

REVIEWED: Ableton Live 7 • Adobe Audition 3 • Native Instruments Kontakt 3



Vol. 10, No. 2, FEBRUARY 2008

ELECTRONIC • URBAN | PRODUCTION • PERFORMANCE

REMIX

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Goldfrapp

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& CALIFORNIA SUNSHINE**

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CURSE

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Cover photo of Alison Goldfrapp by **Serge Leblon**
Photo of Pete Rock this page by **Pier Nicola D'Amico**



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TIME TRAVEL

I listen to a ton of new music—all day, every day. I listen to the stuff that's on the runaway hype train, the stuff that no one knows about yet (but will) and the stuff that may just slip through the cracks. There are reasons why some bands blow up and some don't. And sometimes, because music is so subjective, and because success is based on so many factors (including luck), there doesn't seem to be any plausible reason at all.

I'm surprised by how varied people's opinions are about music. A friend and I went to see Kenna at the Fillmore in San Francisco, and we were blown away by the show. I was also blown away by the album, but my friend wasn't. I don't really get why. On the other hand, sometimes I listen to a band that everyone is flipping out about, and I don't get it.

Sometimes I need to cleanse the palate and go back to music that's tried and true—songs I know I can hear without a wavering opinion. Not to get all dad-rock on you, but one of those bands is Fleetwood Mac—the post Peter Green incarnation with Stevie Nicks, Lindsey Buckingham and Christine McVie. I recently listened to *Rumours* again. Nicks is my favorite songwriter, lyrically, in the band. But I love Buckingham as a guitarist, and although I don't love McVie's lyrics all that much, she's a great songwriter, musically. And how often does a band have three really great singers? But what hit me listening this time was the production quality. How did they get the mix to sound so...perfect? How did they get all those layers of background vocals to sound so lush?

Digital recording has come a really long way. These days, if you do a taste test between tape and the highest-quality digital recording, well—without opening the floodgates for debate here—let's just say some highly trained ears have been deceived.

Still, sometimes I wish I could have made an album in 1977 when everything was analog. I made a demo on a reel-to-reel once, but I was too green as a musician/songwriter for it to be worth listening to. I was just born into an era where I would be forced to go with the flow of the big digital takeover. Not everyone is giving in. Bands like Beach House, in this issue, still record on 4-tracks, but even they are forced to work with software at some point during the process.

I'm not jealous about the old days of editing. No amount of old-school tape splicing could replicate some of the plastic surgery-enhanced albums released in the past few years. Software is truly amazing. But it is pretty sad that as long as you're a good songwriter or are working with one, you don't necessarily have to be a great singer or musician.

I don't hear many songs like "Dreams" anymore. Why does it seem like, although we have every advantage of technology, it's almost harder to create great music now? Are we just given too much of a handicap these days? We don't have to *play* three memorable drum fills anymore because we're too busy doing microscopic editing to think about the genuine, organic flow of a song. I might sound like an old codger going, "Back in my day..." but I was in diapers in the '70s when some of these albums came out. I just think it's important that, before we create music for the future, we remember how great music was made in the past.

Kylee Swenson
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REMIX

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

ANALOG + DIGITAL = BFFs!

In thinking about the times, how do we make sense of where we stand, musically, in the grand scheme? It's interesting to flip through the pages of *Remix* and see ads like Alias', where he says "Remix is my only magazine subscription," and see more and more pages devoted to analog synths and particularly vinyl culture. Digital purists might gasp at this "archaic" art form and medium, but paying attention to vinyl's place in music history is crucial to understanding where we are in this musical moment.

In this digital information age, there are tools affording and ultimately democratizing the creation of music. I support this movement. The affordability and processing power of laptop computers and access to software and digital downloads (legal or not!) is changing the landscape of music and the industry. It's a revolution. For me, Ableton Live has brought together all of my musical sensibilities into a platform that unifies them into a seamless flow of production and performance. Does this mean I sell my 1963 Rogers drum kit for an MPC? Does this mean I sell my collection of records on eBay or at the Pasadena Flea market? No, because like Egon says in the December 2007 issue ("Wax Archaeology 101"), the tactile sensation of a treasured piece of wax, its accompanying album art and liner notes is really something special. Today, access to music is astounding and particular to this moment in time. I search catalogs and playlists on the Web (carpal tunnel and all), and with a click of the mouse, it's mine (or is it the other way around?). I still dig for that gem, that 12-inch import, dusty fingers and all, but now I can import that record with all its artifacts into my aging Mac PowerBook, combining the ease of digital with its analog counterpart sitting comfortably in a plastic dustcover at home.

So, here's some virtual daps to the folks at *Remix* for having the vision and balance to unify the parts and processes of music creation and appreciation. Thanks for sharing this information to help raise the collective understanding of analog and digital. Now go make some music!

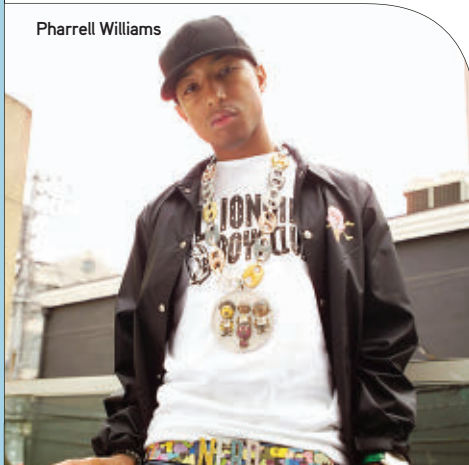
Jesson D (aka Grainshifter)
Los Angeles, Calif.



SOUL MUSIC

As I have grown up, I have come to realize that music is a part of my soul. Although I am an aspiring producer with an emphasis in hip-hop production, I like and take inspiration from all forms of music, including country, pop, rock, R&B and even classical. Every time I listen to the radio or a CD, I find myself not really listening to the lyrics but rather dissecting the beat and trying to identify what instruments are being used. Then, when I get a chance, I get on my keyboard and try to make beats using the sounds I like. Doing this is how I have taught

Pharrell Williams



myself to make beats, along with reading magazines such as yours, reading interviews of established artists and just trial and error.

Although I am no Dr. Dre or Pharrell, I still have faith in myself. Many times since I started making beats in high school, I have felt like quitting and giving up on getting discovered. But when that happens, I just listen to the tracks I made back then and compare them to today. I then feel proud of myself on how far I've come and get more focused on how far I need to go. I also get encouraged when reading interviews of established artists and seeing what they have gone through to get where they are. By believing in myself, I feel I have as good a chance as any of making it.

Nick Smith
(aka John Storm of Plaeboy Nation)
Grenada, Miss.

WE CARE A LOT

I wanted to start by thanking you for all the kick-ass articles in the magazines I've received so far. (I've

only gotten three, but I can't wait for more!) I also wanted to say thank you for having such a great balance when it comes to life in general. You guys show us all there is to producing, the ins and outs, what to use, how to use it, etc. But at the same time you have articles such as "Gotta Get Away" in the October 2007 issue (Editor's Note, p. 8), which tells us readers to take time off and slow down when things get too hectic. It may sound simple, but articles like that wake people up to the reality of life and let's them know that there's more to life than producing and partying.

Remix has shown me more than just how to make a kick-ass track; it's also shown me that in life, everything has to be taken moderately, and personally, that's a very important value for me. Some people think that *Remix* is just a guide to producing and remixing—which is good and satisfies most customers—but it goes beyond that and gives you a whole new lifestyle, a way of living and loving your life and job. Thank you *Remix* for caring so much about our personal lives!

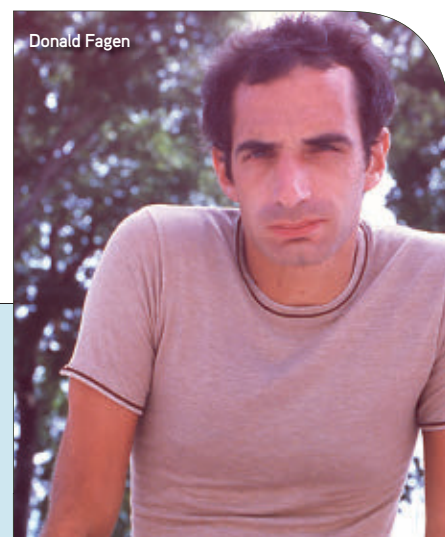
Gabriel D. Moraes
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

A BIG, FAT OOPS

Although there are some good issues of your magazine, many get recycled. The fact that you think Donald Fagen's name is spelled "Fagan" speaks volumes.

John Viehweg
Austin, Texas

After feeling a bolt of shame and nausea, followed by having a good cry, the Remix Editors came to terms with the fact that we misspelled the almighty Donald Fagen's name on p. 18 of the November 2007 issue (Stars, "Into the Dark"). It's not like we've been singing along with Michael McDonald's backup vocals on Steely Dan's "Peg" since we were 9 years old or anything. Oh that's right, we have. Please forgive us. Heaven knows we may never forgive ourselves.



Donald Fagen

JAMES HAMILTON

For sending in this month's winning letter, **Jesson D** wins his own **Mackie Onyx Satellite FireWire** recording system (MSRP: \$499.99). If you send in the most inspired correspondence next month—or simply the letter we like best—you'll win the **KRK Systems VXT Series Monitors**. All you have to do is send a letter to remixeditorial@remixmag.com. Please include your full mailing address.

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First stop of Red Bull Big Tune: San Francisco

BATTLE ROYALE

Three decades ago, Jamaicans would gather hundreds deep in front of giant sound systems while two MCs rocked it over the same instrumental. When it was time to pick a winner, it was the crowd that decided who had the "biggest tune."

With that spirit in mind, Red Bull Big Tune, a series of regional DJ battles held throughout 2007 in San Francisco, L.A., Houston, Chicago, Seattle and New York, brought the finals back to Seattle on Nov. 2, as 12 regional winners battled for beat supremacy. The format was straightforward: Two DJs each play two original, 60-second beats, and the audience decides who moves to the next round.

"I expected people to bring a lot of heat, and they did," says winner Sabzi of hip-hop group Blue Scholars. "There were no wack beats played because everyone won their own hometown." Inspired mostly from either the circus-creepy synth lines of Eminem; the Lil Jon, crunk/hyphy school of party-starting; or the horn-blasted funk of Just Blaze (who, with De La Soul, performed between rounds), it was evident that were some of the most creative cats in the game in the room that night.

Sure, there was no actual live creation of music (contestants popped beat CDs into a Pioneer CDJ), but every battler, from the acclaimed (Marco Polo and Beat Junkies' DJ Babu) to the unknown, tried to win the crowd over, acting as his own hype man. Judging by the crowd, though, the music seemed to rightly win out over any theatrics. Sabzi estimates he spent more than 100 hours working on his beat ammunition for the contest, which acted as a showcase for all the contestants' finished selections.

While including two people from the host city in a competition judged by the crowd may have led to an unfair advantage, winner Sabzi's mix of diverse beats clearly would have held their own anywhere in the country.

"Some peoples' beats had sort of the same vibe to them," he explains, when asked about strategies for winning. "I tried to bring stuff that was varied across the board so I could pick the right kind of thing to match up with somebody else."

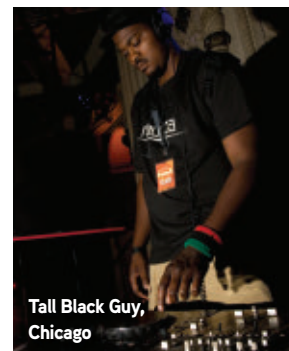
Started in 2004 by program director Jonathan Moore and producer/DJ Vitamin D, what was once a local, bimonthly event is now a national competition, with regional battles taking place across the country. The reward may be good for Sabzi (Genelec speakers and an opportunity to work with Young Buck, Redman or Talib Kweli), but it's even better for the slightly forgotten yet crucial art of the DJ battle.—Jason Newman

Red Bull Big Tune regional battles continue in 2008. Check www.redbullbigtune.com for more info.

The Big Tune Team:
Vitamin D, Jake One,
Jonathan Moore,
Markus Lalaro



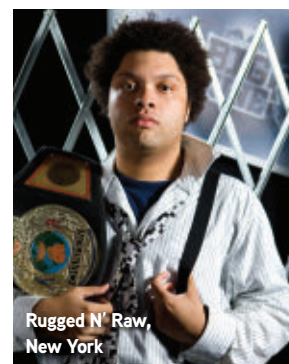
Sabzi



Tall Black Guy,
Chicago



Winning producer of
the Houston Big Tune
qualifier, The ARE



Rugged N' Raw,
New York



Brainstorm and Sabzi

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Ellen Allien

FLORIAN KOLMER

IMPRINT > BPITCH CONTROL

Style: Techno, "elektronics"

Established: BPitch Control has been introducing diversity to the club society of Berlin since 1997. The label, created by Ellen Allien, tries to split the technoid-electronic microcosmos of the capital city with the function of being a platform for upcoming artists.

Artists: Ellen Allien, Ellen Allien & Apparat, Tomas Andersson, Damero, Feadz, Sascha Funke, Paul Kalkbrenner, Kiki, Ben Klock, Larsson, Moderat, Modeselektor, Smash TV, Timtim, Zander VT

Essential Listening: Ellen Allien, *Data Romance* (2000); Ellen Allien, *Stadtkind* (2001); Sascha Funke, *Bravo* (2004); Tomas Andersson, *Washing Up* (feat. Tiga Remix) (2005); Ellen Allien & Apparat, *Orchestra of Bubbles* (2006); Various Artists, *Boogy Bytes Vol.1 Mixed by Kiki* (2006); Various Artists, *Boogy Bytes Vol.2, Mixed by Sascha Funke* (2006); Modeselektor, *Happy Birthday* (2007); Various Artists, *Boogy Bytes Vol.3 Mixed by Modeselektor* (2007)

Manifesto: "Berlin is growing from the important role as one of the cities where techno has been at home for the last 15 years," Allien says. "Consequently, BPitch Control puts this into practice and leaves its unmistakable marks on techno, hence 'made in Berlin.' Musically, BPitch Control is not only defined by techno; it is a wide concept including self-organized parties on a regular basis, an open-content label, visual implementation and the successful move to keep the material production under our own direction. BPitch Control considers itself a channel where the collective is the priority, and the ideas of every individual have space. We romp about in the vast plane of electronic music—we just don't get stuck on one style."

A&R Philosophy: "We accept demos and look out for artists who are capable of development and focus on modern electronic dance music," Allien says.

Upcoming: Early 2008 will see releases from Ellen Allien, *Sol* (2008); Sascha Funke, *Mango* (2008); and Various Artists, *Boogy Bytes Vol. 4 Mixed by Ellen Allien* (2008). Sascha Funke will tour in February 2008, and Ellen Allien will tour in March and May, 2008. Fall 2008 will see releases from Telefon Tel Aviv, Moderat (aka Apparat & Modeselektor) and Kiki.

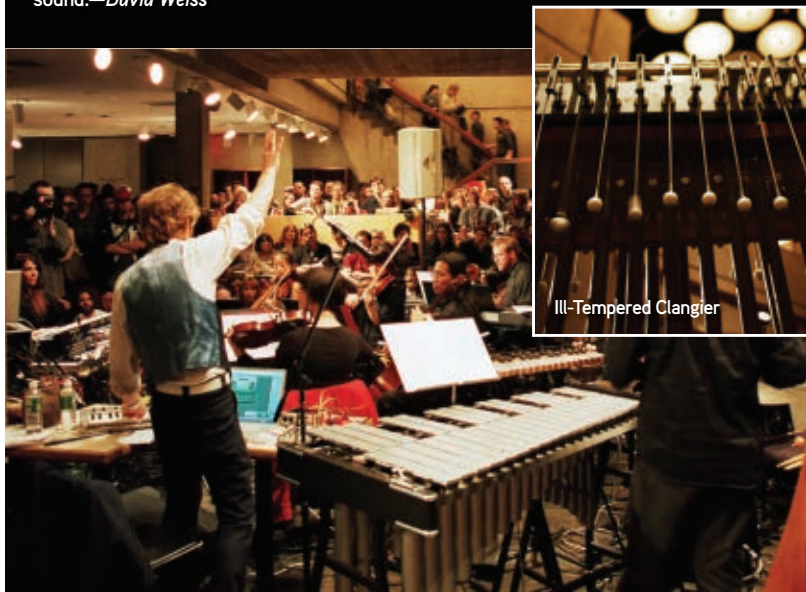
Contact: BPitch Control, Oranienburger Str. 91, 10178 Berlin, Germany; +49-30-292-08-01; office@bpitchcontrol.de; www.bpitchcontrol.de

ROBOT UPRISING

"I've always enjoyed being exposed to new things," says a young lady standing nearby. On a damp November night on New York City's Upper East Side, she wouldn't be disappointed: LEMUR (League of Electronic Musical Urban Robots, www.lemurbots.org) was putting on a show at the Whitney Museum that would definitely qualify as a new thing to the uninitiated.

The philosophy of LEMUR, which was founded in 2000 by musician/engineer Eric Singer, is to build new sculptural musical instruments which incorporate robotic technology—not robots that play existing musical instruments. Hence inventions such as the electric stringed GuitarBot, IrBot (which plays a Peruvian goat-hoof rattle), the singing-bowl inspired TibetBot, the xylophone-like Ill-Tempered Clangier, the rattling ForestBot (featuring 10-foot rods that quiver and sway) and a series of percussive ModBots that look suspiciously like the underside of lunar landers.

The robots performed in a Composer's Showcase at the Whitney in collaboration with Foetus' musical adventurer JG Thirlwell, playing an entrancing set of new and recent pieces written specifically for LEMUR robots and string quartet. The often-arresting sounds veered from jagged and blurry soundscapes to cinematic orchestral techno, with the mechanical musicians playing often extreme parts that humans would be physically unable to pull off. As a result, the LEMUR initiative introduces new possibilities to the body of live experienced sound.—David Weiss



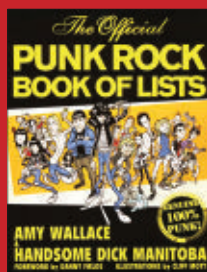
Ill-Tempered Clangier

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SEX, PUNKS, PUKE 'N' MORE

Have you ever wondered what the "6 Great Moments in Puking" are? Well, of course you have! And now you need wonder no more thanks to Amy Wallace and Handsome Dick Manitoba, authors of the new tome, *The Official Punk Rock Book of Lists* (Backbeat Books, 2007). This slice of hilarity, at more than 300 pages, presents wacky punk lists such as "Blag Dahlia of the Dwarves' 5 Things Assholes Always Say When They Want Something Free," "Debbie Harry's List of People I'd Like to Fuck" and "Sex Pistol Steve Jones' 13+ Things I've Stolen." Also, apparently Iggy Pop has a giant wang.—Lori J. Kennedy

ALL-INCLUSIVE

Del the Funky Homosapien happily keeps it in the box to produce *11th Hour*

A sense of urgency should characterize Del the Funky Homosapien's definitive Jux debut, *11th Hour*, based on what he called the record. Or maybe a sloppy, partially inebriated laziness would suit tracks called "Slam Dunk" or "Last Hurrah," merely because of what the album's title implies. On the contrary, with his self-produced follow-up to *Both Sides of the Brain* (Hieroglyphics, 2000), Del flaunts an anti-

procrastinator's sense of organization, grounded in his oft-expressed affection for software. Following ethereal Def Jux releases from Aesop Rock and El-P in 2007, Del's effort sits as cozily in his own circle on the label as he does with his MacBook.

"I know El-P from back in the day, from about seven years ago," Del says of the Def Jux boss. "That made it all good. Also, I'm extremely proud of what he's accomplished; I think it's great. El-P was open to releasing this project; he felt me, so it rolled like that. Pretty easy."

Del's résumé tells of his membership in the Oakland, Calif. group Hieroglyphics, an impressive solo career,

vocals on the Gorillaz debut and sci-fi hip-hop with Deltron 3030 (featuring Dan the Automator and Kid Koala). While he's nowadays conspiring with a herd of other musicians—Prince Paul among them—as well as participating in a new Deltron effort, it was *11th Hour* that caused him the most blood, sweat and tears and had to be restarted several times. A deceptively effortless flow of quirks in *11th*'s verses are welcome and complement any Del release, and though he loves to create his own sounds, there's an occasional foray into sampling. "Bubble Pop," for example, will ensure a party-rockin' slot. For that track, Del used FXpansion's GURU to mash classic hip-hop standbys (a Bob James piano loop and brass bursts) with ascending keyboard blurs and a memorable, overtly deadpan chorus.

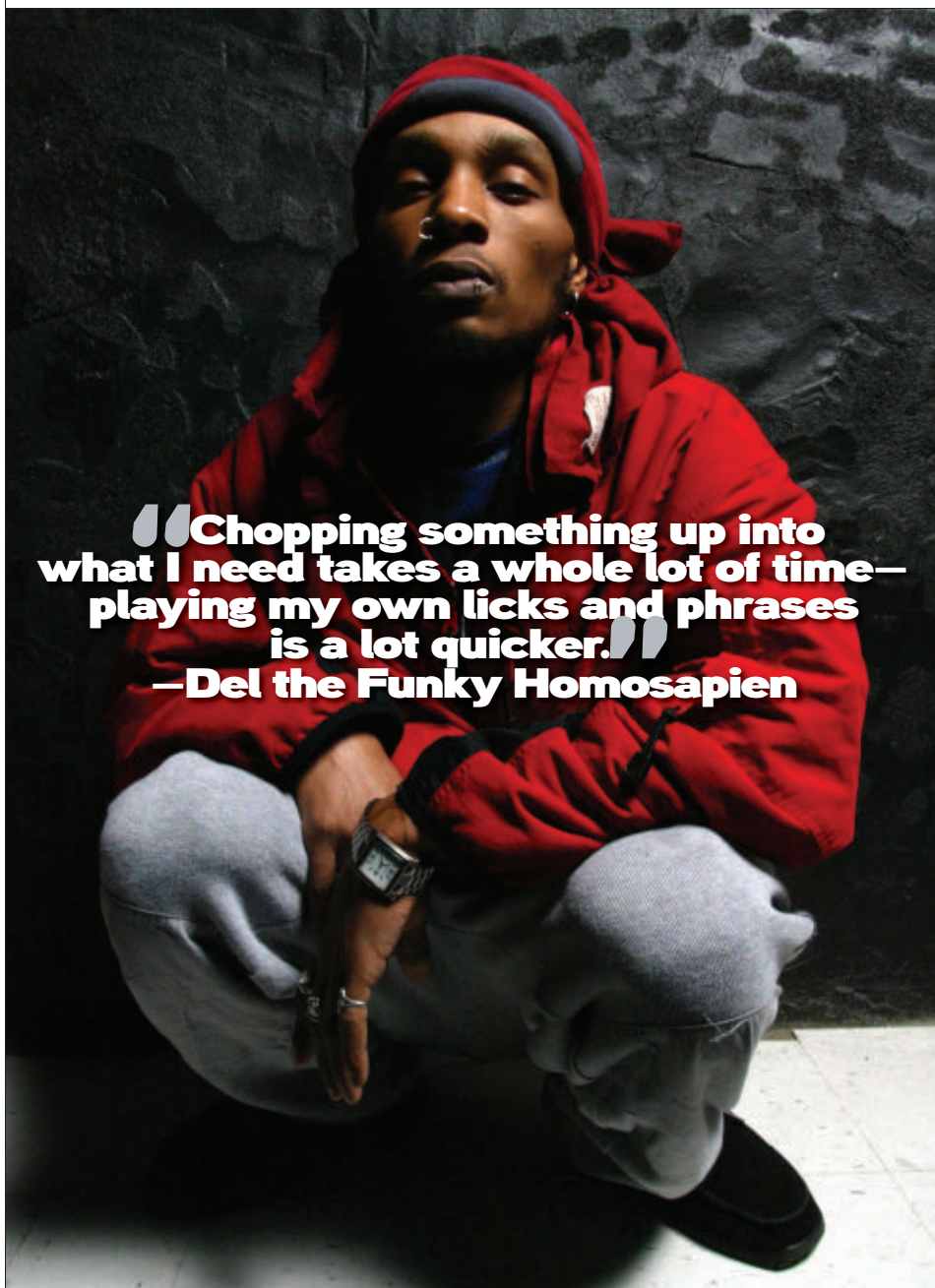
"I used to dig strictly to sample," Del says. "I still have that 'DJ' ear. Over time, I felt like I should know more. I sometimes employ royalty-free samples. Chopping something up into what I need takes a whole lot of time—playing my own licks and phrases is a lot quicker. I do use the REX format a lot for things like rhythm guitar, which is very hard or nearly impossible for me to emulate on a keyboard. The REX files allow for a lot more room to play. Pieces of the loop can be played separately, with the pitches changed for individual chops of the loop; rhythmically, you can play the loop differently. Also, you don't get the background noise that you would from sampling a whole band and trying to isolate the part in the loop that you actually are trying to use. You can have loops that are nothing but rhythm guitar, for example, not a whole band playing with rhythm guitar included. This makes my overall production a lot cleaner-sounding and less crowded."

Although Del has spent a great deal of time studying keyboards, bass and guitar and gathering various hardware, he's usually "relaxing somewhere with a full studio" on his MacBook. He employs Ableton Live with a variety of VST plug-ins and builds all of his beats in applications. For *11th Hour*'s "Foot Down," cuts from friend/turntablist Zac Hendrix and jabs of minimal, rubbery rolls spike the slowly bubbling toms that Del put together in FL Studio. And the glitzy tones on "Hold Your Hand" weren't tapped out on Del's Sequential Circuits Prophet-5, which he affectionately calls a "huge, enormous monster." Instead, the producer/MC found solace in his laptop and crafted the track's retro feel in Native Instruments Komplete 4, using the FM7 synth plug-in.

"Comfort and ease of access would be the reason I prefer DAWs and plug-ins over the actual physical units," Del contends. "I can be in the bed working on music, and it allows me to do so literally all day and night."

In terms of sound quality, Del's argument for plug-ins versus plugging in an oversize synth is just as casual and easily explained: "Some would argue that it doesn't have the same resonance that an actual unit has, but I don't care. Sounds good enough to me." 

**"Chopping something up into what I need takes a whole lot of time—playing my own licks and phrases is a lot quicker."
—Del the Funky Homosapien**



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WILLFUL WAYS

Beach House attempts to ditch digital and creates an intense collaborative stew

Alex Scally and Victoria Legrand both love vinyl records and vehemently dislike the sound of digitally recorded music. And as much as you can expect to hear ghostly organs and heavily reverbed guitar and vox on their slow-motion indie-pop tunes, you might also find your ears catching an audio glimpse of something as raw as sandpaper.

Legrand met Scally in 2003, when Legrand's band at the time was on the hunt for a bass player. When the state of the band spiraled into dysfunctionality, it didn't take long for Legrand and Scally to pair off on their own. Scally's "dingy" basement was the inauspicious locale for their first album recording, which took two days. Their latest, *Devotion* (Carpark, 2008), took a little longer (four weeks, including mixing).

"The recording process for the newest record was

much more intense than the first," Legrand explains. "*Devotion* was recorded at Lord Baltimore Recording in Maryland. It was a very relaxing, homey place to be; a lot of pizza and sushi were consumed there. We filled that space with crazy energy, an average of 12-hour days just listening and listening."

Recording most of their basic tracks on their own Tascam and Fostex 4-track recorders, they tracked the additional bells and whistles digitally on a Pro Tools|HD system, although neither Legrand nor Scally are big fans of what they call the "sterile" digital sound. They even had Alan Douches (at West West Side in New Windsor, N.Y.) run everything back through tape when he was mastering the new album.

"Tape has age and distance to it that feels very human and flawed," Legrand says. "The imperfection is truly its most endearing and priceless quality. We got our sound pretty immediately with our old organs, and we were recording onto tape immediately."

Sticking with that old-school aesthetic, *Devotion* is set for release on double-vinyl at the same time as the

CD release. "Vinyl is very aesthetically pleasing and is nicer to look at," Legrand says. "It gives the artwork more room to breathe. It's also much stronger in quality than annoying, easily scratched CDs. And our use of tape helps the album itself not sound like a piece of plastic."

The songs on *Devotion*, while wistful and brooding, are laced throughout with shifting melodic moods and quixotic moments. The organ is one of the foundations for Beach House, and Legrand and Scally will take more than one, thank you. "We actually have a bunch of organs that we have collected over the last few years [including a Kimball Caravan, Yamaha PS-20 and Korg Polyphonic Ensemble], so we used six different organs on this record, as well as different tones on each organ," Scally says. But on "Wedding Bells," they deserted their standard organ sounds briefly for a trek into harpsichord territory, varying levels of time, mix and mode. Other songs were the subjects of experimentation; on the live-sounding "You Came to Me," they recorded bass and drums onto 4-track, dumped them into Pro Tools and later added a track of

If the music thing doesn't pan out, Alex Scally (top) and Victoria Legrand can always go back to their magic act.



“We manage to coexist in an intense creative union—the practice space is a bubble, and we’re stewing in it.”
—Victoria Legrand

room sound along with guitar, organ and vocals.

The guitar tones—a Fender Strat run through a couple of different amps drenched in reverb—skim easily alongside those organs while leaving space for Legrand's voice, with its distinctive, bruised tone. "Victoria's voice has a lot of character, so it's easy to make it sound good," Scally says, "and we used a ribbon microphone, which helps, as well."

Despite their strong personalities, Scally and Legrand collaborate well. "We are both song crafters and control freaks," Legrand says. "We manage to coexist in an intense creative union—the practice space is a bubble, and we're stewing in it. Mostly what happens is that one person has parts to songs, and then we piece them together...together. I don't write Alex's parts for him, and he doesn't write mine."

Producing on their own, the toughest part for the duo was seeing the forest for the trees. "I'd say listening with open ears was the hardest challenge," Legrand says. "It gets old after 12 hours. Your ears feel numb after a while, and that's no good."

Scally couldn't agree more: "It was very hard not to lose perspective listening to ourselves constantly, and we did. Even though it sounds cheesy, the hard thing was not to lose faith." 

LIZ FLYNTZ



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SPIRITUAL START

Cheb i Sabbah returns to India to artfully recast traditional religious songs

San Francisco-based DJ and world-music producer Cheb i Sabbah began bridging cultures through music and dance back in 1964, when he spun American soul tunes in a Paris club at age 17. Born in Constantine, Algeria, Sabbah was deeply influenced by the music of North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. Since 1990, Sabbah has melded the traditional sounds of those regions with modern beats, effects and breaks while performing in clubs and at festivals throughout the world.

India's religious music has long inspired Sabbah's work, and *Devotion* (Six Degrees, 2008) is Sabbah's prayerful tribute to the devotional music of Hinduism, Sikhism and Sufi Islam. "There is a form of music in India known as *kirtan*, which is based on call-and-response," he says. "I tried to represent the three major faiths of India in a devotional context." Sabbah produced *Devotion* entirely in New Delhi and tapped

Gaurav Raina of the Midival Punditz—also on the Six Degrees label—to engineer the album; Raina had engineered Sabbah's *Krishna Lila* (2002) and *La Kahena* (2005).

Sabbah began by recording a cross-section of renowned Indian musicians at New Delhi's Ravi Shankar Cultural Center. According to Raina, "The RSCC has a very basic setup: [Apple] Logic Pro 7, Digi 002, Mackie 1604 and Neumann and Shure mics. They have a very large recording room, with three booths. We could record a singer, rhythm section and two melodic instruments all at one time. Since Cheb i wanted all the tracks to sound authentic, I had to get them to perform the track sitting in separate booths and singing together. The songs were recorded without click tracks in many situations, as the musicians were not used to that concept."

To reshape the live tracks electronically, Sabbah and Raina retreated to Raina's personal studio and used his Mac G5 running Logic Pro 7 and Reason 3. The first order of business involved editing the percussion parts, which were rife with recurring tempo fluctuations, and locking them into steady 4/4

grooves. "We would identify loops every 16 or 24 bars and then make sure the loop fell on the 'one' and that it was clean," Raina explains. "This was done visually many times. Indian percussions are generally on a 30- to 40-percent swing, so I prefer to quantize all the percussion."

"Once you have that, you go through your sample library or beats and choose the one that will work," Sabbah says. "It could be drum 'n' bass, trance, techno, house, hip-hop." Raina added subtle synth lines and pads with his Clavia Nord Lead 3 synth and programmed drum grooves in Logic using his Akai MPD16 USB/MIDI pad controller.

Logic ultimately helped Raina to marshal the songs' disparate tempos. "Logic 7's beat-mapping feature was exactly what I needed," he says. "All the live rhythm tracks were then used to map out the main tempo map of the song. Whenever the song sped up, the loops [and] played electronic parts did, too. However, I had to use all the loops as REX files or [as] played through the sampler drum kits."

Raina sculpted some eerily cool yet subtle effects and textures with plug-ins. For "Qalanderi," Raina created a



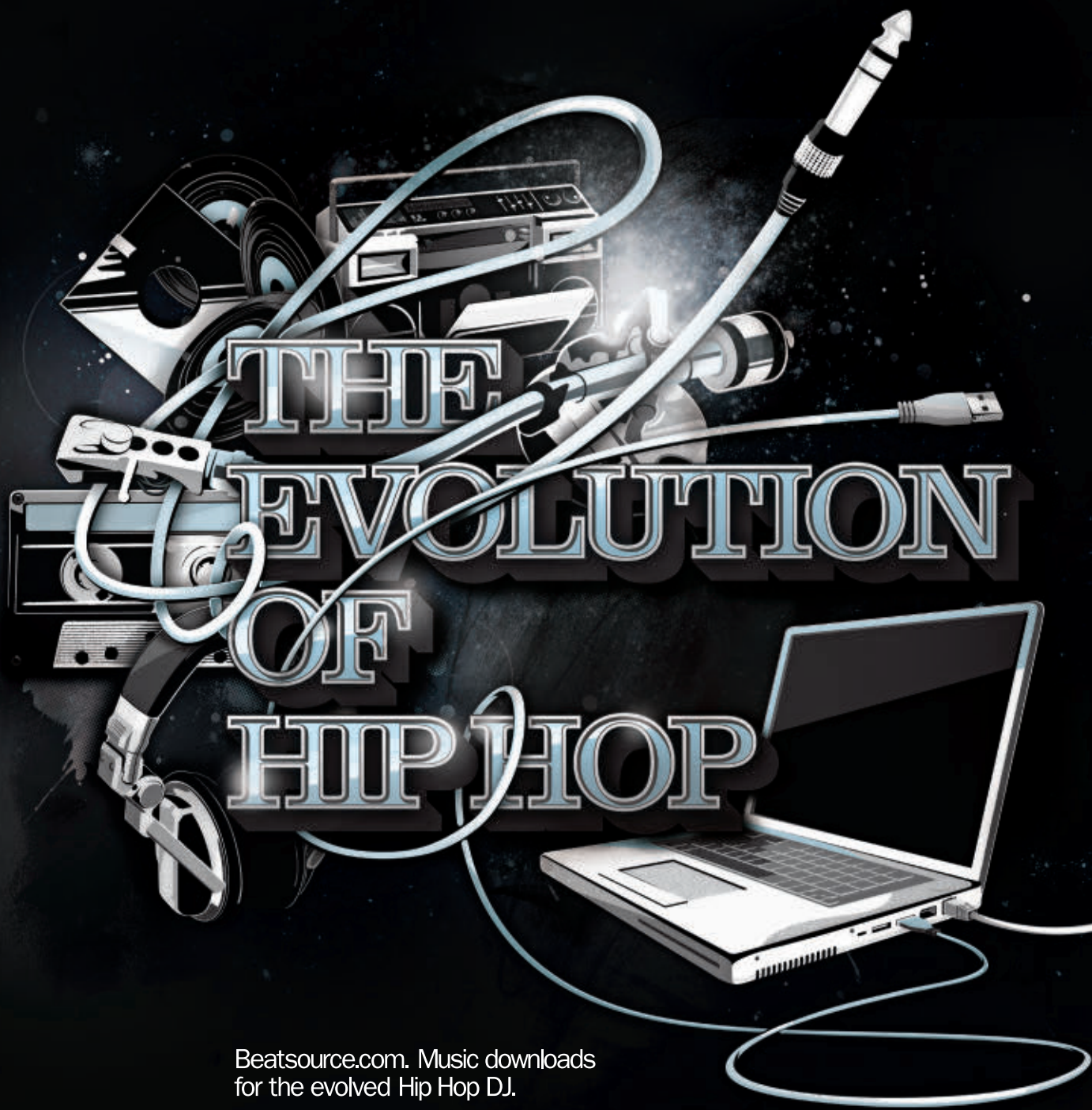
Gaurav Raina

I always deal with strictly headphones. It's the only way to be really right there in the mix.
—Cheb i Sabbah

haunting, warped vocal effect by sending Riffat Sultana's voice through a plug-in chain comprising Waves Truverb set to a high decay value, Logic Tape Delay with 45-percent feedback and Logic Tremolo for fast panning. He also blended a stringed instrument, the saarang, with a swirling vocal effect: "I loaded it with reverb and brought in the vocal effect from the front of the track. I passed them both through a common bus and applied another reverb and compressor."

Devotion closes with the title track, a compelling and meditative collage of the sounds of Varanasi, the City of Light. "Those sounds were recorded by Soundwalk, three people in New York that have done a series of CDs," Sabbah says. "It's basically like walking on the *ghats* of Varanasi—those steps that go down into the river. On the sides of those steps, you have all those temples and different faiths. It's just incredible—a kind of symphony. That kind of collage is a very personal thing. I put the headphones on and just move things around until I'm happy with the way it sounds. I always deal with strictly headphones. It's the only way to be really right there in the mix. And maybe it's a DJ kind of an approach—I don't know. All I have is my ears. I know what I want to hear."

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ANTHONY GORDON

TOUR DE FORCE

While Kenna's stage show is planned to a T, it's the energy that makes it a success

For the sake of all that's right in world, Kenna Zemedkun should be huge. But as author Malcolm Gladwell wrote in his best-selling book, *Blink*, he's just too new and different for his own good. It's a sad excuse, but fortunately, people are coming around.

While *Make Sure They See My Face* (Star Trak/Interscope, 2007), co-produced with Kenna's Virginia Beach neighbors, The Neptunes, is ahead of the curve in its sound and influences, it also brings you back to the pop-perfect days of '80s Tears for Fears and U2 (as well as older bands, The Beatles, and newer, Radiohead). As you get to know the album, it stings a bit as you pine for the days of enormous, emotional pop—the kind of music these days pushed aside for heavily compressed, cookie-cutter R&B/pop and, on the flip side, music so forward-thinking and “cool” that you don't care to listen to it over and over. Music that stands the test of time is the kind that you can't stop listening to 40 times in a row.

As soon as the building synth strings of “Daylight” break into slamming drums, pulsing piano and Kenna's powerful voice, you should be sold. It's the same when you hear Kenna live. While he still opens for massively (sometimes undeservingly) successful

bands, he's blowing them out of the water.

But it's not easy. “It's a tricky process for this music, to be honest,” Kenna says. “You want all the dynamics of the album but still need to be mobile and effective like a crack team. A lot of it will end up sampled and re-created in what I call ‘one key moments.’”

And that's not a simple process. On the contrary, says Kenna's sound engineer, Mike Bangs: “It was actually a lengthy and painstaking process to make the transition to live. Almost all of the sounds were custom designed in the studio for the record, but we were able to get all of the sounds reprogrammed and consolidated in a live-friendly package. Kenna doesn't compromise when it comes to his live show, so we now have all of the actual sounds from the record in Brian's keyboards.”

Bangs also had his work cut out for himself effects-wise. “Every venue is different, and you don't want to tie your sound guy's hands behind his/her back with prerecorded effects,” Kenna says.

“I do mix a show that has the feeling of the record,” Bangs adds. “However, it's very important to us to preserve and accentuate the dynamics that make a live show fun and interesting. As far as effects, it is very much day to day. There are some things that I always have to create out front, such as tap delays for repeats, but reverbs are very dependent on what the room gives us. I generally end up with varying plates for the drums. The vocal effects are all over the place but usually center around an emulated room sound. I

think for live, natural is better and less is more.”

A key element of monitoring for the band is that everyone has his own mix. For now, the wireless receiver is a Shure PSM 600. “It is, however, an older system with limited transmitter frequency flexibility,” Bangs says. “This is becoming more of a problem everyday as the FCC sells our bandwidth to digital television. It will probably force us to change soon. I'm hoping to be able to hold out until the new Audio-Technica system comes out.”

The intro to “Daylight”—which builds up the anticipation and allows the band time to tune and set up—starts out with a click “made up of two drum samples fed into the monitor console along with all the instruments,” Bangs says. “It is sent from there to the band's in-ears. At the top of the show, [tour manager] Ramey [Shippen] starts the intro music. The click comes in near the end of the intro and counts off a few bars to cue the band.”

Preparation is the best policy to ensure a good show. “We have backups of everything known to man,” Kenna says. “But Murphy's Law says that it will be the one thing you don't have backed up that will go down!”

Yet for all Kenna's dependence on the technical side of things, once he has the crowd, nothing matters. “The best nights are the nights when the fans are there in full effect,” Kenna says. “There is no feeling and vibe like that in the world. No problems onstage can affect that energy—not possible.”



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SHOP.TALK.

By Jake Iacovetta

Photos by David Stephenson

KNO OF CUNNINGLYNGUISTS

At Pops Resale in Lexington, Kentucky

In this age of superstar beatmakers, where the men behind the beats receive nearly as much shine as the MCs who rap over them, it's becoming harder to stand out in the realm of production. Combine that with the fact that "Southern hip-hop" has almost become a vulgar phrase in the lexicon of national and international music critics, and it makes the accomplishments of Ryan Wisler (better known as Kno of the hip-hop group CunninLynguists) much more impressive.

Since the 2001 release of CunninLynguists' debut album, *Will Rap for Food* (Urban Aces), Kno has helped the group form a solid and steadily growing fan base and has done outside production work (with his cohort, Deacon the Villain, under the production moniker *A Piece of Strange*) for artists such as Lil Scrappy, D12's Bizarre, KRS-One and Warner Brothers' rock artists Melee, to name a few.

Kno moved from Atlanta to Lexington, Ky., in 2004 and officially solidified CunninLynguists as a Kentucky-based group. The move not only brought the group together physically but also proved to be

a strong point concerning producers in the hip-hop game—anyone can put together a beat for someone to spit to, but when that producer is actually able to sit and work directly with the artists, the result is much more solid.

When he sat down with Deacon and Natti in early 2005 to begin work on *A Piece of Strange* (LAU, 2006), the group's third LP, their music reached a much higher level of art and maturity. "Before then, it was just patchwork," Kno says of his production on the group's first two albums, for which everything was prepared in advance from long distance and then knocked out in scattered two-week recording sessions. "I didn't see how they lived, what they were into day-to-day, and now I can accommodate the sound more for them as people."

Mostly known for his sample-based production work, the Georgia-bred Kno prefers the grit of records to the gloss of current Southern rap's signature synths. "Usually if I've heard of the artists prior to walking into the store, I won't touch it," he says. "I like to try and keep it fresh. When I'm familiar with an artist, chances are the rest of the world's producers are, too." It's this dedication that finds him in Pops Resale, a vintage vinyl and clothing store in Lexington, at least one to two times per week. "I was working here about eight or 10 hours per

week up until earlier this year, but I got too busy with music, so I had to quit. I started because it just didn't make sense to be here so often and not be involved in some other way. I'd always spend more than my week's pay on records, but Pop is a good guy, and I liked being here. It's like family, except there's no mom, and everyone likes vinyl records and beer cheese."

Fresh off his group's multiple trips to Europe and across the U.S. in the past 18 months in support of *A Piece of Strange*, Kno gears up for their fourth LP, *Dirty Acres* (APOS Music, released at the end of 2007), by doing...what else? Heading to the record store to get started on his first batch of beats for 2008. *Remix* follows him as he gets elbow-deep in some dirty-South crates.

ALIAS

Alias (Wild Daisy)

I got tossed this one when I walked through the door by my man the Record Vulture. That's my ace; he knows the type of weirdness I'm into. The record is filled with a lot of acoustic guitar work, some nice gloomy chord changes in between some random bluegrass-meets-British folk. This is what Donovan would have sounded like if he was less poppy and drank copious amounts of moonshine and dipped Skoal.



RAFAEL CAMERON

Cameron's in Love (Salsoul)

I already flipped this for a track we did with Devin the Dude, but I need a backup copy for shows and general use because my other copy is beat. This is as solid a disco record you can buy. Take that how you want, but even when the most talented R&B vocalists skinny-dipped into that tempting ocean of nothingness that was disco music, the albums were always sure to have at least one high-quality slow jam. This is no exception. Shout-out to the crispy, white horse jockey pants he's wearing on the cover. Disco madness.

JACKIE DESHANNON

Your Baby Is a Lady (Atlantic)

Weird title. Maybe the alternate was, *Your Lady Is a... Man!*, but that was a tad risqué for the time period. A little too much honky-tonk for me, but there is some interesting piano work here. Some of this teeters on soul, but it's probably dependent on the writers. Production quality is great, and as a bonus, she's kind of hot in a, "Dude, why is your mom always out front washing the car in those tiny shorts?" kind of way. Title track is kind of provocative. "Now your baby is a lady, can I lay my body down for you?" I'll skip the R. Kelly jokes.

EIRE APPARENT

Sunrise (Buddah)

I'll let you in on a secret of digging in the "Bluegrass State." If you pick up a record that has a small ink stamp that says "Charles Simpson" on it, chances are it's quality. Local lore has it that Charles Simpson, or Charlie as we call him, was the state's biggest purveyor of psych-rock records and an all-around vinyl junkie. He passed away in a house so chock-full of records they had to hire people to remove them all. Yes, my friends, he was living the dream. God rest his soul, Charlie S. has provided me with many a gem. As for this particular little number, it's from some Jimi Hendrix underlings and produced by Jimi himself. There are some interesting textures to it, but I might buy this just to listen to.

FOTHERINGAY

Fotheringay (A&M)

Let's see. Band name has an interesting ending, everyone on the cover is dressed like Renaissance Faire concession-stand workers and the back cover features some sort of goat-fish. I'm secure in my sanity and masculinity and there is a stamp on the front cover that says "Charles Simpson," so I'm going to give this record a chance: real strong piano and guitar chord changes, nice female vocals reminiscent of a Stevie Nicks or Donna

Godchaux. Interesting. Ooh, track four is a winner. That will make for a nasty little chop. Creepy vocals.

RABBITT

A Croak & A Grunt in the Night (Capricorn)

Man, I hope nobody sees me holding this. The guy couldn't get anymore nude on the cover. I think you can see his spleen. This guy graduated from the Freddie Mercury school of singing with a degree in muted flamboyancy. Not too over-the-top, and there is some interesting stuff going on with the organs and overcompressed drums. Rabbitt needs to put some clothes on, though.

MICHAEL W. SMITH PROJECT

Michael W. Smith (Reunion)

Looking at the cover, I never knew they made a sequel to *Tron* starring Grizzly Adams. His head is floating in a box that looks like it should have Light Cycles running around in it. I picked it up for that reason alone. This is Christian rock, but it's got some real interesting synth chords. Whoa, he's getting all Rick Astley on us with the vocals. I feel bad sampling from a faith-based record. Will I be smote by Jesus' sample-clearance lawyer? 

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Protect and Defend

OG producer Pete Rock preserves and progresses the boom-bap and champions the lost art of dynamics on *NY's Finest*

By Will Johnson | Photos by Pier Nicola D'Amico

Who says you can't teach old dogs new tricks?

For the 36-year-old Peter Phillips, aka Pete Rock—the producer known for pioneering New York hip-hop's golden era—it's not that he can't learn new tricks; it's just the old ones sound better. "I'm not mad at producers who use handclaps and snaps on everything," Rock says diplomatically before adding, "but that's just not me. That's not Pete Rock." It's true. With a love of plush horns and animated drum breaks, Rock was always "more interested in making something real, something soulful." But in an age where cheap presets trump rich samples, is there any place for the producer who prefers soul to Soulja Boy? Pete Rock thinks so.

Having begun producing in the mid-'80s during the height of electro-rap, the veteran beatsmith is no stranger to the minimalist tendencies of hip-hop today. At an early age, the Chocolate Boy Wonder made a clear choice to break from hip-hop's sparse drum machine aesthetic. For Rock, the robotlike music "flowed through [his] body" but never "really stuck" to him. "My problem with that type of music is that it always sounded mechanical, it always sounded effortless, and it was usually all about money," he says. "I'm a real dude, and I value the art of my music, so I wanted to make something that sounded like that." And so he did, and after unleashing a bevy of sample-drenched arrangements for tag-team partner, C.L. Smooth, Rock rose to prominence in the midst of hip-hop's formative years, providing sonic backdrops for Public Enemy, Nas and the Notorious B.I.G. In 2001, Rock released the critically acclaimed, *Petestrumentals* (BBE, 2001), an instrumental album that was equally meditative as it was lively. For Rock, that album was governed by a formula that he feels was inherently a "New York thing." It was a formula the producer couldn't abandon for *NY's Finest* (Nature Sounds, 2008), the producer's latest production/MCing outing, which features a posse of NY-minded rappers such as Jim Jones, Papoose and Redman.

STREET AND SOUL

Rock's studio formula, a bipartite mélange, self-described as "part-street, part soulful," was conceived as a teen in the midst of the Reagan years. Informed by his father—a Jamaican DJ with an immense record collection—Rock sought to imitate the music that he felt pumping through his veins. The influences were vast, from Johnny Mathis to the Doobie Brothers, but one thing that remained throughout was soulfulness. "Soul" as defined by the self-proclaimed Soul Brother No. 1 is a musical characteristic that "takes over your body and sticks to you. It's a force," Rock says. He first experienced it with hip-hop when listening to KRS-One and productions by his early mentor, Marley Marl—music that despite its reliance on technology managed to capture the essence of the human soul.

But the other element in Rock's formula is street savvy. Rock's ability to re-create the energy of New York's streets earned the producer recurrent dap from his core audience of hardened urbanites. A native of Mount Vernon—the predominately black and West

Indian community that lies just north of the Bronx—Rock learned from the characters that populated his community. Feeding into their taste for steep bluesy melodies and concrete, hard cadences, Rock would drive around Mount Vernon with fresh productions, conducting impromptu listening sessions. "If people on the street feel it, then it's good," he says of his unorthodox hot-or-not rating system. A tastemaker for New York's infamous brand of razor-sharp boom-bap, the OG producer has recently become a liaison for artists like Ghostface Killah, Talib Kweli and The LOX.

NY's Finest is Rock's attempt to do the same. With an emphasis on forgotten samples, chopped and spliced to make new grooves, the album marks Rock's latest attempt at bridging the gap between soul and hip-hop. But unlike previous releases, this one was made entirely on Rock's MPC2000XL, a machine that Rock calls "the upgraded SP-1200." With his new MPC swing, some exclusive Stax sampling rights and borrowed ears from engineering wizard Young Guru, it's fair to say this old dog's learned a few new tricks.

FEELING THE FREQUENCIES

The 15 tracks that comprise *NY's Finest* were created in between Rock's 2001 solo effort, *Petestrumentals* (BBE) and late 2007. For the prolific PR, they represent his favorite few among the several hundred he's created since purchasing the MPC in 2001. Unlike *Petestrumentals*, made entirely with his prized SP-1200, this release strays from filtered, ethereal washes and aims for a pristine, distinctly MPC sound. For the forward-thinking producer, that was an intentional decision.

"When I started putting this record together, I found myself listening to [hip-hop] radio a lot more. I wanted to get a better sense of today's sound so I could hopefully mix that with my own. It's important, especially when you're associated with a certain era, to update your sound." Chief among Rock's observations about today's hip-hop is the attention it pays to the higher frequencies. For Rock, this resulted in the music's newfound presence. "Hip-hop today sounds bright, like it's right in your ear. It's clean." Rock sees the change as, in part, attributable to the Akai MPC's predominance in the world of bits and bytes.

FINEST GEAR

Akai MPC2000XL sampling workstation
Alesis Monitor One MK2 monitors
API 2500 stereo compressor
Apple Power Mac G5 computer
Digidesign Pro Tools 7, Digi 002 interface
E-mu SP-1200 sampler
Empirical Labs Distressor compressor/limiter
Fender Rhodes keyboard
Focusrite Octo Pre preamp
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"The main difference I noticed when I switched from the SP to MPC was the MPC has a thin, clean sound. The SP's gonna give you that raw, gritty hip-hop feel. The SP just makes your sound fat." For the erudite E-mu scholar, one who admits to once downgrading sampling rates for the sake of increasing sample time, adapting to Akai's model was a mixed blessing. While it gave the producer a superfluous three minutes of high-rate sample time, it also meant parting from his signature bandpass filters that yielded famous horn lines like the opener for "T.R.O.Y." "It's a tradeoff; you gotta give up some of that *boom-bap-buh-boom-buh-boom-bap*," Rock says as he breaks into a deep-voiced beatbox pattern. But, in response to the MPC's less warm, slightly dead sound, the producer implemented two strategies that preserved the boom in his boom-bap.

"Before I sample anything into the MPC, I always EQ

my sounds first," Rock says. "I just use an old GLI Pro mixer that I got hooked up to the sampler. It's not a great mixer, but it has three basic bands that I can equalize on. If you want your sound to be heavy on the MPC, you need to EQ. For kicks, I have [tape] markers that I leave on the EQ knobs. The markers give me a range that are gonna make the kick boom. I have the same type of markers for the hi-hat and the snare. Every time I sample anything, I use those markers as a reference."

On Rock's lead single, "Til I Retire"—the producer's three-round lyrical knockout atop a tough beat that flirts with Southern minimalism—the difference shows. The kick, hat and snare/clap each occupy distinct frequencies, and though Rock peppers the mix with scratches; a dampened, reverberating horn stab; and futuristic analog tones, the textured sounds never compete with each other, resulting in an overall brightness hitherto

unknown in Rock's compositions. While part of the solution is Rock's "pre-Q" strategy, another part of Rock's new brightness can be attributed to his newly acquired engineer and Roc-A-Fella affiliate, Young Guru.

ENTER YOUNG GURU

"The main difference in working with a cat like Young Guru versus some of the other engineers I've worked with is [that] he actually knows my music," Rock says. "He's like a true hip-hop head. So rather than me having to explain what things are supposed to sound like, he just gets it!" To Young Guru, a longtime Pete Rock enthusiast, grasping Rock's mixes was second nature. "Being the age that I am, [34], I'm obviously going to know his sound," Guru says. "I used to study him when I listened to his music, and so when I came in to work [on *NY's Finest*], it didn't take eight years for me to get familiar. I knew what he was going for."

One of Guru's key techniques for emulating Rock's brand of '90s New York street-hop was replicating the sound of the SP-1200 with outboard gear and plug-ins. For tracks like "PJs," a syrup-thick, bass-driven track featuring Raekwon and Masta Killa, Guru used one of Pro Tools' factory bit-distorter plug-ins to bring out the crunchy warmth of the RZA-esque track. "You gotta understand, the SP-1200 is a 12-bit sampler that samples at a rate of 22 kHz," Guru says. "I used those parameters as a reference point and crunched it up like it would've sounded going through that machine. I know that machine; nothing's gonna sound exactly like that machine, but the parameters can be replicated. The track already sounded like an old Wu-Tang joint, so my job was to just finish what Rock started. I reduced the bass line to 12 bits and brought the sample rate down to 22 kHz. I also colored it with some of the API 2500's harmonic settings."

One difference between "PJs" and most of Guru's concoctions is the subtlety of the drums. Accustomed to mixing street bangers for Roc-A-Fella acts like Jay-Z, Freeway and Beanie Sigel, Guru took a different approach here. "Whereas I usually try to get the drums more knocking, the bass was the driving element here, so I just let the drums sit in the mix once the bass sounded right," he says. "Producers pay a lot of attention to their drums, but I've learned sometimes it's not the drum that drives the song."

When Guru was focusing on the drums, however, he relied primarily on his API/Empirical Labs' Distressor compression combination. "I never read the manual on the API until recently. When I did, I learned some of the proper preset settings. You can pretty much copy any old compression unit on the API," Guru says, referring to the unit's two primary settings: "feed back" for old-style or "feed forward" for newer models. "I ran all the drums through there and really got that snap from the snare. I also copied some of the tape-compression settings to get the feeling of the original recordings that Rock might have sampled from." In combination with the onboard equalizers and compressors from Manhattan Center's Neve VR mixing console, which Guru mixed on, "there wasn't much more to do," Guru says.

Guru credits Rock's source material and method of working as inspirational for the whole process. Seeing



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Protect and Defend

“Everyone wants to sound this one particular way. It’s like they don’t realize that’s the curse of hip-hop; once you start sounding like everyone else, your timer starts ticking...faster and faster.”
—Pete Rock

the producer's concentrated ability to work within a single machine, entirely from samples, reminded the mix master of Pete Rock & C.L. Smooth's sophomore album cover. "When I got to Rock's home [studio], it looked exactly like the photo from *The Main Ingredient*. He was still working in the same environment: He recorded most of his vocals for this album in that room, not in a booth, just standing up next to the mic, going into a Focusrite [Octo Pre] preamp." Guru insists this type of vocal recording gives the album "that raw, basement-tape feeling."

Guru, who also produces, was equally impressed with Rock's ability to self-contain his sound before the mixing phase. "Watching Pete's mind at work is crazy," he says. "He would sample three different records and get it sounding like a mixed, single record. I've never really seen a producer do that and work so quickly. Sometimes he'd make beats on the spot, as many as three or four a day, and to his credit, each of them was already mixed within the machine." That made it easy for Guru to focus on creative rather than corrective engineering.

HAPPY MEDIUM MIXING

Rock, who is now becoming more comfortable mixing his records from his home studio with a newly added Digi 002 setup, appreciated Guru's ability to not over-mix in the final stages. Both the producer and engineer agreed that today's mixes tend to sound squashed—usually the result of too much compression at different phases. "You got the producer adding compression, the engineer adding compression and then the mastering guy adding compression. At the end, it sounds like a loud, squashed track. I don't know where this comes from, but people today just like loudness, not dynamics," notes Guru. Rock sees it as the producers' growing estrangement from the mixing process. Because of that, engineers—especially those who don't have an ear for hip-hop music—don't know which direction to take the final mix. Rock cites his Ghostface Killah collabo, "Be Easy," as proof. "They kinda did *too* much to it. They were taking out kicks and maybe didn't focus enough on the horns," the producer notes when referring to one of the few tracks that he wishes could be remixed. "Me and Ghost's people are cool, and we've resolved the issue, but it just goes to show you the producer should always be present during the mixing phase." Guru agrees, noting Rock's involvement as crucial to his decision-making.

Regarding his overall production savvy, Rock's learned a lot from listening again to music that pre-dates hip-hop. Having secured a partnership with the soul flagship, Stax, Rock has acquired several multitracks from some of the label's rarer sessions. By having the ability to solo, mute and sample tracks within Pro Tools' interface, Rock's taken a closer listen to techniques in the age of analog production. In many ways, that has expanded his compositional vocabulary. "Producers from the Stax era paid a lot of attention to stuff like hooks, choruses, building bridges and drum breaks. When you listen to it track by track, you start to learn how to break away from the loops and add to the dynamics. I'm trying to bring that to hip-hop producers." On "The Best Kept Secret," a track featuring New

York's Lords of the Underground, Rock uses a marching band-like brass section to conjure up the feeling of a well-conducted 20-piece orchestra. Here, the beat conductor demonstrates his growing understanding of song forms, creating several crescendos from stacked samples that play the same melody, eventually inviting a decrescendo, and then the hook erupts into a roaring climax—a climax few producers could reach even with live instrumentation.

For Rock, these are the type of dynamics that are missing from hip-hop today. "Everyone wants to sound this one particular way. It's like they don't realize that's the curse of hip-hop; once you start sounding like

everyone else, your timer starts ticking...faster and faster. Eventually, you're not in it anymore." Though Rock promises his basic elements—street and soul—will always remain present, he's vowed that he will continue to think progressively about his production. "It's easy for me to feel nostalgic about music—like me and Preme might just sit back in D&D and complain some days—but I can't stop. I really love what I do too much to stop. Hip-hop music has always been about changing and evolving. I've always been dedicated to that. The industry can pigeonhole me all it wants, but I'm at a point where I just need to be making music, and that's what keeps me going; that's why I'm not stopping." 



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**With *Seventh Tree*,
Goldfrapp's Will Gregory
and Alison Goldfrapp
change the landscape
for a more expansive
yet introspective sound**

By Justin Kleinfeld | Photos by Serge Leblon



With the release of 2005's Grammy Award-nominated *Supernature*, UK electronic pop duo Goldfrapp hit the big time. The album's highly danceable and catchy tracks were heard in numerous television advertisements (most notably Motorola, Target and Verizon), television programs and films, thus cementing them a massive new level of fame and exposure. However, longtime Goldfrapp fans would have probably never seen that coming despite a distinct evolution in sound over the years. Goldfrapp's 2000 Mercury Prize-nominated debut album *Felt Mountain* (the first of four albums on Mute Records) matches Will Gregory's cinematic backing tracks with Alison Goldfrapp's unique and sometimes bizarre vocal style and is already considered a classic. The album was mysterious, shy and cold, which largely reflected Alison's own personality. 2003's *Black Cherry* was Alison's own way of opening up artistically, and the music was far more cabaret and accessible when compared to the dark and depressive *Felt Mountain*. As the fan base continued to expand, Goldfrapp's supporters were still deeply rooted in the underground. But while *Supernature* (2005) was packed with smash hits ("Ooh La La," "Fly Me Away" and "Ride a White Horse") and came across more like Madonna-meets-Cerrone in their prime, the newfound attention and constant touring brought on another change for Goldfrapp as the time came to record their fourth album, *Seventh Tree* (2008).

The uptempo glitz and glamour of *Supernature* is replaced with a sound that harkens back to the delicate style of *Felt Mountain*. While some would consider it risky to tinker with a winning formula, it's important to realize that Goldfrapp has always been about the art front and center—fame is an afterthought. "I think it's unhealthy to be aware of yourself," Alison Goldfrapp says. "Neither of us is interested in the fame side of it or the kind of attention that feels pretty shallow and a bit unhealthy in some ways. We've managed to avoid that, and we aren't tabloid fodder or anything like that. Being on tour has made me appreciate home and what home means. It's about enjoying the simple things in life."

After the whirlwind of success that accompanied *Supernature*, Goldfrapp and Gregory both agreed that a change was necessary. In fact, the earliest writing for *Seventh Tree* was done while in the midst of the

Supernature tour. "You know, after being surrounded by this hugely successful record for such a long time and being recognized in a way that was far more intense than previous records, our heads were about to pop," Gregory says. "We thought it would be nice to explore a larger and less intense musical space, and that was our frame of mind from the earliest songwriting on this album." The resulting record comes across as far more psychedelic than past releases, and Alison Goldfrapp describes it as "a combination of the naive English folksiness with a bit of horror and Californian sunshine thrown in."

STRINGS AND A FLOOD OF IDEAS

As with past releases, much of the writing and production on *Seventh Tree* took place at Goldfrapp's countryside studio near Somerset, England. The beautiful

studio setting and sense of country isolationism squashes most distractions that often come with fame and enables Goldfrapp and Gregory to work with clear minds. Each of the tracks on *Seventh Tree* start with a process that the duo considers a "jam session." Unlike a traditional rock band jam session, however, Goldfrapp's version of this concept includes any idea or influence that gets the creative juices going. "There's no formula at all to the starting point of any track, and it's like a sketch where over time the picture becomes clearer," Goldfrapp says. "Sometimes I'll have a little melody idea, but quite often it starts from musical jamming or sounds that we particularly like. Sometimes it could even be us talking about a concept, idea or atmosphere. Sometimes a film has an atmosphere that we like, and it becomes part of the inspiration for a song."

This multidimensional approach to the formation of *Seventh Tree* is exemplified by the title and subject matter of each song. While most songs center on the concept of "going nowhere," it's far more complicated. The standout track "Cologne Cerrone Houdini" features a wonderful Shirley Bassey quality. It's interesting to note that this track marks yet another reference to French disco legend Cerrone (*Supernature* is also the name of a classic Cerrone album), but Goldfrapp's explanation of the title is more of a random coincidence than another tribute. "We were jamming, and the word 'Cerrone' just came out of my mouth," she says. "Subconsciously, maybe I was thinking of Cerrone, but it wasn't something in the front and center of my mind. The 'Houdini' part came because I was reading a book about him and the whole idea of escapism. I used this as a metaphoric idea about an ex-boyfriend who tried to escape from as many situations as possible."

Unlike the recording of Goldfrapp's previous three albums, *Seventh Tree* features several collaborators that were integral to the jamming process. One of the biggest additions to the Goldfrapp team came in the way of a collaboration with respected UK post-punk/alternative-rock producer Flood (aka Mark Ellis). In his career, Flood has either produced or engineered classic albums from the likes of New Order, U2, Nine Inch Nails, Depeche Mode and Smashing Pumpkins. He entered the picture after most of the album material was written and exited before the mixing process began, but Gregory felt his presence: "Flood is a great exponent of the analog sequencer, and he got me into the headspace of standing in front of a modular synth with a fistful of minijacks and jumping in there. I learned a lot about having patience with patch leads and putting something together in that old-fashioned production way. The modular bleep-y sounds you hear in the track 'Happiness' was all Flood's doing."

"Even if they don't do anything, it's nice to have someone else in there to help you with the music," Goldfrapp adds. "Even if you don't agree with what they say, it helps you to form your own idea. It helped to have Flood around to bounce ideas off. Flood helped us whip our own asses, really. It can be something technical or him just sitting there staring at us. [Laughs.]"

Another key contribution on *Seventh Tree* came via the use of session guitar players, a choir (featured on "Happiness," "Caravan Girl" and "Eat Yourself") and a



It helped to have Flood around to bounce ideas off. Flood helped us whip our own asses, really. It can be something technical or him just sitting there staring at us. —Alison Goldfrapp

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full string section. "On *Felt Mountain*, we had a budget for just one violin," Gregory says, "and then on *Black Cherry*, we used four violinists, and it took them one day to play all the parts. For *Supernature* and *Seventh Tree*, we had a proper string orchestra with 30 pieces and recorded in Abbey Road. This was exciting because we sampled a sound that's great for big dramatic sweeping string writing. We always loved sweeping strings, and from great disco records to soundtracks, it's always been an influence and a great way to get wide-screen instantly. Nobody has been able to figure out any program that replaces the sound of a real string orchestra."

Also of note was harp player Ruth Wall, who brought in a steel-strung harp (designed in the 1600s), which was sampled on the track "Road to Somewhere." "If you get an inspiring sound, it could really help write something," Gregory says. Ruth came in with her lovely Celtic harp, and it had a very medieval, simple sound to it. We probably wrote three songs with that sound in mind just as an atmosphere. Sounds can be really great for initiating ideas and getting your juices going."

Goldfrapp herself was pleasantly thrown for a loop

by the harp: "I was expecting to hear more of an innocent sound come from the harp, but instead it came across twangy and nasty, much like a sitar. The sound was one of the more inspiring moments I can remember from the jamming."

AMATEUR HOUR

Despite his previous career in film scoring and as a session musician playing saxophone for the likes of The Cure and Portishead, Gregory's role as the main physical production mind behind Goldfrapp is very much immersed in a DIY mindset. Apart from a simple studio setup, there aren't many bells and whistles that go into making Goldfrapp's music sound so polished. "I don't think of myself as a typical producer, and technically, we are both the producers of the music because we both make all the decisions," Gregory says. "There are lots of things that I don't know about production, but I think the amateurish approach is part of our spirit. If we knew what we were doing, I think it wouldn't be quite as interesting. We both jam ideas together or bring in ideas/sounds to initiate stuff, and we are both there

all the time making it happen, either writing, arranging, producing or mixing."

With few exceptions, Goldfrapp's setup has largely remained the same throughout the years and centers around a common and small amount of analog gear, computers and digital programs. Gregory operates an Apple G4 loaded with Logic Pro 6.4 software. "I would like to know other programs, but my life is too short to learn more," Gregory says. "Logic is ages to get through, and I don't think I have it in me to learn more." Included in the Logic setup are various plug-ins, such as the GarageBand acoustic guitar instruments ("It was used often to write with in lieu of the fact that neither of us play guitar," Gregory says) and Celemony Melodyne software. "We use Melodyne quite a lot because it's great for tuning backing vocals and many soft synths," he says. "The program is great for getting something down quickly, and we often used it on vocals to correct mistakes and to copy and paste lead vocals two or three times onto different tracks and then pitch the stuff around to create two- or three-part harmonies. It's easier than turning on a piece of old analog



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Console
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Apple GarageBand acoustic guitar instruments
ARP 2600 synth
Celemony Melodyne 3.2
Farfisa Compact organ
Fender Rhodes electric piano
Formanta Polivoks (Russian synth)
(9) Gibson, Martin and Taylor acoustic guitars
Hohner Clavinet electric piano
Korg MS-20, Polyphonic Ensemble synths
Mattel Optigan
Oberheim 4 Voice SEM modules
Roland Jupiter-6, Paraphonic 505 string synth, SH-09
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30-piece string section
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Sampler
Akai S5000

Mics, compressor
AKG C 12 mic
Percy Bear mic (C12 capsule)
Valley People Dynamite stereo compressor

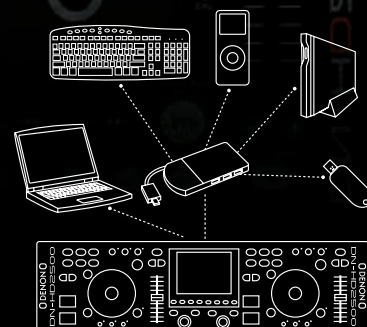
Effects
AKG BX20 Spring Reverb
Boss CE-20 Chorus Ensemble pedal
Moog Music MF101 Moogerfooger Low Pass Filter Pedal
Roland RE-501 Chorus Echo
Univox Super-Fuzz pedal

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equipment, waiting for it to warm up and then finding out it's out of tune. By the time it works, you forget the musical idea you had in the first place!"

The core analog synths and keyboards include ARP 2600; Farfisa Compact; Fender Rhodes; Hohner Clavinet; Korg MS-20; Oberheim 4 Voice SEM modules; Polyvox (Russian synth); Roland Jupiter-6, RS-505 Paraphonic string synth and SH-09; Wurlitzer electric piano; and Korg Polyphonic Ensemble. Used most notably by Jean Michel Jarre on his classic *Equinoxe* album, Gregory singles out the Korg Polyphonic Ensemble as an essential piece of analog gear. "It's got a very '70s cheapness to it, which is really appealing, and it has a sound that makes you want to play more," he says. "Because it's 48-note polyphonic, you can put very long decay on the sound and go on playing without sounds stopping or re-triggering. This results in beautiful cascades of '70s-ness."

GOLDENVOICE

There are few contemporary female vocalists with a voice that can match Alison Goldfrapp. While she doesn't have the most powerful vocal, it's certainly unique, and for the most part, authentic. Gregory claims that most of the strange patterns you hear in Goldfrapp's voice (for example, check out the awesome echoing sound toward the end of "Little Bird") have not been enhanced by any studio trickery. "Of course, when we want to make things lo-fi, we put the vocal through a synth and crank it a little bit hot or put it through a distortion unit," Gregory says.

Alison Goldfrapp isn't just a singer; she also uses her voice as an instrument and a placeholder for other instruments. During the jamming process with Gregory, Goldfrapp often sings melodies for other

instruments and ends up writing parts based on these vocal ideas. However, there are instances in tracks like "Lovely Head" (featured on *Felt Mountain*) where Goldfrapp's voice was manipulated to sound like a vocal/machine hybrid. "There are a few bits of old analog gear designed to enable guitar players to play the piano or keyboard," Gregory says. "Essentially, the guitarist is supposed to plug their guitars into the synth, and the synth was supposed track along with the guitar sound. Of course, it didn't work properly because the gear was primitive. So instead, we plugged Alison's vocals into things that were originally designed for a guitar, and they sounded great. These sorts of things are really luck—when you do things you aren't supposed to and they sound good."

Beyond having a great voice or understanding how to work with a great voice, an essential piece of gear for Goldfrapp and Gregory is a solid microphone. From the beginning, the AKG C 12 has been the microphone of choice. The C 12 was the world's first remote-controllable, multipattern, large-diaphragm microphone and was produced from 1953 through 1963. Because of its short production life span and status among audio engineers for being one of the finest vocal microphones ever created, availability is scarce and cost is expensive. "The C 12 has a lovely airy top end that suits Alison and adds a breathy edge to her voice, although she also sounds good on a Shure SM58. I'd love to get a Neumann U 47 (the first multipattern condenser) because it's the mic of mics, but I haven't found one that I can afford," Gregory says.

OPTIGAN ILLUSION

Although far from being a gear junkie, Gregory always seems to pick up a new gadget for the production

"We had to choose not to finish some of the tracks, or the album would have come out a year later. I guess it's like choosing who in your family to save from a fire."

—Will Gregory



of each Goldfrapp album. During the recording of *Supernature*, Gregory picked up a 1960s Univox fuzz pedal made famous by renowned guitarists including Jimi Hendrix and Pete Townshend. Although created for use with the guitar and bass, Gregory had fun adding serious fuzz and distortion to his keyboards.

When looking for a new toy for the recording of *Seventh Tree*, Gregory turned to Mattel and one of its most ingenious creations, the Optigan (OPTical orGAN). Manufactured in the 1970s, the Optigan was a cheap home organ that spun clear discs, optically preset with looped recordings of instruments. A sequence of chord buttons provides a rhythm section, while the melody is played with the right hand on the 37-note keyboard. "The disc we used in particular is called 'Folk & Other Moods,' and it had this lovely crackle to it," Gregory says. "It was made in the '70s, so it comes with this built-in crackling sound, and it was a nice way to initiate the material we used on the album."

"We used the Optigan on 'Eat Yourself,'" Goldfrapp continues, "and it had this old woody and folksy guitar sound with a very rustic feel. I did this little scat over the music, and it definitely sounded nice and interesting."

Another of Gregory's favorite studio tricks involves putting sounds through his Moog Music MF101 Moogerfooger Low Pass Filter Pedal (which removes the high frequencies from a tone) and turning sounds backward. "It's so much easier to do these days because you don't need to turn over the tape anymore," he says. "You can just reverse the audio file, and that's always interesting."

THE MARCH AHEAD

Goldfrapp and Gregory left the friendly confines of the British countryside to mix *Seventh Tree* in Los Angeles ("I like [L.A.] for three days, in a kind of TV car crash way," Goldfrapp says). Tony Hoffer, who mixed at the famous Sunset Sound Recording studio, added a special touch to the sound. "Tony didn't think there was enough bass on one of the tracks, so he took out his bass and put down some more parts himself. He's a real musician and exactly the type of mix engineer you need," Gregory says.

With the album complete and ready for the masses, the next order of business was the reproduction of another world tour in support of *Seventh Tree*. Touring is always a subject that gets Gregory scratching his head because moving recording material over to a live setting is always a difficult process. "If all you do is reproduce the record, then you might as well just play the record live," he says. "You need a departure from what was originally recorded, and it's always a puzzle to figure that out. It's also payback for the flights of fancy you had when making the album in the first place. Songs that you thought were runts of the litter often take on a different life when performed live, and they sometimes become the stars of the show."

If worrying about the release of their new album and planning a world tour wasn't enough, there's still a matter of figuring out what to do with all the extra studio tracks lying around. In fact, the *Seventh Tree* recording sessions were so bountiful that more than 10 additional songs were cut before the final tracklisting was confirmed. "We had to choose not to finish some of the tracks, or the album would have come out a year

later," Gregory says. "I guess it's like choosing who in your family to save from a fire. Though, I can tell you that those extra tracks would have probably sounded a lot different." While there are no discussions currently underway for another album, the additional tracks could very well end up as B-sides or as part of new material on a film soundtrack.

Despite a steady rise in fame and critical praise with each subsequent CD release, Goldfrapp and Gregory still appear cool, collected and focused. While it's easy for fame and increased expectations to deteriorate the quality of a beloved act like Goldfrapp, it's apparent that *Seventh Tree* was a calculated maneuver to ensure

quality control. It would have been easy to revisit the winning formula of *Supernature*, but would that really result in a longer career or facilitate a quicker demise? Fans will love Goldfrapp's new album because, as in the past, the music is constantly evolving and ever sincere. It's all about what Goldfrapp and Gregory want to create, and nobody can influence their space or sway them in any one direction. "The pressure to create is always there, but it comes from us," Gregory says. "We always worry that we aren't going to be able to write another song, and that's the pressure. You can never take songwriting for granted, and that's the only pressure that matters." 

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Wheel of Misfortune

Having braved curses, floods, mysterious injuries, mental breakdowns and desertions, Omar Rodriguez-Lopez and the Mars Volta leap headlong into the signal-processed unknown

By Bill Murphy | Photos by Ross Halfin

Sure, curiosity killed the cat, but who's to say the cat had nothing to gain from the experience? That might be one way of looking, in a positive light, at what's happened to the Mars Volta since the band finished recording its last studio album, the genre-busting ambient-psych-rock opus, *Amputechture* (GSL/Universal, 2006). It all started when lead guitarist, conceptualist and producer Omar Rodriguez-Lopez delivered the final master and decided to reward himself for all his hard work with a spur-of-the-moment trip to Israel.

"One of the things I brought back was this old antique I had found in a shop in Jerusalem," he begins. "It was a talking board—like a Ouija board—for [lead singer] Cedric [Bixler-Zavala]. He started using it during our tour with the Red Hot Chili Peppers. The things that were being told to us, and the poetry that we found inside of the thing, and also the way that it affected us during the process, are what drove the lyrical concept for the new album."

Like any creative endeavor, there's always some price to pay for the exertion, but this one was almost too much. First, longtime drummer Jon Theodore threw in the towel before the tour even began. The band soldiered on, running through several replacements before settling on Cali-based prodigy Thomas Pridgen. They soon began tracking new material at Ocean Way Recording in Hollywood, until lead engineer Jon Debaun succumbed to what amounted to a nervous meltdown—convinced that Rodriguez-Lopez was trying to drive him insane with his "evil music" and firm in his refusal to give up the hard drives that held weeks' worth of sessions and notes. Meanwhile, Bixler-Zavala was hobbled with a bizarre foot injury that required surgery, and back in New York, Rodriguez-Lopez's home studio in Brooklyn was hit with a flood, irreparably damaging many of his vintage guitar pedals and some of the power supplies for his high-end microphones.

"I attributed it all to the warnings and the curse that we had from fucking with the Ouija board," he says with an uneasy chuckle. "Obviously, people who don't believe in that sort of thing would just say, 'Hey man, you work 14-hour days and seven-day weeks—it was only a matter of time before [your engineer] was gonna get fried.' But I couldn't have that amount of perspective at the time, because after that it was just one thing after another. This album should have only taken me three weeks to record, but instead it just became a nightmare."

Right from the opening bolt of hyper-amplified mayhem that shocks the leadoff track "Aberinkula" into being, it seems clear that there's something downright creepy, even *Exorcist*-like, about *The Bedlam in Goliath* (Deimos/Universal, 2008). But what's even more frightening—or better yet, awe-inspiring—is the level of sheer musicianship and commitment to experi-

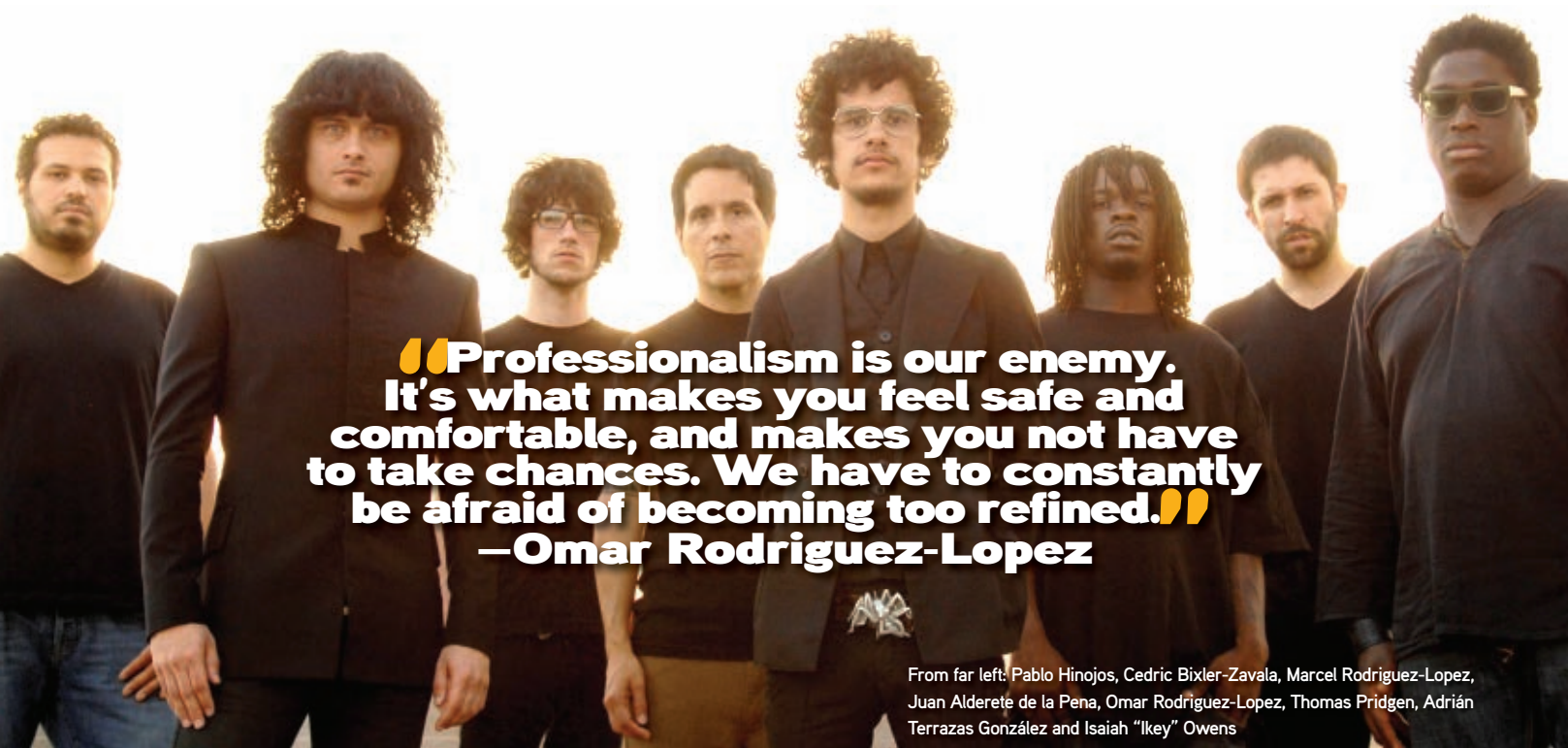
mentation that Rodriguez-Lopez and his mates have realized since they first rose from the ashes of the Texas cult hardcore band At the Drive-In, way back in 2001. *Bedlam* might have been a wild roller-coaster ride (eventually the original hard drives were rescued, although the files had somehow been corrupted and needed to be stitched back together with the help of four—count 'em, *four*—Pro Tools engineers), but the result is probably the hardest-hitting, most mind-blowing sonic excursion you'll ever hear from a so-called "rock" band, this year or any year.

PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

To get a grip on just how deep Rodriguez-Lopez is willing to go in pursuit of the strange sounds, melodies and beats he has whizzing around in his head, it helps to learn a bit about how he constructs a song.

Where most songwriters and producers take a linear approach—recording complete takes from beginning to end—Rodriguez-Lopez prefers to track pieces of songs according to their tempo or mood, assembling them later in the same way a director will assemble a movie.

He'll also teach each member of the band—which also includes bassist Juan Alderete, percussionist/keyboardist Marcel Rodriguez-Lopez (Omar's younger brother) and horn player Adrián Terrazas-González—their individual part just before tape begins to roll. And it does roll; Rodriguez-Lopez prefers to record to 2-inch multitracks, later dumping the results to Digidesign Pro Tools for editing and manipulating, and then mixing down to stereo half-inch. The method has led to some heated arguments in the studio, with Volta members complaining that given enough time, they could really nail a part, but all the yelling just falls on impassive ears.



“Professionalism is our enemy. It's what makes you feel safe and comfortable, and makes you not have to take chances. We have to constantly be afraid of becoming too refined.”
—Omar Rodriguez-Lopez

From far left: Pablo Hinojos, Cedric Bixler-Zavala, Marcel Rodriguez-Lopez, Juan Alderete de la Pena, Omar Rodriguez-Lopez, Thomas Pridgen, Adrián Terrazas González and Isaiah "Ikey" Owens

Some Assembly Required

Rich Costey is no stranger to the feverish imagination of Omar Rodriguez-Lopez; the New York-based producer has mixed all four of the Mars Volta's studio albums, beginning with *De-Loused in the Comatorium* (GSL/Universal, 2003). Known for his uncanny ability to give space to each instrument, whether it's embedded in a complex arrangement or a heavy onslaught of sound (as heard on albums he has produced and mixed with Muse, Interpol, Franz Ferdinand, Audioslave and Mastodon), Costey probably gets tested the most by a Mars Volta session, but he seems to enjoy every minute of it.

"Omar to me is someone like a Miles Davis-like character," he explains, "in that the emotional core of where he's at is always gonna be intact, so he can go wherever he wants. After a while, you stop thinking about how could he take his music

any further, because it doesn't matter. Wherever he's going, it'll be fine."

The Bedlam in Goliath is certainly a case in point. Mixed at the legendary Electric Lady Studios on an SSL 72-input J9000 console, the album underwent a few significant tweaks that wouldn't ordinarily come up in a mixing session. The vocal track on the paint-peeling punk-funk anthem "Ilyena," for example, went through a fair amount of filtering on a handheld Korg Kaoss Pad, as well as some extra distortion supplied by the mic preamp and mixer sections of an ARP 2600 synthesizer.

"The automatable features on the SSL have also become pretty necessary when working on Mars Volta albums," Costey says. "We'll have a song that's pretty well finished, and then Omar will say, 'Okay, can we make everything in this section come out of the left speaker for 10 seconds?' There's no way to do that unless you're on a really modern desk or unless you're mixing in Pro Tools, which I don't do because I can't get it to sound right. When something strikes Omar at a particular moment, he doesn't want to hedge his bets, so we just go that way."



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E-Clat: Portrait of a Bear Explosion

Once dubbed the E-Clat Portable Morgue Disaster Unit—shorthand for the home studio Omar Rodriguez-Lopez has used to record numerous solo projects for the exceedingly eclectic Gold Standard Laboratories label—E-Clat is now a fully blown home studio located in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, where Rodriguez-Lopez did most of the editing and track sequencing for *The Bedlam in Goliath*. (And this isn't even the whole list. Did we say it was fully blown?)

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Apogee Big Ben studio clock
Apple Mac G5 Dual (2 GHz and 1.8 GHz) and MacBook Pro (2.3 GHz)
Digidesign Pro Tools|HD3 with Digi 003, 002 and Mbox Mini

Console

Neve 10-channel sidcar with 3116 mic pre/EQs
Trident 75 series console

Tape machines

Ampex AG-440B 1-inch tape machine (8-track)
Studer A800 2-inch tape machine (24- and 16-track head stacks)
Tascam 1/2-inch tape machines (4-track, various)

Plug-ins

Bomb Factory bundle
Waves Platinum bundle

Mics

AKG C 12, C414 and D112
Audio-Technica AT4050
Neumann U 67
Royer R-121 and SF-12
Shure SM57 (10), SM58 (2) and SM7
Sennheiser MD 421

EQs, compressors

API 550B EQ (2)
Neve 1073 EQ (4)
Universal Audio LA-2A compressor (2)
Urei 1176 compressor (5)

Effects

Boss VB-2 Vibrato
DeltaLab Effectron (3)

Electro-Harmonix Stereo Memory Man
Eventide H3000 Ultra-Harmonizer
Fulltone Echoplex
Ibanez WF10 Wah Fuzz
Korg KP1, KP2 Kaoss Pad (4)
Maestro Echoplex (4), Ring Modulator
Mutronics Mutator
Roland RE-201 Space Echo (8), RE-501
Chorus Echo and RE-101 Space Echo
Symbolic Sound Kyma X effects

Instruments, amplifiers

Ampex SVT-VR bass heads (2), 810 cabinets (2)
Fender Twin amp
Harmony combo amp (8-inch)
Ibanez custom guitar
Lakland Skyline Darryl Jones bass
Ludwig stainless steel 5-piece drum kit (vintage)
Marshall Plexi (1967), 4-by-12 cabinets (2)
Orange AD140 head with cabinet
Supro combo amps (with 8-inch, 12-inch and 15-inch speakers)
Tama Bubinga 5-piece drum kit
Vox AC30 amp (3)

Drum machines

Electro-Harmonix DRM16
Korg ER-1 Electribe R

Roland TR-707
Yamaha QY100
Zoom RT-223 RhythmTrak

Synths, keyboards

Access Virus A
ARP Axse
Clavia Nord Lead 1
Electro-Harmonix Bass Micro-Synthesizer
Farfisa VIP-233 combo organ
Fender Rhodes 88 Suitcase, 73 Stage, 73 (silver top) and Piano Bass (orange top)
Hammond A-100 (with two Leslie 31H speakers) and M-101 organ
Hohner Clavinet C, D-6, Clavinet/Pianet Duo and Pianet T
Korg MicroKorg, MS-10, MS-20, Trident, Triton Studio and VC-10 Vocoder
Mellotron M400 and MkVI
Moog CDX, Minimoog, Satellite, Sonic Six and Taurus II
Roland Juno-106, JP-8080, SH-1000, SH-2000 and VP-333 Vocoder Plus
Wurlitzer 200A electric piano

Monitors

ATC SCM20s (on loan from Rich Costey)
Yamaha NS-10s

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"It's a backwards way of recording," Rodriguez-Lopez admits, "but it's also part of the chaos of not knowing what's next. These guys are masterful musicians. They could all be their own bandleaders and have their own band, so what good am I to them if I can't push them to a new area that they couldn't have discovered on their own? And [to that end], one of the very first things I try to do is to make them forget about their professionalism. Professionalism is our enemy. It's what makes you feel safe and comfortable and makes you not have to take chances. We have to constantly be afraid of becoming too refined. If I have to go through some tension in order to get that result, then that's fine because we're all adults here. Now we look back and we laugh about it."

In fact, if there's one rule that the Mars Volta has ever followed in the studio, it's that the rulebook should always be burned. Rodriguez-Lopez doesn't just insist on spontaneity when it comes to a performance; he'll even start freaking effects (such as the Electro-Harmonix Bass Micro-Synthesizer on Alderete's blistering bass line for "Goliath") during a live, one-and-only take, spurred on by the idea of committing fully to a particular sound rather than fixing it later in the mix (although even that phase has its quirks, as mix engineer Rich Costey explains in the sidebar "Some Assembly Required").

QUANTUM ENTANGLEMENTS

As a unit, the Mars Volta has always been open to sonic possibilities, and on *Bedlam* they take advantage of them at will. Whether it's in the swirling, whirlpool-like frequencies that Rodriguez-Lopez captures on guitar with all manner of delay, flanger and ring modulator (including such arcane devices as an Electro-Harmonix Memory Man, a Maestro Ring Modulator, a Boss VB-2 Vibrato and an Ibanez WF10 Wah Fuzz pedal) or in the metallic sheen of distortion that often drapes Bixler-Zavala's skyscraping lead vocals (check out the pulsating single "Wax Simulacra"), the album offers up a veritable three-ring circus of effects processing.

"I always liked the idea of learning from these little metal boxes that supposedly have no life and no influence," Rodriguez-Lopez says. "There are breaks on 'Wax Simulacra,' for instance, where I'm just sending the guitar signal through a [Thermionic] Culture Vulture and slamming the shit out of it to where it sounds like some kind of mechanical being. That's what I used to love about getting into recording when I was a kid."

Rodriguez-Lopez also used a Doepfer A100 modular synth owned by Red Hot Chili Peppers guitarist John Frusciante (who also guests on *Bedlam*) for another round of vocal processing and used a Zoom RT-223 RhythmTrak to build drum loops for Thomas Pridgen to absorb into his playing. "It's really all about being bored," he says. "I'm just trying to keep looking for new ways of doing something."

STATUES COME TO LIFE

New ways and new styles are what drive the music on *Bedlam*, and in tribute to the chaos that sur-

rounded its creation, the song "Soothsayer"—which is the name the band gave to the curse-generating Ouija board—pretty much tells the story. Opening with a Middle Eastern string melody that is punctuated by the call of a muezzin to prayer, the song launches into a long, episodic dream sequence of loping rhythms, Leslie-soaked vocal lines, frenetic free-jazz guitars and waves of noise. It is not only a vivid example of the Mars Volta's ability to go epic at the drop of a hat, but it also offers a glimpse of one of the many areas where Rodriguez-Lopez has become an intrepid explorer—a role he seeks out consistently

when he and the band are on the road.

"Obviously records are great because they're what's left in stone," he says. "They're sort of an approximation for the people who don't ever get to see the band live. It's like, 'Well, it's something like *this*, but not really.' I think when you come see us live, it's the best thing we could ever do. This is the core of a band and the existence of a band. This is us playing live, and that's what really matters. The records, they're just snapshots. They're ego things. They're like, 'This is what we did. We took this picture—look how beautiful it is.' [Laughs]" 

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SMOOTH OPERATORS

No need to ask, both Mac OS 10.5 Leopard and Windows Vista have enough useful new features and sexy, overhauled interfaces to make upgrading worthwhile

By Jason Blum and Markkus Rovito



Although some of the brainiest, most technically gifted geeks are trading potentially big bucks for their passion by working in the music/pro audio technology industry, it's still an industry that often lags behind the leading edge when compared to consumer electronics (CE). Samplers rock Zip drives long after they're dead to the rest of the world; workstations sport CD drives ages after DVD drives became commodities, etc. Part of that is due to how small the music tech market is compared to the CE market, and part of it is due to musicians and producers wanting to stick with working methods they're accustomed to. Being an early-adopting gear nerd is fun, but nothing compares to mastering a speedy workflow and then sticking to it, eschewing hardware and software upgrades until you really need them.

That's especially true with computer operating systems. In the ever-tiresome debate of Mac vs. PC, when it comes to making music, sticking with the platform they know best is often how musicians "choose" a computer in order to be most productive. And before upgrading an OS or buying new computers with the latest OS installed, they should make sure their favorite software is compatible, which can take a lot of time for the small staffs that handle much of their beloved music programs. So, while Apple's OS 10.5 Leopard and Microsoft's Windows Vista have been available for some time, enough critical mass of audio-oriented third-party software support now has arisen to warrant a thorough look at both systems and how their new features will affect musicians, digital DJs and producers.

SEEING SPOTS

Apple uncaged a dazzling array of improvements for Mac OS 10.5 Leopard

By Markkus Rovito

Although it now sells millions more iPhones and iPods than Macintosh computers, Apple quietly toiled on Mac OS 10.5 Leopard for more than two and a half years, adding greater than 300 features overall and giving it a general spit-and-polish that makes it the prettiest operating system in computer history. Apple knows that its OS defines its Macs and sets them apart from the competition; without the Mac OS, you've got just another computer.

Early this decade, OS X gave us gifts such as Core Audio and Core MIDI, which made making computer music so much more pleasant that anyone doing it in the '90s instantly had something to complain about to their grandkids. Leopard doesn't grace musicians nearly as directly; its core improvements are organizational with an eye toward security. Some power users who constantly strive to work as fast as possible will find Leopard's simple-yet-elegant time-savers irresistible, while penny-pinchers or upgrade-phobics may be content to wait until buying a new Mac introduces them to the newest cat in the OS X family.

BIG STACK ATTACK

Installing versions of OS X has always been fairly straightforward—no big deal to anyone used to installing

software from discs, and there's no serial numbers or authentication required. Like many programs, you can choose what not to install, such as printer drivers, fonts, language translations, etc. It is a good idea, however, to create a clone (an exact copy) of your Mac's hard disk on a bootable external drive in case something goes wrong during installation. (Try Bombich Carbon Copy Cloner for a \$10 donation at www.bombich.com.) Once installed, download any software updates or drivers you need to make your studio setup Leopard-compatible.

The first thing you notice when Leopard boots is the fancy-schmancy new Desktop, with transparent menu bar and dock. We artists can appreciate aesthetics, but the new Dock also harbors a nice new tool called Stacks. Represented as folders in the right-hand side of the Dock, Stacks are basically receptacles and launchers for any group of files or programs. You create a Stack by dragging any folder from a Finder window into the Dock. When you click a Stack, it shows the contents of the folder in either a "fan" of files spread vertically across the Desktop or in a grid. You can set each Stack to display as a fan or grid in its contextual (right-click) menu. Either way, a Stack shows the file name and a graphical preview for each item, and clicking on the items launches them. As a tidy way of cleaning up the Desktop, a default Downloads Stack holds all files you download from the Internet until you move them somewhere else.

I enjoyed creating a Stack called Music Apps where I kept all my favorite programs in order to launch them quickly. Stacks are also great for keeping your sessions in progress or keeping track of your most recent sessions, perhaps using the Finder's new Smart Folders.

ALL KINDS OF WAYS TO FIND STUFF

Once you open a Finder window, you see several new features: a left-hand sidebar based on that of iTunes, an "eye" button in the toolbar that launches the new Quick Look and another new toolbar button that launches the Cover Flow view.

The Finder's new sidebar features collapsible folders, as well as Smart Folders. To create a Smart Folder, use the Finder window's search function to detail a specific search and then click on the Save button. For example, you could create a folder that has only Pro Tools session files from the past week, month, year, etc.; AIFF files that only contain "final" in the name; and so on. Drag one of the Smart Folders to the Dock as a Stack, and you've got a very handy automatic way to find specific things. Leopard's Finder also lets you search other Leopard-running Macs and servers connected to your network.

With a file selected in the Finder, if you click on the Quick Look button or hit the Spacebar, you can instantly preview any QuickTime-compatible audio or video file; images; PDFs; or text, Word, Excel, Pages, Keynote and Numbers docs without actually launching any software. The Quick Look window that opens instantly plays audio files, so it's great for auditioning songs, loops and samples. You can also add images to iPhoto straight from Quick Look.

Also ported over from iTunes, the Finder's Cover Flow view displays crisp and vibrant previews of documents that you can flip through using the mouse or the arrow keys. Cover Flow's previews flip through as if you were rifling through documents in a filing cabinet. Cover Flow is most useful if you're not sure what you're looking for or the name of what you're looking for, but a visual aid would help.

EVERYTHING IN ITS RIGHT PLACE

Leopard's Spaces system takes a big step beyond the Exposé features of earlier versions, which show a separated view of all the open windows. Spaces lets you configure and move among multiple Desktops, each with its own programs that it hosts exclusively.

In the Spaces System Preferences, you set the number of Spaces you want from two to 16. You then go about choosing applications and assigning them to a particular Space. Finally, you set the keyboard shortcuts to navigate the Spaces. For example, you could set your DAW and Propellerhead Reason for Space 1, an audio editor for Space 2 and a Web browser for Space 3. Then, the next time you launch each of those apps, they



BLOCK PARTY > Leopard's Spaces let you organize programs in their own Desktops to keep your screen clean.



NO. 1 FAN > This Finder window demonstrates the new Cover Flow view flipping through a folder of images, while the default Downloads Stack in the Dock shows the same folder of images fanned out.

will open automatically in their particular Space, which is basically a separate Desktop reserved for those programs. Your assigned Spaces keyboard shortcut splits your display into a live view of all the Spaces at once and lets you navigate to the one you want to use. It's all very easy to set up and quite handy for making a single-monitor system feel like it has more screen real estate. I preferred to launch Spaces using the fourth button of a mouse rather than using one of the "F" keys, which are often better used as shortcuts in certain DAWs.

For those Mac users who love them, Leopard still includes the Exposé keyboard shortcuts, and in fact, you can use them while you are in the Spaces view, which can invoke some “WTF?” stares from onlookers.

GOTTA GO BACK IN TIME

It's always a good idea for computer musicians to have at least one external hard drive for either recording to, storing samples or both. With Leopard, you'll want to add either another external hard drive, an internal drive (if possible) or create a partition to your external drive for using Leopard's new Time Machine automatic data backup. Time Machine is Apple's way of making data backup as cool and painless as possible. All you have to do is open the Time Machine System Preferences and then choose the drive (other than the internal boot drive) that you want to use as the backup disk. It then starts by making a copy of everything from your main hard drive. From then on, it automatically creates a copy of all the new files and programs or files that you edit or change in some way. It keeps backed up versions of files from each hour of the last 24 hours, each day of the last 30 days and each week beyond that. When the backup drive runs out of room, Time Machine starts deleting the oldest weekly backups.

When you want to restore a file, you can launch



HYPERDRIVE > Time Machine is Leopard's automatic backup function for saving all your data to a separate hard drive.



MAC BE NIMBLE, MAC BE QUICK > A Quick Look window on the bottom left previews an audio file launched from the Finder, while a custom-made Stack in grid view shows music apps ready to launch.

Time Machine, which probably adds the biggest “wow” factor to Leopard. Against a galactic background, Time Machine shows you a Finder window containing each backup version, and you can browse them backward and forward using arrow keys. A Restore button sends any file back to your main drive. The Mac’s updated Migration Assistant also makes it easy to use the Time Machine backups to load your files onto another Mac.

Time Machine promotes peace of mind in a few of different ways. Obviously, if you lose precious data to corruption or accidental deletion, you can recover it right away. But it could also be a lifesaver—for example, in the case of a recording project that has been changed many times over many days. You may get to a point where you realize that you like what you had a week ago better, but the session is radically altered now and you haven't saved different versions. Time Machine will let you retrieve that old version and perhaps teach you to be more diligent next time. Also, if you use FileVault on your data, Time Machine backups will also be fully encrypted and password-protected. And when you want to erase a file completely, there's an option to fully delete all backups of that file.

BEST OF THE REST

The aforementioned features may appeal to neat freaks and efficiency experts, but they only scratch the surface of the Leopard skin. Many users will flip out for Apple's Boot Camp, now out of beta and fully available in Leopard. Boot Camp lets you run Windows XP and Vista software natively on your Mac, using a partition of your internal drive that boots up as a Windows machine (you still have to install your own copy of XP Service Pack 2 or Vista).

Leopard includes major updates to many of Apple's bundled programs. As a brief overview, Preview 4 lets you rearrange PDF pages and merge PDFs, making it possible to organize custom guidebooks from frequently visited sections of software manuals; Safari 3 lets you make custom updating Dashboard widgets from any

section of a Web page, so you could, for instance, save the “new threads” area of a favorite user group as a widget; Automator 2 includes a Record button that captures your keystrokes, making it easier to create shortcut actions; iChat 4 includes video and audio recording—useful for saving your chats with collaborators as fodder for documentaries and videos; and Mail 3 has improved searches and mailbox archiving, for cleaning out your e-mails without throwing them away.

ON THE PROWL

While offering full performance and compatibility with existing 32-bit applications, Leopard is optimized to take advantage of 64-bit computing. If that means nothing to you, consider that the Atari 2600 was a 4-bit machine and your typical computer of a year ago was 32-bit. So moving to 64-bit is an exponential leap that means literally billions of times greater power—for example, potentially accommodating 4 billion times the memory of 32-bit apps. Basically, 64-bit is the future, and the transition to it is taking place in the present without yet being widespread. More importantly for now, Apple also optimized Leopard throughout to take advantage of the multicore processor systems installed on all current Macs.

For testing, I wasn't able to make exact comparisons between performance in Leopard and OS 10.4 Tiger because my test Leopard machine was a new Mac Pro, while my Tiger machines were a new MacBook Pro laptop and an older Power Mac G5 desktop. However, Leopard's performance impressed me with both its stability and power. I ran Ableton Live 7 and Logic Pro 8 sessions of 20 tracks or more with plug-ins on each track that never clipped the 10 percent CPU mark, even with several other apps open in different Spaces. While I only used programs that were certified Leopard-compatible by their makers, I experienced great stability, with no program crashes or system freezes.

No incremental OS X update can compare to the epiphany of moving from Mac OS 9 to OS 10.2 Jaguar

Kevin, DJ Product Manager and Bert, Recording, Keyboards & Midi Product Manager, BEHRINGER Germany came up with the awesome concept of the BCD3000.

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inputs as well as a full-fledged monitor section.



Uli Behringer supervised
development of the BCD3000.

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early in this decade. Personally, I didn't miss OS 9 at all, and OS 10.2 was a revelation for music making and took only a few days to get used to. Overall, stepping up to Leopard—although its new features are unparalleled—felt much like it did when I upgraded to OS 10.3 Panther and OS 10.4 Tiger before it. Going into it, many features interested me, but I wasn't dying to have them. However, just like before, feeling comfortable with the new interface adjustments took almost no time at all, and I didn't want to go back to previous systems.

What it comes down to for Mac users is this: If you like any version of OS X, you'll probably love Leopard. Whether you'll love it enough to pay \$129 for the discs or accelerate your purchasing schedule to get Leopard on a new Mac depends largely on how much you're

into the organizational, workflow and backup features it showcases. The greatest consideration for anyone is how many of the software programs you need are compatible with the OS. That number is growing by the week and includes the aforementioned Live 7, all of Apple's programs, Reason 3 and 4, Spectrasonics Stylus RMX and most Native Instruments programs, including the Traktor products. Many others, such as Pro Tools and Serato Scratch Live, are not yet officially compatible. As the group of compatible apps fills out, you'll definitely want to make this kitty purr.



For a sidebar on the Leopard compatibility of many major music and pro audio software apps, go to remixmag.com.

APPLE

OS 10.5 LEOPARD > \$129

Pros: Many workflow enhancements. Easy automated backups. Powerful, stable platform that will challenge 64-bit software developers. Many major updates to bundled apps. Additional networking features.

Cons: Very cool Back to My Mac feature that lets you browse and access files on a remote Mac requires a separate .Mac account. Not all third-party apps are compatible yet.

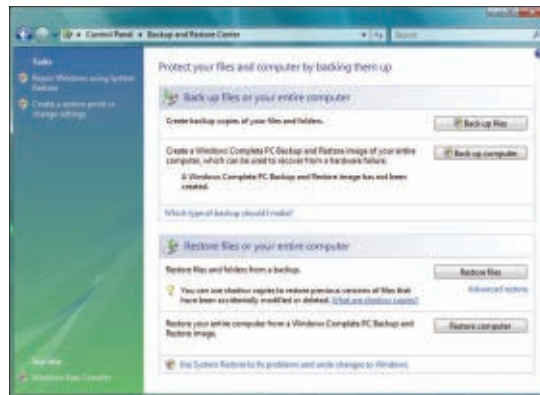
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MICROSOFT WINDOWS VISTA

By Jason Blum

If you use a PC for audio production—actually, if you use a PC for anything—then you've probably already formulated some pretty strong opinions about Windows Vista, even if you haven't laid eyes on a Vista PC. Microsoft hyped Vista pretty hard during its launch earlier this year, and a confusing mixture of irate tirades and glowing reviews from end users in the intervening months have added a layer of confusion to all the talk surrounding this new operating system.

Is Vista really better or worse than XP? And what exactly does five years in the world of Windows development bring? Frankly, it brought fewer changes than expected, but enough to make Vista worth a look. Even if you're completely happy with XP, the inevitable march of progress continues, and within two to three years, it



will be difficult to find security patches or new applications for XP as Vista comes into its own.

Vista gets a bad rap for being hard to use, useless, a resource hog and so on and so forth ad nauseam. In all fairness to the rumor mill, Vista does require more advanced hardware than XP, and it does demand more from your system. However, with numerous optimizations for accelerating the end-user experience and under-the-hood improvements including low-level audio drivers and multimedia prioritization, Vista stands a good

PROTECT YA NECK > Complete PC Backup and Restore automates file backups and can take a snapshot image of your entire drive, making recovery a snap if you encounter a complete system crash. It's also a great way to keep your system squeaky clean: Install Vista and your audio apps and then take an image of your drive. When you feel like a fresh install, just load the backup image, and you're back to a virgin OS without all the hassle of building from scratch.

chance of being the pro audio OS of choice by the end of 2008. I took Vista's Ultimate version for a spin with a variety of audio apps over the course of a month, and while XP is still a tried-and-true platform for music production, I did find plenty to like about Vista and was encouraged by the efforts Microsoft is making for pro audio users.

With all of the choices today in CPU speeds, hard-drive capacities, video-card specs, and so on, it isn't as though we don't already have enough to worry about when selecting a PC. Naturally, leave it to Microsoft to complicate things even further—it split Vista into four separate versions, all built on the same core software but with key features enabled or disabled depending on how much cash you feel comfortable spending (see sidebar).

GIT 'ER DONE

Installing Vista is shockingly easy and painless. Say goodbye to XP's text-based setup; Vista's bootable DVD kicks right into a mouse-driven graphic interface, and there are additional tools available right there in the setup for creating and resizing disk partitions. Once you've entered your product key and identifying information, Vista takes the reins, and you're free to grab a cup of joe while the OS configures itself without any further intervention. Around 30 to 45 minutes later, you've got a fully functioning Vista setup that's ready to rock.

Since Vista is a brand new OS, most of the drivers required for standard hardware are already included. Vista auto-detected my Nvidia graphics card, SATA drives, RAID array, network card and motherboard



WHAT'S UP, SLICK? > Vista brings a long-overdue artistic makeover to the traditional Windows UI, with transparent glass effects, window animations and smoother fonts for sharper LCD viewing.

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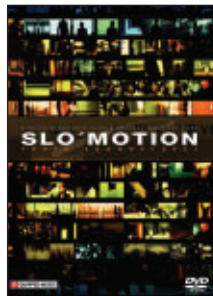
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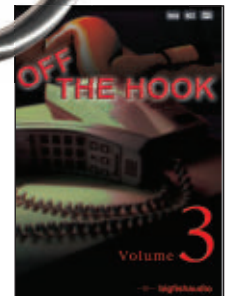
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chipset all by itself. I didn't have to lift a finger to get things running—a far cry from XP, where a fresh install would send me running all over the Web looking for the right drivers to silence the nagging “New Hardware Found” messages after startup. You'll still need to grab drivers for more obscure products such as pro audio interfaces and accelerator cards, but Vista should be able to handle all of your basic system devices easily. If not, a quick visit to Windows Update will usually resolve the problem.

If you're planning to dual-boot a system with Vista and XP (or any other operating system), it's important to note that Vista uses a brand new boot loader that's not directly compatible with older operating systems. That can pose problems if you purchase a PC with Vista pre-installed. On a new laptop that came with Vista Business preloaded, after partitioning the drive and installing XP, I was stuck booting straight into XP without any obvious way to access Vista—no boot menu or other selection option during startup. Fortunately, that is relatively easy to fix, and a number of third-party tools (like EasyBCD; www.neosmart.com) will back up and modify your boot sector to make it dual-boot ready.

BRINGIN' SEXY BACK

One of the areas where Vista really shines is, arguably, one of the least important. I always felt that the rounded blue and green elements in XP's default interface had a distinct Fisher-Price feel, and Vista tosses all that out the window with its classy and refined Aero interface. Aero may simply be Microsoft's response to the beautiful Aqua interface Apple introduced with OS X, but that makes it no less welcome; its transparent glass motif is easier on the eyes than any previous version of Windows, and when you're pulling all-nighters in the studio, a little aesthetic flair is always a welcome relief.

Unlike OS X and its Dock toolbar, Vista doesn't introduce any radically new interface elements; rather, it seems to be a simple re-skinning of the old XP interface. Some items have moved around—the new Network Center and Control Panel icons—but the overall feel is generally the same. I was particularly pleased with Microsoft's integrating the Windows Desktop Search functionality right into the Vista shell. It's fast and robust, lets you track down files and messages by keyword anywhere on your network and can be configured to index only specific locations to keep system resource usage at a minimum. With a properly structured sample archive, Vista's search can make picking the perfect sample out of gigabytes of data a simple task.

64- VS. 32-BIT

The retail version of Vista ships with two DVDs—one with a 32-bit installer and another with a 64-bit version. While most PCs these days are quite capable of 64-bit operation, most hardware and software manufacturers in the audio realm have yet to jump on the 64-bit bandwagon, so unless you're one of the lucky few with 64-bit Vista drivers, you'll probably be stuck running the 32-bit version.

That isn't a problem in any way; the vast majority of XP installations are 32-bit, and most of today's audio software and hardware is optimized for the 32-bit realm. That's slowly changing as 64-bit operation does have a number of advantages, including support



SO HAPPY TOGETHER > This large Cubase project and a whole mess of VST plug-ins all ran smoothly on Windows Vista.

for vast quantities of RAM and higher-precision audio processing. However, with the slow uptake on device-driver availability (most 64-bit drivers are still in beta), it's wise to wait it out a bit and roll with a 32-bit installation until 64-bit support becomes more widespread.

RIDE THE WAVE

One of the most promising technologies in Vista is WaveRT, Microsoft's first real attempt at low-level integration of audio drivers directly into the Windows kernel. This is essentially Microsoft's take on what the ASIO architecture has offered for years—a driver model that allows manufacturers to offload the laborious task of low-latency audio processing from the CPU onto the audio interface itself. Of course, because WaveRT is directly embedded in the OS, drivers that take advantage of this programming model should offer significant improvements in latency and host CPU utilization.

Unfortunately, as with the 64-bit conundrum, we're facing another chicken and egg issue with WaveRT. The only pro audio manufacturer I could find that is offering WaveRT drivers appears to be Echo (www.echoaudio.com). Others, such as MOTU, Native Instruments, RME, etc. seem to be waiting in the wings to see whether ASIO will continue to hold the throne, or if this upstart challenger will wind up king of the audio hill.

In an ironic twist, makers of consumer audio hardware like SigmaTel and Realtek—two of the largest manufacturers of on-motherboard audio interfaces—already have WaveRT drivers for many of their embedded devices. While onboard audio won't ever take the place of a quality pro interface, WaveRT drivers do increase their usefulness for pro audio users, and that's good news for musicians who need to stay creative on the road but don't want to lug around an extra audio card. With WaveRT, it should finally be possible to eke out some decent low-latency performance from these interfaces.

PRIORITIES, PRIORITIES

Another important advance in Vista's audio handling is the Multimedia Class Scheduler Service (MMCSS), which is essentially a traffic cop for all of the processes on your machine—implemented properly, it prioritizes processes such as audio streaming over other system processes, giving it a straight pipe to your sequencer and theoretically reducing the possibility of those annoying

pops and glitches that often plagued unoptimized XP systems. MMCSS can also make good use of dual or multicore systems by assigning specific multimedia tasks to certain processor cores or relegating background system tasks to a percentage of a single core while giving audio apps free rein over the remaining resources.

Like WaveRT, MMCSS is something that manufacturers will need to add to their products via patches or ground-up redesign. Most pro audio apps such as Cubase, Live and Sonar are already multithreaded to take advantage of multiple processors, but adding MMCSS to the mix should allow these programs to use resources even more efficiently and deliver a rock-solid, glitch-free recording platform.

UNDER THE GUN

Tech specs aside, I put Vista through a standard array of tests on my machine by loading Cubase, Live and Wavelab projects I'd created in XP to see how they'd fare. To be honest, I was expecting a significant performance hit with Vista. The general consensus out on the street is that it's a bloated memory hog, and while I was happy with the shiny new user interface, I did harbor a little apprehension about getting the same performance that I had with my old XP rig.

One rumor is confirmed true—Vista is a memory hog and will chew through RAM quickly. My mere 1 GB of RAM (admittedly not a large quantity) was dinged at more than 60 percent usage even when idle, and after loading a Live set with 16 tracks, it shot up to near 90 percent capacity. Clearly there's more background stuff happening in Vista, but somehow even with the additional workload, Vista managed to deftly keep total usage under 100 percent, and performance never suffered as a result.

My experience with Cubase was similar—though it actually used less memory than Live—and Wavelab also performed flawlessly, as did all of my VST plug-ins. Recording and playback through both applications with a 256-sample buffer size was glitch-free, even in complex projects with multiple plug-ins, and while Vista does seem to tack an extra one or two percent on the CPU usage bar in both Live and Cubase, it's a negligible difference that doesn't seem to affect playback in any way. Reducing the buffer size did introduce some glitching on more complex projects, but I would expect the same behavior in XP.

The only instance where I did notice some glitching was during window resize operations. Even with my accelerated GeForce 7950GT video card, Vista still didn't prioritize audio tasks above screen refresh jobs, causing irritating little pops and clicks while dragging or resizing windows during playback. I always had the same issue with XP, and it is still easily fixed by disabling some of the window-animation options under System Properties > Performance Options. However, I was hoping that Vista would fix the problem. Hopefully as advances such as MMCSS are implemented in audio apps, such things will have less of an impact.

I also noticed that all of my music applications seemed to start a bit faster than they did on XP, no doubt a result of Vista's propensity for pre-caching commonly used programs and firing them out of RAM when executed. I don't typically switch programs a lot while working, but it does add a little boost to the overall user experience.

BUENA VISTA

Windows Vista is a robust operating system with plenty of little enhancements over earlier versions of

Windows. The new user interface is beautiful, there are a few under-the-hood enhancements targeted squarely at the pro audio world, and most major hardware and software manufacturers have finally released drivers or Vista-compatible patches (although 64-bit support is still sorely lacking).

But is it really worth the upgrade for XP users who are perfectly happy? For professional music applications alone, probably not. Vista currently doesn't offer much aside from a few usability and efficiency tweaks that may—depending on your hardware—offer increased performance. Improvements like WaveRT drivers and MMCSS will help audio

performance as manufacturers adopt them, but that hasn't happened en masse, so you can probably get by just fine with XP for another year or two. Besides, XP will eke out a touch more raw performance on an older machine.

Regardless of whether you're upgrading an old machine or buying new, the fact is you'll be faced with the switch to Vista at some point within the next few years as XP is eventually phased out of Microsoft's lineup. Don't fear change! Vista is a great OS for audio applications, and as more products take advantage of its powerful multimedia tools, you'll wonder why you didn't make the switch sooner. 

MICROSOFT

WINDOWS VISTA

\$199/\$99 (upgrade) Home Basic: A stripped-down version that lacks the new user interface. Avoid it if possible.

\$239/\$139 Home Premium: Offers a few bonus features such as Windows Media Center, some basic games, a DVD authoring tool and other entertainment-focused add-ons. Neither Home versions are good for networked business environments.

\$299/\$199 Business: Keeps the revamped Aero interface but ditches the games and media apps in favor of useful features including Remote Access, domain-level network integration and the excellent Complete PC Backup and Restore.

\$399/\$299 Ultimate: The flagship version crams in every feature from lesser incarnations with a few exclusive bonuses such as file-system encryption and Ultimate Extras.

Selecting the right version is a matter of taste more than necessity for most users, as the differences from a pro-audio standpoint are negligible. You'll get the exact same stability, functionality and performance with each version. A slight edge goes to Vista Business for a studio PC: It does away with superfluous fluff like games and media players and includes useful tools that you'd probably wind up purchasing separately anyway.

Pros: Revamped user interface. Good backup tools. Great search functions. Low-level OS improvements for audio streaming and multimedia prioritization.

Cons: Slight learning curve. More processor- and RAM-intensive than XP. Feels slightly overpriced.

Contact: www.microsoft.com/vista



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ALL KEYED UP

Take your DJ sets—and the dancefloor—to the next level by mixing in key

The time has come to get your keys together. This won't require a trip to the hardware store or a 10-cent key chain; you're going to need some basic software, a smidgen of music theory and a little creative thinking. With those tools in hand, you will stand poised to take musical control over the dancefloor.

All aspects of our lives involve some form of the never-ending soap opera starring Tension and Release, also with Conflict and Resolution. It's a story line we are all familiar with—and secretly love—so it's no surprise that it manages to weasel its way into almost all forms of art. Music is unique because there is an almost scientific system of tension and release, not to mention that it's one of the most powerful emotional triggers around. No cinematic climax would be complete without the final musical touch that tugs at the human heartstrings. So how do film composers use music to leave them spellbound, and how can you have the same effect on the dancefloor? Whoa there, cowboy; you need to learn how to get on the horse before you can go galloping off into the sunset.

MUSICAL JOHN HANCOCK

Each song has a unique key—its melodic fingerprint if you will. Although there are 12 notes in the Western musical scale, they can be combined in ways that yield many more unique keys. Even though some of these keys contain the same musical notes, it's the specific way in which they are arranged that gives each its own special flavor. You can mix some songs together that are not in the same key, and they don't clash because they share similar tones. Sometimes small changes can make a big difference in mood. For example, dropping two notes down turns the happy-go-lucky A major into the mysterious A minor. Before looking at how to use those characteristics in your mix, you need to figure out the keys of your songs.

SHORTCUT CHEMISTS

Figuring out the key of a new record in the past involved 10 minutes of fiddling around on a piano and then marking the (often-incorrect) key you found on the record label. As with so many other things, digital technology has made that process significantly easier and more effective. In the past few years, several software programs have emerged that can quickly analyze each digital audio file's signature and assign the correct key about 90 percent of the time. One of the more popular programs is appropriately called Mixed In Key (\$58; www.mixedinkey.com). Created in 2006, this simple but effective application counts Pete Tong and Ali "Dubfire" Shirazinia (Deep Dish) among its users. Mixed In Key founder Yakov Vorobyev explains why it



Ali "Dubfire" Shirazinia of Deep Dish uses mixing in key and devil's horns to whip clubbers into a diabolical frenzy.

COURTESY REPHLEKTOR INCORPORATED

works: "The patent-pending technology enables Mixed In Key to think like a human musician, including mistakes they commonly make, so even though the keys may not always be perfect, they will always blend well. Consistency is key; when Mixed In Key recognizes that two songs are in the same key and you mix them, it will sound amazing." Mixed In Key is streamlined; there's also a less-straightforward—but free—key program called Rapid Evolution (www.mixshare.com).

DJs OF THE ROUND TABLE

Finding out a song's key may be simple, but keeping track of which keys mix well together nearly requires a music degree. That is, until some helpful DJs created a circular system of numbers called the Camelot Sound Easymix System based on the circle of fifths. The Camelot system replaces the common lettered keys labels such as B^b with a logical sequence of numbers that keeps brainwork at a minimum. Instead of letters, you have 11 numbers—major and minor have become 1A/1B, respectively—and the numbers are assigned in a pattern that keeps friendly keys close to each other. For instance, if you are playing a song in A^b minor (1A on the Camelot scale), you know that a song in 1A, 1B and 2B will all blend well without clashing musically. Always mixing up one step on the Camelot scale will result in a continuously pleasing mix, but it can get a little monotonous after a while, so you need to learn to move around the Camelot scale.

One popular method is moving up one full note

to create an uplifting feeling. For example, if you are playing in A^b minor, you would jump up to B^b minor. Although those two keys will clash if you try to blend them musically, a clean drum transition will work perfectly. Remember the Camelot scale does not mirror the traditional Western scale, so although A is next to B on your piano, they are on opposite ends of the Camelot scale. To create this effect without trying to figure out keys, remember this simple formula. To create a boost in energy, add two or seven points to the number you are currently mixing. In the case when you're mixing a song in A^b minor (1A), you'd need to find something appropriate in 8A (A minor) or 3A (B^b minor). A reliable formula for a full set would be to play two or three songs in the same key and then move up a whole step, slowly working through the scales.

These suggestions for mixing in key are not hereby the Ten Commandments of DJing. Doing nothing but moving up one key at a time or mixing 20 songs that are all in E minor will be a profoundly boring mix and result in you getting fired as a DJ. Sometimes your musical instinct will come up with a much more creative and compelling combination of songs than any computer program ever could. That being said, noticing that two current dancefloor hits are in the same key and doing a creative blend between them will leave the crowd with the impression that you are the most brilliant DJ ever. You don't even have to tell them that a \$60 software program helped; take all the credit for yourself. 



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FUTURE RETRO

Create killer new FM patches with old-school flava in Native Instruments FM8

The moonwalk. Hair gel. Pumas with fat laces. Leg warmers. Madonna, Wham, Run-DMC. Such things define the '80s, a decade of such sugary decadence that only then could the hallmark of digital synthesis, FM (frequency modulation), be concocted. Green cities. Intelligent Dance Music. Wikis and blogs. Stem cell research. Madlib, Luke Vibert, TV on the Radio. Those are the stuff of this decade, the conscious-raising first decade of this century. While the dawn of the digital age in the early '80s produced the classic sound and notoriously archaic user interface of the Yamaha DX-7, FM synthesis is still with us today, although vastly improved and best represented in Native Instruments FM8 soft synth (\$339; www.native-instruments.com).

A typical classic analog synth structure is based on one or more oscillators that are typically fed into a VCA (amplifier); the oscillators' levels are altered by the VCA, which in turn is altered by an envelope generator (EG). FM synthesis builds on this basic structure by grouping these three essential components together and labeling them an Operator. FM is unique in that it makes use of one Operator to modulate another Operator, the former generally acting as a Modulator and latter generally acting as the sound source or Carrier, with the result being a totally new, unique waveform. This is not unlike the classic analog LFO (low-frequency oscillator), which is often below the range of human-audible frequencies and used as a modulation source rather than a sound source. The beauty of FM synthesis is that several operators (six in the case of FM8) can be mixed and matched on a matrix in an open-ended, connect-the-dots type of way. Beyond this grid, FM8 boasts a great array of other sound-sculpting tools that can further enhance your Dr. Frankenstein creations, such as an effects rack and a four-voice x-y axis that functions similarly to a Korg Kaoss Pad, mixing and allowing gradual shifts between the different voices.

OPERATOR CANNIBALISM

It's useful to begin with one of FM8's presets that has a tone somewhat like what you want to hear, and then dive in and mash it up. In doing that, you'll discover not only how FM synthesis works, but I also guarantee that with enough playing around, you'll come up with new patches that are truly unique, satisfying to create and way off the charts from what you originally envision. After all, isn't that the point of synthesis? By entering the Expert tab on FM8's Navigator, you will access the Operator matrix. You may know how to make one Operator modulate another, but any Operator can also feed back into itself, or into any other on the grid. In



DOUG EISENGREIN

other words, any Operator can act as a Modulator, a Carrier or both. To make an Operator feed back into itself, click on the junction directly above it and drag up to increase the feedback "volume" (amount). To feed one back into another, click on the junction above and to the right of a pair and perform the standard click-and-drag. Adding feedback in this way can impart some dirt to your patches. Which waveforms to choose for Modulators and Carriers is of course in the ears of the beholder, but I personally like to use the more traditional waveforms (square, sine, triangle) as the sound sources and the more complex waves (6th, 8th, 10th formant, 1+7, 1+8, etc.) as Modulators. But I also like to break that rule.

Remember that externally input waveforms also can feed into any FM8 Operator, further expanding the already endless sonic possibilities—take note of the In box in the lower right-hand corner of the FM Matrix. Finally, though it might seem like a tiny detail, inverting the Operator waveforms can really make a difference in the overall tone of your patches. Immediately upon choosing a waveform, click on the little Invert button directly below the drop-down list and listen to the results; in many cases, you may be surprised.

MOD SQUAD

The next area worth exploring is the Modulation Matrix. You access it in FM8's Expert tab by clicking on the Mod button below the tabs. Two simple ways to make your patches more instantly dynamic are to add some modulation generated from either (or both) LFOs and to send Pitch Bend to one or more Operator.

Pitch bend Up and Down are separately available via the PB Up and PB Dn junctions, and it's interesting to send Up to only one voice Operator and Down to only another. The beauty of the LFOs here is that they have the identical choice of waveforms available as the regular Operators. I've had very interesting results by assigning smoother waveforms (Parabol, Soft Square, Soft Tristate) to the LFOs and slower-to-medium Rate settings and medium-to-longer Delay settings. That can make for complex, morphing pads.

PEAKS AND Q'S

Our last stop on the FM8 road is the Effects tab. Laid out like a traditional effects rack, the coloring that FM8's various effects can impart at the expense of minimal extra CPU load is incredible. One of the most basic yet not-to-be overlooked is the Peak EQ. This can very simply dial in your patch to fill a frequency void in your song, give a lead or pad some real bite, or—if played in real-time—add a serious sweeping effect to a live set. As with any semiparametric EQ, setting the Q higher will affect a larger frequency span, while lowering it will narrow and focus the equalization. I recommend starting with just one Q point and only using the other if really necessary. Also, don't miss the obvious: Entire effects combinations can be copied from one patch to another. If a certain preset already has the effects you hear in your head, try punching the Copy button (above the effects list), opening your patch-in-progress and clicking on Paste. This is a simple way to quickly color your sound—again, before diving deeper and exploding it to your heart's desire. 

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SMALL SCREEN

Learn how to get massive exposure from music licensing in advertising campaigns

While I studied business with a focus in economics in college, music has always been an influential part of my life. Upon finishing school and considering my career options, I thought about getting into the music business on the label side. However, due to fairly recent technological advances, the music industry as a whole has been forced to reinvent itself. Branded entertainment has been at the forefront of this reinvention, and I decided to find a way to wedge myself right into the middle of things and work my way up the ranks at as Director of Music/Talent at Creative License (www.creativelicense.com). As of late, we've been working with Ford, Geico, Frito Lay and several other clients.

What does a band have to do to get your attention?

Relationships are everything in this industry. While labels and managers might have existing networks to champion a band's cause, there are other ways. Bands/artists who are looking for exposure through advertising should observe a brand's trends and actively pursue the right opportunities. You have to have an accurate perception of yourself and aggressively go after the right projects without crossing the fine line of alienating your band. An immediate way to alienate yourself is to constantly solicit music supervisors with phone calls and e-mails. You have to get your music in front of the right people without becoming a telemarketer. Aggressively pursuing opportunities is much different than *desperately* pursuing them. Another way to find yourself in the same place is to be difficult by not appreciating what's in front of you and exploiting the situation. Recently, I was working with a baby band from the UK on a project for Ford. I had expressed interest in one of their songs and offered to place it in an online campaign. There was no money involved, but the trade-off on Ford's media buy should have made up for it. The band asked for a measly \$5,000. Without having a name or any equity Ford could benefit from, it felt exploitive. I gave the opportunity to a hungrier band that was eager and understood the benefits of having their music placed in the commercial.

What's the process, from finding the right song to locking down placement in an ad campaign?

Finding the perfect song for a campaign can be a lengthy and frustrating process—partly because the nature of this work is so subjective. Many times, decisions are made because of a client's personal preferences, and others times, decisions are based on market research. You can't put all of your eggs in one basket; it's diligent to have viable backup alternatives. Sometimes a song is simply too perfect to work. Sounds like an oxymoron, but trust me, a song can be so perfect that the objective of the campaign gets lost in the music.



Looks like cuffs and collar don't match for Band of Horses' Ben Bridwell (center, next to Creighton Barrett, left, and Rob Hampton).

DAVID BELISLE

What kind of compensation can a band/artist expect from the range of advertising out there?

The value for a small band participating in an advertising campaign doesn't come from the compensation they are given but rather the exposure. Advertising is quickly becoming the new radio. For example, a small band without a label doesn't have a huge financial backing to market their band. Say they have an opportunity to place their music in a Ford commercial. They now have Ford's \$50 million media buy promoting their music to an audience they could have never reached on their own. It's especially not about the compensation with brands like Geico, Apple and Ford, who bands/artists want to be associated with. If a band can get \$10,000 to \$30,000 for a campaign using its music, great, but there is enough value in doing it for free to make it a no-brainer. That said, in most cases, a company will offer a fee to a band for its participation in an ad campaign.

What are a couple of success stories of small bands that get placed in big campaigns?

There are plenty of success stories of small bands getting placed in big campaigns. Two that we have recently been a part of that are worth mentioning are Röyksopp's placement of "Remind Me" for a Geico caveman spot and Band of Horses placements of "Is There a Ghost" and "The Funeral" for a pair of Ford spots. In the case of Band of Horses, the opportunity could not have come at a more perfect time. They were just getting ready to release their new album, *Cease to Begin* (Sub Pop, 2007), and we used the first single off of the album. We

have also done some recent work with the Red House Painters and White Buffalo.

When a band masters its record, is it important to also get mastered instrumentals?

Having full splits available is always helpful after the fact when putting together the final audio mix for a spot. It doesn't play any part in the decision-making process. Choosing the right songs is always about the content of the music. With that said, there are opportunities where instrumental tracks work best for a campaign and opportunities where full lyrical versions work best. Having mastered instrumentals makes your music more versatile and can double your opportunities.

What are some mistakes you've seen bands/artists make that have affected their chances at getting in the music-licensing game?

It is extremely important for a band/artist to surround itself with like-minded people. There have been instances where we have approached a band's manager with under-the-gun opportunities, and because of the manager's lack of knowledge or fear of the band's reaction—we've had to pass. Anyone representing a "small" band/artist should know his or her clients well enough to give the green light or say no almost immediately.

The worst approach by a band would be to send a CD without having a conversation about the contents of the CD. Music supervisors are solicited with music for hundreds of hopefuls everyday. A band has to set itself apart from the rest to get noticed. Get creative, and think up unconventional methods to build a rapport with the right people. 



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TECH SECTOR

NEW PRODUCTS

By Asher Fulero

PIONEER SVM-1000

AUDIO/VIDEO DJ MIXER

In *Remix*'s November '07 Digital DJ column, we hinted that Pioneer was working on the next big thing in live audio/video mixing. This is it. Simply crammed full of features, the Pioneer **SVM-1000** (\$5,999; www.pioneerprodj.com) audio/video DJ mixer is an attempt to tear down the walls between DJing and VJing. To begin with, each of the SVM-1000's four channels can operate as a video input (with or without audio) or an audio-only input. Pioneer's new Multiple Video Blending Technology with full A/V effects section is controlled via the gorgeous 11-inch LCD touch screen at the center (not multitouch, but it's still very cool). Effects include 12 AV Beat Effects that synchronize to bpm, 12 AV Touch Effects that allow Kaoss-like use of the touch screen to manipulate visuals directly as they appear on the panel and Text Effects that display and manipulate messages entered via the touch screen or a USB keyboard, all in sync to bpm. What's more, a JPEG viewer allows using effects, looping or mixing with as many as eight still images. The audio system uses 24-bit/96 kHz A/D conversion and operates internally at 32-bit DSP resolution. The extensive back panel offers video inputs and outputs for S-Video, component and more. More features include full MIDI integration, AV Sync, Video Trim and Video EQ controls, a talk-over microphone input and full crossfader section with curve adjust. The SVM-1000 is an exciting new tool in the fight to help creative people cross the boundaries of media.



DYNAUDIO AIR 12

SMART MONITORS WITH DSP

The latest in Dynaudio's line of "smart" monitoring systems is the **AIR 12** (\$TBA; www.dynaudioacoustics.com), a 200W biamped two-way near-field speaker with an 8-inch woofer and 1.1-inch soft-dome tweeter that includes built-in room-adapting DSP. The high-precision amp/driver system delivers all the well-known Dynaudio sonic fidelity for stereo or surround settings while an internal wireless network between speakers manages audio and control information, including an automatic level calibration system, Acoustic Placement Compensation, bass management, on-the-fly simulations, central level control, preset setup recall, speaker solo/mute and full control of all features via the included remote control. Each speaker contains integrated parametric EQ, offset delay and optional digital and/or analog inputs. When used in conjunction with more AIR units or a dedicated AIR Base Subwoofer, a single remote can control them all thanks to the inter-speaker network. Stop the endless speaker placement arguments and discover the ease of a smart monitoring system.

IMAGE LINE MAXIMUS

MULTIBAND MAXIMIZER PLUG-IN

In the seemingly never-ending loudness game, many players have come and gone. Image Line **Maximus** (\$189; www.image-line.com) aims to stick around a bit longer by combining multiband peak limiting and maximization with overall dynamic control, including compression, noise gating, expanding, ducking, de-essing and more. Four definable compression curves with brightly colored visual analysis offer separate settings for low, mid and high bands, as well as a fourth wide-band Master control. Each of the four bands sports custom look-ahead settings, two saturation types, parallel-style mix control and a stereo separation control for really dialing in the specifics of how each part interacts in the mix. Currently supported under only Windows XP/Vista as a VSTi 2.4 or FLStudio plug-in, Image Line says Mac OS X compatibility is coming soon. Whether on individual tracks or across the whole mix, Maximus can help you in the fight to be heard amidst the bevy of loud music out there.





M-AUDIO FAST TRACK ULTRA

USB 2.0 AUDIO/MIDI INTERFACE WITH DSP

Once again M-Audio raises the bar for mobile recording interfaces, this time by tying together the slightly faster-than-FireWire USB 2.0 protocol with dedicated DSP cores inside the hot new **Fast Track Ultra** (\$449.95; www.m-audio.com) 8-by-8 audio/MIDI interface. Offering complete 24-bit/96 kHz operation simultaneously on all of its six analog inputs and six analog outputs—and on the stereo S/PDIF connections—the real “ultra” element is the powerful MX Core software mixer, which uses the hardware’s eight DSP chips to offer near-zero latency and a deeply flexible routing matrix with a 16-by-8 mixer. That makes it easy to create multiple setups for all sorts of uses, including sending to the two stereo headphone outputs (each with dedicated volume knobs). And helping it earn the Fast Track name, the DSP chips also offer onboard reverb and delay programs for use on the headphone outputs, so you never have to choose between making processing power available or tracking dry. The four mic preamps on the front panel borrow M-Audio’s Octane technology for low noise and high gain, and come complete with 48V phantom power and a redesigned pull-out gain knob that activates a 20 dB pad. Fast Track Ultra is bus-powered via USB 2.0 and PC/Mac compatible for all ASIO and Core Audio-compliant applications.

MAREK DESIGNS KS3

TUBE CONDENSER MIC WITH AMP

The Marek Designs **KS3** (€3,350 [approx. \$4,900]; www.md-mics.com) is a hand-built condenser microphone with a built-in tube amplifier. Using a true pressure transducer for perfect impulse and phase response, the 1-inch diameter aluminum diaphragm uses an Omnidirectional polar pattern with a slight proximity effect and a small-but-even gain-curve rise above 2 kHz. Offering both line- and microphone-level outputs, the use of an outboard mic preamp is entirely possible but not necessary; the line-level output can happily drive recording devices or A/D converters as far as needed without receiving a helping hand. Superlow self-noise and a wide dynamic range make it great for just about any instrument in the orchestra, and the ability to accept sound-pressure levels as high as 173 dB makes it amplifier- or drum kit-friendly. Said to be surprisingly warm and 3-D, the units are made within Marek’s labs in Germany using hand-selected NOS (new old-stock) tubes and milled high-grade steel. The KS3 also comes with an integrated shockmount for minimizing handling and environment noise.



DAVE SMITH INSTRUMENTS PROPHET '08

8-NOTE POLYPHONIC ANALOG SYNTHSIZER

Heavy synth heads, start your drooling now. With the original Prophet-5 designer (Sequential Circuits founder Dave Smith) at the helm, the DSI **Prophet '08** (\$2,199; www.davesmithinstruments.com) is a fully future-ized version of Sequential’s classic analog beast that boasts its own 100-percent analog signal path with eight notes of polyphony, each with two VCOs and a Curtis lowpass filter. The five-octave keyboard has semiweighted action with Velocity and Aftertouch (lacking in the original), a spring-loaded pitch wheel and an assignable mod wheel. The 16-by-4 gated sequencer, powerful arpeggiator, three envelope generators (ENV3 can loop) and four LFOs offer a multitude of ways to animate sounds. MIDI In, Out, Thru and Poly Chain are all offered on the rear, as are sustain pedal and CV/expression pedal inputs, a headphone output and a pair of stereo 1/4-inch outputs for sending patch layers to separate places. With a sound clearly resembling the original, the Prophet '08 offers significantly more control and power, and will certainly be one of the collector’s pieces of the year.





CME M-KEY

PORTABLE USB MIDI KEYBOARD

At only 2.2 inches tall, the CME **M-Key** (\$100; www.cme-pro.com) MIDI keyboard is possibly the thinnest USB bus-powered keyboard to offer full-size, full-action keys. Based on the popular ringtone-making keyboard the U-Key, the M-Key loses the LED display, the ringtone sound module, the trigger pads, the knob controllers, the U-CTRL and the speaker. In fact, the only things to remain are the 49 Velocity-sensitive keys and flexible joystick controller. Simple MIDI I/O, two pedal connections and a single USB port appear on the back (the device is class-compliant with Windows XP and Mac OS X), and the whole package is designed to work fluidly and in a straightforward way without a lot of setup. The M-Key also ships with the CME MusicPack, which contains free versions of Magix Samplitude SE, Arturia Analog Factory SE, Waldorf Edition LE, Keytosound Remedy VST and more, for a package that's ready to provide portable-yet-playable control for players on the move.



OLYMPUS LS-10

PORTABLE LINEAR PCM RECORDER

Better known for its cameras, Olympus also has made handheld audio recorders for a while now, and the new **LS-10** (\$399; www.olympusamerica.com) brings much of that knowledge to the crowded field of pro-audio contenders. The palm-size aluminum unit can record audio through its built-in stereo microphones or via the 1/8-inch Mic In and Line In jacks, all in MP3, WMA or high-resolution 24-bit/96 kHz WAV. Audio records either to the built-in 2 GB flash memory or to the removable SD card slot on the side. Anything in the internal memory or on the SD card may be played back through the built-in stereo speakers on the back or the 1/8-inch headphone jack. You can transfer audio to and from a computer via USB, and the package comes bundled with Cubase LE. A Record Level knob, tripod socket on the bottom and side buttons for mic sensitivity and auto gain control (AGC) all show off how the design is optimized for active users who want flexibility and fidelity in a portable recorder.

PRESONUS ADL 700

HIGH-GAIN CLASS A TUBE CHANNEL STRIP

The PreSonus **ADL 700** (\$TBA; www.presonus.com) marks the company's second "partnership product" designed by Anthony DeMaria but manufactured by PreSonus. Taking one of the channels from the popular ADL 600 2-channel tube preamplifier (which features a balanced input transformer, three vacuum tubes with 600V power rails and no op-amps or integrated circuits), the single-channel ADL 700 adds a discrete FET-based VCA compressor and a discrete Class A 4-band parametric EQ to the preamp's high-gain architecture. The Preamp section features instrument-, line- and mic-level inputs with selectable impedance, as well as gain, pad, phase and lowpass filter controls; the compressor provides variable threshold, ratio, attack, release and gain. The EQ has a switchable high/low Q control for each band, and there is a large VU meter in the center that can display either input level or compression amount. If you're looking for a high-quality channel strip to record those important tracks, the ADL 700 is a good bet.



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THE CHAIN GANG > Live 7's amazing new Drum Rack stores Chains on an MPC-style drum pad interface. Chains can hold any number of instruments, effects, sounds or nested racks.

ABLETON LIVE 7 SUITE

LIVE KICKS DOWN THE DOOR TO THE BIG BOYS' CLUB FOR DAWS

BY ASHER FULERO

> Ableton has really shown itself to be, well, able. Those übercreative and hard-working Germans are back with the revamped and re-energized Live 7 Suite, which keeps Live on the cutting edge of technological advancement and user demand without sacrificing its intuitive nature and flexibility. As with previous versions, Ableton ran a massive beta testing campaign that enlisted enthusiasts to fine-tune what was already a major upgrade to Live's core. With Live 7, Ableton rebuts any naysayers' complaints about fidelity, accuracy or other qualitative points in previous versions. With a revamped audio engine, improved MIDI timing, jitter reduction, dithering and 64-bit summing, Live 7 is all about sound quality; every user should notice a marked increase in clarity, even with old sessions. Also on hand are some hot new instruments, updated devices, expanded sound banks and other user-requested features.

I tested Live 7 Suite—which includes Live 7; the Operator, Sampler, Analog, Electric and Tension instruments; and the Essential Instrument Collection 2 (EIC2), Session Drums and Drum Machines sound libraries—on a MacBook Pro 2.2 GHz Intel Core Duo with 2 GB of RAM running OS 10.4.10. Many users have reported speed gains of up to 10 percent using the newer OS 10.5 Leopard, and Live 7 is also compatible with Windows XP and Vista. Installation was a snap; once the installer was complete, it auto-checked Ableton's Website for updates and took me directly to the download page for version 7.0.1. Authentication is achieved through the use of a challenge/response system.

GET THE FACTS ON YOUR AUDIO

The name of the game in Live 7 is accuracy. Ableton spent much of its upgrade efforts improving the audio and MIDI engines. In the process, the company carefully tested and analyzed Live's fundamental performance. This data is presented in the new audio and MIDI "fact sheets" delineating which actions are "neutral operations" (causing absolutely no change in the data) and which are not. Although Live's internal audio system operates at 32-bit resolution, the new engine uses double-precision 64-bit summing at all points where signals are mixed, offering nearly neutral operation at the Master track, all clip/return track inputs and summing points inside Racks. Other verifiably neutral operations (zero change to the incoming signal) include un-dithered rendering to disk at 32 bits, un-stretched warping (where Warp is on but the clip's bpm matches the session's), bypassed effects, internal signal routing and split clips.

The included MIDI fact sheet is enlightening. Ableton clearly put a lot of effort into improving the overall timing accuracy and reducing Live's internal jitter. I definitely noticed a subjectively tighter feel when auditioning MIDI clips from version 6, and virtual instruments tracked more tightly even with complex automation. Also, MIDI input recording to clips is more accurate, especially at high levels of CPU usage. Live 7's new memory management scheme seems to be

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ABLETON LIVE 7 SUITE > \$799
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\$339 (UPGRADE)
ABLETON LIVE 7 > \$499
(DOWNLOAD), \$599 (BOX),
\$119 (UPGRADE)

Pros: Improved audio and MIDI engines with overall sonic improvements throughout the program. Great new instruments and devices greatly expand the available palette. Session Drums and Drum Machines sound great.

Cons: Tension doesn't sound very realistic. No brick-wall limiter device. No 64-bit mode for Compressor. Needs multitake management solution.

Contact: www.ableton.com

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Mac: G4, G5, or Intel (recommended); 512 MB RAM (1 GB recommended); OS 10.3.9 or later

PC: 1.5 GHz; 512 MB RAM (1 GB recommended); Windows XP/Vista

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successful as well; I definitely noticed complex Sampler banks loading faster than before, patch changes happening in less time and each virtual instrument instance tapping the processor a little less than in version 6.

SLICE IT AND PUT IT ON THE RACK

The one new instrument included with the Live 7 basic install is the incredible Drum Rack, a device so powerful it deserves its own review. Initially resembling an MPC-style interface with 16 “pads” arranged in a square, it can get a lot more intense. Each pad is really a Chain that can hold any number of instruments, effects, presets or even whole, nested Racks. Running vertically along the right-hand side of the pads, a small graphic overview shows all 128 MIDI notes, each representing its associated pad. Click anywhere on the overview to edit nearby pads; the handy overview uses gray dots for empty slots and black dots for those in use—very easy to comprehend at a glance. With 128 Chains in a Drum Rack and infinite nesting possibilities, there is no limit to the potential complexity.

Each Drum Rack has an internal mixing system with volume, pan, mute/solo, MIDI input filtering, output assign, Choke Groups and even internal effects sends for each Chain. In Live’s Session view, a Drum Rack’s track can “open” to reveal a vertical track for each Chain. Chains can be hot-swapped from others in the Library, and there is a handy Auto-Select that keeps currently active chains visible for editing amid the masses. Dragging one pad onto another will swap Chains with that pad directly—fun for moving samples around while a MIDI drum loop plays. You can drop Clips from the Session view, Arrangement view or the browser onto a pad; Ableton will create a Simpler instrument on that Chain and insert the Clip into it, ready to be triggered. Dragging multiple samples will create a Pad Chain with a Simpler instrument for each.

Live 7’s new Slicing feature works similarly to Reason’s Dr.Rex device; it automatically divides a sample into smaller chunks in a Simpler and then drops each onto a different Pad inside a Drum Rack. Samples may be sliced according to a variety of beat resolutions or according to the Clip’s Warp Markers (if there are any). Once sliced and auto-placed, Ableton creates a MIDI clip for the track that is loaded with chromatically ascending MIDI notes; when triggered, it will play back the original Clip sounding intact. But once you start to move those notes around or replay them with a MIDI controller, the rules change completely. Beat producers and remixers, now is the time to rejoice.

EMULATION IS FLATTERY

Ableton connected with physical modeling trailblazers Applied Acoustics Systems (AAS) to translate some of AAS’ best work into three powerful new emulation-based instruments for Live: Analog, Electric and Tension. Each is sold separately as an add-on to Live 7 for \$159 each or are all included in the Live 7 Suite.

Analog is a detailed classic synth emulation based on a physical model of subtractive synthesis techniques—mathematical equations describing how physical circuits function. It uses no samples or wavetables, which creates an alias-free atmosphere; sweeps of all kinds sound flawless and clean. Two oscillators, a noise generator, two multimode filters routed to two amplifiers with ADSR envelopes for each, two LFOs and a rich



CHARTED TERRITORY >

In this Live 7 Session view, the new Spectrum real-time frequency analyzer is shown in its enlarged view, with the spectral graph broken out from the device window below.

Global section make Analog ripe for synth heads. I was truly impressed with its level of clarity and real-sounding flavor, and I’m already going to it first for synth sounds over Operator or even my favorite VSTi synths. It’s my favorite of the three emulator instruments, thanks to its great sound, flexible architecture and fast interface.

Electric is a vintage electric piano emulator that again uses no samples or wavetables, relying on algorithmic reproductions of the physical behaviors of classic EPs. As someone with a lot of electric piano experience, I was excited to try Electric, and it didn’t disappoint. The level of detail is impressive, with rich and adjustable models including Mallet, Tine and Damper settings; Magnetic Coil Pickup types; and Tuning/Voicing details. When played alone, it was slightly less engrossing than some sample-based EPs, but the advantages of a sample-free instrument undeniably make up for that: artifact-free tone-switching and deeply adjustable tone with reactivity well beyond what sampling can do. From classic Rhodes and Wurlitzer sounds to outlandish, unheard-of bastardizations, Electric is flexible, fun and sounds great in a mix.

Tension is the third emulator in the trio, dedicated to the re-creation of string instruments. With adjustable Excitators (two types of hammers, a pick or a bow), a String modeler, fret/finger interaction modeling, a Damper model and a modeled Soundboard with adjustable types and size, Tension should be capable of extremely realistic results. However, I thought it was the least successful of the three in this area and not nearly as realistic as Logic Studio’s similar Structure instrument. Almost every preset patch sounded more like a synthesizer than the real thing, and I would choose Ableton’s EIC2 string patches over Tension. However, for creating otherworldly or bizarre sounds, Tension takes the cake, with its ability to create unique attacks and sometimes unpredictable results that sound beautiful and haunting.

FREQUENCY SEE, FREQUENCY DO

In keeping with the sonic accuracy improvements, Live 7 features Spectrum, a new real-time frequency grapher for measuring and analyzing incoming audio. Settings that balance graph resolution with CPU usage help Spectrum fit happily into the Ableton scheme. You can toggle the graph into a larger view above the Devices, and when you roll your mouse over the graph, a handy position readout pops up. You can also zoom the view by clicking-and-dragging from the graph’s left-hand legend. For precision mixing, Ableton couldn’t have offered a better tool.

EQ Eight, Live’s high-precision 8-band parametric EQ, features an expanded layout and a new 64-bit Hi-Quality mode that taxes the CPU a bit more but improves the

sound quality even further—most noticeably at low frequencies or when working at high sampling rates.

Dynamic control has increased with the new-and-improved Compressor. Now with a graphical visualization of the current settings, Compressor has the previous feed-forward models (making it backward compatible with old settings), as well as a new vintage-style Feedback model and three EF (envelope follower) modes: Peak, RMS and Opto, each offering a slightly different dynamic quality. The powerful new sidechain is also the kind of quality enhancement that defines Live 7, making it possible to perform many dynamically interactive effects that were previously impossible in Live. Sidechain monitoring, detailed input filtering and Pre/Post options make Compressor very flexible.

Sidechaining is also available for the Gate and Auto-Filter—great for creating all sorts of internal triggering effects. Also, the same 64-bit High Quality modes on the EQ Eight appear on the Dynamic Tube, Saturator and Operator synth (in Live 7 Suite or as an add-on). The new External Instrument and External Effect devices allow routing to and from external units with detailed gain, phase and latency controls (in milliseconds or samples), which helps integrate Live into more complex studios.

GIVE THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT

Addressing users’ needs, Ableton implemented several new functions in Live 7. Powerful Dithering options in the Render menu offer three varieties of POW-r algorithms. Live now supports time-signature changes, which are automatable in the Arrangement view like Markers or in the Session view via scene trigger labeling. The excruciatingly awesome Tempo Nudge gently adjusts the session bpm up or down momentarily to help manually sync Live to an external source on the fly—priceless for DJs. The new Multi-Lane automation lets you simultaneously view several automation curves for a single track. Live 7 also supports REX files, opening it up to masses of sound banks with the ability to use REX metadata for warping. Also, Live’s rendering abilities have been expanded to include video export for saving your warped or edited video clips.

Ableton Live 7 Suite admirably extends what was already one of the production world’s most groundbreaking tools. By staying abreast of current trends, in cahoots with the most talented people and in constant dialog with its users, Ableton has created the best Live yet and secured a key place in the industry. 



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YOU'RE MY No. 1 > The ReMote SL Compact's Speed Dial allows you to turn any software knob or fader that the mouse is currently resting on when Automap is enabled.



THE READ-OUT > A two-line LCD and two corresponding rows of eight buttons each make choosing Automap templates and parameters easy.

NOVATION REMOTE 25SL COMPACT

INTELLIGENT, SCALED-DOWN USB MIDI KEYBOARD IS AUTO-MOBILE

BY ASHER FULERO

> While the fairly recent and successful Novation ReMote Zero SL control surface provided the the revolutionary Automapping and cool blue LCD strips of the popular ReMote SL keyboards without the keys, demand was still there for a smaller ReMote SL keyboard. Enter the newest member of the line, the ReMote 25SL Compact (also available as the 49-key 49SL Compact). Delivering the Automap functionality in a smaller frame, the SL Compact gently refines the interface while adding a few new features. While Automapping can be a bit clunky sometimes, once you get the hang of it you can really save time and go from turning knobs with your mouse to turning real knobs without much hassle. I tested the SL Compact with a MacBook Pro 2.33 GHz running OS 10.4.10 using Ableton Live 6, Digidesign Pro Tools M-Powered 7.3 and Propellerhead Reason 4. Novation frequently updates templates, so check the company's Website for the most current installers.

BIGGIE SMALLER

The SL Compact packs a lot of interface into a small space. The Velocity- and Aftertouch-enabled keyboard with 25 synth-action keys is paired with the more traditional mod and pitch-bend wheels rather than the x-y pad

and joystick controllers that appeared on the original SL. The demand for wheels probably came from keyboardists because beat-oriented programmers would no doubt miss those more futuristic input styles. Whereas the original SL featured two sets of LCD info strips, the Compact has only one; however, fewer places to look actually felt more concise. The original SL's eight faders have been removed, and there are only half as many rotary encoders and assignable buttons (eight of each). But with the eight group/banks available below the LCD, you can access four banks of assignments, making a total of 32 knob and 32 button assignments per template (although Automap templates are basically infinite). The detented rotary encoders are not my favorite because it can be difficult to achieve precision at faster knob turns, but the combination of the multiple groups and the LCD that instantly tells you the new assignments and their values can more than make up for it in the time-saving department.

The eight drum pads that appeared on the original have been moved to the top right, making them much more playable as a group for quick-fingered drum programmers. However, Novation could work on the feel of the pads a bit; the rubber is thin and the pads have very little give. You can feel the circular sensor underneath

the pad, which is weird when playing quickly and makes it hard to aim your hits at fast speeds; my fingers sometimes slid off the rise in the center of the pad. The velocity curve is indeed adjustable, so it can definitely be adapted to work comfortably, although I still found them more useful in Ableton Live as scene-up/down triggers and tap-tempo controllers.

The transport controls have been moved to the left-hand side away from the keys, making them easier to

NOVATION

REMOTE 25SL COMPACT > \$399
(\$499 49SL COMPACT)

Pros: Automap functionality in a more portable size. Many quality preset templates. Eight encoder/button banks means lots of assignments available. Sweet Speed Dial function. Template Editor software.

Cons: Pads are rather thin and don't have enough give. No dedicated MIDI Thru. Slightly too large to fit into most laptop bags.

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access while playing. They provided fast and accurate response in all the programs I tried. The keyboard's rear-panel connectors remain basically the same as the original: MIDI I/O jacks (sadly, no MIDI Thru, although the MIDI Out can be configured to work that way), along with inputs for sustain and expression pedals.

There are 40 assignment templates in the SL Compact's memory; they can be swapped, updated and replaced, but not deleted. Numbers 1 through 33 are preprogrammed for popular programs such as DAWs and software instruments. Templates 35 and 36 are blank user sets for creating new templates from scratch (although any template can be overwritten and restored later from the installer), and templates 34 and 37 through 40 are used for Automap. Template access is superfast and can be achieved in one of two ways; either via the template-up/down buttons, which let you scroll through the list one-by-one, or by pressing both template-up/down buttons together, which displays all the templates 16 at a time on the LCD for choosing via the 16 buttons. The templates are quite thorough, and although I was able to test only a few of them on the software I have, I inevitably found every parameter I wanted. The new Automap 4.1 offers enhanced support and improved layouts for Nuendo, Cubase and Sonar, as well as a cool new Randomize feature that lets you find new sounds with a soft synth quickly (not to mention 64-bit Windows support, graphics-handling improvements and more). Another feature I appreciated is when you are paging through the list of templates, the larger DAWs (Live, Logic, Pro Tools and Reason) stay on the bottom row without changing while the top row pages through the rest of them; this makes it easy to get from whatever instrument template you might be using back to the template for your main DAW. Novation also just released a new template editor for the SL Compact that makes it a breeze to create and edit templates, move them back and forth from the computer, and save them for backup.

MAP-MATICS

Regarding Automapping in general: It all comes down to how you want to use it. While it can certainly save a lot of time in some settings, even when it's working at its smoothest you still have to physically mouse over to the device you want to control, select it and then look back to the keyboard to see which knobs are assigned to what. For quick access to a single command, it can be faster to just grab it with the mouse while your hands and eyes are focused on the mouse and screen. However, if you're looking to spend a moment with more than a few of a device's settings, there's no faster way to let go of the mouse and be able to dial it in with real knobs than to use Automap. Plus, it lets you remove the visual distraction and focus more intently on the sound, helping cure the "mixing-by-numbers" problem. That said, I enjoyed using Automap just for the sheer geeky satisfaction of seeing the new assignments come up on the screen as I used the mouse to move from device to device in Live 6 and Reason, but I wouldn't necessarily say that I worked faster overall.

One feature of note, however, is the amazing Speed Dial at the top left that, when Automap is working, allows you to turn any knob or fader that the mouse is



POWER COUPLE > The ReMOTE 25SL Compact can receive power either from the AC input or a powered USB port.

currently resting on. I was in disbelief when I first tried it, but I wasn't able to find a control in Pro Tools, Reason or Live that I couldn't turn simply by using the mouse to get to it and turning the Speed Dial. In fact, Novation alerted me that the Speed Dial actually works in any application on Mac or Windows, which is simply too cool. I was able to open and close windows, move them and change their size depending on where I put the mouse.

To make Automap work, you simply run the Automap Universal Server application in the background while the SL Compact is connected. Compatible virtual instruments will work right away, but the larger DAW/sequencer apps require a bit more attention. Each works a bit differently, but in particular you are forced to choose at install whether to place either the Pro Tools HUI or Digital Performer HUI template into slot 34. I'm not sure what you'd do if you wanted to use both, and there doesn't seem to be a solution for that at this point. Logic requires a manual socket connection from within Logic's Environment for Automap to work, and a helpful how-to guide appears on Novation's Website. Also of note, upon install Automap scans all your VST and Audio Units plug-ins and makes versions designed for Automapping, a process Novation calls Wrapping. The Wrapped plug-ins have a special Wrapper menu bar beneath the plug-in that allows each parameter to receive a custom name for display on the LCD, as well as a custom step-size and control range.

Automap was most successful for me within Ableton Live 6, which actually has its own live-mapping feature called MIDI Remote Mapping. Simply enabling the SL Compact port 2 in and out within the Live preferences completes the link, and I was impressed the first time it started working. Each of the tracks in Live appear from left to right across the LCD; if there are more than eight tracks, the page-up/down buttons scroll from group to group. Encoder bank A is assigned to the Live mixer's send A, bank B to pan and bank C to track volume for quick access to the main mix parameters. Bank D assigns itself to the last selected device and changes as you choose a new device. The four button banks are assigned to solo, mute and record-enable, with the fourth again reserved for other devices. Just as you can page through track banks within the main mix elements, you can also page through assignments in the "open" banks. Whichever device you select, every single parameter will be available on as many pages as necessary, even for devices with more buttons and knobs, making it possible to program pretty thoroughly within Live without ever having to assign anything. Wrapped plug-ins seemed to work fluidly, and I was surprised to not have to open the Automap-labeled versions to get results. Controls for the non-Wrapped versions appeared right away; however, to adjust things like display name or control range, you need to use the Wrapped version.

Setting up the SL Compact with Reason 4 was even easier; a simple scan from within Reason's preferences automatically set the SL Compact as the Master Keyboard, and it was ready to go. However, Automap only controls devices with a sequencer track. Because Reason 4 only auto-creates sequencer tracks for instruments (not for mixers, effects or mastering devices), you'll need to manually create one for each of those you want to control. Once you do, all the available controls will appear within the eight encoder or button banks (sometimes with several pages on each), ready for tweaking. Simply click on another sequencer track to select that device for Automap control; and, of course, any parameter can be adjusted immediately by using the mouse to get to it and turning the Speed Dial.

DESIGNED FOR DIGI

Setting up Pro Tools integration is a little different. Pro Tools interacts with the SL Compact via the HUI protocol rather than standard MIDI, so you need to open Pro Tools' Peripherals window (from the Setup menu), and under MIDI Controllers enable HUI on SL Compact port 2 (in and out). Don't forget to choose the Pro Tools template on the keyboard itself. The Pro Tools Automap template is also laid out a bit differently; encoder Bank D displays bank assignments on the LCD (pan 1, pan 2, level, solo, record and mute) for a quick reminder. Button Bank 4 selects a Plug-In mode that starts by letting you choose from inserts 1 through 5 on the currently selected track via the first five buttons. Once chosen, the controls for that plug-in will appear across the LCD with as many pages as necessary. Strangely, they are accessed not by the page-up/down buttons but by turning encoder 5. The transport controls worked well, and the Speed Dial worked on any parameter I tried. Overall, the Pro Tools integration was useful but maybe a little counterintuitive sometimes. For example, when viewing parameters for a plug-in, the button-bank info is listed on the top row and the encoder-bank info on the bottom row, backward from how the controllers themselves are laid out on the SL Compact. Also, when using the track volume bank, the SL Compact doesn't display the current fader value; you have to look at the screen to see what it is. Earlier versions of Automap had problems running multiple DAWs (such as Reason with Pro Tools), but Automap 4.1 addresses that and improves support for Cubase, Sonar, Nuendo and Logic.

Overall, the ReMOTE SL Compact is a well-designed, successfully streamlined and fully featured MIDI controller that would make a great addition to any portable programming-and-music rig, especially for a keyboard player. While Automap may take some getting used to, it offers unprecedented controllability and flexibility across programs. And once you get used to things already being assigned, you'll wonder how you ever lived without it. 

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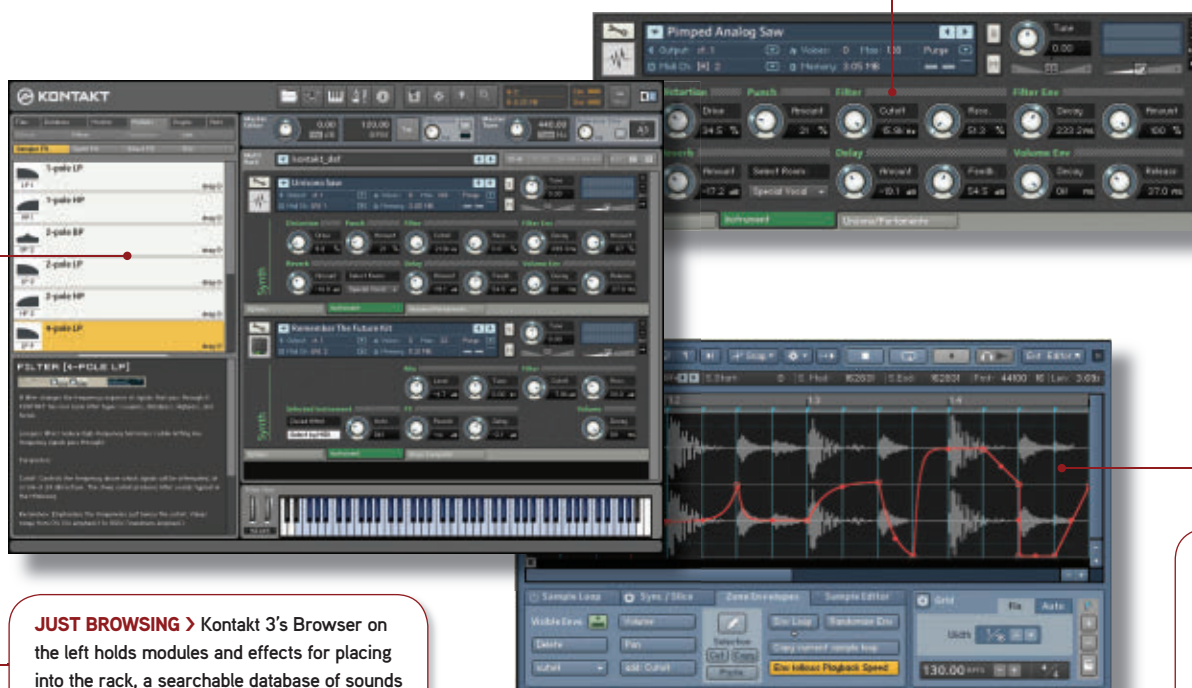
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KONTAKT FOR DUMMIES > Performance Views hide Kontakt's dizzying array of options and modules, providing a simplified means of tweaking instruments from a single panel.



JUST BROWSING > Kontakt 3's Browser on the left holds modules and effects for placing into the rack, a searchable database of sounds and instruments and much more.

IN THE ZONE > Here the Wave Editor has the grid enabled for 16th notes and a Zone Envelope controlling filter cutoff on a 4-pole highpass filter.

NATIVE INSTRUMENTS KONTAKT 3

SAMPLER PILES ON EXTRA EDITING AND TONS OF SOUNDS

BY JASON BLUM

Most people credit the birth of electronic music to early analog synths that hit the scene back in the '60s and '70s. I'm not one to dispute the fact that companies like Moog, ARP and Oberheim brought life to the electronic music scene with their legendary wares, but the real catalyst for the worldwide popularity of synth-driven music can be traced back to one instrument in particular—the sampler.

We've come a long way since the 8-bit beasts of the early '80s, whose grimy, lo-fi sound lent an unmistakable grit to early new-wave and hip-hop recordings. Those old workhorses with floppy drives and sub-megabyte memories were far too limited to do much more than play back a few notes or stutter short vocal ad-libs (anyone remember Stacey Q?), but since then, advances in technology have molded the sampler into a powerful stand-alone instrument. Software versions in particular have refined and extended samplers' capabilities with point-and-click interfaces, advanced time-stretching algorithms, complex signal routing and an unprecedented collection of sound-shaping tools that would have left old E-mu Emax and Ensoniq Mirage users scraping their jaws off the floor.

The field of modern samplers is crowded, but a few standouts have risen to the top, Native Instruments (NI) Kontakt among them. Since its original release in 2002, Kontakt has raised the bar for sampling, boasting a pristine audio engine coupled with a unique modular structure that offers outstanding signal routing and sonic flexibility. The third major iteration of this software continues to offer all of those benefits while filling in a few feature gaps and smoothing over some rough edges, polishing this gem of a sampler to a refined, sparkling luster.

BOX SHOT

Part of Kontakt 3's value is the massive sound library that comes on four DVDs. Installing the entire suite takes a while, so grab a cup of coffee and set aside about an hour just to get everything copied to your machine. A full installation takes more than 33 GB, so clear out the old and make way for the new.

A 239-page printed manual does a nice job of explaining the features in detail, with plenty of visual references and clear explanations of the more complicated tools. Frankly, it can be nice to tear away from the screen for a while to read the hard copy manual; of course, an identical PDF manual is included on the disc for quick searching.

NATIVE INSTRUMENTS

KONTAKT 3 > \$449 (\$169 UPDATE)

Pros: Flexible and powerful sampler second to none. Top-quality 33 GB sample library. Improved editor with wave grid and per-sample zone envelopes. Performance views offer easy parameter access. Powerful sample-search functions.

Cons: Powerful interface means difficult learning curve. Complex instruments are processor intensive.

Contact: www.native-instruments.com

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Mac: G4/1.4 GHz or Intel Core Duo/1.66 GHz; 1 GB RAM; OS 10.4.x; 34 GB free disk space for complete installation

PC: Pentium or Athlon/1.4 GHz; 1 GB RAM; Windows XP/Vista (32-bit); 34 GB free disk space for complete installation



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SOUND VAULT

One of Kontakt's most impressive features has been its massive sample library, and version 3 forks over a gargantuan 33 GB sound archive. The 1,000 bundled instruments run the gamut from organic acoustic and orchestral patches to synthetic pads and drum loops, and each one is meticulously multisampled and specifically programmed to take advantage of Kontakt's powerful sound engine.

Kontakt's library is split into six genre segments: Band, Orchestral, Vintage, World, Synth and Urban Beats. You can pick and choose from those during install to save some space. I found usable material in all six banks, so pick up an extra hard drive if you're low on space and go whole hog.

I've come to expect most bundled sounds to serve as mere placeholders to get you started while you shop around for proper sample libraries. Kontakt's library, however, is a pleasant surprise. There's no cut-rate material here—sonic quality on each and every sample is outstanding. All of the sounds are eminently playable and creatively inspiring, and I can easily see putting together an entire song using little more than Kontakt 3 and its bundled patches.

Kontakt's massive library stays in line with the ever-increasing size of sample libraries in general. While it can be inspiring to have tons of quality raw material at hand, it's getting harder to make heads or tails of any of it, and nothing kills the mood faster than putting a hot track on hold to sift through thousands of samples in

search of that perfect sound. As we fill our drives with more material, picking the needle out of the haystack is becoming a serious problem.

However, Kontakt neatly sidesteps that with its Quick Search tool. Built into Kontakt's file browser, the Quick Search bar works a lot like Windows Vista's built-in search function. Typing any part of a file name pulls up all matches in real time; for example, if you're looking for piano patches, typing "piano" into Quick Search brings up all of Kontakt's patches with "piano" in the name from everywhere in the library. You can search multis, banks, instruments and even individual samples, so zeroing in on exactly what you're looking for—if you're a meticulous labeler—is easier than ever.

CONDENSER

Kontakt's powerful sound engine offers plenty of tweakability—so much, in fact, that the near-limitless possibilities can be rather daunting when you're looking to just sit down and bang out some music. Complex instruments can contain multiple modules with a dizzying array of knobs, so it's sometimes rough to figure out simple tasks such as tweaking filters or adjusting envelopes. Version 3 deals with much of that confusion by including a handy Performance View, a quick-access panel for each instrument in the Kontakt library that puts a pretty face on this powerhouse sampler.

Think of each instrument's Performance View as its own homepage. The view can contain any collection of knobs and sliders from modules the instrument

uses, aggregating them in one place for quick and easy control. If you run out of space—or want to categorize groups of controls—you can add as many as five separate pages of controls, easily accessed by a convenient row of tabs arrayed along the bottom of the window.

Keep in mind that only the library shipping with Kontakt is preprogrammed with Performance Views for each instrument. Patches converted from other sampler formats such as Akai or Roland won't have Views preconfigured. However, there's a way to create Performance Views—if you have the fortitude to learn Kontakt's slightly daunting scripting language.

UNDER THE HOOD

While scripting sounds more akin to systems administration than songwriting, Kontakt's programming language isn't as scary as it looks, and it significantly extends Kontakt's already powerful capability by letting you modify its inner workings. While scripting isn't new to Kontakt 3, it is a key element that sets Kontakt apart from other samplers.

Scripting allows you to pop the hood on Kontakt's powerful engine and extend it to suit your precise needs. Need an arpeggiator? Program one yourself. Feel like modifying a module's signal flow or slapping on a few extra control knobs? No problem, just tweak the existing code and whip up whatever you need. The 88-page PDF scripting manual is an excellent reference and has a great plain-English tutorial to walk newcomers through some simple scripting.

16:42:11

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If that all sounds like way too much, don't worry. You don't need to write a single line of code to harness Kontakt's power. However, if you have the time and a little dedication, you can use scripting to make Kontakt do just about anything you can imagine. There's also a worldwide community of Kontakt coders out there who freely share scripts and tips. Check out the Kontakt User Library on Native Instruments' site for just a taste of what you can do with Kontakt's scripting.

HOME SLICING

One of the most exciting (and long overdue) features in Kontakt 3 is the expanded Wave Editor. Working with raw sample material in Kontakt has never been easier thanks to a number of upgrades like the wave grid, which lets you edit samples in rhythmic slices much like Steinberg's venerable Recycle. The grid can be manually set to incoming tempo and associated musical intervals such as quarter or 16th notes, or it can run in automatic mode, where you simply select a minimum slice length and let Kontakt insert grid markers at rhythmically significant points. In practice, Manual mode worked great for electronic drum loops, but transient detection in Auto mode was spot-on and offered tighter results for looser acoustic loops.

Kontakt's new destructive editing tools can trim and polish each slice in the wave grid. Rather than shuffling samples off to a third-party editor to trim silence, reverse a segment, etc., you can do many such tasks inside the sampler's edit window. In fact, Kontakt 3 has

the ability to perform all of the basic cut, crop, reverse, normalize, fade and other destructive operations you'll need to get samples cleaned up. Don't let "destructive" scare you, either; you can use the editor's 20 levels of undo/redo if you make a mistake.

The real stars of the new Wave Editor are the Zone Envelopes, which allow you to apply any of Kontakt's modulators to individual samples within an instrument. The Zone Envelopes pane in the Wave Editor allows you to access as many as 16 modulation parameters, including volume, pan, tune, etc. and draw them directly into the sample window. If the wave grid is engaged, edits snap to the nearest grid marker, ensuring all of the events you add are synced to the master tempo. There's even a handy tool that creates random envelopes if you run out of creative juice.

Zone Envelopes' level of control is unprecedented—a major advancement in Kontakt's toolkit that opens a whole new realm of possibilities for tempo-synced instruments. Combining the power of the wave grid with Zone Envelopes means individual slices in a drum loop, for example, can be manipulated separately from the rest of the sample; you can ramp up the volume on a snare's reverb tail, for example, or highpass kick drums while leaving the rest of the sample untouched. The potential to create complex rhythmic soundscapes is also limitless when you begin layering samples with separate Zone Envelopes into a single Kontakt instrument. A single note can trigger multiple samples, each with its own rhythmic modulation, potentially unleashing pulsating, evolving

pads or throbbing lead tones. The possibilities are truly exciting, and I'm looking forward to seeing how Kontakt's sound-design community handles them.

3, 2, 1, KONTAKT

Having followed Kontakt closely since its debut back in 2002, I'm pleased with the refinements NI has made over the years. The first version of Kontakt sported a revolutionary (if somewhat confusing) interface, and Kontakt 3 smoothes over some of the rough edges in that department, bringing a more elegant look to the table along with robust searching, convenient tools and a split-rack interface motif that keeps things organized. Sonically, things are very much the same as Kontakt 2, but the wave editor's direct-draw modulation tool, destructive editing options and waveform grid are powerful new additions for sound designers who regularly create patches from scratch.

If you're new to sampling and are looking to get your foot in the door with powerful software, Kontakt remains an ideal choice despite its steeper-than-average learning curve. Its quality is second to none; the 33 GB library will keep you supplied with fresh sonic stimulation for quite some time, and the upgraded wave editor provides fertile soil for shaping samples. Version 1 users have plenty of reasons to upgrade, while sound designers and version 2 users with vast sample libraries will appreciate the usability improvements in Kontakt 3. All in all, Kontakt 3 is a worthy purchase, whether you're stepping up or starting fresh. 



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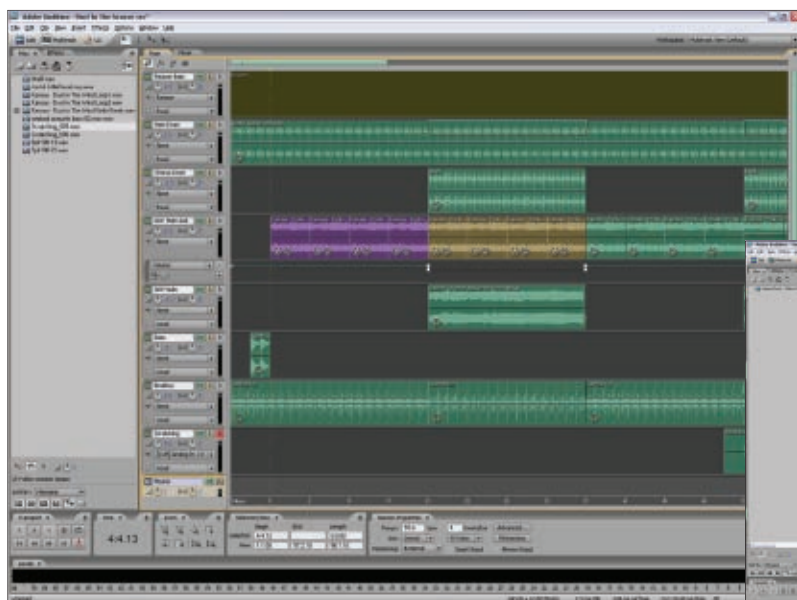
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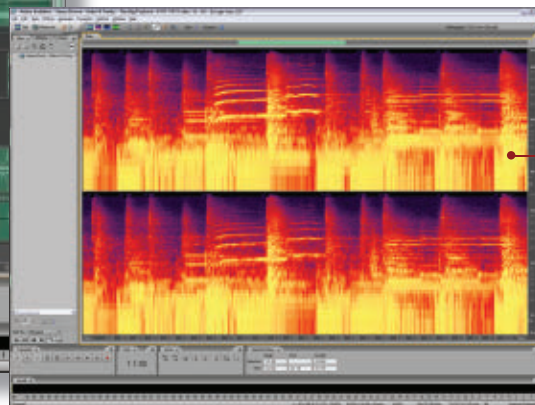
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SUPER FREQ-Y, YOW > Audition 3's Spectral Frequency tool uses color variation to map out the frequencies of an audio file and lets you edit and remove noise from only certain frequencies.



ADOBE AUDITION 3

AUDIO WORKSTATION CASTS NEW TOOLS AND MIDI AS KEY PLAYERS

BY ROBIN SMITH

> Touted as an "all-in-one toolset," Adobe Audition 3 (Windows-only) provides recording, mixing, editing and mastering of audio files and includes some basic video integration. Version 3 has undergone considerable "under-the-hood" work to enhance performance and responsiveness. Audition is now fully multicore compatible, splitting up processing among multiple cores. Improvements in disk I/O buffering have made read/write operations faster and both the mix architecture and effects handling are more efficient. I performed testing on a 2.13 GHz dual-core PC running Windows XP SP2 and driving an M-Audio Delta 66 soundcard.

Adobe purchased Syntrillium Cool Edit Pro in 2003 and renamed it Audition. In 2006, the powerhouse Audition 2 included ASIO driver support, a redesigned GUI that broke from the standard Windows look, VST support and improved mastering tools and effects. Many of the time-based effects in Audition use the Radius time-stretching/pitch-shifting engine from iZotope, a top-shelf algorithm also used by Sony, Cakewalk and Digidesign.

Audition requires about 500 MB of hard-disk space, and a 5 GB Loopology DVD with more than 5,000 bass, drum and guitar loops covering many genres is included. The caliber of this sample collection impressed me, and the retail box also includes an excellent 322-page user guide with detailed instructions and tips for using Audition 3's myriad features. Once installed, the software requires activation over the Internet or phone.

DRESSING THE PART

Audition has been my wave editor of choice since the Cool Edit days; however, I have preferred Sony Acid Pro for multi-tracking. Audition's Adobe-specific interface is notably more compact and appealing than the standard Windows GUI, and it allows for efficient and attractive themed layouts. Multiple color schemes are provided, and you can save custom color schemes. The interface is clean and uncluttered, although many tools you may frequently access end up buried under multilevel menus or contextual menus. Each section of the GUI is actually a dock-able, float-able, tab-able and resizable window panel; the active panel is highlighted with an orange margin. You can save custom layouts as well.

Audition 3's "workspaces" concept can optimize the layout to match the task at hand. The three main workspaces are Edit, Multitrack and CD; however, variations are provided, including optimized dual-monitor setups. You can create and save your own custom workspaces. When composing a song, I frequently flipped back and forth between the Edit and Multitrack views. Audition lets you have separate audio soundcard settings for its Edit View, Multitrack View and Surround Encoder, so you can further optimize your setup based on your tasks and preferred equipment. Unlike applications such as Acid Pro, which cram many panels into a single crowded interface, the Workspace

ADOBE SYSTEMS INCORPORATED

AUDITION 3 > \$349
(\$99 UPGRADE)

Pros: Powerful all-in-one audio solution. Attractive and flexible interface. Free Loopology DVD and printed manual. Value for the dollar.

Cons: Rather clunky multitake recording compared to other programs. Confusing redundancy in the choice of effects. Some erratic ReWire performance.

Contact: www.adobe.com/products/audition

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

PC: P3, P4 or Centrino; 512 MB RAM (1 GB recommended); Windows XP Pro/XP SP2/Vista; soundcard with DirectSound or ASIO drivers (multitrack ASIO soundcard recommended)

approach provides one of the best, most flexible interfaces of any audio app I have used.

MONOLOGUE: THE EDIT VIEW

In the Edit View, the Waveform Display is the large primary panel. Transport, Time, Zoom and Selection controls sit along the bottom with File and Effects tabs showing in a left-hand column. The default layout works well, and the waveform editor is straightforward to use, with the mouse scroll wheel performing multiple zooming duties depending on where you place the pointer. The display update rate is markedly improved over version 2.

The Import dialog features a selectable Auto Play preview and a File Information viewer that shows file type, uncompressed size, parameters and length, making selecting files easier. It would be nice to see some of that functionality integrated into the File tab as well.

Changes made in Edit View are destructive, but Audition supports multilevel undo. Audition 3's waveform editor usability enhancements include on-clip fade handles and on-clip gain control that allow quick visual access to common tools. While viewing the start or end of a waveform, small boxes appear that let you apply quick fades that show their adjustable curves in real time on the waveform. However, as with many of Audition features (file close, trim and effects), they are available only when playback is stopped.

Audition 3's dizzying and slightly confusing array of more than 50 effects are grouped by category or by type (real time, process or multitrack), making finding the effect you want a little easier. Abundant effects would generally be desirable; however, many of the effects in Audition are seemingly redundant, partially because Audition includes both process effects and VST effects, many with similar or identical names.

Process effects use the standard Windows GUI and generally have less user-friendly interfaces; VST effects use the new GUI with more visually oriented dialogs—you edit parameters with sliders instead of value boxes. Only VST effects are available in both the Multitrack and Edit views, but in Edit mode you cannot apply them non-destructively in real-time or automate them.

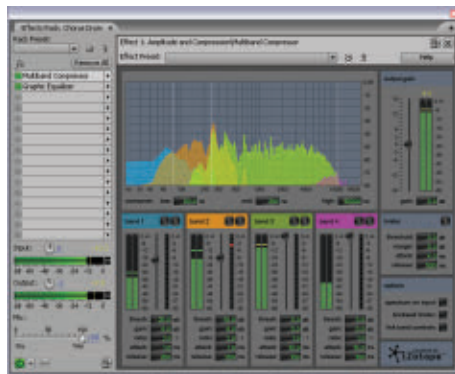
Effect dialog boxes show you effect parameters and let you preview the effect before applying it. Most effects provide multiple presets with descriptive labels, and Audition 3 applies the effects faster than the occasionally sluggish version 2. It also introduces some great new effects: Convolution Reverb, which simulates acoustic spaces from coat closets to concert halls; Analog Delay, which simulates vintage hardware delays; and Guitar Suite, which has compression, distortion, filter and a Box Modeler optimized for guitar tracks.

The Waveform display can toggle into the new Top/Tail View that allows you to zoom in to the start and end of an audio file, while still seeing the entire clip in a central window with the zoomed top and tail highlighted. That's quite handy because you have zoom control over all three panes and can edit a section of audio while viewing it simultaneously at two different zoom levels.

Three spectral-editing views have been enhanced in Audition 3: Spectral Frequency, Spectral Pan and Spectral Phase. Spectral Frequency shows the frequency of the signal on the vertical axis with the amplitude represented by color variation, and you can edit and/or apply effects

to only select frequencies of an audio file—a powerful feature. Spectral Frequency is great for cleaning up clicks, pops and unwanted noises. Using the Marquee or Lasso tools, you can highlight specific frequencies; or, using the new Effects Paintbrush, you can “stroke” and define the intensity of the effect—similar to Photoshop editing tools. After playing with the Paintbrush for a short while, I like it, and it works very well. The new Spot Healing Brush does a superb job of auto healing selected frequencies of an audio file.

Spectral Pan shows the pan position of every frequency along the vertical axis with brighter colors representing higher amplitude at the given position. In the Spectral Phase Display, the vertical axis shows the amplitude of the audio that exists at a given phase as ± 180 degrees. Both displays now include the Marquee tool for easy visual isolation and editing of any portion of audio based on time, frequency, pan and phase.



SFX > Audition uses some outstanding Izotope effects.

Spectral Pan and Phase were less useful than Spectral Frequency, but for certain tasks, they're quite powerful.

Audition 3's large collection of editing tools has many improved automated tools. Adaptive Noise Reduction can be tweaked to clean up audio when you can't isolate a place in the waveform from which to take a noise profile. Also, the Automatic Phase Correction calculates the optimal delay to align the channels of a stereo waveform. Both tools perform impressively.

ENSEMBLE CAST: THE MULTITRACK VIEW

In Multitrack View, the Main tab represents each track as a horizontal waveform, and the Mixer tab shows fader channel strips with Effects, Routing and EQ sections. Multitrack “songs” are stored by default as SES (session) files, which will reopen all related audio files and ReWire slave apps (if used). Unless you're using only WAV files, it takes considerable time to open a session; Audition seems to reprocess each file, displaying multiple progress bars as the files open. A fairly simple 10-track session typically took more than 10 seconds to complete loading—while not that long, it is notably slower than a similar session in Acid 6. Audition 3 also allows multitrack sessions to be stored in XML format for sharing with other applications.

The Multitrack View lets you arrange multiple audio clips on one track. You can create virtually unlimited tracks restricted only by disk space and processing power. Some usability enhancements include grouping clips together both within and across tracks, so you can

move them as a batch and perform simple edits like trims and fades en masse. The new on-clip fade handles even apply identically to grouped clips. Audition 3 applies automatic but adjustable crossfades when any clips overlap, and when moved, clips snap-align to the start/end of other clips, making it easier to arrange quickly and precisely.

Audition 3 supports automation of both clips and tracks. Clip envelopes allow you to automate clip volume and pan settings per clip, whereas Track envelopes let you automate almost anything over time; each track can have multiple automation lanes. Furthermore, you can record automation settings to a track envelope while playing back your session back in real time. Volume and pan automations are reflected in the Mixer interface. You can also create bus tracks to combine the outputs of several audio tracks and collectively apply effects, EQ and automation.

Effects and edits performed in Multitrack View are nondestructive, allowing you to experiment easily. The most effective way to work with effects in Multitrack is the Effects Rack, a pop-up window that contains slots for stacking multiple effects and adjusting the wet/dry mix. Its right-hand section lets you control the effect parameters and reuses the dialog box layout from Edit view. You can apply as many as 16 effects to each audio and bus track and adjust them on the fly, as well as save presets.

Audition 3's looping controls a little bit difficult. While you have the ability to define audio files as loops, such features are hidden away in a contextual menu. Setting a newly created audio clip to loop and to match the session tempo requires multiple clicks and is more complicated than it could be.

Audition features the ability to record multiple takes; however, the interface for doing so is rather clunky, and the end result is difficult to work with compared to multitrack features in Acid Pro or Propellerhead Reason.

OUTSIDE INFLUENCE

Audition 1.5 introduced ReWire support; ReWired apps consume a track in Multitrack View. During testing, I ReWired a Reason 4 Thor synth into a song, but despite any amount of tweaking, I couldn't get the latency low enough to record/playback the bass line in real time. The lag was longer than 1 second. After working with Adobe Tech Support, it appears the bug may be related to some specific VST EQ effects. Ultimately I removed the offending effects, recorded the bass line and then re-added the effects with ReWire playback unaffected.

You can import, edit and record MIDI data from VSTi instruments or hardware synthesizers with Audition 3's sequencer, and keyboard shortcuts and MIDI controllers can trigger almost any command. Also using MIDI, you can playback and record multitrack audio with other hardware or software as either a SMPTE master or slave (as an alternative to ReWire).

While there are some great new features, Audition 3 is more of an evolutionary than revolutionary step compared to Audition 2. Still, it's a bargain for new users or for current users to upgrade. Audition is a powerful tool with excellent features, a highly usable interface and a collection of high-quality loops; it would be an excellent addition to a PC-based studio. 



For audio demos of Audition 3's Spectral Frequency tool, go to remixmag.com.

THE SHIELD > A mic and standard shockmount (not included) screw into place on top of a metal post.



SE ELECTRONICS REFLEXION FILTER

EGG CRATES ON YOUR WALLS? REALLY? TRY THIS INSTEAD

BY MARKKUS ROVITO

> No matter how dependent they are on soft synths, samplers or directly recording keyboards and guitars through an audio interface, sooner or later computer-based music producers will want to or have to record something from a microphone. When that time comes, an acoustically untreated bedroom, garage or basement won't be the ideal environment. Many home and project studio producers have valid reasons for not acoustically treating their rooms: There are aesthetic and financial concerns, as well as the work-arounds of using headphones to mix or room-correction monitors or software to aid in the mixdown. However, those fixes won't rid your miked recordings of the audio reflections and room ambience that color tracks recorded in an untreated room. That's where the SE (Studio Engineering) Reflexion Filter comes into play. Its purpose is to shield microphone recordings from ambient room noise in studios, rehearsal spaces or wherever you record.

ON LOCKDOWN

The Reflexion Filter requires some fairly simple assembly out of the box, and it clamps onto a standard microphone stand. The full 8-pound apparatus balances better if you have a tripod boom stand; if you have a common mic stand with just a circular base at the bottom, the Reflexion Filter—which does not position its weight over the center—will probably tip it over. I used the latter type of stand and had to weigh down the base to keep it balanced; a sandbag, a barbell and other heavy objects worked.

The semicircular filter portion itself clamps into the main clamp, and you can adjust its position vertically or rotationally. A metal bar also screws into the clamp; the bar's position adjusts several inches back and forth horizontally, and on top of it, you screw on any standard

microphone shockmount. With that adjustability, you can position a mic in three dimensions to the left, right, up, down, close to and away from the filter, for achieving various amounts of ambient room correction.

SILVER SCREEN

With its seven layers (mmm...burritos) of sound absorbing and diffusing material, the Reflexion Filter blocks sound from both the outside and inside from penetrating. It first keeps sound coming from the recording source from hitting the studio walls and other objects—reducing the amount of reflectable sound—and then blocks part of the reflections that do occur from reaching the mic and thus, your recordings. The filter's outer shell starts with a layer of hole-punched aluminum that diffuses sound. Next, a layer of wool absorbs sound, followed by layers of sound-dissipating aluminum foil, an air gap, another wool layer and then another layer of hole-punched aluminum. The seventh and final layer is the Reflexion Filter's main sound absorber, a four-panel inner shell made of special acoustic-absorptive material. SE doesn't reveal its exact makeup but points out that there is no foam in the Reflexion Filter, addressing the bad rap foam sometimes gets as an acoustic treatment.

All that looks nice on paper, but results are all that matter. I tested the Reflexion Filter with a nice tube condenser mic in a very reflective bedroom (a single clap of the hands proves that). I recorded vocals and hand percussion, as well as an acoustic piano in a different, yet also reflective, room. There's no doubt that the filter does its job of reducing room ambience—not only reflections, but also to some extent other noise, such as the whir of an external hard drive. In many cases, the effects were subtle; it's not like there's a signature sound where you'd

listen to a track and think, "that singer used a Reflexion Filter." But for clean recordings, dry tracks are often better, and this product can help you achieve that.

SE recommends starting with the mic vertically centered and horizontally parallel with the sides of the Reflexion Filter. Moving the mic closer in made the sound more "dead," and moving it out or moving the filter up and down reduced the filter's effect. Naturally, sounds that produce more reflections—for me, louder, sharper sounds with more treble—make Reflexion Filter's presence more noticeable.

Initially, the subtle effect of the Reflexion Filter may not seem like much for the money (about \$300 street price). But if you are trying to wrangle professional-caliber recordings out of a small home or project studio that you can't or don't treat acoustically for either financial, aesthetic or practical reasons, it's definitely worth the investment. Another option is SE's smaller Instrument Reflexion Filter (\$299 or about \$200 street price), a portable version that fits a pencil mic (think Shure SM57) through a hole in the center, more intended for drums, pianos and other instruments. 

SE ELECTRONICS

REFLEXION FILTER > \$399

Pros: Noticeably reduces room ambience on recordings. Provides some instant acoustic treatment wherever you choose to record. Accepts standard mic shockmounts.

Cons: Expensive. Tips over mic stands that aren't tripods.

Contact: www.seelectronics.com

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TECH SECTOR

REVIEWS » ONE-SHOTS

By Jason Scott Alexander

BIG FISH AUDIO SYNTRON-X

JUST ADD LOUD CLOTHES AND SPIKED HAIR

Veteran producer Matt Buschbacher has set out to capture the stark essence of early '80s synth-pop—an era of music he fondly remembers for having a rigid elec-



tronic structure and cold synth sounds but with underlying pop sensibilities and a strong beat. Using retro-emulating virtual instruments as his source, you can hear sound-design influences of Kraftwerk, Soft Cell, Vince Clarke, Gary Numan, the Human League, Thomas Dolby and OMD, to name but a few. Stylistically, though, Buschbacher has gone in his own direction.

The disc opens to a folder containing 23 construction kits ranging from 80 to 180 bpm, with most hovering around 120. I'm immediately impressed by the scope of what's offered: everything from dream-pop, robot music, techno-goth and early Ministry-like electro industrial (minus screaming guitars) to erotic '80s house and even a cool

downtempo new-wave rap beat. Typically four bars in length, several permutations of drum parts are offered per kit, and individual hits are provided for beat tweaking. Additional folders contain simple, rather uninspiring octave arpeggiations; four drum kits offering 184 unique sounds, mostly typical of classic Roland, Linn and E-mu boxes; and 25 backing beats that have been heavily mangled by flanger and reverb/delay. Closing things out are nearly a hundred short male and female phrases, splicing such wondrous prose and alliterations as "silicon snowfalls" and "green geisha." Presented in vocoded and reso-voice forms, none of them are particularly interesting or useful in context. Perhaps through intent, Syntron-X doesn't hit the sonic signature of '80s synth-pop quite square on, but it should inspire producers enough to create a "neo-wave" subgenre.

BIG FISH AUDIO

SYNTRON-X > \$69.95

At a glance: 3 GB of neo-'80s construction loops, grooves and soundscapes. Acidized WAV, Apple Loops, RMX, REX.

Contact: www.bigfishaudio.com

SAMPLE LOGIC THE ELEMENTS

EXPANDING THE PERIODIC TABLE

The year-old Sample Logic A.I.R. breathed new life into experimental dance and soundtrack work that involved arranging tracks from only three basic musical elements: ambience, impacts and rhythms. More than double the size (13.5 GB of new material), The Elements takes those categories and expands into bass, harmony and melody for a much more musically rounded library. The six folders are subdivided by genre, timbre and the mood they evoke.

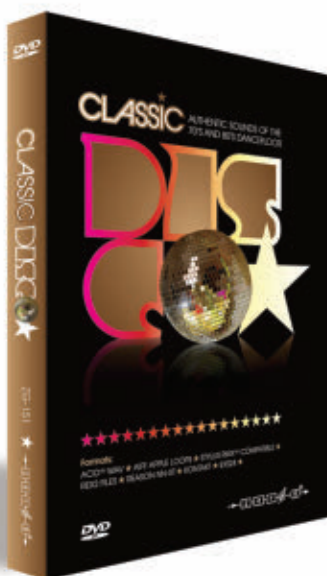
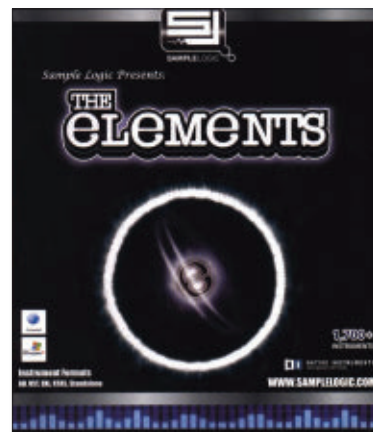
There are 25 highly emotive categories in the Ambience folder, including Dark N Twisted, Melloncollic, Narcotic Adventures and The Fun House. From tempo-sync'd motionscapes to free-flowing, complete environments, these go far beyond the mostly transitional material in A.I.R. The Impacts and Rhythms folders use synthetic/electronic/natural sources to accentuate mood shifts through powerful buildups and action-packed loops. These are made from glitched beat-boxes, metallic scrapes, thwacked objects, hammered woods, world drums and more. Throughout the library, there's a good balance of synthetic and organic material, sometimes fused to the point where you can't tell the difference. I love how the new categories allow you to complete a score within a single instrument. The bass elements are provided as instruments and loops, ranging from distorted, electric guitar to "woofed out" and trance-y subwobblers. My favorites of the nearly 700 new melody and harmony patches include the majestic brass wind and cathedral organ patches, sparkling modular synth arpeggiations, world instruments and vocal voyages. Unlike in construction kits, much of the material from across the collection works marvelously together. The Elements is an awesome one-stop production resource for many musical genres.

SAMPLE LOGIC

THE ELEMENTS > \$299

At a glance: A six-element approach to creating experimental dance and evocative soundtrack work. Kontakt Player 2, standalone or Audio Units/VST/RTAS/DXi plug-in.

Contact: www.samplelogic.com



ZERO-G CLASSIC DISCO

AN ATTEMPT TO BRING SEXY BACK

Something pretty amazing happened in the late '70s, when disco went underground and became black dance music—the foundation for house and R&B as we know it today. Almost overnight, television shows such as *The Midnight Special* and *Soul Train* began featuring artists like Evelyn "Champagne" King, Thelma Houston, Loleatta Holloway, Norma Jean and Luci Martin (formerly of Chic), who each brought welcomed doses of funk and soul to the dancefloor. Classic Disco is a 700-sample, 1.6 GB collection reminiscent of the period spanning 1977 to 1987, presenting 35 construction kits (107 to 125 bpm) in a multitracked format. Other folders contain additional bass, guitar, piano and drum machine loops, plus a special whispered shouts section (think Van McCoy's "Do the Hustle").

Stylistically, the kits run the gamut from funky clavinet-based George Duke-type romps and Quincy Jones-inspired acoustically infused jazzy numbers (replete with signature mono synth parts) to material from the early '80s proto-house/post-disco era that borders on hi-NRG. There are even some fun oddballs like "A Buddy From Rio," with all the right Copacabana breezy vibe of a merengue club turned disco, or "Bad Hair Good Groove," which provides heavy drum machine claps and classic staccato synth hooks reminiscent of Nu Shooz. There's definitely some classic Philly sound, typified by the lavish percussion that became a prominent part of mid-'70s disco songs. That said, I'm a little surprised that more hard-hitting floor fillers à la Michael Jackson's "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough" or even Madonna's "Borderline" didn't make the cut to truly round out what could have been a mini-anthology. Classic Disco offers swagger but seems overpriced, all considering.

ZERO-G

(DIST. BY EAST WEST/SOUNDS ONLINE)

CLASSIC DISCO > \$159.95

At a glance: 35 construction kits covering a decade of soulful disco. Acidized WAV, Apple Loops, RMX, REX2, NN-XT, Kontakt 2, EXS24.

Contact: www.soundsonline.com

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Chuck Surack



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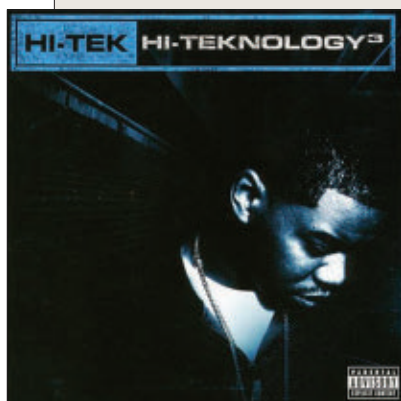
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HI-TEK

Hi-Tekology 3 (Babygrande) A hasty return

Only a year after dropping *Hi-Tekology 2: The Chip*, Cincinnati, Ohio-reared producer/occasional rhymer Hi-Tek is back with the third chapter of the *Hi-Tekology* series. Because of the quick follow-up and lack of many distinguishable sure-shots, *Hi-Tekology 3* seems rushed—almost like his new solo album is a batch of unused material

from *The Chip*. That's not to say that this disc doesn't ever deliver; it's just not Hi-Tek's magnum opus.

On the album's lead single, the Ghostface and Raekwon-assisted "My Piano," Hi-Tek expresses his love of music through a brief but blunt verse and high-powered guitar-tinged beat. It's here where his work sounds as driven as his influential Reflection Eternal tracks with Talib Kweli. Even a free-form joint featuring some of his unknown hometown brethren ("Ohio All Stars") works well with the bouncy keys and drums leading the way. But some moments feel underdeveloped—especially "Life to Me," in which Hi-Tek's supersparse drum programming and string loops don't do much to complement UK singer/MC Estelle's smooth vocals. While there aren't many duds on *Hi-Tekology 3*, there also aren't enough dynamic tracks to make this effort great.—Max Herman

★★★☆☆



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Better Days (BBE)

Dig out those platform shoes

The '70s have returned, embodied in Al Kent and his funky, funky crew. Disco aficionados will be tripping over their bell-bottoms to run and buy this one. These songs were recorded mostly in one take in a regular ol' analog studio, giving them an earthy, retro sound, with tracks like "Canal Street Bus Stop," "Feel the Music" and "Funky Funky Beat" (see, told you it was funky) perfectly capturing the disco era. If you like that kind of thing, groovy; if you don't, then steer clear, because Al Kent's got himself a '70s time capsule, and he wants you to step on in.—Kristi Kates

★★★★☆



BLACK SPADE

To Serve With Love (Om: Hip Hop) One-man team shows his craft

With Common and Mos Def going all Hollywood, St. Louis MC Black Spade arrives just in time to help you remember the days when hip-hop championed creativity and fueled a culture of poetic and hungry youth. Spade's flow falls somewhere between the aforementioned rappers, but where Common comes off sappy and militant, Spade breathes life into anthems of love and hate with his relaxed, introspective cadence and eclectic beats, as on "She's the One ('20s Love Song)". Spade has vocal chops, showcasing a confidence to put his rhymes on the back burner and let the songbird out ("Actioneer").—Jason Jurgens

★★★★☆



CAROLINE

Murmurs Mixes (Temporary Residence) With faith intact

Worthy remixes landed on *Murmurs Mixes*, where producers retooled Caroline Luffin's elegant chamber electronica. The stoned, nap-inducing swirls that Brightest Feathers conjured on "Sunrise (Sunset Mix)" mirror Lullatone's theory on his "Bicycle" entry, which exposes Caroline's intimate call notably more so than her record did. Aside from Lullatone's mild beat against her single-tracked vocal on a lengthy intro, these chilling interpretations emphasize the precarious balance of *Murmurs*: The hypnotic musical textures play up the action without overpowering Caroline's delicate voice.—Dominic Umile

★★★★☆



CASPA & RUSKO

Fabriclive.37 (Fabric) Dubstep steppin' up

UK Dubstep producer/DJs Caspa & Rusko loaded their *Fabriclive* contribution to the gills with deep, structurally monstrous swabs of bass (Coki's "Sponge Bob") and chirpy riddims, evenly stacked against swerving strings (Caspa's "Cockney Violin"). A generous helping of the hosts' productions and gratuitously rippling, echo-laden powerhouses from The Others, Matty G and Unitz quashes a minor complaint about the too-quick appearance of Distance's gritty "V." Advocates of Skream's BBC *Radio Essential Mix*, where the host masterfully hogs a lot of room, should not pass this by.—Dominic Umile

★★★★☆



DEADSET

Keys Open Doors (Front Room) Set to dance

Hobnobbing with the likes of Röyksopp and Justin Timberlake inspired the members of Deadset, Tom Mangan and Cass Cutbush, to attempt their very own album. Does it work? Mm, yeah, for the most part. The duo's cheeky street-dub-meets-house vibe is something you'll recognize, so you won't be jarred away from your stylin' dance moves via tracks like the hypnotic "Acid Radar" or the zippy "Brazil '70." And a few novelty twists in tunes "Instructions" and "Tick Tock" keep things decently entertaining, even if you get a vague sense that much of this has been done before; but sometimes that's all a dancefloor needs.—Kristi Kates

★★★☆☆



DISKJOKKE

Staying In (Smalltown Supersound) Another fine Norwegian export

The sophisticated dance beats on this debut should come as no surprise seeing as the Norwegian producer is a big part of a scene that also produced Lindström, Prins Thomas and Oslo's esteemed Sunkissed events. True to the course set by his countrymen, diskJokke's evocative music takes its influences from disco's descendants. The rhythms hang in the margins between breaks and house, as cuts like "Større enn først antatt" and "Interpolation" pair Italo synths and Chicago bass lines, and "Cold Out" employs rolling percussion and abundant bottom. It's another triumph for Oslo.—Noah Levine

★★★★☆



DUB TRIO

Another Sound Is Dying (Ipecac)
Dub and metal coexist harmoniously

This isn't your stoner roommate's idea of smoke-a-delic dub. While certain moments of *Another Sound Is Dying* will entice you to pack the pipe—with tobacco, of course—most will make you want to bloody your knuckles on an unsuspecting mosh. The marriage of dub and metal is odd but somehow works. "Mortar Dub" followed by "Regression Line" is an example of how one minute you're caught in a subsonic trance beat, then you're snapped back to reality by choppy guitar riffs à la Helmet and explosive drums. This fresh take on two "dying" genres makes for an amazing musical experience.—*Jason Jurgens*

★★★★☆



CLUTCHY HOPKINS

Walking Backwards (Ubiquity)
Mystery is clutch

The "Who is Clutchy Hopkins?" publicity smog can be stifling. Charades aside, *Walking Backwards*' dense, drifting instrumentals were built on dry snare thwacks, woodwinds and gloomy, dim-lounge organs. They can play well in the den—lethargic drum rolls tumble through "3rd Element," with what sounds like melodica and Wurlitzers providing one of the few truly settling segments here. In its rampant loops-or-live ambiguity, *Walking* doesn't rest on its laurels. Armed with frequent counter-melodies and flute spontaneity ("Horny Tickle"), Hopkins is a creepy one. Whoever he is.—*Dominic Umile*

★★★☆☆

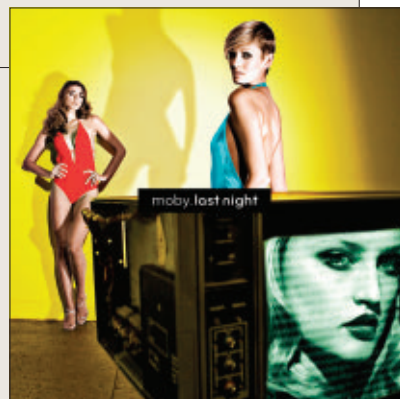
MOBY

Last Night (Mute)
Sixth time's a charm

Moby's sixth release starts slowly, creeping up on you with the offbeat electrodisco of "Ooh, Yeah." It might sound low-key for starters, but it soon becomes evident that Moby's done it again; he might as well start making appointments with those ravenous ad agencies now.

Part of Moby's appeal—aside from his ridiculously obvious innate abilities and that distinctive Moby sound—is the clarity of his production work. Every instrument, every enunciation is crisp without sounding like it's being thrown into a tin can, yet there's still emotional and melodic depth. This is evidenced through the likes of "257.Zero," with its repetitive spoken refrain (is it a flight number, a laundry ticket or the forming of a protein molecule? Who cares, when the auditory ambiance is this cool); "I Love to Move in Here" with the old-school rap cachet of Grandmaster Caz on the mic; the retro video-arcade loop of "Hyenas"; and the metallic patina and hypnotic wordplay of "Alice." Elsewhere, "Everyday It's 1989" recalls the piano and soul feel of "In This World" without being a mere copycat, while both "Degenerates" and "Sweet Apocalypse" open the door to chill mode with their bass-y languidness. Yes, folks; there's something Moby for everyone.—*Kristi Kates*

★★★★★



MIGHTY JOSEPH

Empire State (Urchin Studios)
The empire strikes back

Vast Aire of Cannibal Ox fame is stepping into '08 on the right foot with fellow NYC rhymer Karniege by his side. Going by Mighty Joseph, this new hip-hop duo updates the grimy, late-'90s Rotten Apple aesthetic with vivid lyricism and potent production from Karniege, J-Zone, Da Beatminerz and Madlib. The beats, which consist of robust boom-bap ("Beast") and spaced-out funky backdrops ("Rock-It-Science"), are no doubt good enough to stand alone. But the MC's combination of street-side storytelling and witty wordplay markedly liven up the NYC-inspired instrumentals.—*Max Herman*

★★★★☆



CHRIS JOSS

Teraphonic Overdubs (ESL)
More like Tera-porn-ic

At its most slovenly, *Teraphonic Overdubs* seethes with retro-porn imagery; it screams "hump music." Surely French producer/multitalent Chris Joss couldn't have meant for that to happen. His overtly colorful, late '60s-sounding instrumentals burst in splashes of brass and sitar, while Joss struggles to steady them with robust floor toms and maracas. Bouncy Hammond organ-rife pop like "Jungle Dolls" and "Surgelator Action" counter harpsichord and flower-child backups in languid boning soundtracks like "A Room With a Vu Meter." Sugary, slick and straight-up porn-y.—*Dominic Umile*

★★★★☆

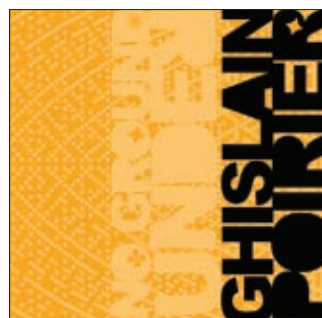


MIKE LADD

Nostalgialator
(Definitive Jux/World's Fair)
Remember three years ago?

The U.S. issuance of *Nostalgialator*, a 2004 !K7 release from Paris' premium Boston import Mike Ladd, will no doubt have little appeal for America's style-blind hip-hop advocates. For the open-minded, Ladd demonstrates unpredictable musicianship amid Bomb Squad-esque noise; chilled, spoken-word outings such as "How Electricity Really Works"; and lo-fi, spaced-out blues in "Sail Away Ladies." Granted, the cryptic rants and sporadic tuneless choruses are tough to take, but Ladd's ventures from punk and hip-hop to whatever are at least veteran artistry at work.—*Dominic Umile*

★★★☆☆



GHISLAIN POIRIER

No Ground Under (Ninja Tune)
Keeping it riddim-driven

On his Ninja Tune debut, Montreal beat-smith Ghislain Poirier's riddim-driven tracks remain ever-pulsing, but he hardly sticks to one sonic framework, making this album consistently surprising. Arguably it was Poirier's move to work with a variety of Canadian hip-hop acts (Omnikrom, Ambitieux, et al.) that helped inspire the inclusion of everything from sci-fi-sounding tracks ("City Walking") to upbeat grime- and dancehall-influenced numbers ("Blazin"). Some of Poirier's instrumentals aren't always as enjoyable, but all in all, *No Ground Under* is a worthy start for Poirier.—*Max Herman*

★★★★☆



ARMIN VAN BUUREN

Universal Religion 2008 (Ultra)
If "Ibiza" means "church"

Universal Religion 2008, a moniker that's shades away from becoming a Mitt Romney campaign T-shirt, is a robust live recording born at Ibiza's Amnesia nightclub. Holland-born award-winning DJ/producer Armin van Buuren can tack this onto credentials that include well-attended residencies, several studio albums, mixes and a weekly radio show that celebrated its 300th episode in 2007.

Although overjoyed crowd sounds—whistling, clapping—can be heard all over *Universal Religion 2008*, the forefront is baked in Van Buuren's specialty: trance. Mid-track breaks, surging, dissipating riffs...the whole nine. Displacing climaxes are top shelf here, with Mungo's "Summer Blush" a highlight. Before its soaring melody is pitched down and sent into the rattling undercurrents of Forerunners' "Lifecycle," "Summer Blush" splits open in smothering keyboard swatches, and faux looped-guitar harmonics abound. For five minutes, you're neck-deep in a crowded dancefloor of half-naked partygoers, brimming with sexual tension. Then the subway pours you out into the gray street in front of the building that houses your cubicle. Sad, really.—Dominic Umile

★★★★☆



RAFTER

Sex, Death, Cassette (Asthmatic Kitty)
Lo-fi wiz takes it personal

Writing "4-track power forever, multiplied by computer power = ☆" in his brief liner notes, Rafter Roberts sublimely sums up the aesthetic behind his mix of rock styles and world rhythms. Linking a fondness for idiosyncratic compositions and unimproved sounds with a precision plan for fitting them together, he's at his best creating the finest noise that just might have been recorded in your neighbor's living room. The most potent songs get personal as "Chances" channels the excitement of new love, "Slay Me" focuses bitterness of loss, and "Tropical" is a plea of concern.—Noah Levine

★★★★☆



THE RAVEONETTES

Lust Lust Lust (Vice)
Dull, dull, dull

Recorded with what seems like a strangely listless approach given the rather, er, straightforward album title, The Raveonettes' latest is unswerving throughout in its lack of enthusiasm. Perhaps that's what they were after—a contrast of words vs. sound? Either way, the whole thing seems too wearily calculated to make much of an impression, even when they do pep up occasionally. Instead of conjuring up dubious titles, perhaps they should've put more time into the songs themselves—"Dead Sound," "Blitzed," "Sad Transmission"—doesn't matter which one you're listening to; it's all one long, tepid drone.—Kristi Kates

★☆☆☆☆



TUXEDOMOON

Vapour Trails (Crammed Discs)
This moon shines

Has Tuxedo Moon really been around for 30 years? Apparently so—but it hasn't dulled their sound. The avant-garde band still has a slightly wacky, striped-socks way about them, and they revel in their songs' details. Trumpeter Luc Van Lieshout is a big part of this album's sound, especially on "Dark Temple," which seems inhabited by electro-toads that can only be tamed by horns and spoken word. Elsewhere, "Dizzy" takes a horseshoed gallop through a martini lounge, "Big Olive" matches up buzzy guitars with jazzy piano, and "Kubrick" sets a lo-fi tone with subtle bass and stage-actor ghost voices.—Kristi Kates

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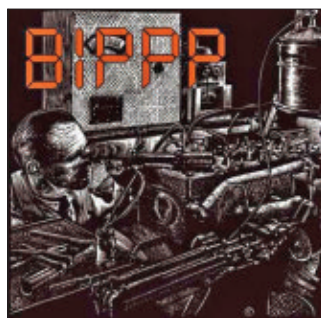


URSULA 1000

Undressed (ESL Music)
Out with the old, in with the semi-new

Electro breakbeat maestro Ursula 1000 (aka Alex Gimeno) knows how to manipulate the shelf life of an album. Not satisfied with the original tracks of 2005's *Here Comes Tomorrow*, the multi-instrumentalist enlisted some of the coolest producers (Ladytron, Myagi) for *Undressed*. The resulting sound is a melding of eclectic styles, ranging from electro and techno to jazz and funk. The scat-heavy "Boop" shows off Latin jazz chops. Each track pushes the drums to the forefront, delivering crisp beats that get the toes tapping. Most impressive is the album's attention to percussion ("Kaboom").—Jason Jurgens

★★★★☆



VARIOUS ARTISTS

BIPPP—French Synth Wave 1979/85 (Everloving)

Spiky sounds from gay Paree
While late-'70s/mid-'80s U.S. radio listeners enjoyed seminal synth-pop hits from Gary Numan and Soft Cell, Parisian underground chasers had a vast array of similarly minded artists to choose from, all espousing two-finger note-driven Casio synth sounds and pedestrian machine-drum rhythms. As current sounding as anything waving the retro-electro banner today, *BIPPP* offers 13 tracks of robotic fun, from Marie Moor's squeegee-infused "Pretty Day" and TGV's tribally ambidextrous "Partie 1" to the polymetric haze of Vitor Hublot's "Aller Simple."—Ken Micallef

★★★★☆



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Disco Not Disco: Post Punk, Electro & Leftfield Disco Classics 1974-1986 (Strut)

The roots of today's dance scene
Consisting of 14 cuts from an illustrious international cast, this comp is the blueprint for the varied sounds that get modern hipsters onto the dancefloor. There's A Number of Names' proto-techno classic "Sharevari" and the robot rock of "Don't Lose Control" from Bill Laswell & Material. Konk's "Your Life" is one of many tracks showcasing the stomp of New York's elemental dance-punk, while "Love Tempo" from Quando Quango is a bit of early Manchester. These are the musical seeds that grew into today's club sounds.—Noah Levine

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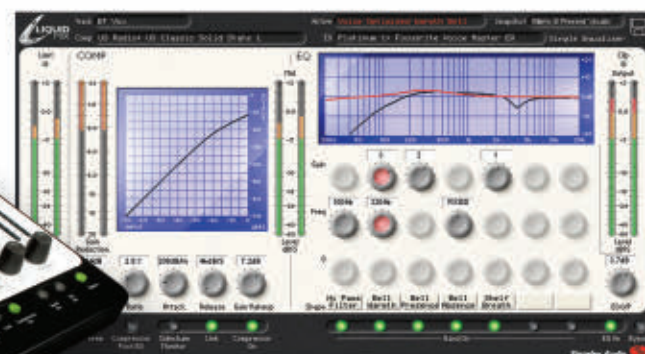
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¡VIVA EL MAESTRO!

With the studio as his launching pad, Esquivel blew the hi-fi into outer space

Believe it or not, those of us who watch television—you know, that invention where they show shows, as Samuel L. Jackson (playing the messianic gangster Jules) so aptly puts it in *Pulp Fiction*—already know the music of Juan Garcia Esquivel. For more than 40 years, every program that was ever produced at Universal Studios, from *McHale's Navy* to *Law & Order*, has concluded with a jarring blast of orchestral music over the Universal emblem. The cue is only three seconds long, but it speaks volumes about the freewheeling and eclectic demeanor of the man who created it.

Esquivel is often lauded as the “big daddy-o” of the early lounge sound—a trendy musical by-product of the atomic age (that is, the late '50s and early '60s)—but at his iconoclastic core, he was, first and foremost, a razor-sharp composer, arranger and producer. Born in 1918 in Tampico, Mexico, he took up the piano at an early age; by his late teens, he was conducting his own orchestra for Mexico City's XEW radio station, where he learned about early recording techniques and echo chamber effects. Eventually, he became so popular in Mexico that executives north of the border at RCA Victor took notice.

Other Worlds, Other Sounds (RCA, 1958) was Esquivel's American debut, and as its title suggested,

the album introduced what would become known, many years later, as “space-age bachelor pad music.” Almost defiantly weird and exotic, the music was akin to big-band jazz on the surface, but all resemblances to straight jazz quickly disappeared beneath the wash of strange sound effects and the Spector-ish wall-of-sound bursts that Esquivel often demanded of his musicians. (“That Old Black Magic,” with its abruptly blaring horn lines, slinky conga-and-bass groove, Hawaiian slack key guitars and dreamy chorus of singers scatting “doo-wee-wee” is a grade-A slice of the Esquivel style.)

“Obviously, I didn't have the electronic equipment we have now,” the maestro explained in an interview with *Electronic Musician* (“Space Age Pioneer,” September 1996), “so I had to produce these different sounds purely with instrumental arrangements. I was trying to achieve with conventional instruments these strange sounds that I had in my mind.”

Esquivel was also fascinated by the possibilities of stereo, a new medium at the time. He tested the waters on *Exploring New Sounds in Stereo* (RCA, 1958), which was recorded in New York's Webster Hall by splitting the orchestra into “left” and “right” sections, with Esquivel directing from his piano in the middle of the room so he could get a feel for the stereo experience. The sessions also marked his first use of electronic instruments—in particular the theremin (on a version of Miklós Rózsa's “Spellbound”) and the Ondioline (played by Esquivel on the campy “Whatchamacallit”).

“Esquivel told me that he had two sets of charts for the mono and stereo versions of that album,” recalls Boston-based DJ and producer Brother Cleve, who—as a member of the lounge-core troupe Combustible Edison—helped spark a wave of renewed interest in Esquivel's music in the early '90s. “*Exploring New Sounds* got a Grammy nomination for best engineering. Juan had an electrical engineering degree, so he was aware of that stuff, but it was really more the aesthetic he was interested in. Five years later, that concept turned into the whole idea for *Latin-Esque* [RCA, 1962].”

Esquivel decamped to Hollywood for *Latin-Esque*—an album that surpassed, in sheer sonic wackiness, 1960's legendary *See It in Sound*, which RCA had actually refused to release (thus prompting Esquivel to record the one-off *More of Other Worlds, Other Sounds* in 1962 for Frank Sinatra's Reprise label). What made *Latin-Esque* so profoundly unique was the maestro's radical new approach to recording the orchestra.

“Acoustic separation was extremely important to me,” he said in 1996. “We recorded directly onto ¼-inch stereo tape, and I had to be very careful that the sound didn't leak from one channel to the other. When I wanted something in the right speaker, I didn't want to hear even slight ghost images of it in the left speaker. So I asked RCA to book two studios that were one block apart. We hooked up a closed-circuit television, and all the musicians wore earphones so that we could keep everybody in sync with a click track.”

As crazy as it sounded, the album's title track alone is a triumph of stereo manipulation (beginning with the cascade panning of an echo-drenched xylophone) and proto-psychedelic tape delay effects. “Even though there are extremes in Esquivel's records,” says producer/archivist Irwin Chusid, who facilitated the compilation *Esquivel! Space Age Bachelor Pad Music* (Bar/None, 1994), “it never got to the point where he simply wanted to show off what could be done with panning or stereo mixing or effects. It had to make sense, musically.”

By the late '60s, Esquivel's popularity had waned, although he performed at the Stardust Hotel in Las Vegas until 1973 and experimented with an updated sound featuring electric guitars with fuzz-tone and wah-wah. When the rigors of keeping a large ensemble on the road proved too exhausting (and expensive), he returned to Mexico; his background music for a children's TV show called *Burbujas* featured the sounds of various Moog and ARP synthesizers (including the ARP Axxe) and was his most unusual work of the period.

Esquivel resurfaced in the mid-'90s a bit worse for wear—he'd broken his hip in 1993—but he was still able to enjoy the accolades (from such fans as Stereolab and Thievery Corporation) that accompanied a rediscovery of his music. Although the maestro passed away in 2002, the unadulterated weirdness and whiz-bang dynamics of his patented sound continue to inspire hipster cocktail parties the world over. 



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