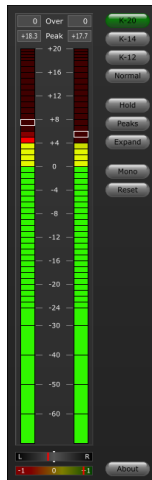


K-Meter

Free implementation of a K-System meter
according to Bob Katz' specifications



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Last edited on 3rd February 2011

Contents

1	The loudness race	4
2	The K-System	5
3	Installation	7
4	Controls	8
4.1	Meter selection	8
4.2	Infinite peak hold	8
4.3	Show peak meter	9
4.4	Magnify meters	9
4.5	Mono mode	9
4.6	Reset button	10
4.7	About window	10
4.8	Display license	10
5	Meters	12
5.1	K-System meter	12
5.2	Peak meter	12
5.3	Overload counter	13
5.4	Maximum peak display	13
5.5	Phase correlation meter	14
5.6	Stereo meter	15

6	Final words	16
A	How to build K-Meter	17
A.1	Dependencies	17
A.1.1	premake4	17
A.1.2	Fastest Fourier Transform in the West	17
A.1.3	JUCE library	18
A.1.4	Virtual Studio Technology SDK (VST)	19
A.1.5	Artistic Style	20
A.2	Building on GNU/Linux	20
A.3	Building on Microsoft Windows	21
B	GNU General Public License	22

1 The loudness race

When comparing two similar pieces of music, the louder one is perceived as sounding better (although this is only true for short periods of time). Accordingly, the loudness of music productions has continuously grown during the last decades.

As maximum levels of records, tapes and digital media are limited, however, mastering engineers have started using sophisticated dynamic compression techniques to achieve higher loudness without distorting the music (as of 2010, distortion is increasingly being used in order to achieve even higher loudness).

Unfortunately, this decrease in dynamic range does not leave the music unharmed. Current compressed music blasts away your ears and makes you turn down the volume of your amplifier. Having lowered the volume, you'll find that the "better-sounding" compressed music suddenly sounds pretty dull and boring compared to uncompressed music. In contrast, music with high dynamic range makes you turn up the volume – heck, it even sounds better when broadcast on the radio!

2 The K-System

The K-System has been devised by mastering engineer Bob Katz in order to counteract the ongoing loudness race and to help adjusting the levels of different songs during mastering. K-System meters are average level meters that do **not** have 0 dB on top. Instead, 0 dB on K-System meters relate to a reference loudness. There are three K-System scales:

- K-20 (0 dB at -20 dBFS, recommended)
- K-14 (0 dB at -14 dBFS)
- K-12 (0 dB at -12 dBFS)

Using the K-System is easy. Just calibrate your monitor system so that pink noise (-20 dBFS RMS, 20 Hz to 20 kHz; see the K-Meter source code for a FLAC-compressed wave file) on one channel yields 83 dB SPL on a loudness meter set to *C-weighted, slow*. Then mark the monitor's gain position as "K-20".

When your mixes or masters seem to have just the right loudness, they should now yield 0 dB on a K-20 meter.

In case you want to use the K-14 meter, attenuate the monitor gain by 6 dB or repeat the above process so that pink

noise yields 77 dB SPL. For K-12, attenuate the monitor gain by another 2 dB (pink noise should yield 75 dB SPL).

For more information about the K-System, please see [Bob's website](#).

3 Installation

In order to use the pre-compiled binaries, please install the “Fastest Fourier Transform in the West” library first (see [their website](#) for instructions).

When you’re done, simply extract the K-Meter files from the downloaded archive. For the VST plug-in, you’ll then have to move the extracted files to your plug-in folder (~/.vst, C:\ProgramFiles\Steinberg\VstPlugins\ or the like).

4 Controls

4.1 Meter selection

You can select the different K-System meter scales (**K-20**, **K-14** and **K-12**) by clicking on these radio buttons.



In the rare case you want to use the meter in a mixer's channel strip, click the **Normal** button (0 dBFS on top). Please note, however, that the **Normal** state will be neither saved, nor recalled in your DAW and the standalone version. This is by design – the K-System meter has been explicitly designed to **not** have 0 dBFS on top!

4.2 Infinite peak hold

Click on this button to toggle between infinite peak hold and “falling peaks”. This settings applies to both K-System and peak meters.



4.3 Show peak meter

Click on this button to toggle display of the peak meters. The original K-System meter specification demands peak meters, but Bob Katz has asked me to hide them by default:



“Too many people will try to normalize the peak to full scale if they see a peak meter, and that’s what we want to avoid. You can still make a K-System meter like the original, but if we meet again in 15 years I hope that peak metering will be outlawed.”

4.4 Magnify meters

This button magnifies both K-System and peak meters to 0.1 dB steps. If switched on, the 0 dB mark is placed near the centre.



Hint: by selecting different meter scales, you can easily magnify the whole range between -25 dBFS and 0 dBFS.

4.5 Mono mode

Click this button to easily check the mono compatibility of your mix or master. In **mono** mode, both stereo meters will be linked.



If you insert the plug-in into a mono channel strip, **mono** mode will be selected and cannot be toggled.

4.6 Reset button

Click on this button to reset peaks, maximum peaks and overload counter of both K-System and peak meters. You can also get rid of graphical artifacts, because the meters will be redrawn as well.



4.7 About window

Clicking on this button will open the **about** window where you will be informed about version number, contributors, copyright and the GNU General Public License.



4.8 Display license

This button is located in the **about window** and does not only advertise that you are using free software licensed under the **GNU General Public License** – when clicked, it will also open the license’s website in your web browser ...



5 Meters

5.1 K-System meter

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5.2 Peak meter

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5.3 Overload counter

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5.4 Maximum peak display

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5.5 Phase correlation meter

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5.6 Stereo meter

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6 Final words

Although coding K-Meter has been a lot of fun, it has also been a lot of work. So if you like K-Meter, why not send me a short email and tell me so? Write a few words about yourself, send suggestions for future updates or volunteer to create a nice theme – do whatever you like!

Here is my email address (please remove “-nospam”):

Martin Zuther <code-nospam@mzuther.de>

Thanks for using free software. I hope you'll enjoy it!

A How to build K-Meter

To build K-Meter yourself, you'll first have to install the dependencies listed below. To compile on 64-bit GNU/Linux operating systems, you'll also have to install the multilib files for g++ (Debian package: `g++-multilib`).

A.1 Dependencies

A.1.1 premake4

Importance: required

Version: 4.3

License: BSD

Homepage: industriousone.com/premake

A.1.2 Fastest Fourier Transform in the West

Importance: required

Version: 3.2.2

License: GPL v2

Homepage: www.fftw.org

Installation on GNU/Linux

Extract the archive into the directory `libraries/fftw3`, change into this directory and run:

```
./configure --enable-float CC="gcc -m32"  
make  
mkdir bin/  
mv .libs/* bin/
```

Installation on Microsoft Windows

Extract the source code archive into the directory `libraries/fftw3` and the archive containing the pre-compiled binaries into the directories `libraries/fftw3/bin` and `%SystemDirectory%` (usually `C:\WINDOWS\system32\`).

A.1.3 JUCE library

Importance: required

Version: 1.52

License: GPL v3

Homepage: www.rawmaterialsoftware.com/juce.php

Installation on GNU/Linux

Extract the archive into the directory `libraries/juce`, change into the directory `libraries/juce/Builds/Linux` and run:

```
make CONFIG=Debug
make CONFIG=Release
mv build/libjuce*.a ../../bin/
```

Installation on Microsoft Windows

Extract the archive into the directory `libraries/juce` and compile the library.

A.1.4 Virtual Studio Technology SDK (VST)

Importance: optional
Version: 2.4
License: proprietary
Homepage: ygrabit.steinberg.de

Installation on GNU/Linux

Extract the archive into the directory `libraries/vstsdk2.4`.

Installation on Microsoft Windows

Extract the archive into the directory `libraries/vstsdk2.4.`

A.1.5 Artistic Style

Importance: optional

Version: 1.24

License: LGPL v3

Homepage: astyle.sourceforge.net

This application formats the code so it looks more beautiful and consistent. Thus, you only have to install it if you plan to help me with coding K-Meter. Please run *astyle* using the script `src/format_code.sh`.

A.2 Building on GNU/Linux

After preparing the dependencies, change into the directory `build` and run

```
./run_premake  
make config=CFG TARGET
```

where `CFG` is one of `debug32` and `release32`, and `TARGET` is one of `linux_standalone` and `linux_vst`. The compiled binaries will end up in the directory `bin`.

A.3 Building on Microsoft Windows

After preparing the dependencies, change into the directory `build/windows/vs_2010`, open `kmeter.sln` with Visual C++ 2010 and build the project. The compiled binaries will end up in the directory `bin`.

B GNU General Public License

Version 3, 29 June 2007

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