



Hear's paned interface offers tons of options, all at your fingertips.

JOESOFT HEAR

RATCHET UP YOUR MAC'S AUDIO OUTPUT

Think you've got better ears than the sound engineer who mastered your favorite CD? Maybe you'd just like to get the most from the tinny speakers on your \$2,000 laptop. The folks at JoeSoft are here to help. For a lot less than the cost of pro audio hardware, you can try your hand at soundscaping on your Mac with Hear.

Hear is a feature-packed digital signal processor that gives you total control of the sound coming out of your computer, whether it's destined for your external speakers, a pair of headphones, or your home sound system. The software is a standalone app that runs alongside iTunes (or any other app that puts out audio) and provides last-stop control of your Mac's audio. With dozens of preset sonic environments included, you're bound to find richer sounds in your existing media that weren't possible by fiddling with just the volume slider or iTunes equalizer settings.

If you're not satisfied with putting the genre-based presets' stamp on everything, Hear lets you delve into the minutiae of sound engineering with tweakable levels (utilizing sliders, virtual knobs, and wave-forms), giving you a level of control ordinarily reserved for professional audio gear. When you find the sweet spot, you can save your own preset for future use.

We used Hear to rebalance and restore the mix of 20-year-old cassette recordings of our favorite garage band, bringing out previously buried punch

in the bass and snap in the snare drum. We loved the added presence and bottom end we were able to coax out of the sound effects in games, and we easily fixed the dialogue in our download of *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* so it wasn't overwhelmed by the Ennio Morricone soundtrack. Hear makes your speakers or headphones sound better than you've ever heard them sound before.

The PDF user manual gives detailed explanations for each of Hear's seemingly limitless tweaking options, which include ways to optimize sound for games, music, speech, and movies and TV. Still, we found ourselves wishing the help system was built into the app, rather than just being a link to open the PDF manual, which we were loath to print out lest we kill trees. Hear's wealth of options makes it easy to find the perfect settings for your audio, but for fiddly types—or the easily distracted—the sheer quantity of available audio presets can be overwhelming. We also wished there was an easier way to toggle between favorite settings without having to navigate through gigantic hierarchical menus.

The bottom line. Hear is excellent sonic imaging software designed to bring out the best in your Mac's sound output. The controls are intuitive enough for newbies, and deep enough for serious audio geeks, although it takes a bit of time to totally master the interface.—*Lonnie Lazar*



HEAR

JoeSoft

www.joesoft.com

Price: \$49.95

Requirements: Mac OS 10.4 or later

➤ Tweaks sound from any app. Simple to use. Powerful. Presets get you going quickly.

⚠ Number of controls and presets can overwhelm. No simple way to toggle between frequently used settings. Interface cannot be resized.

