modeled plugins from Abbey Road Studios. If you're looking to instill "vintage vibe" into your productions and mixes, you don't need to look much further. The bundle includes tape machines, vinyl, console emulations, channel strips, reverbs and signature FX.

[SSL 4000 Collection](#)

Precision models of the SSL E and G console channel strips, plus the powerful SSL G-Master Bus Compressor and SSL G-EQ. A classic studio bundle.

[Chris Lord-Alge Signature Series](#)

Chris Lord-Alge (Green Day, U2) is a name that barely needs an introduction in the world of rock and pop mixing. Now you can easily apply his tried-and-true mixing chains to your music, to boost the sound of your vocals and instruments. This bundle includes 6 easy-to-use plugins to quickly achieve his legendary tone on your mixes.