

SHARK S3

Operating manual / Advanced Musical Compressor



Getting started

Load S3 on the track or bus you want to process. Start with a suitable factory preset or choose Clean, switch Character off, and adjust Threshold until the red gain-reduction display shows the desired activity. Set Ratio, then adjust Attack and Release while listening to transients and recovery. Refine Knee and Range. Match output level for a useful bypass comparison.

Use lower monitoring levels when auditioning Listen or Delta. Turn these audition modes off before normal playback/export. Save the DAW session to retain settings and favorite flags.

Reading the display

The upper red graph shows gain-reduction history, with a 0-18 dB display scale. The lower graph overlays gray input and theme-colored output history. Its vertical scale is in dB. The diagonal/static transfer curve shows the input/output level law; its horizontal axis is input dB. History runs in time, so do not interpret waveform horizontal position as input level.

The static curve excludes timing, makeup gain, character and external-detector level. IN/OUT segmented meters show peak dBFS; the red GR meter shows gain reduction. A display is feedback, not a replacement for listening.

Main controls

Control	Range	Purpose
Threshold	-60 to 0 dB	Sets the level reference for compression.
Ratio	0.5:1 to 50:1	Shapes the static level relationship; audition below-unity settings carefully.
Attack	0.05-500 ms	Sets the response to rising compression demand.
Release	5-5000 ms	Sets base recovery timing in free/manual operation.
Knee	0-72 dB	Softens the transition around threshold.
Range	0-60 dB	Limits the dynamics gain change.
Mix	0-200%	0% dry, 100% wet; above 100% extrapolates the wet/dry difference rather than a conventional blend.
Output	-24 to +24 dB	Final level control for processed playback.

Styles are Clean, Vocal, Bus, Master, Punch and Upward. Upward raises lower-level material rather than behaving like ordinary downward compression. Release Mode selects Manual or ARC; ARC adapts release behavior. Behavior selects Electro or Opto. Tone selects Smooth or Warm. These labels describe S3's responses, not certified models of particular hardware.

Sidechain, channels and monitoring

Lookahead spans 0-20 ms and changes declared processing latency. Set it before critical playback; changing latency can cause host updates or audible transitions. Stereo Link spans 0-100%. Channel Mode selects Stereo or Mid/Side.

The Sidechain button selects external detection; first route the external source using your DAW. With it off, detection is internal. SC HP spans 20-1000 Hz and SC LP spans 1000-20000 Hz. The filters shape detection, not a general-purpose output EQ. Listen auditions the detector.

Auto Gain provides approximate makeup, not measured loudness matching. Delta auditions the wet-minus-dry difference, which can include gain and character changes as well as compression. Bypass returns the original signal with the lookahead delay.

Advanced controls

Open Advanced above the graph; close it to return to the history display. An asterisk marks active advanced settings.

Control	Settings	Operation
Input Gain	±24 dB	Trims input before compression; internal detection follows it.
Wet Makeup	±24 dB	Trims the compressed branch before mixing.
Hold	0-500 ms	Delays recovery; zero disables Hold.
Detector Gain	±24 dB	Changes detector sensitivity without directly trimming audio.
SC Bell Frequency	20 Hz-20 kHz	Selects detector emphasis frequency.
SC Bell Gain	±18 dB	Boosts/cuts detector emphasis.
SC Bell Q	0.1-10	Sets bell bandwidth.
Detection	Peak / RMS (10 ms)	Selects instantaneous-peak or averaged-energy detection.
Channel Focus	Normal / Mid Only / Side Only / Mid triggers Side / Side triggers Mid	Selects which stereo component is processed and which triggers it. Focus modes override Stereo Link; use Normal on mono tracks.
Release Sync	Free / 1/16 / 1/8 / 1/4 / 1/2 / dotted 1/8 / triplet 1/8	Sets base release from host tempo; fallback is 120 BPM. ARC/style still affect recovery.
Character	Off / Soft / Dense / Asymmetric	Selects optional saturation; Asymmetric includes DC blocking.
Character Drive	0-24 dB	Drives the character stage with compensation after shaping.
Character Route	Pre / Post	Places character before/after gain reduction on the wet branch; does not move the detector tap.

Character runs at native sample rate without oversampling. High drive can alias. Audition discrete mode changes with playback stopped if switching causes a transient.

Presets and comparison

The browser contains 100 factory presets. Use the arrows for navigation. Factory preset loading resets advanced controls so hidden settings do not carry over unintentionally. Use A/B/C to compare settings and Undo/Redo to revisit edits.

Click the adjacent star to bookmark the selected factory preset. It turns yellow and the preset appears in Favorites. Favorite flags persist in session state and survive A/B/C changes. The bookmark refers to the factory entry, not an edited snapshot. CUSTOM has no factory identity and its star is disabled.

Appearance and window controls

Click the logo to cycle orange, purple, blue and green. Red gain-reduction indicators remain red. Roboto is embedded. Zoom is under Menu:

Zoom	Window size
80%	806 × 504
100% (default)	1008 × 630
120%	1210 × 756
140%	1411 × 882

The expand button beside Menu opens a larger live view sharing the same processor. Exit, close or Escape returns to the normal view. Zoom presets are disabled in expanded view. Menu Credits - SHARK S3 opens the credit page; Close, Escape or an outside click dismisses it.

Troubleshooting

No expected external triggering: check DAW sidechain routing and the Sidechain button; audition Listen.

Unexpected output: check Input Gain, Wet Makeup, Output, Mix, Auto Gain, Character, Listen and Delta; inspect Advanced.

Pumping or softened transients: adjust Attack, Release, Hold, Range and detector filtering; compare at matched level.

Favorite missing in another instance: favorites belong to session/instance state, not a global preset database.

Tempo recovery seems different: check ARC/style and whether the host supplies tempo.

Distribution and credits

Use the installation and compatibility information supplied with the released installer. This handoff includes source, not a signed installer. AU/VST3 and macOS 12 are project build targets; a release support matrix is still required for public documentation.

Plugin Creator: Alex Raven. Product Design & Production: Sharky. Shark Plugs.