PEAVEY REVALVER MK III (MAC, PC)

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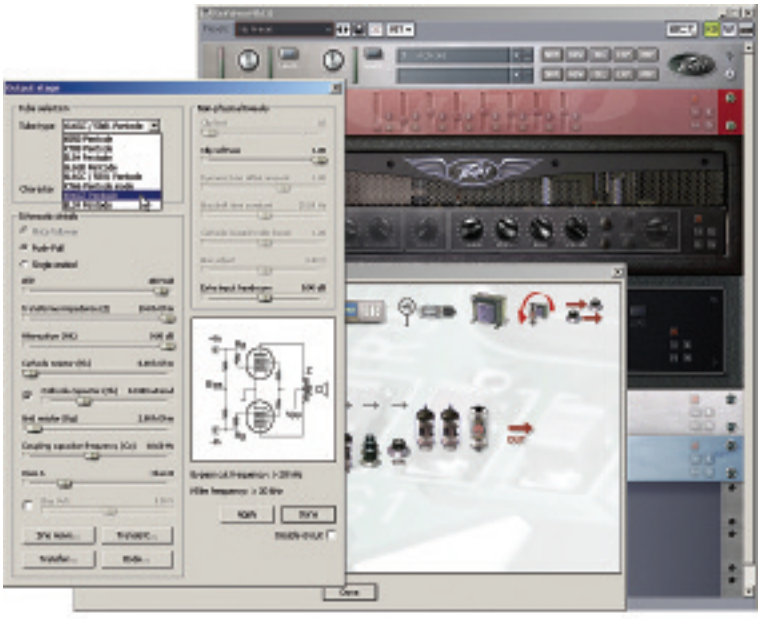

Like to tweak? You can't do much better than this "virtual schematic" where you can tweak parameter values as if you were soldering on a breadboard. What's shown here is just for the output stage!

VITAL STATS

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
Mac: PowerPC or Intel processer 1GHz or faster, OS 10.4.X. *PC*: 1GHz or faster processor, Windows XP or Vista 32-bit. *Both*: 512MB RAM, minimum 1024 x 768 screen resolution.

PLUG-IN FORMATS
AU, VST, standalone mode supports Windows ASIO and WDM, Mac CoreAudio.

COPY PROTECTION
Online activation.

If Peavey wanted to make a big impression with their entry into the world of guitar amp modeling, they've succeeded: The buzz about ReValver Mk III is huge, and with good reason.

ReValver uses a rack paradigm with 15 amps, 16 stompboxes, 10 effects, 12 preamps, nine power amps, a VST host module (for loading your favorite plug-ins *into* ReValver when it's in standalone mode), and eight "utilities." These include two tuners, a frequency analyzer, level adjusters, a signal splitter for creating parallel paths (this can be used once in a setup), a triode tube if you want to roll your own amp from scratch, and a simple tone stack. As to speaker cabinets, you have two very rich choices: A convolution-based speaker simulator with over 150 impulse options (you can load your own impulses as well), and a "Speaker Construction Set" where you can change the virtual cabinet's width, height, and depth, choose from eight different speakers and 20 different virtual mics, and tweak the mic's angle, axis, and distance from the cabinet. Additional cab controls are for lows, highs, distortion, and crunch. The amp/speaker combinations have the *feel* — not just the sound — of a tube amp, with undeniable authenticity.

There's one more outstanding aspect: You can tweak your tone on a *schematic* level. Seriously. When you click an amp's "tweak" button, you see the components that make up the amp — the tubes, output transformer, power supply, and more. Click on a tube, and you can change its type (Do you like a 6V6 better than a 6L6? I do!). You can also vary the tube's plate voltage, transformer impedance, cathode resistor, class of operation, and much more. Having worked with tubes for a good portion of my life, I can say that changing these parameters makes the same sonic differences you'd get from pulling out a soldering iron and messing with physical parts. Amazing.

There is a downside, though: The deep tweaks (including speaker construction) aren't editable in real time; you make a change, then hit "Apply." I think few users will be familiar enough with tube amp design to say, "Hey, know what this amp needs? Change the preamp stage grid resistor from 38k to 220k!" Given the huge number of parameters, learning how each of them affects the sound is a time-consuming process — change, apply, listen, change, apply, listen. Given the current state of technology I don't know how Peavey could get around this, but it just means you're in for a learning curve if you want to take full advantage of ReValver's incredible tweakability.

Normally this might scare some off, but the program comes with 12 banks of patches, each with around ten patches. While many of these are quite useable as is, you can call up amp presets within the patch that make a considerable difference to the sound. Overall, I'd say that the factory sonic character tends to be aggressive, but can be tamed fairly easily with the various options.

One of the big surprises was the quality of the clean sounds, as they add character while retaining an instrument's natural quality. Putting some vintage keys-oriented soft synths through the clean amp sounds made them really stand out in a mix, and on electronic drums it was possible to really bring out some extra "snap." I did find the highs on some speaker cabs to be a bit fizzy, but a little EQ with reduced gain solved that; I also suggest using the "hi-res" mode for the convolution speaker module. Note that there's a 64-bit "mixdown" mode that uses four times the CPU power of the 32-bit version. Although this will bring many computers to their knees, if yours is powerful enough, it does improve the sound. As the name "mixdown" suggests, this is best used for bouncing down to a hard disk track after you have your sound sorted out.

Bottom line: Bravo, Peavey!

PROS

Responsive feel. Excellent choice of modules. Very cool cabinet options, from convolution to "roll your own." Can save the resulting amp character as an impulse for loading into a convolution reverb. Unparalleled tweaking options.

CONS

Only one signal split allowed per program. Circuit-design tweaking is not realtime.

$299.99

PARALLEL LINES, PART 2

Most guitars have mono outs, so many guitarists get a big stereo spread by splitting the output, running each line into a different cabinet, and panning the two cabinets left and right. Even though most keyboards have stereo outs, this is still a good trick. IK AmpliTube2 has routing specifically for running cabinets in stereo, and NI Guitar Rig's modular approach lets you put as many cabinets as you want in parallel, panning them wherever you want. Even if your software doesn't make it this easy, just clone your track, and process each one independently through two instances of the plug-in.