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Eventide, one of the founding companies of digital audio effects for professionals, has introduced the 24-bit/96kHz H7600 Ultra-Harmonizer™ effects processor. This is the "ultimate" Ultra, no matter how you measure it.

This stereo, single-processor version of the H8000FW is the progeny of the H3000, DSP 4000 and DSP 7000 systems, but the H7600 has more processing power and better performance. It has a faster clock and a new operating system that includes a search engine to quickly locate any sonic treatment for your mix.

POWERFUL ARCHITECTURE

The H7600's staggering power comes from the 230 effect building blocks or modules used to create the unit's nearly 1,100 factory presets or programs. Just as in the DSP 4000, each program has its own evocative and descriptive name, as well as its own unique algorithm made up of these blocks and the myriad ways they are interconnected.

The included preset collection lists 85 banks of programs with titles such as Dual Machines, Front of House, Film, Atmosphere, Pitchtime, Reverbs (nine banks), Shifters (four banks), Vintage Gear and PX, as well as 15 banks of effects for film/TV, theme park and industrial/commercial use.

Using the front panel or the included VSIG™ (Windows) or VSIG-X (Mac OS X) software, you can easily edit programs or create your own unique effects from scratch. Program files run from 1 to 24 KB in size. A nonvolatile memory can hold up to about 50 user-contrived programs, and there is space for hundreds more on the supplied Compact Memory card.

EXTENSIVE SEARCH OPTIONS

With so many programs, finding and loading what you want would be a daunting exercise without an extensive search feature. Each program is assigned a four-digit number, where the first two digits are the bank number and the second two are the program's number. You can enter a number on your keypad to load a specific program or search for it by category in a number of ways.

Program categories include name, number and the types of effects they contain, such as samplers (S; the H7600 has 174 seconds of sample memory), pitch shifters (P), reverbs (R), delays (D), modulations (M), complex (C), EQ and filters (E), and dynamics (Y). Programs are also categorized by the source audio they were designed to effect. Source categories are guitars, vocals, drums, keyboards, special effects and surround.

Each program usually has several effects connected together and I liked that whenever you look up a program in the manual or load it into the unit besides its name and brief description, the aforementioned nomenclature (R, S, D, C, etc.) indicate what individual effects went into that patch. Also listed is the highest sample rate supported (not all effects can run at 96kHz); how many inputs/outputs are used; if the input is summed mono; and relevant tweak descriptions and the recommended uses for the effect. Sweet!

You can also categorize programs in Banks of similar programs, User Groups and by Recent Use. User grouping allows for your favorite and most-often used effects to reside in a single list for immediate audition and quick A/Bing. Both User Groups and Recent Use will be well-used search criteria after owning an H7600 for a few months.

FAMILIAR FRONT PANEL

Users of previous Ultra-Harmonizers need not worry about operating the H7600. The front panel starts with three pairs of LED level meters that show analog input, digital input and analog output, and the current sample rate. The Bypass button offers three choices: It will connect the inputs to the outputs with a relay; the "electronic" option allows the unit to pass audio without effects while maintaining any internal level trims; and the third option mutes output. I found this feature necessary for live sound and studio use, as it allowed complete flexibility when I was using the H7600 as either a send/return or inserted effects unit.

Also well-known to veteran Ultra-Harmonizer users are the four Soft Keys, Up/Down/Left/Right cursor keys, numeric keypad, large LCD display, parameter and setup buttons, and the large knob encoder wheel--all mainstays going back to the first H3000 units. There is a Tap button for entering tempos for loops or timed delays and a memory card slot for the loading/off loading of your own effect designs.

IN THE STUDIO

I tested the H7600 as both a stereo insert and a send/receive effect at sample rates from 44.1 to 96 kHz. I connected the unit to my Pro Tools HD 192 I/O over AES/EBU digital cables and externally clocked the H7600 from the HD 192.

My first inserted effect was a stereo compressor for Pro Tools' stereo mix bus. There is a whole bank called Mastering Suite, and program number 2310, called Bigger and Brighter, is a stereo EQ followed by a compressor followed by a stereo limiter with 5-band EQ. This one hit the spot for controlling my mix's wide dynamics and acted more "analog" than any plug-in I would normally use for this application.

Looking for something quirky for my Wurly piano, I went for the Perpetual Motion program, a fantastic filter sweep that sounds like it only sweeps downward (or upward if you select it), but I ended up using it on a drum loop. I found the Leslie speaker preset very realistic--complete with analog amp distortion and fully adjustable depth and fast/slow rotor speeds. It was perfect. And speaking of analog, I also tried out the Manual Tape Flange program; it's the best I've heard since I used to do it with two analog tape decks.

Mouth-a-Later Two worked very well for a vocal *wah* effect on a boring guitar track, but Dual Wa Pedals turned out even better. I came to realize that there are dozens of presets in the H7600 that can work well for any given task, and it is quite a luxury to choose from among them and then tweak to exact taste.

SEND/RECEIVE EFFECTS

After routing the H7600's digital output to a stereo aux input in Pro Tools, I went looking for a main reverb for my mixes. I sorted programs by effect and then searched by effect and found 455 reverb-based programs. With so many choices, I thought I would have to wade through a lot of useless, wacky stuff--WRONG! I immediately found

Masterverb Room within the first dozen. Far from the token reverb typically thrown into some multi-effects boxes, this reverb was dense and sonically beautiful with a naturally smooth tail and decay. It was perfect for adding a general ambience to many different individual tracks in my song.

I next wanted a stereo delay program for widening the lead vocal track. A search returned 653 delay-based programs. I liked a lot of these programs, but settled on TruPhase Delay from the Spatialization bank; it provided a cool thickening and width enhancement without sounding electronically fake.

For a percussion/breakdown section, I thought to use an extreme effect for which Ultra-Harmonizers are known. I tried Garden Halo, Sonic DisorderVerb, Alien ShiftVerb and TapRing Plex--all great programs-- but PsychoGyroscope fit the best. It was just the right audio chaos I was looking for.

HIGH RESOLUTION EFFECTS

The Eventide H7600 Ultra-Harmonizer effects processor is a wonderfully deep effects unit that almost physically "glows" with its powerful processing energy and vast resource of effect programs. After woodshedding with it and consulting the well-written manual, I was crafting unique-sounding programs that always fit and often sounded magical within my mixes.

Apart from the dual-engine H8000FW, the H7600 is by far the best-sounding and most versatile professional multi-effects unit now available. If you could only buy a single piece of outboard effects gear, this would be a logical and solid choice.

Price: \$4,495 MSRP. Eventide, 201-641-1200, www.eventide.com.



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