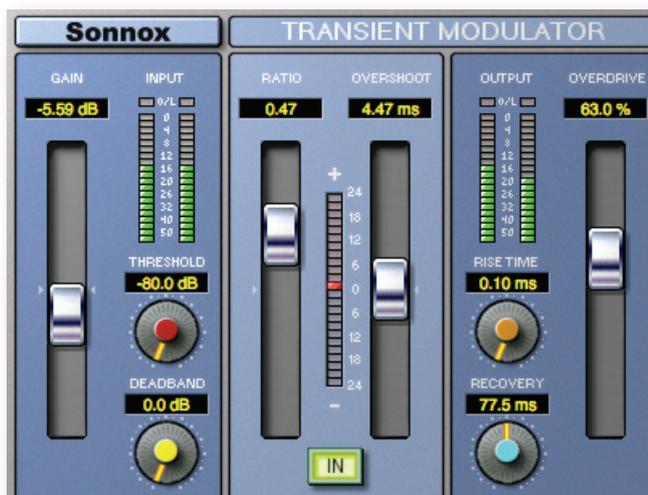
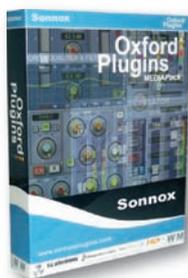


Sonnox TRANSIENT MODULATOR



FOR PC
& MAC



Sonnox's Transient Modulator plug-in offers precise control over the transient details in your music. **Mark Cousins** goes on the attack...

TRANSIENT MODULATOR

Manufacturer **Sonnox**

Price **£115**

Contact **Source Distribution 020 8962 5080**

Web **www.sonnoxplugins.com**

Minimum system requirements

PC Windows XP, 512MB RAM, iLok USB key

Mac OSX 10.4, 512MB RAM, iLok USB key

KEY FEATURES

- Radically changes the dynamics of instruments
- Accentuates or flattens attacks and transients
- Increases or reduces the effects of ambience
- Produces rounded and dynamic percussive effects

As any good engineer will testify, a recording's transient detail – in other words, the first few milliseconds of sound energy contained in an instrument's attack phase – forms a defining part of the overall sound quality of a track. This comes as little surprise when you realise just how much auditory information the ear extracts from a transient, with a sound's complete identity often being formed in a time period as short as three or four milliseconds.

Controlling transient detail, therefore, has long been an important part of the mixing process, although the equipment and techniques required in manipulating such discrete elements of sound have been well beyond the reach of the amateur musician or engineer.

Sonnox's Transient Modulator plug-in (or Trans Mod, in its abbreviated form) is one of a number of plug-ins specifically designed to manipulate transient details and you can trace its roots back to the original hardware SPL Transient Designer. The Transient Designer was a unique product that combined elements of gating and compression technologies to precisely control both the attack and sustain properties of a given sound.

Although engineers had previously been performing similar tricks using outboard compressors and gates, the SPL Transient Designer made the whole process considerably quicker to achieve, enabling them to efficiently and intuitively manipulate a range of transient issues presented to them.

On the attack

In keeping with many of Sonnox's other plug-ins (including the Oxford Dynamics, EQ and Inflator reviewed in Issues 51, 49 and 53 respectively), the Trans Mod plug-in certainly isn't short on detail or flexibility. Compared to the simple attack and sustain controls of the aforementioned SPL Transient Designer,

positive scale, for example, and you'll notice a corresponding rise in the percussive energy and transient detail in the input. In the context of a mix, this transient enhancement can help bring drum sounds into focus (or, indeed, other instruments with important transient details). Over-compressed loops, sloppy kick recordings and lacklustre drum samples can all be brought back to life through the subtle use of the Trans Mod plug-in, making it a real life-saver in a variety of situations.

Transient refinement

Refinements to the transient enhancement taking place are achieved using the other controls found on the

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the Trans Mod plug-in takes a far more configurable approach to transient control, with a full list of parameters including Ratio, Overshoot, Recovery, Rise Time and so on.

Given the somewhat unique nature of the Trans Mod plug-in, such a wealth of unusual controls can initially be confusing to new users, although after a short period of tweaking, the principal parameters soon become evident.

Arguably the most important parameter is the Ratio control, which adjusts the relative strength of the Trans Mod effect and determines whether transient details are turned up or down. Raise the Ratio control just a little into its

Trans Mod plug-in. Overshoot, for example, sets the relative bias between short and long transients. In the case of a drum loop, a short Overshoot setting would steer the transient enhancement towards sounds with a shorter duration (such as a hi-hat), while progressively longer Overshoot settings bring in more extended transient details such as the kick and snare.

The Recovery and Rise settings also enable you to manipulate the effect in a similar way – perhaps using longer Recovery times to prevent unwanted transient enhancements, for example, or gently softening the effect with a longer Rise time.

METHOD SPOT

As an indication of the versatility of the Trans Mod plug-in, you can achieve some interesting loudness-enhancement treatments by directing the plug-in towards loud, short-term transients that often dictate a track's peak energy. By using small Overshoot and Recovery values alongside a minimal Rise time, you'll find that negative ratios will start reducing these occasionally problematic transient peaks.

▶ Given the addictive nature of much of what can be achieved with the Trans Mod plug-in, it's also pleasing to see the inclusion of an Overdrive section, providing a degree of soft saturation ahead of hard-edged digital clipping. At more extreme transient-enhancement settings, Overdrive becomes essential, adding extra edge, body and a touch of level control to a drum sound, although never to the point of it sounding deliberately distorted.

Of course, in its negative scale, the Ratio control can perform the equally valid task of transient reduction – taking the edge off some overheads, for example, or even as an alternative means of loudness enhancement (assuming you use fast Recovery and Overshoot settings). All in all, it just goes to show how versatile Trans Mod is as a creative tool, offering an important counterbalance and alternative to conventional compression and gating techniques.

Transient nature

With a number of transient-based products coming onto the market – including SSL's Drumstrip (part of Duende) and the Universal Audio-endorsed re-creation of the SPL Transient Designer – it's clear to see that transient control is becoming an

increasingly important tool in the plug-in portfolio. Unlike both SSL's and Universal Audio's solutions, though, Sonnox's Trans Mod plug-in offers the distinct advantage of being completely native – and at £115, it's priced more towards the competitive end of Sonnox's price scaling (although it's worth remembering the potential 60 per cent saving that can be had if you buy Trans Mod as part of a bundle).

Given the immediacy and ease of use of some of Trans Mod's rivals, though, it's worth considering whether the approach and flexibility of Sonnox's solution is right for you. For some users, the depth of control might just prove to be somewhat distracting when straightforward attack and sustain parameters (as found on the SPL Transient Designer) provide all the level of transient control required in an immediate and effective way.

However, there's no denying that for the ardent knob-twiddler, Trans Mod provides a professional level of control and refinement, making it eligible for a range of production activities including sound design, mixing and mastering. Certainly, once you've tried Trans Mod on a few sloppy kick drums, you'll find it hard to return to a more conventional – and often less effective – means of transient control. **MTM**

MEASURING UP

Despite their relatively similar objectives, there's no denying some underlying differences between the approaches taken by Sonnox's Trans Mod plug-in and Universal Audio's SPL Transient Designer. Apart from its immediate simplicity, one of the pleasing things about the SPL Transient Designer is the Sustain control, which provides a quick-and-easy way of adding body to drum sounds, in much the same as a heavy 6:1 compression setting. Trans Mod lacks an equivalent control, but provides far more control over the front end of the sound, enabling the transient enhancement to be fine-tuned between super-tight peaks or the broader attack characteristics of a kick or snare. In truth, therefore, both plug-ins have a valid place in your plug-ins folder, although without a suitable UAD-1 card, you won't be able to run the SPL Transient Designer.

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- In-depth control over transient peaks
- Helps produce an up-front, contemporary drum sound
- Relatively inexpensive
- One of the few Native products in this area

WALK ON BY

- Parameters initially confusing
- Lacks the Sustain control of the SPL Transient Designer

VERDICT

Sonnox's Trans Mod plug-in is a flexible, in-depth tool for transient control that can bring new life to saggy drum recordings or over-compressed loops.



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