

ICHIKA NITO

TONE TUTORIAL

Brought to you by Ichika Nito discord people

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Preface

This is a guide for how to replicate the clean, ambient guitar tone of Ichika Nito. The setup also aims to be DAW-agnostic and accessible to all via free guitar plugins. All links and resources mentioned can be found at the bottom section of the guide 😎.

This guide features anecdotal experience from various guitarists within the Ichika Fans Discord server.

We have not used any AI/ChatGPT to write this. These are strictly our own words.

We recommend using this guide as a baseline to get you started, but we encourage the act of tweaking it to your liking and discovering the skill of tone-shaping on your own terms.

1. Knowledge Prerequisites

The chapters that come after this assume that the guitarist possesses knowledge of the following music and production concepts:

1. Guitar pickups and how pickup types, configurations and positions affect a guitar's output tone

2. A general understand on various audio production effects such as:
Compression, EQ, Saturation and Reverb

If you find yourself a bit unfamiliar with any of the concepts mentioned above, fret not! (pun intended) This chapter serves as a quick refresher into what each concept is, as well as what are the parts of each concept that are *relevant to Ichika's guitar tone*.

1.1 Guitar pickups

The type, position and electronic configuration of a guitar pickup(s) play an important role in generating the original, "dry" signal that will be manipulated with various effects. It controls the direct source of the guitar signal.

Selecting the right pickup configuration is crucial to the first step of Ichika's clean guitar tone. Neck pickups sound warm and thick, while bridge pickups sound bright and twangy. We tend to select a coil-split for humbucker guitars and a middle + bridge for single coil setups. We speculate that this gives the best balance of warmth and clarity.

1.2 Compression

A compressor *reduces the dynamic range* of a signal by attenuating high-amplitude (loud) parts of the signal, then bringing the amplitude of the *entire* signal up.

This brings out elements of the sound that were originally very soft and subtle, and shifts them to the foreground where they are now more audible. Minute and imperceivable details of the signal's character can now be perceived, making the mix more interesting and alive.

In the context of guitar tapping

The act of guitar tapping is a degree softer than a typical strummed note. By compressing a signal, we can *increase the volume of tapped notes*, narrowing the - otherwise large and disconnected - dynamic range of tapped notes vs picked/strummed notes, which could *make the overall melody smoother and more cohesive*.

Multi-band compression

Multi-band compression uses the same principle of normal (also named single-band) compression. The difference is that instead of applying the compression over the entirety of the frequencies, you can customize your compression for different ranges of frequencies. Often you'll have 3 bands, one for the lows, one for the mids, and one for the highs. In theory, you can have an infinite amount of bands, but due to neglectable use, 3-5 bands are enough.

You *could* try multi-band compression instead of regular compression. Try compressing only the low-end and leaving the high-end alone. In theory, this could *both* bring out the tapping sounds as well as preserve the high-end dynamics

At the end of the day, the most important modifier of dynamics is **your own playing**. That is to say, try not to use compression as a crutch. Learning how to tap properly with the right stroke and strength matters a lot. It was definitely easier for Ichika as he has a piano background, and finger-mechanics carry over to tapping very well.

1.3 EQ

EQ (Equalisation) is the adjustment of signal levels across the audible frequency spectrum. EQ allows the direct shaping of a guitar tone, e.g. boosting the high-end, quieting the low-end of the signal

A bright, Ichika tone features attenuated lows and mids, with a boost in the high end. Without EQ, you simply can't get his sound.

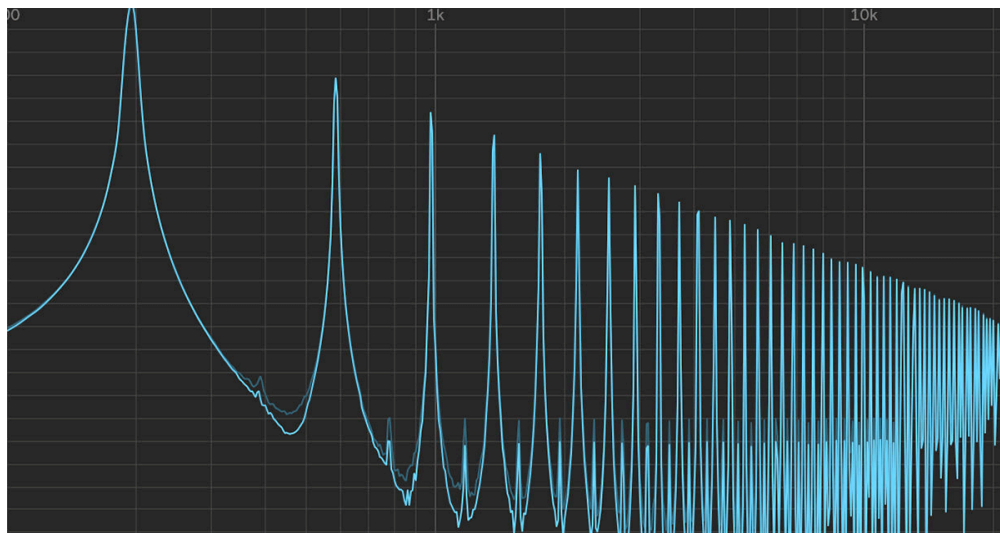
1.4 Saturation

Saturation is the overloading of analog electric audio-recording components such that the incoming audio signal gets *compressed and distorted, through the imparting of harmonics*.

By imparting harmonics onto a given frequency spectrum, we can add *warmth and presence* to a guitar tone, as thin-sounding notes would literally become fuller-bodied.

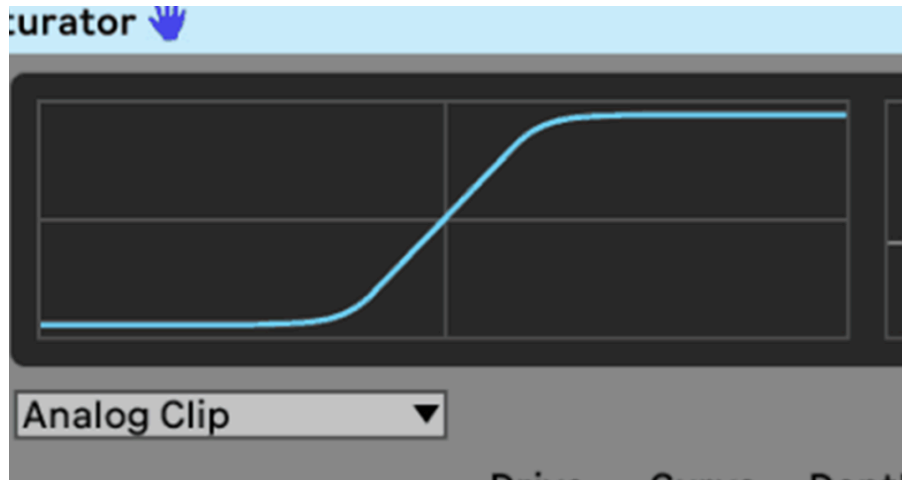
Before: Fundamental note

After: Fundamental note + harmonic series (makes the frequency spectrum richer, and therefore the sound is richer)



An example of a harmonic series

Saturation also acts as a soft-knee compression due to higher-level signals getting leveled out as a result of the saturation curve function. A subtle, gentle compression may be desirable as it might sound more natural.



Screenshot of a saturator plugin within Ableton Live

There are 3 main types of saturation: Tape, Tube and Transistor. These different saturation types provide different colourations of harmonics, so they make a mix warm and full but in their own unique way.

- Tape saturation is well-known for its *inherent compression*, which gives a more cohesive sound
- Tube saturation is very flexible and powerful, able to give both even and odd harmonics
 - A *triode* tube gives *even harmonics*, which make a sound *warmer and fuller*
 - A *pentode* tube gives *odd harmonics*, which gives a more *gritty and edgy* tone
- Transistor saturation really depends on the model of the saturator, as it can impart a wide range of even-to-odd harmonic ratios. It is typically regarded as having a *harsher* sound tho.

In the context of Ichika's tone, a saturator helps to breathe some life into an otherwise thin and sparse-sounding tone. It could be said that this helps to **balance** both the *high frequency-rich clarity* of the base tone with having *warmth and fullness* to the overall mix. The *inherent compression* effect of tape saturation also aligns well with trying to bring out the tapping sounds of Ichika's melodies.

The warmth of a saturator also **differs** from the warmth provided by a simple EQ plugin, which might explain how it manages to sound warm without it sounding muddy. EQs provide warmth by *raising the level of lower and midrange frequencies*, whereas saturators *increase the presence of harmonics*.

The type of saturator is just up to personal preference. Depending on how warm and/or gritty you'd like the sound, go nuts.

1.5 Reverb

Reverbs provide a desired spatial and atmospheric aspect of your guitar tone. It can open up the sound of the guitar as well as transport it to be in a realistic(or made-up) environment, depending on artistic expression.

Reverb configurations are **highly subjective**. Every Ichika song has a slightly different reverb amount and character, but this guide can provide a good starting point.

2. Tone Analysis

2.1 Characterizing Ichika's tone

To the typical Ichika music enjoyer, Ichika's tone is described as bright, clean, ambient, spacious, and crystal-like.

There is a LOT of space within his sound, and his guitar carries this sort of "shimmering" effect to it.

EQ-wise, it's the literal opposite of mud. It's very bright, featuring heavily-attenuated low-end + midrange frequencies and boosted treble frequencies.

Compression is used to squash the dynamic range, which brings out the soft-volume tapping notes *into the foreground*, where it is audibly pronounced.

Saturation is recommended to give more warmth and presence to the guitar sound.

2.2 Equipment used by Ichika

Guitars

Ichika uses the following guitars:

- **Ibanez SIR27FD**
 - Pickups: DiMarzio PAF 7 (H)
 - Controls: Single volume, 5-way toggle pickup selector.



- **Ibanez RGAIX7U**

- Pickups: Bare Knuckle Aftermath (H)
- Controls: Single volume, 3-way toggle pickup selector, coil-split switch.



- **Ibanez S5527QFX-GFB**

- Pickups: Bare Knuckle Aftermath (H)
- Controls: Single volume, 5-way toggle pickup selector.



- **Ibanez S5527QFX**

- Pickups: Bridge: Ibanez V87 (H) (passive/alnico)
Neck: Ibanez V77 (H) (passive/ceramic)
- Controls: Master volume, master tone, 5-way lever pickup selector.



- **Fender American Telecaster Thinline (~1970)**

- Pickups: Custom Shop Hand-Wound '67 Single-Coil Tele
- Controls: Master volume, master tone, 3-way lever pickup selector.



- **Ibanez RG852MPB**

- Pickups: DiMarzio PAF 8 (H) (passive/ceramic)
- Controls: Master volume, master tone, 5-way lever pickup selector.



Hardware

Ichika is also known to use these effect racks/pedals:



Ichika has been known to use the Axe-Fx II from Fractal audio. He uses the presets "Shiver Clean" and "Boutique 1" hence his treble tone which can be heard in his EPs "Forn" and "She Waits Patiently".

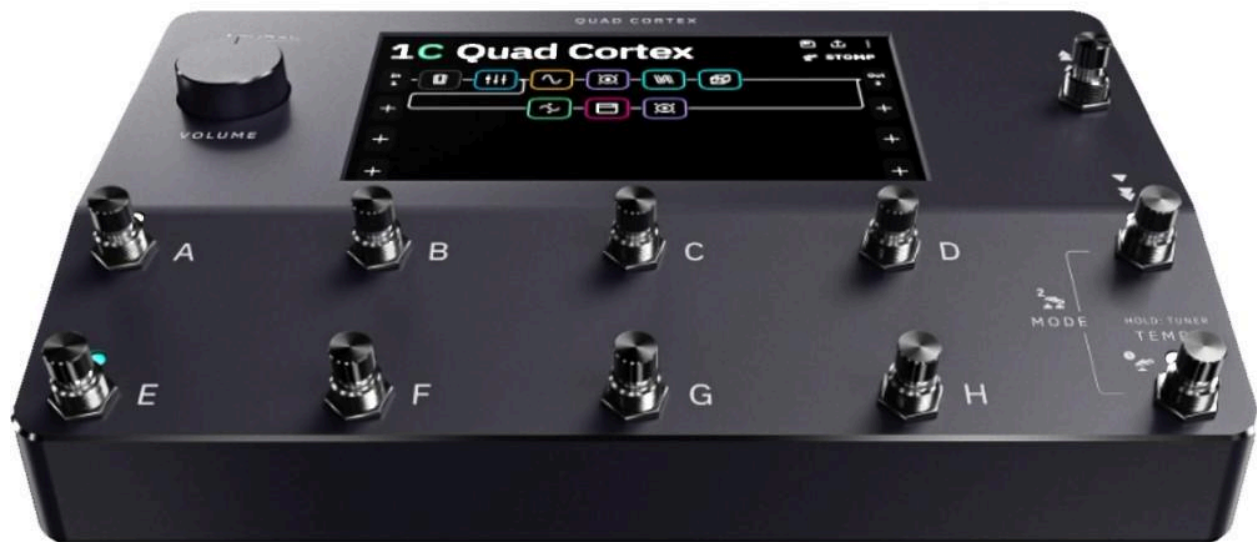


Ichika uses the Discrete 4 by antelope audio as his audio interface. He combines it with the Axe Fx II via S/PDIF. By doing so, he is using the Discrete 4 to record his audio and use the Axe Fx II as his effects chain. Aside from using the Axe FX for his effects, he also used the plugins that

came with the Discrete 4 such as the "Reel to Reel" tape emulator and the "FET-A76" compressor.



As Ichika discovers more guitar tones, he discovers new ways to record guitars as well. Not just for his videos, but also for his live performances. Ichika uses the Line 6 Helix for this case as he mentions that in his recordings, he uses the Helix's DI sound. He has been using the Helix since 2023 as can be seen during Ichika's clinic tour and live performances.



Portability is important especially for Ichika's live performances, for his solo gigs and his gigs with ichikoro and Dios. As Ichika gets caught up with performing in various countries, he found himself using the Quad Cortex by Neuraldsp.

Software

Ichika has known to use certain guitar effects and plugins, notably:

- Valhalla reverb
- FabFilter Plugins

2.3 Nuances and additional notes

Ichika's guitar tone varies based on the "era" of his music.

(perhaps a timeline breakdown of how his tone has changed over time + perhaps talking about different tones for different "main styles" of songs that he is known for)

3. Tone reproduction

For this chapter, we finally detail how to chain together the various configs and effects together to get your very own Ichika tone.

For this demo we're going to emulate the sound from Ichika's song, "a bell is not a bell". Here is a [link to an audio demo of the tone](#).

The equipment I'm using for this demo is the [Ibanez QX527PB](#) and the string I'm using are the "D'Addario EXL110-7 Nickel Wound Electric Guitar Strings, 7-String, Regular Light, 10-59"

You'll need:

- A guitar (hopefully you have this one)
- A DAW (digital audio workstation e.g. Ableton, FL Studio etc.)
- Appropriate guitar VST plugins (examples and free resources linked below)

The order of FX-chaining is as follows:

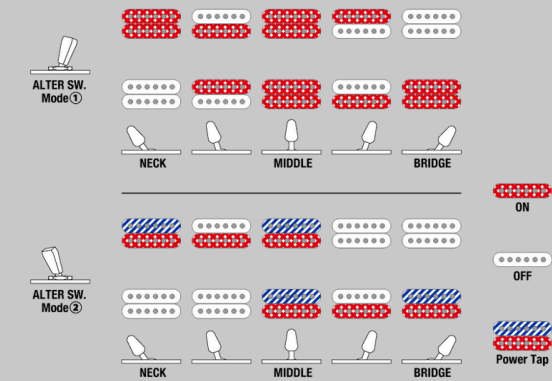
EQ -> Compressor -> Saturator -> Reverb

Optional: Add clean-up EQ and/or limiter in the middle of any of the steps for personal tone preference

3.1 Guitar config

For the demo, we are using an Ibanez QX527PB. Alter switch is at mode 1 with the 5-way switch in the 4th position. This selects a coil split, using the 2 outermost pickups.

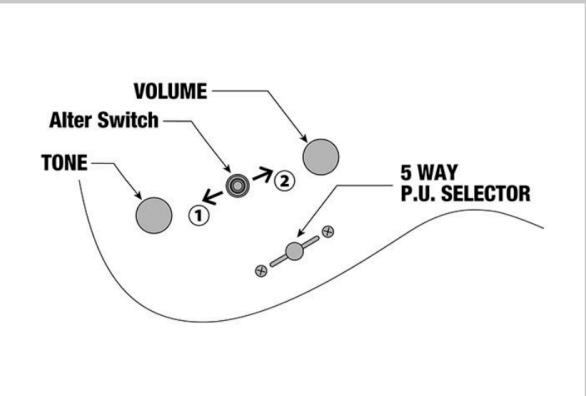
SWITCHING SYSTEM



DESCRIPTION

+

CONTROLS



DESCRIPTION

+

3.2 Audio Effects

EQ



- Cut out the lows and the mids.
- Additionally, add a scoop that covers the 2k-5k Hz range. I find this very beneficial for Ichika tone-shaping.

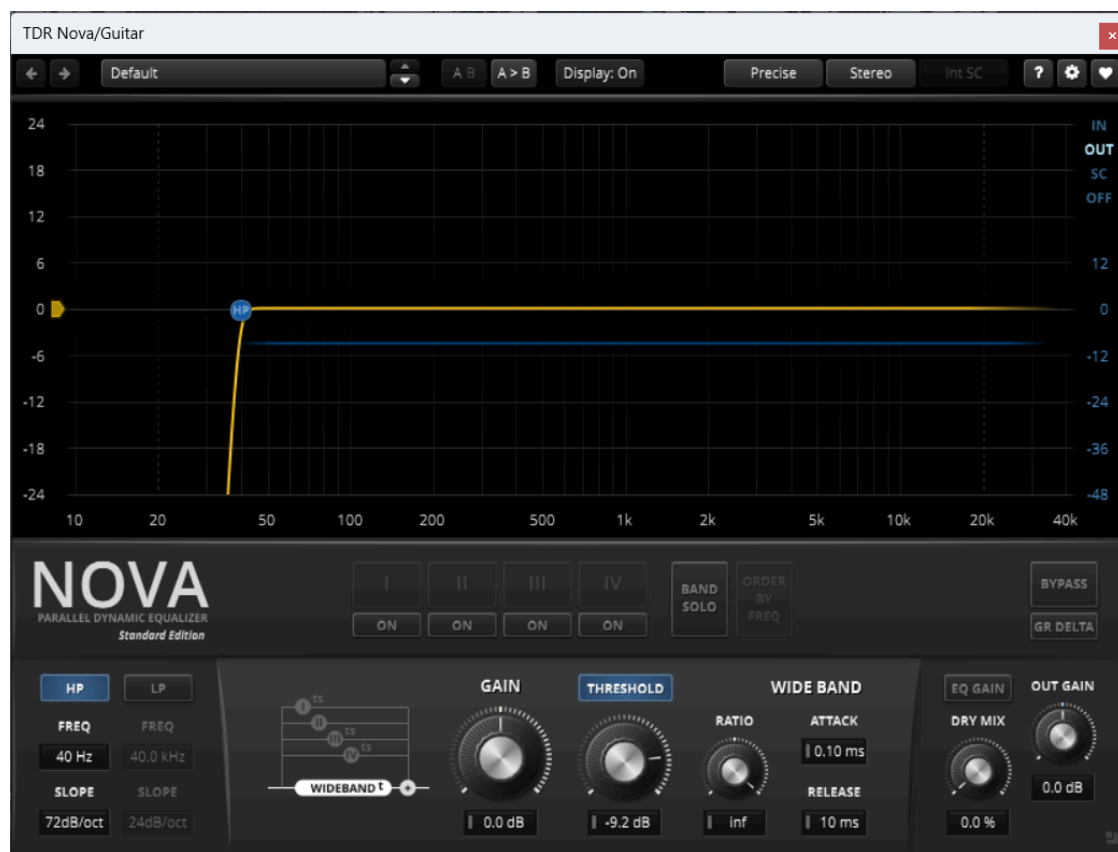
Compression



- Configure a fairly low threshold with a medium gain ratio. We'd like to shrink the dynamic range to bring out the tapping sounds, but we don't want the overall mix to sound lifeless and "un-dynamic"
- Additionally, the low end has an even lower threshold, with the purpose of avoiding it overpowering the highs

Limiter

A limiter helps to keep the dynamic range in check, just in case anything falls outside the comfortable loudness.



Saturation-EQ chain



- The image above demonstrates a chainable Saturator-EQ chain.
- The saturator contains a slight gain, with a color curve to make it so that only the mid-to-high end frequencies get harmonics imparted on them. The intention is to make the mid-high notes stand out (think more harmonics = more presence)
- A cleanup EQ is appended after this, as I've found some unwanted low-end and high-end noises come out of the saturator, probably as by-products of processing. Just a small fix.
- This is **stackable**. If you want lots of saturation, consider adding saturation in *layers*. We reason that this makes tone and EQ more controllable.

Reverb

The last step would be to configure the reverb

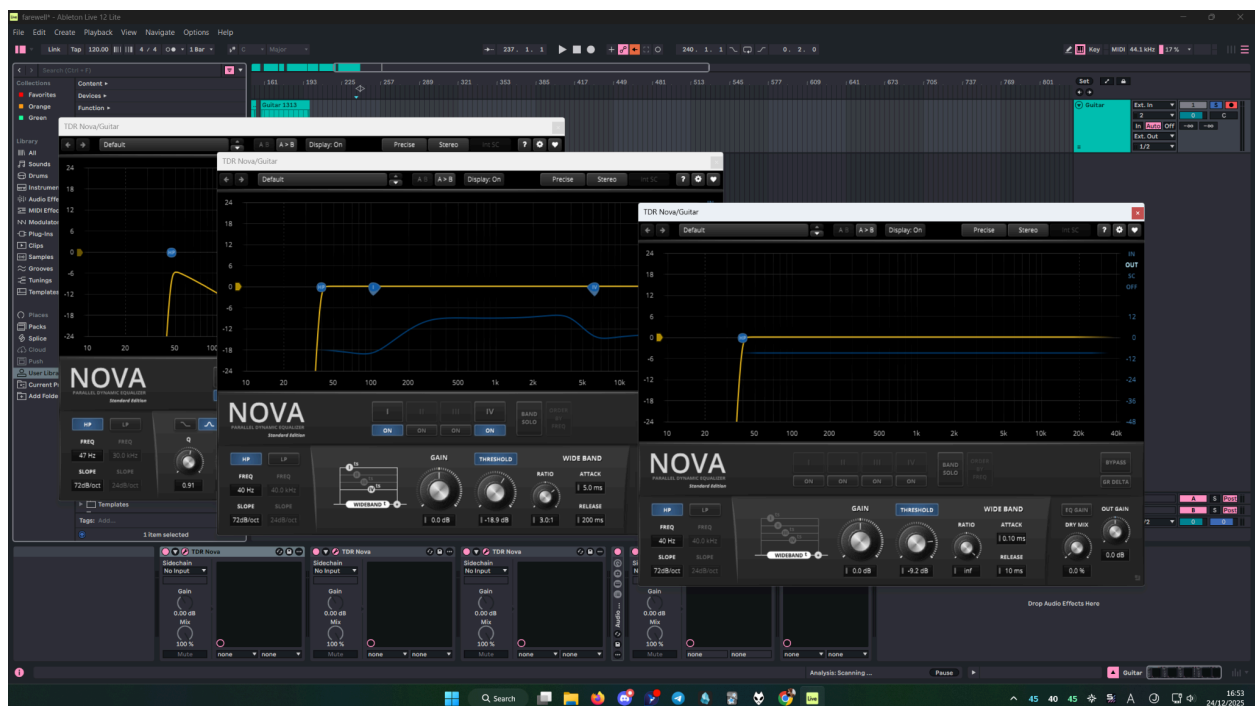


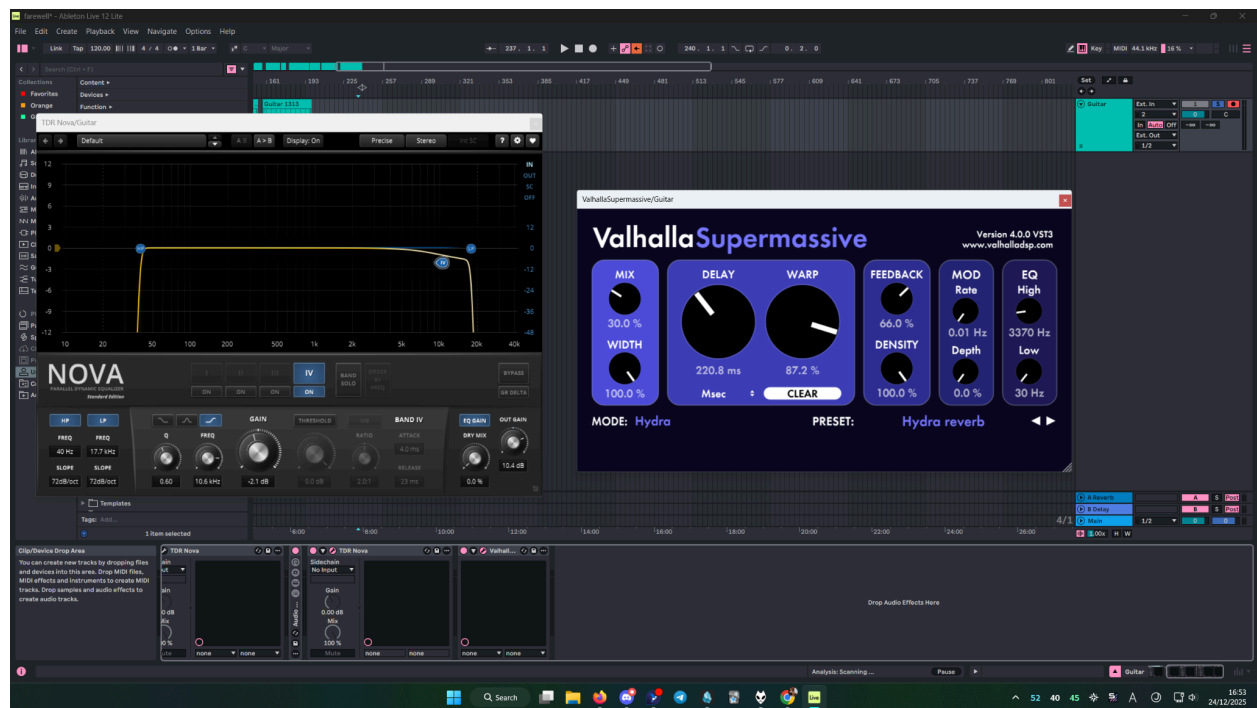
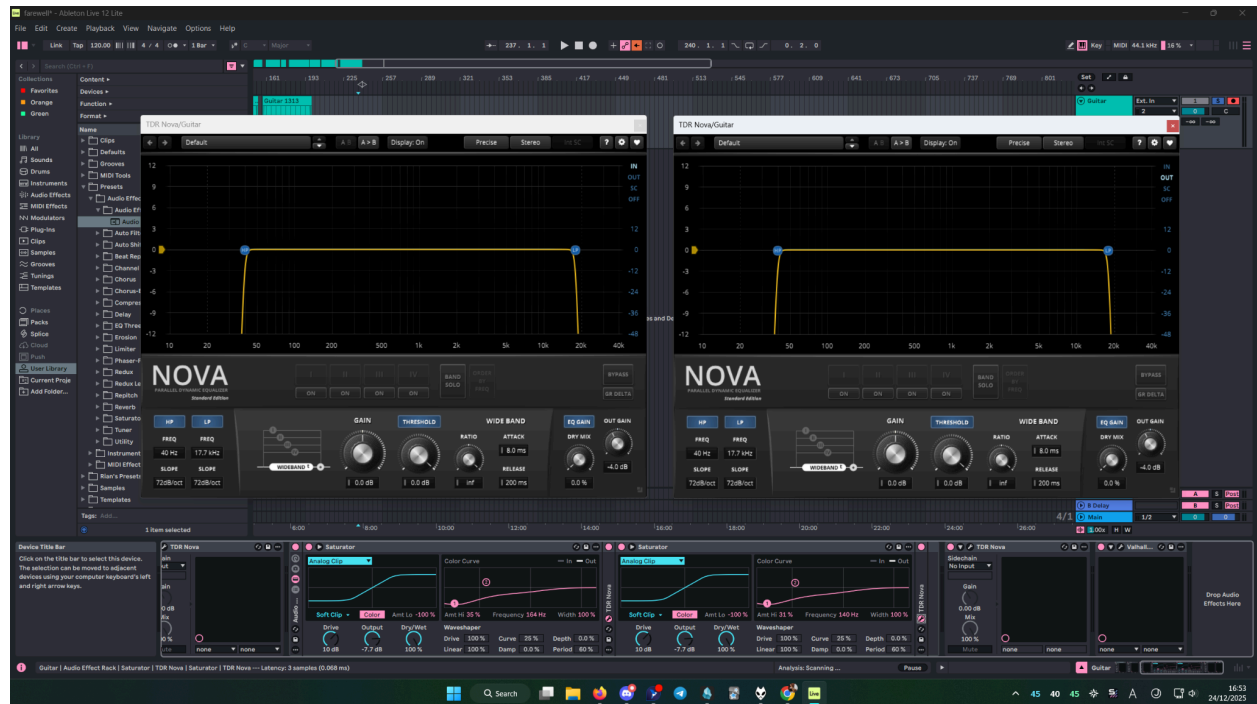
Some things to note:

- Low MOD rate for the shimmering effect
- High Warp % for reverb. A low warp % would see the echoes becoming too regular. In that case, the plugin would act like a relay pedal instead. A high warp % fixes that by randomizing the time taken for the echoes to come back, resulting in a thick, continuous wave of sound reflections.
- The High-cutoff is set to 4000Hz. This is purely personal preference. I would say that anything above 5000Hz and you risk the shimmering echoes becoming rather harsh on the ears. Aim for a comfortable balance.

4. Additional Tone setups

Farewell





5. References

- Compression:

- [Demystifying the compressor](<https://dynaudio.com/magazine/2023/august/demystifying-the-compressor>)
- Saturation:
 - [What is saturation?](<https://www.sageaudio.com/articles/what-is-saturation-for-mixing-and-mastering>)
 - [What is Saturation and how it improves your mix](<https://www.iconcollective.edu/audio-saturation>)
 - [Tube vs. Tape: Navigating the World of Saturation](<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsaWdnObCvE>)
 - [Tube Saturation 101: Key Elements & Best Tips/Techniques](<https://unison.audio/tube-saturation/>)