

# STEINBERG WAVELAB 6

One of the world's most popular editing and mastering packages has upped the ante with a raft of new and powerful features.

**Text:** Calum Orr

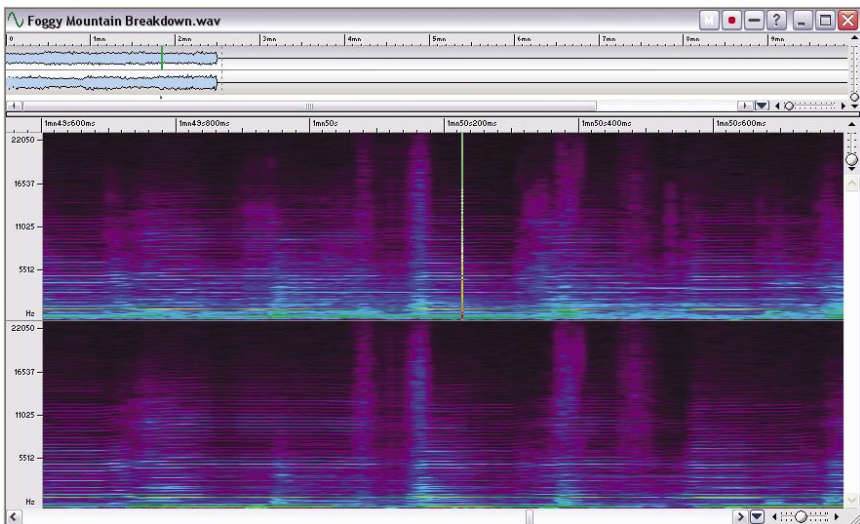
► Since Version 4, Wavelab has become *the* definitive audio editing/mastering program available for PC. Many a mastering house now favours Wavelab's workflow, useability and analysis tools. It has all the bells and whistles needed to master and sequence a professional CD and, in my own humble opinion, is leaps and bounds ahead of its major competitors such as Adobe Audition, Sony Sound Forge or Bias Peak on the Mac.

In Version 6, Steinberg has implemented a raft of new features that are likely to attract a lot of admirers from its ever-expanding user base and some converts from owners of competing programs.

When I opened the box from Steinberg I was initially surprised to see that it had adopted the Syncrosoft USB copy protection dongle that's also in use on Steinberg's Cubase SX and Nuendo. I guess it makes sense to protect its R&D investment and keep its legitimate user base ahead of the game. With the copy protection operating at driver level, the crackers' job is made very time consuming, so don't expect to see Wavelab 6 on any peer-to-peer network any time soon. (Should you already own other Syncrosoft-protected applications, it's possible to transfer the licence contained in the Syncrosoft dongle supplied with Wavelab to an existing dongle already installed on your system, rather than occupy an additional USB port.)

After the installation process, which included installing the Steinberg dongle's driver, I arrived at the desktop greeted by a new eye-catching icon. The program also has a new splash screen when booting... however, I'll cut to the chase of what's new and important.

The all-new Spectrum Editor lets you view problem areas in a whole new way. Also of note on the image below is the new time-saving 'M' (memory) button.



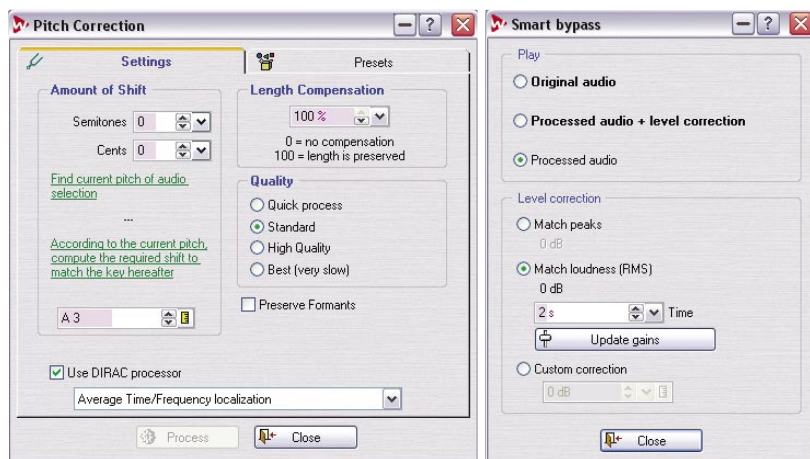
## HARDWARE EFFECTS IN THE FOLD

First of all I was really happy to see a way of integrating hardware effects into the master section plug-in chain via the new external gear plug-in. Set via a new input/output section in the preferences dialogue, users can now freely put plug-ins before hardware or vice versa in any number of configurations. Of course, you can't save presets for the exterior hardware devices within Wavelab, so you'll need to make notes and/or take photos of them and save them in the project folder if you wanted to recall them. Another issue that I should mention is that you need a multi-channel soundcard to use this function. Furthermore, there's also the issue of multiple layers of A/D and D/A conversion going on that could add unwanted artefacts such as jitter, unless you have a soundcard or clocking device with a high-quality, low-jitter word clock generator. Regardless, this is a great new feature that worked seamlessly for me and made a real difference to the processing of audio.

In Wavelab 6 the main Wave and Overview windows can be individually set to display Wave, Loudness Envelope or Spectrogram (spectrum editor). The Loudness Envelope view is pretty easy to interpret and the spectrum editor is reminiscent of a similar editing mode in Adobe Audition. It offers an entirely different view of the audio that makes it very easy to see the 'heat' of a glitch, click or cough. It's quite simple to find the offending audio and replace it with a similar but inoffensive piece of audio in close proximity. The results are great and make this a very fine addition to Wavelab's bag of tricks. Indeed, it is this restoration tool that led a lot of people to use Adobe Audition for cleaning up vinyl grabs etc.

## SALES PITCH

Another new addition that really has me gobsmacked in this version of Wavelab is the DIRAC Time Stretch/Pitch Shift engine. When processing files using the High Quality setting it operates off-line (the rendering process taking as long as the file is in seconds), but the results are worth the wait. It completely surpasses results I've obtained with Logic's Time and Pitch machine or Prosoniq's Timefactory, both of which I've used extensively when mastering songs for clients who have needed songs sped up or slowed down. The DIRAC engine does a fantastic job of pitch shifting as well. During the review I messed with many solo instruments, pitching them well above and below what they were played at. The results were impressive to say the least. Cellos, swung lower, sounded like contra bass, and when swung higher, did a sweet job of impersonating a viola. Other harmonically complex sounds such as electric guitars, vocals and brass fared better than expected. Of course, not everything will sound authentic if taken to extreme settings but if you use the DIRAC engine with care you can get away with audio pitch-shifting murder!



## CRYSTAL CLEAR

A new plug-in known as Crystal Resampler is supplied as standard. It is used in the master section and, as the name suggests, applies algorithms to make the smooth and ‘crystal clear’ transition between different sample rates. The plug-in sounded fine to my ears and although I didn’t test it extensively I’d contend that it sounded better than Wavelab’s standard built-in sample rate converter.

I was pretty happy to see the inclusion of a channel swap dialogue that eases the process of swapping left and right channels. In previous versions of Wavelab, this was an annoying process of saving left and right channels and pasting them into a new file and saving. Very often I’ve had clients come to me with reverse mixes because their monitoring or DAT recorder inputs were back to front, so this is really handy and can be implemented and saved in two clicks!

## TIME SAVERS

There are some other excellent time-saving features within the new Wavelab. Firstly, via the new ‘M’ button on each wav window, users can save a new .mem file that instantly recalls the master section presets and window/zoom/scroll settings pertaining to that file. So now you don’t have to go scrolling through the presets or re-sizing the window etc for that file. One click and the master section plug-ins are loaded and your wav displayed as you were last viewing it. You beauty! I found another time-saver in the CD text editor within the Montage window. Now you can apply the project’s Performer, Composer, and Arranger information for all songs at the press of a button – no more cut and paste for each of these fields... phew!

Steinberg has also given us the ability to accurately measure tonal variations between processed and unprocessed material via the Global Bypass tool. This tool sets a bypass volume for unprocessed, semi-processed or processed audio, selectable via the Global Bypass menu. This really helps the A-B process ‘in the box’ and means you don’t have to dive for your volume knob. Overall, a far more professional approach.

## SCIENCE LAB

I thoroughly enjoyed using this new version of Wavelab. Everywhere I turned, the shortcomings of previous versions had been corrected and/or improved. This is what makes Wavelab the forerunner in CD and DVD audio authoring/mastering. The willingness of Steinberg to listen to its user base and implement genuinely useful, professional and intuitive additions with each upgrade is reason enough to believe that Wavelab isn’t giving up its formidable lead in the market anytime soon.

If you are mastering on the PC you shouldn’t be using anything else. End of story. ■

Left: Pitch Correction dialogue with new DIRAC processor. Right: The Smart Bypass function makes A/B-ing more professional.



## NEED TO KNOW

**Price**  
\$1149

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**Pros**  
Several new time saving and workflow enhancement features. Great new algorithms for time stretching, pitch shifting and sample rate conversion.

**Cons**  
Still the most expensive program of its kind on the PC.

**Summary**  
A very worthy new iteration. Worth the upgrade.