

Antares Autotune 4

Now an accepted and mature technology, the original 'pitch fixer' has grown and broadened in its appeal. **GEORGE SHILLING** searches in vain for the singer ego threshold control.

OK, LET ME put you out of your misery: no, it doesn't tune the individual notes within chords or individual instruments within your mix, just yet. That would really be a scoop for the News section. But here is a significant upgrade to the rather clever tuning technology that has now become de rigueur for vocals on pop hits. And it undoubtedly gets used in all sorts of other situations — I know a recording engineer who purchased the hardware version specifically for dealing with Irish Uilleann pipes when recording Celtic music, which are nearly as hard to spell as to get in tune!

Version 4 is for PC or Mac, in all major plug-in formats except Audio Units, which is promised in the near future (TDM UK£295 + VAT; Native UK£190 + VAT). The new version takes up even more screen space to incorporate a number of new features, the most obvious of which is the piano keyboard at the bottom of the main Auto page. The general appearance and function of version 3 is retained, but there are a large number of added features. The informative PDF manual is 78 pages long, but worth printing for the tutorials and explanations.

Benefits of the new version include sample rates up to 192kHz and the aforementioned Piano Keyboard section, where you can use different settings in different octaves. Better still, it provides an instant visual indicator of the detected notes, as they turn blue. The useful MIDI scale setting and targeting functions can now be selected as Octave Played or for All Octaves. Notes removed from the scale are greyed on the keyboard, and Bypassed notes are brown. Individual notes can be clicked to change their status, having set the usual buttons that still activate all octaves.

The Graphical mode page includes a larger graph, and the whole look is subtly enhanced with new buttons and smoother-looking graphics on both pages. A new Options dialogue includes a setting for Undo (and Redo) Levels (up to 20 can be held in memory) alternative graph colour schemes, and options for how the knobs are 'moused'. The Buffer setting also moves to this hidden page.

Vibrato function in Auto mode is vastly improved, most notably by a Variation knob that modulates the speed, and also with variable Amplitude modulation, Formant variation and an Onset Rate, as well as the familiar Onset Delay, Pitch amount, Rate and Shape settings.

It is much more convincing on vocals when you get the settings right. The Improved Targeting button implements an alternative

recognition algorithm that, remarkably, is quite often able to recognise out of tune vibrato that veers over the threshold into what would normally be an adjacent note. Instead of pulling the tuning to the nearest note, the Stochastic Optimal Linear Estimation Theory (I kid you not!) somehow recognises the intended tuning, and pulls in the correct direction.

On the Graphical mode page there is now a new Vibrato Scaling function where you can increase or decrease existing wobulations, much like the similar function in Celemony Melodyne, and although perhaps not quite as elegantly implemented and with less adjustment range it works just as convincingly. Perhaps the most noticeable change to the Graphical Mode is the introduction of new mouse tools for use with the graph. Power users might struggle initially to adapt to the new tools, but newcomers will probably find operation slightly more intuitive, with tools for drawing lines and curves, scissors for inserting breakpoints, an I-Beam selection tool for horizontally highlighting a time-related section, for choosing a section for the Vibrato Scaling, or Make Curve or Make Auto functions.

There is the multifunctional Arrow Tool for



manipulating lines, plus a useful Magnifying Glass tool, which behaves exactly as you might expect, with the ability to lasso a section and zoom out by holding Alt and clicking. The Hand tool behaves like the one in Adobe Acrobat Reader, moving the entire graph around within its frame. Full Cut, Copy and Paste functions are also available for rendered curves and drawn lines. The look and feel of the Graphical page is a definite improvement, and I found it much easier to use than older versions, although I wouldn't call myself a 'power user' of this page.

Those used to the old version might suffer a short spell of 'familiarisation'. Back on the Auto page, Autotune still includes settings for a baffling list of historic, ethnic and experimental tunings, rarely used for pop hits, but something to play with on a rainy day perhaps. Scale detune now displays its setting in Hz and Cents.

The new graphics look refined and mostly clear, although I don't understand why, when most settings use a white font, some parameters now display in mid-blue on a dark green background, which is quite difficult to read. The audio still shifts slightly later when processed with the AudioSuite version, and the window takes up rather more than a quarter of my 17-inch Studio Display, but these criticisms are minor, compared to the enduringly astounding capabilities of the technology. The new features add value to the package but never get in the way of using Autotune for instant results. The additions are intelligent and useful, and even if you don't use all the functions, the package is greatly improved. ■

PROS

Worthwhile improvements; piano keyboard is great; familiar main controls still in place; technology still amazes.

CONS

Large screen real-estate; some parameters difficult to read in blue.

EXTRAS

The Antares Filter product has four true stereo multimode filters with low-pass, highpass, bandpass and notch modes, variable cutoff slope, four independent delay sections, and a variety of filter routing options.



Modulation control sources include four multishape LFOs, four Envelope Generators with delay and hold times, two Rhythm Generators, an Envelope Follower and a slew of MIDI controllers.

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