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## MUSE RECEPTOR

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£1,399

## INFO

**Muse Receptor**  
Hardware VST host

**Price**  
£1,399

Slots for 16 VSTis + 57  
VST effects

16,384 Patch Banks (128  
patches per bank!)

**I/Os**  
Balanced 1/4" jack  
Left/Right I/O  
S/PDIF outputs  
ADAT TOSlink outputs

**MIDI**  
In, Out, Thru  
16 channels  
(multi-channel operation  
of multi-timbral VSTis  
possible)

4 X USB2 rear panel  
1 X USB2 front panel

VGA Monitor, Mouse and  
keyboard ports

**Processor**  
Athlon AMD 2500

**Operating System**  
Muse Research  
proprietary OS

**RAM**  
256Mb DDR RAM  
(expandable to 2GB)

**Line in to line out A-D**  
**D-A latency:**

Buffer	44.1kHz	96kHz
32	4.3mS	2.0mS
64	7.2mS	3.3mS
128	13.0mS	6.0mS
256	24.5mS	11.3mS

**MIDI input to line**  
**out latency:**

Buffer	44.1kHz	96kHz
32	3.4mS	2.0mS
64	5.1mS	2.7mS
128	9.0mS	4.6mS
256	18.0mS	7.5mS

# MUSE RECEPTOR

> THE MUSE RESEARCH RECEPTOR PLAYS VST INSTRUMENTS AND EFFECTS AND LIVES IN A BOX WITH ITS OWN RACE-PREPARED COMPUTER AND FULLY COMBAT-OPERATIONAL INTERFACES. STEVE EVANS POPS THE HOOD...

THE WHOLE SOFTWARE verses hardware argument is now finally quietening down as everybody begins to understand how things actually work. And before somebody throws things at me, I'm not talking about real analogue synths here and besides, a real French horn is better than a sampled French horn... okay?

When it comes to digital synthesis and sampling, your keyboard or rack unit has always contained a computer, however basic. It has always had some sounds, some effects and an audio/MIDI interface. In the case of these keyboards and modules the deep configuration was all taken care of at the factory and we would only get involved as far as updating the sounds or OS with an EPROM or a SYSEX file.

Then we were presented with empty computers and all the different elements of software and hardware that could potentially be used to construct a kick-ass music-making machine. Some

combinations worked better than others and in many cases the computer 'imitations' of synths sounded better than the originals, purely because of the improved digital to analogue converters in high-spec sound cards.

Of course, a computer loaded with plug-ins can be an unstable beast, and what with the surrounding halo of wires, drives, dongles and interfaces it's never been a practical or reliable live instrument. **The Receptor is a bit like Marty McFly's DeLorean in that it looks like a pretty piece of synth hardware from days gone by, yet has the capability to embrace cutting edge, computer-based sound production well into the future, all in one box, and exactly how you want it.**

## So what exactly is it?

It's a 2U rack in a lovely metallic blue and shiny black finish with smart looking black control knobs and buttons. Although it's a standalone unit, the

Receptor can talk to your computer over an Ethernet connection, and its hard drive can be mounted on your desktop, which is how you install plug-ins, updates and samples.

You feed it MIDI or audio and plug its audio outs into your mixer or sequencer inputs. It comes with a pile of instrument and effect plug-ins as well as demos of many third-party plug-ins, which can be activated as 30-day, time-limited try-outs. It will play up to 16 VST instruments, each with three VST effect inserts and there are two effect channels and a master channel, also with three effect inserts slots each. The internal architecture is like a normal sequencer mixer with volume and pan controls for each channel, but a highly configurable effect section where the inserts can be run in series, parallel and in another two 'in between' configurations too.

You can plug a VGA monitor, mouse and keyboard directly into the unit



■ If the price doesn't kill you then the machine's looks are certainly to die for!

(which has its own graphical editor) or you can operate it from your computer (over Ethernet with special remote control software). As a standalone unit, you can operate it from the front panel using the knobs and small LCD screen (except when you need to perform certain HD management tasks).

Inside it has a 40Gb internal hard disk and 256Mb of RAM (expandable to 2Gb) and outside there are four USB2

ports for external drives or controllers (plus an extra USB socket on the front for your iLok). It has MIDI In, Out and Thru, a front panel instrument input, plus left and right analogue audio I/O on balanced quarter-inch jacks as well as digital stereo audio I/O on S/PDIF plus a stereo ADAT light-pipe output (the ADAT will eventually do eight channels, but we have to wait for a planned software update first).

Even though the Receptor sounds like a complicated affair, you can actually use it straight out of the box with a pair of cans. If you want to play synth sounds you plug into the MIDI In, select Synth Multis and off you go. Likewise if you're a guitarist you can plug into the front panel, select Guitar Multis, and you can play your guitar through several amp simulation and effect plug-ins simultaneously - just have a little

## PLUG-O-RAMA

Plug-O-Rama is the site dedicated to Receptor owners where news of newly 'Receptorized' plug-ins is posted and where new plug-ins can be purchased. Any plug-in upgrades or Receptor operating system upgrades can also be downloaded from here.

When you become a Receptor owner you must register your unit. Some of the unauthorised plug-ins bundled with the Receptor are available to you after your registration and the Members Area is where you generate the necessary licenses.

New purchases are gathered in your shopping cart and credit card payments (in US dollars) are handled via the secure server.

New plug-ins are installed by dropping the installers in the 'Drop Installers Here' folder on the Receptor's hard drive. The install process can be easily activated via the front panel or the GUI. Once the Receptor has converted the plug-ins into its own format the install packages are moved to the 'Installed' folder for dumping purposes.

### Demo Plug-Ins:

(Plug-ins marked with a \* can be unlocked free by registering them at Plug-o-rama.)

\*\* PSP MixSaturator from the PSP MixPack can be unlocked for free by registering it at Plug-o-rama)

### Applied Acoustics Systems

Lounge Lizard

### Arturia

CS-80V

### Dash Signature

Combo Sister\*, daAlla2K\*, daHornet\*, EMM Knagalis\*, EVE\*

### GMEDIA Music

M-Tron

### Kjaerhus Audio

GEQ-7, GMD-1

### LinPlug

Albino 2, daOrgan, RMIV, RMIII\*

### Native Instruments

B4, FM7, Kompakt

### Ohm Force

Hematohm, Mobilohm, OhmBoyz, Predatohm\*, QuadFrohmag

### PSPaudioware

Lexicon PSP42, Lexicon PSP84, MixPack\*\*, StereoPack, Nitro, Vintage Warmer

### reFX

Beast, PlasticZ, Slayer 2, Vanguard

### rgc:audio

z3ta+

### Wave Arts

MasterVerb, TrackPlug

■(clockwise) The VST effects in each of the 16 channels, the two effects channels and the master channels can be managed from this page, which makes it easy to move effects between locations.

■This is the business area of the Receptor, where the inputs, instruments, effects, patches, auxiliary sends and mix are all set up.

■This is the set-up window where hardware settings, MIDI sync and installations can be dealt with...



← “Think of the Muse Receptor as a self-contained sound module/effects processor with a difference. That difference being the way the product embraces plug-in technology” →

■Only when a hungry Lexicon delay and a PSP Mix Saturator were added on the master channel did the CPU back into a corner...

●●● think about that, all you guitarists – and imagine you also have a guitar synth with a MIDI out...

**Yeah, but what is it?**

This is one of those products that throws up more questions than answers. Is it a computer? Does it

increase the functionality of my computer? Is it DSP? What speed is the processor? Can I run Cubase on it? Can I run Reason? Will it chase song pointers? How does it deal with multitimbral plug-ins? Can I insert its effects in my sequencer channels?

To begin with, think of it as a self-contained sound module/effects processor with a difference. That differ-

ence being the way the product embraces plug-in technology. And think of the remote operation facilities as a greatly enhanced Sound Diver-type parameter editor. The result is a module with only your favourite sounds from every software company.

As such you will deduce that any timing info (in this case MIDI beat clock) is received and supplied over MIDI, as with any external module – so you would do best to run song-chasing plugs like Reason, Live, Melodyne or AutoTune from your computer.

**In use**

Due to its operating system you'll find the Receptor takes a minute or



**Included VST plug-ins:**

**4Front Technologies**  
Bass, E-Piano, Piano,  
Rhodes

**AudioNerdz**

Delay Lama

**Big Tick**

Cheez Machine, Dual  
Delay, Hexaline, Nasty  
Shaper, Ticky Clav

**DestroyFX**

Buffer Override, EQ Sync,  
MIDI Gater, Geometer,  
Monomaker, RMS Buddy,  
Scrubby, Skidder

**Elogoxa**

Cosmo Girl, The Devil  
Inside, JG-3

**EVM Synths**

Microsynth

**FXpansion**

Enigmatron, Mysteron

**Green Oak**

Crystal

**GTG Synths**

Drum Kid 4, Drawbar, E-  
Flex, Express 3, GTG 7,  
GTG Micro, Log Synth,  
MPS.1, PD Poly, Transis-  
ter, Wave 2.1, Yuno

**Image-Line**

DX10, E-Piano, Piano

**Kjaerhus Audio**

Classic Chorus, Classic  
EQ, Classic Flanger, Clas-  
sic Master Limiter, Classic  
Reverb, Classic Phaser

**Klang Labs**

WNM-1 FX, WoWi, WoW  
ST

**LinPLug**

Free Alpha

**mda**

Bandisto, Combo, De-  
ess, Delay, Dither, Dub-  
Delay, Dynamics,

■ There's a good logic  
to the system...

**PICKY ABOUT PLUG-INS**

The Receptor only supports Windows VST plug-ins, so Mac-only products (like AudioEase Altiverb) will have to remain on your computer. Muse Research only officially support plug-ins that have been 'Receptorized', and a list of these can be found at the Plug-O-Rama website. They have also made provision for a bit of user experimentation in the form of the 'Unsupported Plug-ins' folder.

The Receptor will not accept Windows installers so you have to install the plug-ins as normal on your Windows machine and then seek out the installed '.dll' file that is the actual plug-in.

This '.dll' file must be dropped on to the Receptor's hard drive in the unsupported plug-ins folder. An 'Include Unsupported Plug-ins' option in the set-up menu will include the new plug-in when you run the install function. The test is to instantiate the plug-in, follow any serial number or challenge and response authorisation processes, and see if it works!

If it doesn't work, you simply drag the offending '.dll' to your computer's trash and wait for the Muse team to release a compatible version.

so to boot up after a press of the power button. If you encounter any misbehaviour, caused by a dodgy plug-in or a system gremlin then you can do a quick re-boot – which lasts about eight seconds – by 'triple-clicking' the power button.

Once it's on, the big question is how much muscle has it got? Well it depends what you use, but I had a very enjoyable half an hour playing a stack of eight FM7s. Holding down a chord of eight notes, the Receptor held its own impeccably and made a lovely noise!

Only by adding a hungry Lexicon delay and a PSP Mix Saturator on the master channel did I finally back the CPU into a corner and even then it hardly buckled, it just missed out a few notes – no awful grinding noises or clunky clicks, I'm pleased to report. The

real test would come with a monster like FXpansion's BFD virtual drum kit plug-in. Just the basic install needs 9Gb of drive space, not to mention the recent upgrades and the sample libraries of any other samplers you may use, and the demands on the RAM would almost certainly be more than the supplied 256Mb could deal with.

**Standing alone**

Apart from the input level, volume knob and power button there are six knobs and eleven buttons that help you navigate the two-line, 24-character LCD 'display'. With so many instruments and plug-ins this could be a disaster, but there is a good logic to the system and it's easy to find the parameter you're looking for. Not so good for

■ Here's how the Receptor's hard drive looks after mounting it from the network...



creative sound design, though, and it's a bit like marching with both feet in one boot – so plug in a mouse and monitor, for God's sake!

**Remote/networking**

To operate the Receptor from your main computer (where the sequencer is) you will need to install the remote control software from the CD that contains all the Receptor and plug-in manuals. This little application will call up the GUI and give you access to all Receptor's patches, plugs, mixer and





■ Capable of blasting out the sound with no hint of hiss...

set-up menu. Before this will work you need to make Receptor part of your network and connect to it over Ethernet – which filled me with dread. Traumatic memories of trying to install a wireless modem still haunt me and it

was with some trepidation I dug out a cat-5 crossover cable to attempt a high-tech 'handshake' between my Mac and the Muse.

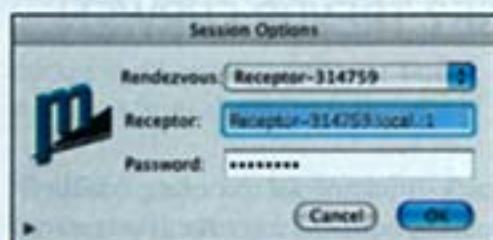
Somewhat astoundingly, this went very smoothly using Apple Talk on my

Mac. After a little wait the MUSE folder popped up in my network and within this was a RECEPTOR alias, which I could then connect to – I chose 'Hard Drive' in the following dialogue and, sure enough, a generic network hard drive icon appeared on my desktop. In Windows you can use the Add Network Place wizard to achieve the same result. You will need to mount the hard drive to do any plug-in maintenance. To make music you just need to launch the remote control application, it then asks which Receptor you wish to connect to and up pops the editor.

All 19 channels are laid out just like a sequencer mixer with faders for both auxiliary sends, which are pre/post selectable. Managing plug-ins and presets is very straightforward as long as you remember not to use the preset windows within the plug-in interfaces themselves. Muse have created their own patch architecture and menu system that enables the total recall of a Multi (ie, 16 Singles with three effects each, two effect channels with three effects each and a master channel with three effects, together with the settings



■ There's a link from Plug-O-Rama to the K-V-R website, a home to all things VST. Here you'll find a Receptor forum with a healthy answer-base and frequent visits from Muse staff to answer any queries. Now that's service!



■ The opening window of the Receptor remote control application displays the Receptor's ID and network password...

for all of the effects), even if the presets that formed part of that Multi were edited at a later date. Good one!

## Conclusion

Obviously a machine like the Receptor has no sound of its own. Although it ships with a bunch of free plug-ins, some of which are better than others, you will depend on your favourite synths, samplers and effects to give you the results you know and love.

There are no problems with the Receptor's audio input and output stages. The machine delivers the sound of NI's FM7 synth with all the wallop I love and not a hint of hiss.

There are some tempting scenarios to be investigated for the MIDI guitar

player too. You could lose days mixing real, synthesised and MIDI synth-powered guitar sounds all in the one box.

And considering that ultimately it's a computer in rack-mountable form it's surprising that there aren't a stack of gremlins in there, which I suppose pays testament to the stability of the system as a complete system.

On the whole the plug-ins supplied are pretty good, but amongst the wealth included there are quite a few duffers in there. Obviously no-one wants to buy an empty box, but perhaps it would be better to start with less but keep the quality higher, and I'm sure we'll see some bundle deals some way down the line.

That said, when it rocks, it really rocks, and it was a joy to hear all this music going on without my computer's CPU meters constantly nudging the red. I could leave my computer to run the Melodynes, Reasons and Altverbs of this world.

The Receptor really would make a hell of a difference to the computer musician as a live tool, but you've still got to have a sequencer on the go to

## ILOK, I SEE!

Many new plug-ins and softwares are now protected by iLok authorisation. The iLok is a USB dongle that stores all the authorisations for your protected software. If the iLok is not connected to your computer the programs or plug-ins will not work. The idea is that you can have your software installed on all the computers you may be using, but only you can use it on one computer at a time.

Getting started with an iLok is a bit of a snore when all you want to do is play with your plug-ins, but the registration procedures have to be endured. When you have claimed free licenses or paid for new plug-ins at Plug-O-Rama the new licenses will be displayed when you log in to your iLok account at iLok.com.

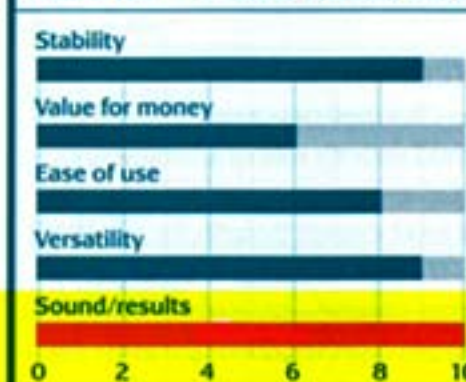
If you have more than one iLok, and you joined the scheme recently enough, it's possible to move licenses between iLoks to make things more convenient, you can also have them transferred to a new iLok if yours breaks. Whatever you do don't lose it!

■ Network the Receptor to your computer via Ethernet, accessible on the back...

play it! If it had a little MIDI data file player onboard and a song menu, and perhaps a third output for a click track/cue mix...

It's undoubtedly a great tool, but pricy – especially as you could also blow the hefty asking price on a brand-new G5 Mac or a spanky laptop that could run Ableton Live. For the moment I see this as a luxury purchase, and those of you who make that purchase will probably end up wanting to buy another one too! **FM**

## VERDICT MUSE RECEPTOR



A self-contained, MIDI-controlled, VST instrument and effect player that takes a hefty load off your battered old computer.

Envelope, Image, Leslie, Limiter, Loudness, Multi-band, Overdrive, RePsycho, RezFilter, RingMod, RoundPan, Splitter, Stereo, SubSynth, Test-Tone, ThruZero

### Odo Synths

A-Sine

### Ohm Force

Frohmag

### PQN Audio

Cooly, Mopar

### PSP Audioware

PianoVerb

### Psychic Modulation

Pandemonium

### reFX

Claw

### rgc:audio

Sfz, Triangle 1, Triangle II

### Rumpelrausch Täpfs

ZR3

### Smart Electronix

Bouncy, H2O, MadShifta, s(M)exoscope, SuperPhaser, OnePingOnly

### Sonic Implants

SoundFont Bank for sfz

### Sound Burst

SoundFont Bank for sfz

### TobyBear

Cow Delay, Decimator, Morphone, RobyBear, SilverBox

### Ultimate Sound Bank

Plugsound Free

### Virtual Creations

UltraPhazer

### Wurr Audio

Little Green Amp, Little booster, Green Gate, Green Wah

### Xoxos

Synger

## ALTERNATIVELY

### Manifold Labs Plugzilla

Another 2U hardware VST and VSTi player that's been threatening to arrive for years now. \$3,495

[www.plugzilla.com](http://www.plugzilla.com)

### Soundart Chameleon

(795 Euro, 8/9/8/9/8, FM135) Open architecture rack that changes functionality by loading different "Soundskins". 795 Euro

[www.soundart-hot.com](http://www.soundart-hot.com)

### Open Labs neKo

(From £3,520, 10/4/8/10/9, FM150) Self contained PC workstation built using off the shelf computer components.

[www.opnlabs.com](http://www.opnlabs.com)