



Brainworx bx_stereomaker \$129

PC MAC

They've impressed us before with their M/S-equipped stereo processors, but this one's a rather different proposition...

> Many of Brainworx effects plugins employ M/S (mid/side) processing, enabling you to rebalance the stereo and mono aspects of stereo sounds. However, bx_stereomaker (VST/AU/RTAS/AAX) takes an alternative path, as it's actually a mono in/stereo out processor designed to add stereo width to mono sounds. They call this 'pseudo-spatiality'.

Of the main bx_stereomaker parameters, the most important is Tone. This has 11 settings between 20Hz and 2.5kHz, and is used to focus the processing on the selected frequency. You can also curtail the processed element with the High Damp (set at 5kHz) control, and mono the overall low frequency content below a set point (20-250Hz) using the Mono Frequency control. Following this, you've got your more typical mono/stereo image control (Stereo Expansion).

The overall stereo image can be shifted 'as one' using the Pan control, or you can switch to Tilt mode to shift only the effected part of the signal. Both the stereo and mono elements of the output can be soloed (Solo M and Solo S), and the overall left/right image swapped (L↔R). Rounding things off are RMS/Peak level meters, as well as balance and correlation meters. Finally, there's an output gain (+/-12dB) control.

Feel the width

An important thing to appreciate about bx_stereomaker is that it only works on mono

signals, so even if you feed it a stereo sound, it'll mono the input signal by summing the left and right channels.

Our first port of call for testing is an electric bass. bx_stereomaker works really well on this sort of sound, applying a lovely thickening effect when lower frequency Tone settings are used. Even so, the width enhancement isn't predictable, and by switching through adjacent settings you can quickly move from lots of extra width to not much at all. Switching to a mono synth bass, we found the effect worked best applied to the upper mid frequencies.

Moving on to a kick drum and the lower Tone settings can introduce flammings to the sound if the transient is particularly sharp. But in that case, you can still add width in the higher frequencies. Here, the Mono Frequency filter comes in handy, particularly with higher Stereo Expansion settings.

With snares and claps, we had no flammings issues other than at the lowest Tone settings (20 and 40Hz). Above that, the 80 and 100Hz settings work really well, making bx_stereomaker very good indeed at adding width and space to backbeats.

On electric guitar, we found that clean sounds could come across as sounding a bit too artificial, particularly at higher width settings. In contrast, driven sounds work really brilliantly, and although there's no replacement for

properly double tracked guitars, bx_stereomaker delivers convincing width and good mono compatibility.

Finally, the plugin also works quite well with vocals in small doses, although as with all vocal processing, the context is important.

Overall, we really like bx_stereomaker. It's simple, quick but effective, and particularly impressive when there's plenty of mid-range to enhance (guitars, snares, claps, etc). Highly recommended, then. **cm**

Web www.plugin-alliance.com

Alternatively

NuGen Stereoizer
cm153 » 9/10 » £74

Includes a number of width-enhancement options and a great graphics visualisation

MeldaProduction
MStereoGenerator
N/A » N/A » €50

For tighter budgets, Melda's plug in is worth trying, although the enhancement is less blatant

Verdict

For Quick results

Flexible mono filter and stereo controls
Great for adding width to beats
Useful Tilt mode for image correction
Awesome on overdriven electric guitars

Against Low transients can flamm
No integrated modulation

Particularly useful for stereoising beats and thickening basses, bx_stereomaker is a powerful mixing tool

9/10

Stereo war

NuGen's Stereoizer is the most obvious competitor to bx_stereomaker, so how do the two compare? bx_stereomaker is simpler in terms of both features and usage, with the 11 Tone settings being the only underlying options for the enhancement process. NuGen's plugin offers two separate width controls, applying adjustments to inter-aural intensity and timing, and also includes effect-specific high- and low-cut filters, further effect density

settings, output stereo image control and a modulation LFO. bx_stereomaker's high-cut filter is a simpler affair, but you do get the useful low-pass Mono Frequency feature, plus effect-specific Tilt panning.

Stereoizer is more flexible and capable of a wider range of results (though pushing for greater stereo width will naturally impair phase correlation). However, bx_stereomaker is much easier to understand and achieves quality results far quicker.