Yoni at Waves Audio on the Abbey Road Saturator

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I’m just gonna say it: I don’t think many people really get the difference between warmth and saturation – not to mention saturation and distortion.

You know who gets this stuff? Guitar players.

Any guitar player who buys a pedal board is 99% sure to save a space for some kind of distortion pedal – most likely more than one.

For guitar players, distortion = heaven. It allows the guitar to sing and sustain with ease, turning it into something closer to a vocal instrument or a violin.

Of course, this is not only about guitar. Whether you realize it or not, pro mixers and producers use distortion every day on drums/vocals/bass/keys/you name it – and not always in the way you’d expect.

Distortion is an essential sonic element that makes up the cherished million-dollar analog console sound, harnessing the kind of texture and harmonics you just can’t get anywhere else.

But unless we’re going for some very obvious effect like a distorted rock vocal, when we’re going for that console magic, we’re using something closer to saturation.

Enter the Abbey Road Saturator.

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Gain is a Spectrum

What’s the difference between warmth vs. saturation vs. overdrive vs. distortion?

Gain.

It’s all subjective really as to where the crossovers are, but we can think of gain as a ladder where we begin with the clean signal, and depending on how much level we add, we enter new territories of the gain stage: warmth → saturation → overdrive → distortion.

Adding warmth is more like adding a bit of the analog sound of the unit you’re plugged into, whether it’s a preamp or mixing board of some kind. It might seem as if the sound is just getting louder, but it’s actually adding “iron” as they say, making the sound fatter and warmer, or more round as the volume goes up – but the tone stays clean and it still sounds like the original sound.

Once the sound changes significantly and is not 100% clean you’ve entered saturation. It’s not quite distortion and it’s not even overdrive. It’s enough to notice the difference but not enough to stick out in a track, meaning you wouldn’t audibly notice that the tone has changed once it’s mixed in.

That being said – the saturation is what makes it stand out.

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From Gain to Great

Check it out for yourself by listening to audio demos of Abbey Road Saturator on different instruments.

If you end up trying or buying – remember to check the presets.

When I’m working with a new plugin, I always start with the presets because I figure the engineers have worked hard to get the best sounds out of the plugin. And by going through the presets, I can hear how the plugin is supposed to sound to their ears.

Once I find a few good starting points I’ll start tweaking the knobs and sliders to see what kind of sounds I can get out of it on my tracks.

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