

DVD INSIDE



Chocolate Puma
EXCLUSIVE VIDEO Learn parallel processing with the Dutch masters

2316 NEW SAMPLES
Analogue & Afro-Latin drums
Electro House AND MORE



Marcel Woods
MIX MASTERCLASS See his tracks taken apart on video

Issue 231
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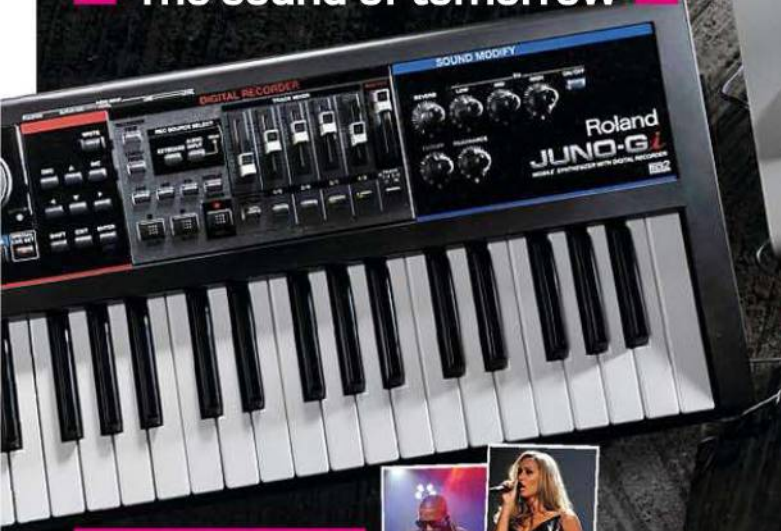
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Brand new Korg Electribes

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Welcome

Retro Active



We like to think we're one of the more forward-thinking music production magazines. But as you know we're suckers for bit of – shall we say – 'heritage' too. So we're delighted that a triple threat of products that score on both counts landed this month.

There's the latest Juno from Roland (laden with classic synth sounds) the return of the Electribes from Korg (now powered up with loops and samples for today's Dance styles) and the rebirth of the Arturia Origin (now in stunning full keyboard form and able to recreate a raft of synth legends and everything in between). Check out the world's first reviews on pages 86, 94 and 98.

Top tutorial this month comes in the shape of *Pro Vocal Production* on page 42. We're covering everything from making your vocalist feel at ease to correcting their wayward notes afterwards.

And there's a trio of top production talent showing you their secrets too. Don't miss House masters Chocolate Puma on page 34, Marcel Woods unique Tech Trance on page 70 and the inside story on BT's pioneering take on music making, on page 58.

And remember, we're the home of the *In The Studio With* video. Be sure to check out over two hours of exclusives on our DVD and demos of all review kit. Phew!



Daniel Griffiths, Editor
daniel.griffiths@futurenet.com

EXPERT CONTRIBUTORS THIS MONTH...

Jono Buchanan
producer, engineer



Vocal scientist Jono Buchanan is the man at the controls for our big *Pro Vocal Production* feature on page 42. Treat yourself (and your next track) to his bountiful skills.

Greg Scarth
music scientist



Greg rocks hard with the new Electribes this month (page 98). We needed someone to check the credibility of their Dance styles and Greg is well known for busting his own special brand of moves.

Robbie Stamp
artist, producer



Flip to page 86 to see Robbie grapple with a monster. While his end-of-the-pier wrestling career may be over, his reputation as a master synthesist only goes from strength to strength.

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FMDVD

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INSIDE STORY



DVD Editor Will Seelig's inside track on the making of *FM*'s DVD



This month's highlight was all about the contrast of situations. Both our studio visits were in Holland – first to Marcel Woods. He had a hardware-packed studio and although he used software, still had an affinity for the hardware approach. Meanwhile, our other Dutch stars Chocolate Puma had (unfortunately) just gotten rid of all their hardware and were completely 'in-the-box'. The interesting thing was, based on their sound, you'd be hard pushed to say who was hardware and who was software.

Enjoy the FM DVD?
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DVD HIGHLIGHTS

Pro Vocal Production

This month our main tutorial feature is all about recording pro vocals at home. Check out our audio examples to help you mix and master your vocal tracks

From the Vaults: Electro House

1000 An amazing collection of kits, hits and instruments that will give your tracks that floor-shaking edge

Synth Masterclass



The fourth instalment of our popular Icon Masterclass series with D.Ramirez takes you through the fundamentals of programming synths

Knowledge Base: Vocoder

Delve in to the sound of one of the most historic of musical effects with these audio examples



Sample Techniques

Each month, our sample creators work tirelessly to bring you original content for use in your music. As always, they go that extra step to make sure that the samples are both unique and useable...



Only the Under Snare Mic

"Often a snare drum is recorded with two or more mics to allow a careful blend of the bottom skin ring/snare wires with the top skin hit/ring. As the top skin is louder in overheads and room mics than the snare wire it can sometimes make sense to only use a close mic beneath the snare, especially if a more open, 'roomy' sound is being sought and this mic is being used to just lift the snare 'snap'. Geoff Emerick used this technique with the later Beatles drum setups (using an AKG D19) and it does help carry the 'snap' and 'crackle' through heavy compression where top-mic-only snares can quickly become a 'pop' or 'paff'. I used a Beyerdynamic M260 ribbon mic in this role as it has a smoother top end and a more accurate transient response than a traditional SM57 or the much revered D19."

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S2S TRIBAL HOUSE



"Here at S2S, summer means one thing: deep, dirty and driving tribal House! Capturing the sun-kissed vibe of afterhours fiestas around the world, *Tribal House* features 160+ dusky beat elements precision-designed to work together for that killer rhythmic workout."

S2S MANUEL DE LA MAREO: BEATS IF TECHNO



"Italian Techno chart-topper and Beatport award-nominee Manuel de la Mare opens his sample vaults for an exclusive beat and drum hit extravaganza, featuring kick-free loops, nu-percussive workouts, tribal elements, kicks, FX and one-shots"

SAMPLESTAR – DEEP TECH SESSIONS SOUNDTRACK & CHILL



"Moody music loops, deep basslines, synthetic grooves, smokey stabs and precision-programmed Tech and Minimal drum loops."

HY2ROGEN – PROGRESSIVE TOOLS



"Electrify Progressive House tracks with *Progressive Tools*, an essential selection of kick-free tops and tech percussions, build and drop FX, reverse vocals, chords and stabs, and a song-starting set of basslines, synth loops and sidechained pads."

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© Gavin Roberts

THE MAKING OF YOUR UNIQUE *FM* SAMPLES...

Afro-Latin Rhythms

Get some new beats for your collection

For this month's samples, Cyclick Samples created a rhythm mash up with the focus on acoustic drums and percussion: "The style takes influence from Afrobeat with a dash of Latin swing. The guitars, electric bass and organ take their flavour from the Afrobeat camp, which itself borrows heavily from Funk, Soul and Reggae. The synths are made to match up with the beats and add a slightly broken beat twang to the collection. The majority of the samples are drum loops (in 90 and 100bpm tempos) and the two kit setups used have been multisampled to create two Kontakt instruments.

"The snare drum samples include centre and edge hits as well as sidesticking, rimshots and snare wire 'off' versions, and as with all the drum hits they have at least four hits per type for velocity layering."

1,000 samples

Mic choice

"The hi-hats were recorded by a real favourite of mine, the Calrec CM1050 pencil condenser. This has a smooth HF response that suits metalwork and transforms the frankly shoddy hi-hats into something rather pleasing. The floor tom used in kit B was spotted by a Royer R121 ribbon mic placed about 15cm above the outer edge of the skin, thus getting a good bit of room around it too.

"The floor tom was heavily damped with Moon Gels (top skin) and duct tape (bottom skin), while the snares (Pearl piccolo in kit A and Tama Rockstar in kit B) were picked up with an old STC 4038 ribbon mic (still available today as the Coles 4038), which really glues everything together."

GEAR USED



Analogue Drums
Groove Criminals use: Star Instruments Synare 3



"Discovered hiding away in a far-flung cupboard in Switzerland this little beauty dates from the late '70s and is a two oscillator percussion synth, with white noise generator and low-pass filter. You can also hit it and it looks like a UFO – what's not to love?"



Afro-Latin
Cyclick Samples use: STC 4038 Ribbon Mic



"The iconic STC 4038 (now Coles 4038) ribbon mic was designed in the '50s by the BBC and has been a studio gem ever since. Though it excels in orchestral recording due to its high sensitivity and even frequency response, it also makes an excellent room mic and drum overhead (as used in this month's samples)."

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At last! Traktor gets hardware

Native Instruments finally unveil their incredible Traktor solution, complete with its own special version Traktor. It's about time!

It's been a long time, they shouldn't have left us, without some… hardware to mix with. Well, something like that anyway. It's certainly true that for the past five years, anytime Native Instruments signalled that we should expect something new and exciting from them, we thought it was going to be the Traktor solution we always wanted. Well, after almost giving up on NI, *FM* got the brief from the top dogs at the Berlin HQ and we were delighted with what we saw.

The Kontrol S4 is a complete integrated hardware and software Traktor solution, including an audio interface based around Native's Audio 4 DJ and a surface riddled with back-lit controls and hooked up via USB. We grabbed a chat with Friedemann Becker, who is the Senior Product Designer of Native Instrument's DJ Division.

FM: Why has this taken so long!?

Friedemann Becker: "We have had concepts for a full-featured DJ controller pretty much since the first version of Traktor, which was nearly a decade ago. But it was always supposed to be an uncompromised design, without all the limitations of typical MIDI-based controllers. We basically had to hold out both for the necessary technologies to become available, for the necessary components to become affordable, and for our hardware engineering expertise to reach a level where we could accomplish such a sophisticated design."

What does the unit offer that other controllers don't?

"There are various unique features and other special touches in Kontrol S4, but the most important aspect is really how it all comes together in the end. What distinguishes Kontrol S4 the most over typical 'all-in-one DJ controllers' is the fact that the hardware has really been engineered from the ground up to complement the software."

We're guessing it fits alongside Maschine too? Are they designed to work together?

"Syncing Traktor and Maschine via MIDI has become quite popular. But with the beat-sync'd sample decks and loop recorder in Traktor S4, you can actually cover much more advanced live sampling and remix techniques purely within Traktor before you need to put a groove system like Maschine on the side."

899 Euros seems quite high… Explain to us what has made the S4 so expensive.

"We don't think the price is high at all, given that the hardware is using top-quality components all around, and has a fully-featured audio interface built-in as well as a proper Traktor Pro software version included.

"Our hardware engineering team actually worked quite hard to make sure the price was below the 1,000 Euro mark, while still meeting all the technological goals."

Will there be a non-interface version at some point?

"Most likely not. It just makes too much sense to have the equivalent of an Audio 4 DJ already integrated in the controller. That being said, you can still bypass the audio interface in the Kontrol S4 and use any external soundcard if you absolutely want to."

How does the sample deck work? Can their outputs be assigned to separate channels?

"When activated, the sample decks take over the third and fourth playback decks in Traktor, and are routed into the corresponding mixer channels."

Please explain the electromagnetic technology.

"The jog wheels are based on an eddy current brake principle, combined with very high-quality bearings. The wheels feel extremely smooth and their resistance is primarily coming from electromagnetic induction.

"The crucial benefit that this technology introduces over regular jogwheels is that the resistance is dynamic, in exactly the way that makes sense for DJing, because it correlates with the rotation speed. This allows you to make very precise, minute adjustments with nearly zero friction, which is really great for cueing tracks.

"At the same time, the jog wheel gives just the right resistance for more extreme moves like scratching, and doesn't feel in any way 'loose' when you spin it fast." FM

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The Native Instruments Traktor Kontrol S4 is on sale this winter at 899 Euros.



New Motif XF

The world's favourite workstation gets a new look, new features and a new sound

It's amazing to think that the Motif has been with us since 2001. It's appeared on stage and studio around the world and is the regular 'go to' keyboard for session players and studios alike.

Its reputation as a one-stop shop for usable instant sounds just took a major step up with the introduction of the Motif XF. Get ready for some specs that knock all competitors into a cocked hat: an incredible 741MB of ROM (twice that of the old XS), 128MB of sample RAM with 2GB of optional flash memory for permanent on-board storage, 18 different filter types, direct to USB recording as WAV via the new digital mixer with three-band EQ for each part, eight insertion effects, two system effects and overall master effect and EQ. All this and a whole new set of tried and tested studio sounds that you'll doubtless be hearing all over high profile release from practically every major artist.

It even comes in XF6, XF7 and XF8 sizes to suit your wallet and back strength. Official UK prices are still to be confirmed but we're told they'll slot right in to replace the equivalent XS.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Full review in *FM* soon. And head to **motifator.com** to see just how popular Motif is.

Apogee's New Symphony

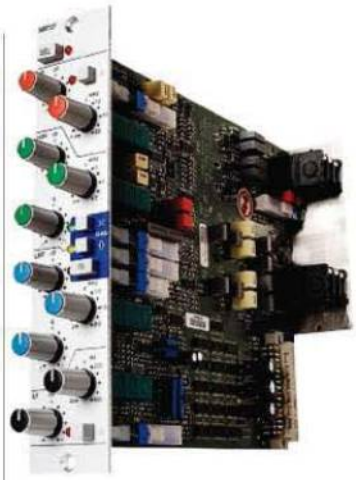
Interface aficionados Apogee announce their flagship model

Updating the very cream of their interface crop the new Symphony I/O builds on the Apogee's X-Series and Rosetta Series converters, the Big Ben master clock and the Trak2 mic preamps that Apogee have become famous for. This time, it's been tweaked and refined even further with enhancements enabling the audio to travel through even less circuitry, which Apogee claim offers lower latency, more accurate clocking and even more transparency and clarity in your recordings. Around the back, there are two slots for I/O expansion boards enabling up to 32 channels of I/O over PCI, USB and Ethernet connectivity.

Modules and other additions to the base unit will be released in five stages over the next few months. Priced from $3690, there's a huge amount of configurations available for all types of I/O requirements. UK prices to be confirmed.

apogeedigital.com





X-Rack Expands

A new EQ module emerges for the increasingly flexible X-Rack range from SSL. Built as a stereo version of the classic SSL XL 9000k Channel Equaliser as used on Duality & AWS consoles, the module features a four-band parametric EQ that's good for surgical style frequency repair, or wide, musical tonal adjustment. There's also 'Selective Mode', which enables independent switching of high, mid and low bands between SSL's E or G console style curves. Tasty stuff, and although it's not cheap, X-Rack is still the best way to build a processing unit based on SSL technology. The Stereo EQ Module will cost £699. **solid-state-logic.com**

FREE RF filter!

In the market for a mic? Well sE have just made the baffling array of choice a little easier by including a free Project Studio Reflexion Filter if you plump for any of the following sE models: Z3300a, 2200T, 4400a (and stereo pair), T2, Z5600aII, Gemini II, Gemini III, Gemini 5, G3500, VR1 and VR2.

Pick one up and bingo, you'll get the 'Baby RF' too. That's £120 worth of top-quality gear for nothing. Get them while they're hot. The free Filter offer only lasts until October 31st! **seelectronics.com**





You're Saffired!

Another jewel of an interface from Focusrite gets ready to hit the stores

Another sibling in the ever expanding range of Saffire interfaces from Focusrite has landed and again looks like it's packed full of features. The Saffire Pro 14 is an eight in, six out FireWire interface. You get two of Focusrite's high quality mic pres, the Saffire MixControl routing environment and the Focusrite VST/AU plug-in pack containing Focusrite Compression, Reverb, Gating and EQ. The front two inputs are also dual input with Hi-Z switches for plugging in your bass or guitar and at a claimed latency of 1.2ms, it's stacking up as a great little unit. Connections include MIDI I/O and S/PDIF while inside there's also a loopback audio function letting you route audio between different applications, so you could route the output from your browser straight into your DAW. The addition of bus-power over FireWire mean it could be a good mobile production unit too, with hefty amount of I/O for its diminutive size. The Saffire Pro 14 is priced at £200 and the unit is shipping now bundled with Ableton Live Lite 8 and a host of royalty-free samples. Tidy. **focusrite.com**



Avid Your Way

Pro Tools loses it's Digidesign moniker and relaunches with some fancy new high-end kit

Avid have announced three new HD Series interfaces, snappily titled – HD I/O, HD OMNI and HD MADI. They claim they offer flexible configurations to support a variety of analogue and open digital formats for audio recording, mixing and playback. Interestingly, Avid have also released a new HEAT software (Harmonically Enhanced Algorithm Technology – we think they added the explanation afterwards…) which apparently adds the realism of vintage analogue sound to the Pro Tools engine via a single global control. Sounds like a tasty idea and saves faffing around adding individual emulation plug-ins track by track. Additionally, a new soft-knee analogue limiter called Curv is included in HD OMNI and HD I/O aims to cut the time spent re-recording and editing by tracking hotter signals when recording, preventing distortion when overloading inputs. The new I/O options include HD OMNI, HD MADI and HD I/O converters. Pricing begins at $3995 for HD I/O, $2995 for the HD OMNI and $4995 for the HD MADI. The HEAT software is available for $495. **avid.com**

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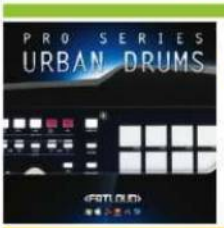
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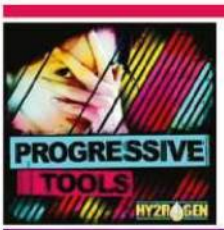




FatLoud
Urban Drums
New
FatLoud open their drum programming vaults to serve up this definitive collection of warm, deep, tight and raw drum hits and all-new loops for hip hop, RnB and pop. **£22.50**

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Capturing the sun-kissed vibe of afterhours fiestas around the world, Tribal House features 160+ dusky beat elements precision designed to work together for that killer rhythmic workout. **£15.95**





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Mix Master

It's a very good month for smart DJ's. Get ready for controller wars as Denon deliver brand-new options for getting to grips with Traktor in the booth…

First up and brand new from the Denon labs is the new dual platter DN-MC6000 mixer and MIDI controller. Based around a four-channel/eight-source standalone digital DJ mixer with MIDI interface and internal sound card, it's got some heavy specs. With features including real-time channel matrix operation, slim tabletop design, gig-ready solid steel chassis, the DN-MC6000 is set to become Denon's flagship controller. Its controller capabilities include maps for the bundled Virtual DJ (USA and Canada) or Traktor LE if you're buying the unit in Europe.

The built in audio interface (with a 2-in/2-out stereo soundcard), makes it a one-stop solution for digital DJs and should make the unit useful for a host of different DJ styles, from weddings to superclubs and could be a direct competitor to Native Instruments very own flagship Traktor controller (see page eight). It's rack-mountable, but equally comfortable sat on a flat surface and each side of the unit is able to control two decks, with different backlighting indicating which of the four decks are being controlled. There's a central section for track selection and assignable effects controllers and looping and cueing functions as standard.



There's a plethora of ins and outs and the DN-MC6000 is quite comfortable as a standalone DJ mixer. Inputs include two RCA/Phono lines, one XLR mic/quarter-inch, one quarter-inch TRS mic jack, and two RCA Aux inputs. Outputs include balanced master XLR, unbalanced master RCA, quarter-inch TRS booth/send out, RCA record out, and stereo headphone out. If you want to connect up CDJs, decks or rope in an MC to swear over your set, then this Denon can deliver.

Next up is a more modular single deck MIDI controller, the DN-SC2000. Minus an interface, built in a rugged steel case and connected up to your Laptop via USB. The unit is optimised for Traktor Pro but is also happy to control Virtual DJ and can be assigned up for other applications too. Lovely looking stuff, reviews as soon as we can! **denondj.com**

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Producer Sessions Live

25th – 26th September 2010

Don't miss this! Grab your last chance to be at *Future Music's* very own special event at London's SAE

September 25th and 26th are almost upon us. That's the weekend that *Future Music* and our sister mag *Computer Music* are taking over SAE (School of Audio Engineering) in London for Producer Sessions Live and we want you – the loyal readers of *Future Music* – to be there.

We've put together an 'access all areas' intimate event that's tailor-made for you. You can try out the latest gear, have one-to-one demos, and – if you're impressed – secure your next bit of kit on the spot at bargain prices. Everything is out on display for you to try and experts from every company are right there to talk you through how it works.

Meanwhile we've secured the services of a host of top producers to give exclusive, one-off masterclasses throughout the weekend in the school's lecture theatre. Ever wanted to watch Dave Spoon at work? Or grill The Freemasons face-to-face about their platinum-selling remixes? Now's your chance.

PRODUCER SESSIONS LIVE
25th – 26th September
Day tickets only £8!
PLUS
Producer Sessions only £4!

All our stars will be taking apart their tracks, showing off what's in their master channel strips and using their favourite hardware, live.

The *FM* and *CM* mag teams will be there to answer questions and our team of exhibitors will make sure that you're kept abreast of every demo and opportunity going on in the building. Plus, internet audio wizards SoundCloud will be on site to show you how to use their fast-becoming industry-standard music sharing website to promote your new music. They may even have some prizes up their sleeves.

It's the must-see hi-tech event of the year so bring plenty of your demos and flyers and take advantage of some A-grade networking too. Check the website for full ticket details and updates and we'll hopefully see you there!

Appearing Live: The Producers



Saturday 25th 12:00 & Sunday 26th 12:00
Dave Spoon
Dave's tracks *At Night* and *Baditude* have battered the UK charts. He's also remixed Dizzee Rascal, Madonna, Calvin Harris and Beyoncé and runs his own label too.



Saturday 25th 1:30
Jon Carter & Alex Blanco
As a producer, DJ and remixer, Jon has travelled the globe DJing and gigging. Alex has produced tracks and remixes for everybody from Seb Fontaine to Simply Red.



Saturday 25th 3:00
Tommy D
He's worked with Kylie Minogue, Janet Jackson, KT Tunstall, Kanye West, Sophie Ellis-Bextor, Jay Z and many more. And never forget: this is the man that produced Right Said Fred's *I'm Too Sexy*. Respect.



Saturday 25th 4:30
Freemasons
These power producers have made hits for Beyoncé, Faith Evans and Kylie Minogue and have remixed Jamiroquai, Eric Prydz, Moby, Shakira, Luther Vandross, Fatboy Slim and the Eurythmics.



Sunday 26th 1:30
Danny Byrd
Both his own track *Red Mist VIP* and his remix of Liquid's *Sweet Harmony* have hit the UK charts. Danny Byrd is the cutting-edge sound of D'n'B right now.



Sunday 26th 3:00
London Elektricity
Co-founder of Hospital Records, London Elektricity is a household name in the Drum 'n' Bass scene. He continues to tour the globe with his 1Xtra award-winning live sets.



Sunday 26th 4:30
Sharooz
Producer, businessman, sound designer and sample star Sharooz has remixed Moby and worked with Mylo on a remix for Swedish Pop princess Robyn.

With More Artists TBC – head to **producersessionslive.com** and prodsessionlive on Twitter for updates!

How it works

First, you need to buy a day ticket. These cost just £8. For that you'll be able to wander the school, check out all the gear on show, meet the makers of your favourite hardware and software and have your questions answered by experts. It's 100% access. Meet like-minded producers, swap stories, demos and tips and – highlight of highlights – rub shoulders with the *FM* team! Just head to **producersessions live.com**. Pick your day (Saturday 25th, Sunday 26th, or both) and buy online.

Picked your day? Now book your Producer Sessions. Each session is hosted by a star producer, lasts an hour and costs just £4. Space in the lecture theatre is limited so make sure you book early to avoid gutting disappointment.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Head to **producersessionslive.com** now. Or follow prodsessionlive on Twitter for recent updates!

Getting There

SAE House,
297 Kingsland Road,
London,
E8 4DD

By Car

Take the A10 exit towards the City (staying south). Stay on the A10 for about 10km. Please note there is no parking provided at the event.

By Tube

The nearest tube station to SAE is Old Street, which is situated on the Northern line. The SAE is approximately 20-25 minutes walk from the tube station.

By Bus

The best but route is to take the bus is from Old Street tube station. Take the route bus 243 towards Wood Green Station.





Appearing Live: The Gear

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THE CLASSIC ALBUM



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The Art Of Noise (Who's Afraid Of?) The Art Of Noise!

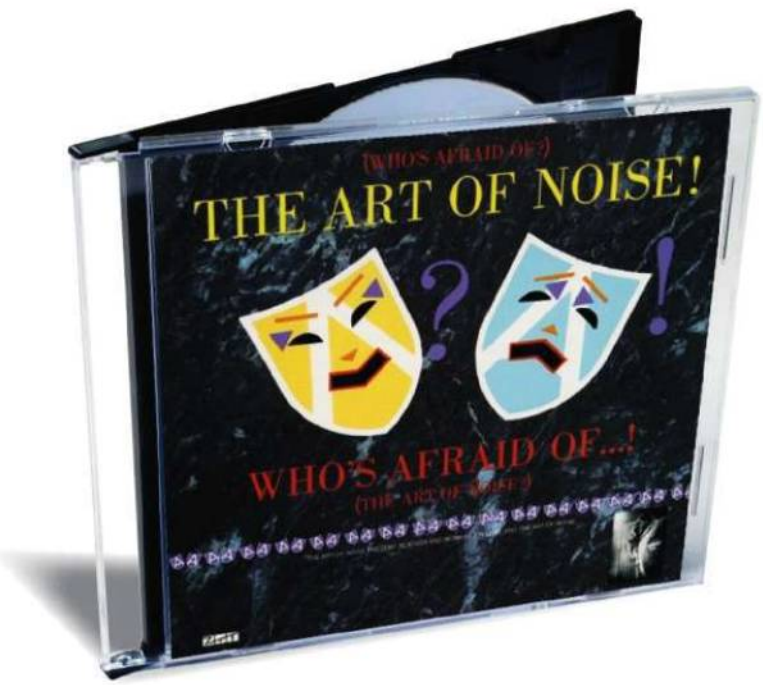
ZTT, 1984

Roy Spencer gets closer to the editor behind this sample slaying classic, and shares in some moments we all love…

Back in 1913 the Italian Futurist, Luigi Russolo, theorised that man's ear for appreciating music would be tainted by the rise of the sonic clatter of the industrial age. To retune himself, he would need to use burgeoning technology to help compose new, engaging, challenging and stimulating sounds. He prophesised that we would need machines to stir our senses, to compete with the discordant hum of the 20th century. The text was L'arte dei Rumori, or, The Art of Noises.

In 1983 Gary Langan was working for Trevor Horn as an engineer. Fresh from The Buggles, Horn was in demand as a producer and the pair set about work on huge Pop albums by Yes, ABC and Dollar. Then came *Duck Rock*. Punk svengali Malcolm McLaren's sampledelic World Music mash-up album. Horn produced, and Langan travelled with McLaren across the globe sourcing sounds.

It was liberating for Langan. Nothing was out of bounds. There was no such word as 'can't'. He got a taste for the caviller approach to sound theft and sample manipulation.



No to Yes

Then, during the recording of stadium Rock monsters Yes' next album, *90125*, Langan, who was engineering the project, began to get bored.

"I'd spent 11 months making this Yes album with Trevor," says Gary Langan. "One Thursday afternoon, when most of them had gone home, I had this idea to sample a whole drum kit into our Fairlight [CMI digital sampling synth]. Nobody had ever done that before. I said to J.J. [Jeczalik], who was Trevor's computer programmer, 'look, everybody's gone. We've got the Fairlight here, some of [Yes drummer] Alan White's drums…I just wanna muck about. Let's stick the whole drum kit in here'. His hair kinda stood on end."

Self-confessed audio dustbin men, J.J. and Gary began added samples on top. The oddest was the sound of a neighbour trying to get his VW Golf to start. This gave the working title to the finished demo: *Cantata for VW Starter*. We had no idea it would turn into the sound of the Art of Noise. It was just something we'd goofed around with."

Round the Horn

A short time afterwards, Gary is driving Trevor Horn around and he says he has a new record label to run, but no acts. A few roundabouts later and Gary has stuck his heavy drums and revving engines number in the tape player. "He just freaked out and said it was amazing," says Gary.

The band was formed.

After that, Journalist Paul Morley joined to provide direction, content and marketing savvy, Anne Dudley brought melody to J.J. and Gary's bonkers beats, and Trevor Horn handled production.

A classic was born. And with remixes of their timeless *Moments in Love* riding high in the digital charts, and a two-disc retrospective recently on the shelves, it seems fitting to return to this ground-breaking album.

Art of Noise was wildly experimental. As avant-garde as any post-modern composer. But, what took it beyond the level of impenetrable art school studio antagonism were the joyous melodies that rode the madness. They had groove. They sounded lawless. They sounded cool. It was the sound of rebellion with a Pop hook. It was people using wonderful new machines to drown out the hum of the rest of the 20th century radio stars. It was the art of noises.

Track by track with **Gary Langan**

A Time for Fear (Who's Afraid)

"That was from the whole Cuba crisis. It was a recording of Fidel Castro. That was the inspiration behind that. We thought it would be cool to sample Castro's speeches. We were being really dangerous. The fact was, when we did our record deal with ZTT we had something written into our contract to protect us in case of any hot water. One of the clauses in the deal said something along the lines of 'I know what I'm doing, and what I'm doing is wrong. But if anybody comes

LIKE IT? TRY THESE...



Black Sabbath
Black Sabbath

"The bell and thunderstorm sounds off *Momento* were inspired by my Heavy Metal days," says Gary. "Especially the first track off Black Sabbath's debut."

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:
Black Sabbath; The Wizard



Malcolm McLaren
Duck Rock

Gary was a freelance engineer on this Trevor Horn-produced slice of cultural theft.

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:
Gals; Punk It Up



Coldcut
What's That Noise?

Matt Black and Jon More kick-ass and keep the cheek on this cut-up classic. The next stage in sampling arrives.

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:
Beats & Pieces; What's That Noise?



Art of Noise
The Seduction of Claude Debussy

Minus Gary Lagan, this 1999 offering takes the music of the French composer and sets it to Drum 'n' Bass and Trip Hop, among other tempos.

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:
Born On A Sunday; Metaphor On The Floor



The Justified Ancients of Mu Mu
1987 (What the Fuck Is Going On?)

Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty's experiments in throwing what ever they felt like in the sampler and sticking a drum machine over.

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:
All You Need Is Love; Top of the Pops

for us with writs or lawsuits, they can't come to us individually.' Kind of like 'if you're gonna run with this band, you're going to have to take responsibility as well.'

"After we had this clause, we knew we could be dangerous. It was possibly the only political song we wrote, and the crux of that was Fidel's speech. We just added bits of musical madness to it after that."

Beat Box (Diversion One)

"That was the first track. The one originally called *Cantata for VW Starter*. That's got the sample of the VW car, it's got a sample from the BBC's Wimbledon coverage: 'quiet please', that's a chair umpire.

"I live in Wimbledon and J.J. used to rent a room off me. We had Trevor's Fairlight in our front room, and we stuck a microphone in it and recorded off the match on the telly [laughs]. I think you can hear them play a few shots and announce the score.

"It was a big track for b-boys. I'm a bit of a groove merchant. That must be why. I really enjoy mixing tracks, and when I'm doing so I have to find its groove."

Snapshot

"I had produced the second ABC album, *Beauty Stab*. And as a little present, guitarist and writer Mark White gave me this little tiny Casio keyboard. It had all these preset rhythms. One afternoon when we were locked in this studio in the East End of London I got out this little keyboard and mucked about with it. I found a little drum machine preset, and with my tiny finger wrote the melody. It was so simple. It was like something you'd learn the first week of learning piano, like *Chopsticks* [laughs]. The keyboard was monophonic, so you could only play one note at a time when the drum machine was going.

"So we sampled the drum machine groove output from a little jack socket and plugged that into the Fairlight. Then I played the melody over the top. I don't think Anne played on that one...It was just me and J.J. on there."

Close (To the Edit)

"This was the second single. It again features the driving drums from the Yes sample and a bit of the VW starting. It also features a sample of J.J. going 'yenom, yenom'. Which is 'money, money' backwards. We were being arrogant. We had a record deal and we were being arrogant little popstars [laughs]. There are a few other samples in there that probably should remain secret. I don't want a lawsuit all these years after [laughs]. I did sample my girlfriend going 'oh to be in England...' She was the manager of the studio we worked at in Aldgate.

"We'd sample anything at the time, just me and J.J. The whole thing at the time was that sampling was so new. It's old hat now. But back then it was so different. So were we. At the time, some people were fooling around sampling a snare drum or a bit of bass. But we wanted to push it to the boundaries. What J.J. and I used to say is that we used to go and rummage around in people's audio dustbins. We were magpies."

> "As long as we stuck some melody over the top we could get away with blue murder"

Who's Afraid (of the Art of Noise?)

"Again this track has that vocal sample that you get on the last track that goes 'hey!' That's from a little girl called Camilla Pilkington-Smythe. What a great name. She was part of the Pilkington glass manufacture dynasty. J.J.'s girlfriend at the time was head of English at this girls' private school in Surrey and she told us about this girl who had an amazing speaking voice she taught.

"So we got her down the studio. She was only about 15, doing her O Levels, as they were called at the time. She was the one The Prodigy sampled off us going 'hey!' for their track *Firestarter*. We paid her. If we

In the Studio with... Gary Langan



"We get called a Synth-Pop band, but that wasn't really us. At the core was this computer called the Fairlight. If that wasn't there, it wouldn't have really started. The synth part was probably Anne Dudley's parts. That would have been Minimoogs, an early Jupiter, a PPG Wave for bell sounds and piano sounds, as well as an acoustic piano. There were no tape loops, it was all the Fairlight.

"It all started with the Yes drums and the Fairlight. Because J.J. wasn't very musical, instead of hitting the sample recorder to go on beat one of bar one, he'd triggered it to record from beat three. So into the Fairlight I'd got beats three, four, one two of this mono drum kit. He played it back to me and I said, 'it's wrong...but fantastic!' Happy accidents.

"The great thing about the Fairlight was that inputs didn't equal outputs. It used to do this mash-up thing. It was only an 8-bit processor, and could only sample one and a half seconds, max. So when you sampled something into it, it didn't sound the same when you played it back. It kind of did its own thing, which was fantastic. It was an oasis of genius, in terms of machinery.

"The Fairlight was named after a suburb in Sydney where it was developed. It could sample things, then put them on a construction page so you could write with what you sampled."

used someone in the studio, we were good at paying people."

Moments in Love

"This probably came around by Trevor saying, 'Look, you're making an album. You need a ballad.' I think he coined the title, which was the seed we based it all around.

"When you bought the Fairlight it came with it's own stock bank of sounds built in. There was one we hadn't used yet called 'Ahh 1'. It was this vocal sample of a bunch of girls singing the word 'ahh'. I wrote the phrasing. Again so simple. It's C to G, down to F, back to G and back to C.

"We started with that and Anne came along and chucked all the great strings on it. Trevor had the great idea to sample Anne singing 'moments in love'. Up to that point it was just riffs and melodies, with no vocals. That became the lead vocal. It was the first time we really had a lead vocal.

"Overall, we didn't want any singers. That was one of the things I said going into this project. I couldn't see how it would work. I always said we would be an instrumental outfit."

The Greatest Hits – Art of Noise: Influence

"This is our best-of album. There are bits on there that I can't remember making at all. But we must have, because there they are in tape and sound.

"Why release it now? It's all down to the label, ZTT. They are very eclectic and they've done bits with all the Frankie Goes to Hollywood archives, now it's our turn. They're really good at doing these retrospective, best-of compilations. It's all down to a guy called Ian Peel, who is like the curator of the archives.

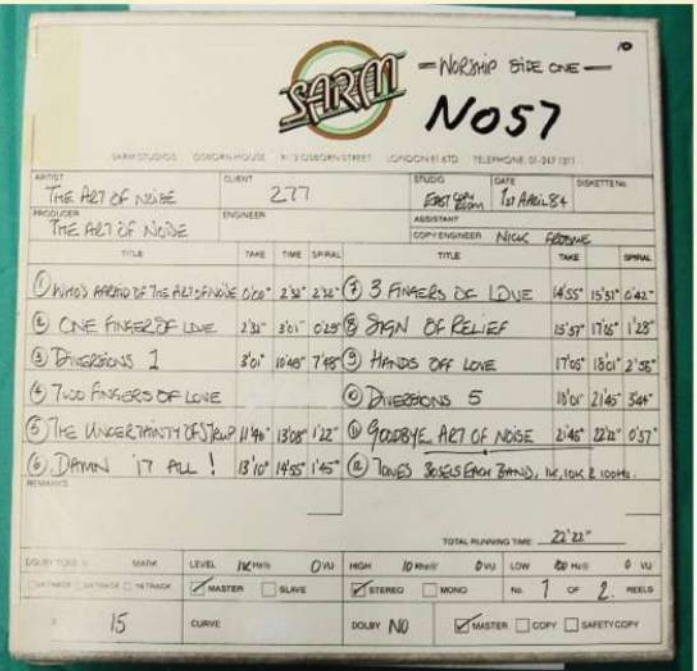
"He's a bit of an unsung hero of the label. He went up to the tape vaults, which were by Heathrow Airport, and saw all our cans of tapes and put together this Art of Noise retrospective.

"It's got our soundtrack work, unreleased material, collaborations with Tom Jones, Max Headroom, Rakim... all the hits and a whole CD of stuff people haven't heard.

"One cool thing is a version of *Moments in Love* with Lucky Gordon. Now, Lucky was Christine Keeler's pimp. She basically was this call girl that got with a high-ranking cabinet minister called Profumo in the '60s. It was front-page news. Lucky was Chris Blackwell from Island's minder, PA, and a pimp.

"He was also the chef at our studios, which lead to him being on a track on this new compilation. The vaults have some great cans of tape in.

"One even says 'I never want to hear this again,' signed by Anne! It must have been a stressful time, but some great tunes came out of it."



> This probably came around by Trevor saying, 'Look, you're making an album. You need a ballad'

Momento

"This is all footsteps and church bells and then it goes into a huge organ. This was Anne's little passion. Now we had a bit of a budget to do things, and Anne always had a passion for playing requiems on a church organ. It was her little thing that she always wanted to record one.

"We went to Angel Studios in Islington and they had a full working church organ. A huge piped thing. It's still there now. A lot of film soundtracks were written there, it's a wonderful room.

"Anne did this Bach piece, I think. The footsteps in the track are a loop of Anne walking across the wooden studio floor to the control room in high heels. It just happened that the mics we set up were open, and the record button was down."

How To Kill

"There's a bit in this track with a looped vocal just saying 'it stopped, it stopped'. That was Anne, when we were recording in Angel Studios, she turned round and said 'it stopped'. In other words the backing track or whatever we were using to put the organ over had stopped, and she couldn't hear it. So we sampled that [laughs].

"The thing was, this band, or outfit, whatever you want to call us, was based on the word 'juxtaposition'. We realised that we could do anything. As long as we had Anne to stick some melody over the top we could get away with blue murder underneath, J.J. and I. We were the mad professors.

"She used to get really cross. She was like a schoolteacher too. You really don't wanna mess with her. As sweet as she is, she could cut you down with one lash of her tongue. She was very money-conscious too. She knew how much it was costing us to be at Angel Studios. Whenever playback stopped she would get very cross indeed!"

Realization

"Actually I'd class this as a bit of a filler track. To be critical about it, it has no direction, no theme...no story to it, really. Every album has a coupla filler tracks, you know? A b-side type of thing... We had a load of material left over from this project. Now we've got this whole double-CD out now, *Art of Noise: Influence*, with all the hits on, plus 20-odd tracks from the archives and master tapes from around this time. It's interesting to see what we left off." FM

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Learn everything there is to know about the Art of Noise and keep up to date with the latest news at **theartofnoiseonline.com**

NEED TO KNOW

Five essential facts about... The Art Of Noise and *(Who's Afraid...)*

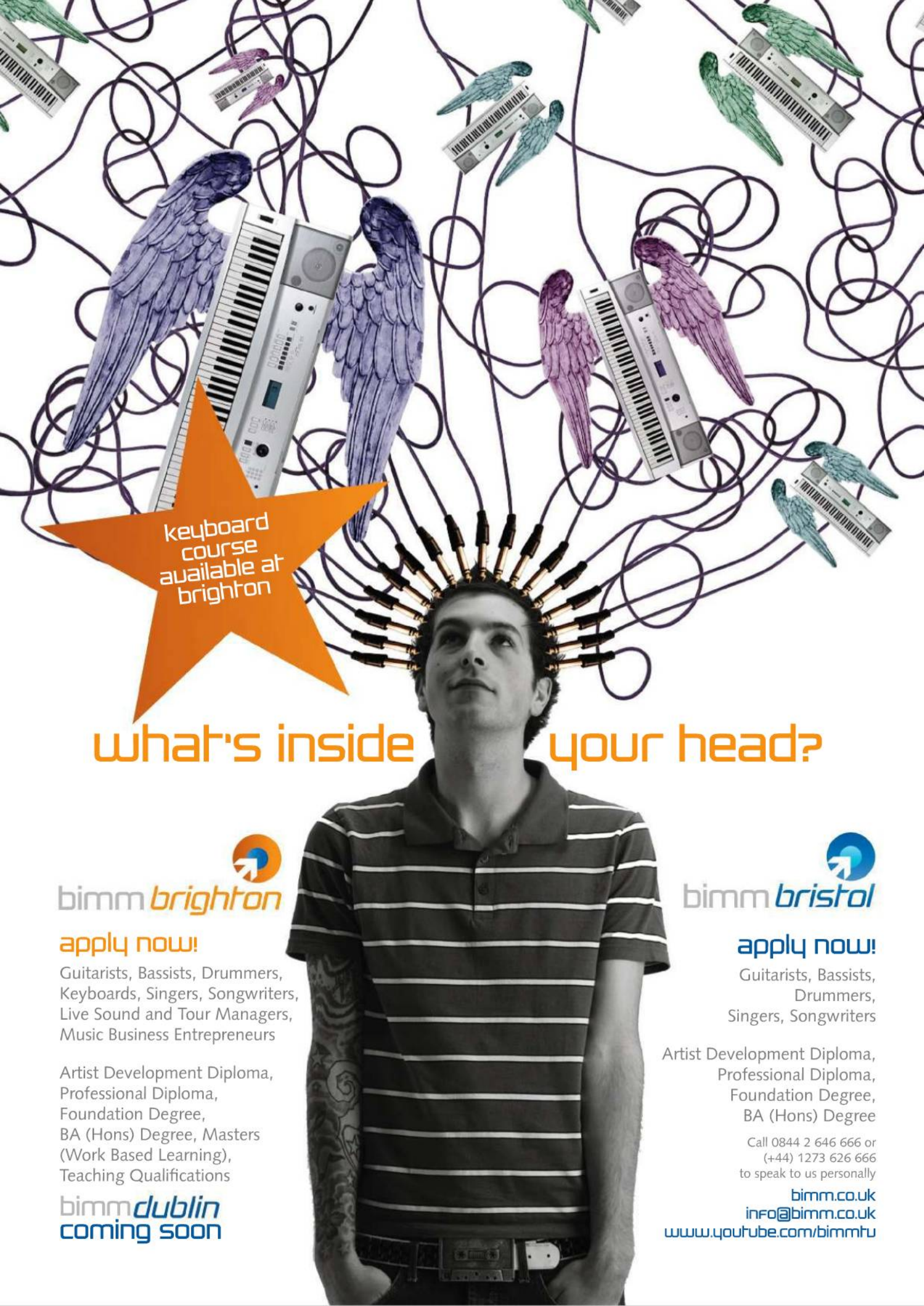
1 Gary built a studio in an old power station in London in the 1980s with £14.5 million of venture capitol. "Thank god for Thatcher," he says.

2 **The band deliberately remained anonymous and hid behind slogans and masks.**

3 Gary loves being the guy FOH, running the console for musical events such as his custom take on War of the Worlds, which ran for three years.

4 **Gary denies *Snapshot* features a sample from The Who. "It would be sacrilege to sample your heroes."**

5 Madonna and Sean Penn walked up the isle to *Moments in Love*.



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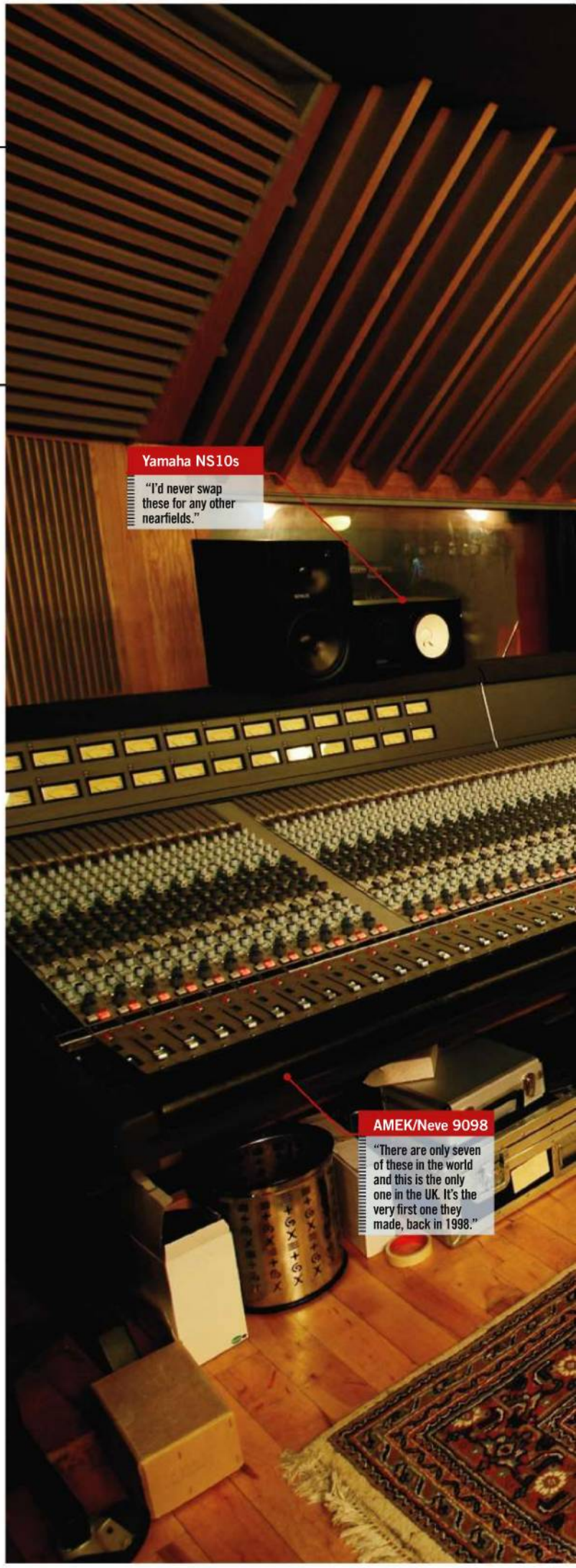
WEBSITE
gracieland.co.uk

A quiet Lancashire market town probably isn't the place you expect to find a top-end recording facility, but Rochdale has one of its famous daughters to thank for Gracieland's existence. Lisa Stansfield built and set up this outstanding studio back in the late 80s and as the *FM* team pull into the driveway and see the gardener meticulously mowing the lawns, it's clear that Gracieland still maintains the highest standards two decades on.

Studio manager Martin Rhodes tells us the story of Gracieland's creation: "When Lisa and Ian [her husband and producer, Ian Devaney] got a record deal they said to the label, 'Instead of paying for us to go to a London studio, give us the money up front and we'll build a studio ourselves.' We got a local builder in and all pitched in with hod carrying and stuff like that." The name came later, a tongue in cheek reference to one of Rochdale's other famous exports, pre-war superstar Gracie Fields (real name Grace Stansfield – no relation).

Lisa and Ian now live in London but still own the studio and operate it as a commercial facility. "It was purely a private studio until about five years ago," Martin tells us. "Then we started taking on work and turned fully commercial three years ago." In-house producer Stephen Boyce-Buckley has been working at Gracieland since the mid-1990s but joined the team full-time in 2005, bringing with him decades of experience working on everything from Punk bands to string arrangements and Rap remixes.

Over the years, Gracieland has played host to a number of huge names including Stansfield herself, Dionne Warwick, New Order, The Charlatans and Gary Barlow. Steve tells us that there's one common reaction to the Gracieland vibe: "Everybody who walks in the door, without fail, tells us how relaxed this place is. It's not like any other studio." We're beginning to feel at




Dynaudio M3s
"These probably get used eighty percent of the time. They're really fantastic for live bands."
Pro Tools 7.4.2 on Mac G5
"We mostly record to Pro Tools 7 but Logic's better as a writing tool."
Genelec 1031As
"These are better for really heavy Dance stuff. We do a lot of remix work."
INTRODUCING...
L – R
Martin Rhodes
Studio Manager
Stephen Boyce-Buckley
Producer and Engineer



Ampex ATR-102

"The majority of studios in LA and New York have an ATR-102 and I know they still use them. I guess they're not so common in this country due to cost."

Mixing To Tape

When it comes to mixing, Steve has a trick up his sleeve: "Every serious project I do gets mixed onto the Ampex half-inch tape machine. I use a DAT and Pro Tools for backup, but I master from tape back into Pro Tools. The Ampex is one of the best tape machines, built to an incredible standard and it makes a massive difference to the sound. I wouldn't bother with it if it was bullshit – you can easily notice the extra depth when you A/B it. A while ago we were mastering a project done in Pro Tools. I slammed it all onto half-inch first and as soon as we played it back the client said, 'It's almost there already.' It just makes everything deeper and takes away a bit of that digital Pro Tools sound that you get when you use plug-ins."



Audio & Design F769X-R

"If I could only have one compressor it would have to be one of these."





Publison Infernal Machine

"This is a bit temperamental but some of the reverbs on it are beautiful. The top end is incredible.



Dolby SR / A Noise Reduction

"At 30-inches per second without noise reduction the signal-to-noise ratio's somewhere in the '60s. With Dolby SR it's about 90dB."







Orban 424A Compressor

"I like to use this on the mix buss, but it's strange to operate. The controls are a bit awkward."

AMS DMX 15-80S Delays

"These are still used in practically every studio, for very good reason. They just work."

TL Audio EQ-1 Re-issue

"I like to use this for mastering. It's fixed frequency, which I like. Sometimes the more choice you have the more you end up messing around."

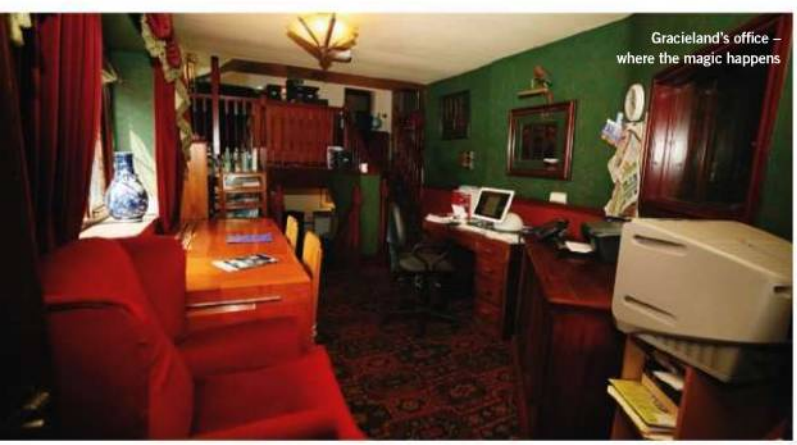



Gracieland's homely kitchen and relaxation area


Gracieland's live room featuring a pair of Hammond organs


The Neumann U87 – a studio staple




Gracieland's office – where the magic happens

home already, so we decide to take a wonder round.

The guided tour

It comes as no surprise to learn that the original design work was carried out by Andy Parry of Manchester-based Electroacoustic System Specialists (ESS). The stunning live room and equally impressive control room feature some of the most visually arresting acoustic treatment we've seen, while the gear selection is absolutely top-notch from mics to monitors, console to compressors. "Ian loves his gear," Martin says. "He put all the thought into this place." That planning has clearly paid off, with a gear list that would make most producers green with envy.

The most immediately obvious piece of exotica is the AMEK/Neve 9098 console, one of just seven in existence. Martin tells us how it fell into their hands: "Ian met Rupert Neve and he said 'I'm building the best desk I've ever built in my life. Would you be interested in giving it a go?'" Needless to say, Ian bit his hand off and Steve's clearly glad he did. "It's got all the features you'd expect on a big analogue desk," he tells us. "But it's got a different sound to VRs and other Neves. The EQ was supposed to be the best ever made and I have to say it's the most musical I've ever used."

> "Just because something is vintage doesn't mean it's not shit"

Monitoring comes courtesy of Dynaudio M3 mains, Genelec 1031As and trusty Yamaha NS10 nearfields. Steve swears by his beloved NS10s, so much that he's stockpiled countless pairs to ensure that he always has a backup. The NS10s are powered by a Bryston 4B ST Pro amp. "It seems mad, doesn't it?" Steve says. "A two grand amp on a two hundred quid pair of speakers!"

Looking around the racks of gear, all the outboard is high-quality stuff. With 48 channels of Neve on hand, preamps aren't a top priority, but Steve has nothing but praise for his 500-series AML units. Compressors from the likes of dbx, Audio & Design, TL Audio and Orban offer plenty of dynamic control, while reverbs and delays from Lexicon, AMS, Eventide and TC Electronic provide plenty of effects options.

Steve has a remarkably pragmatic approach to gear choices, with a healthy scepticism towards rising prices on the second-hand gear market. "Just because it's retro or vintage doesn't necessarily mean it's good," he tells us. "People look at old gear and say, 'It's got valves, it must be good!' but even if it's got valves it could still be shit!"

Keeping fresh

With top quality gear, fantastic design and great staff, Gracieland has everything you could possibly want. For such a high-end studio, we're also impressed by the Gracieland team's commitment to developing young talent and offering something back to the grassroots of the music industry.

Last year, Gracieland participated in Rochdale's Back Door Music Project, offering studio time as a prize for a local battle of the bands competition. As Steve tells us, "Younger engineers should think about evaluating what's available within a certain budget. It's possible to come out with commercially viable tracks that haven't cost thousands and thousands of pounds."

Steve and Martin's easy-going personalities are a big part of the appeal of Gracieland. As Steve wisely points out, if you're not enthusiastic for studio work then you might as well get a less stressful job. He doesn't seem like a man who struggles to come into work in the morning, but he explains that he's motivated by a desire to keep moving with the times. "When computer sequencers first came out I was like, 'I'm not gonna use them!'" he says. "Within two weeks I was on an Atari 1040 with a sampler. You've got to keep moving along or you get stale." FM

YOUR STUDIO IN HERE?

Want to show us around your studio? Drop us a line at **futuremusic@futurenet.co.uk**, and we'll pop round for a Ciroc Vodka.

ON THE RADAR

Annie

Pop royalty and songwriting sovereignty, Annie has conquered the club and charts. We caught up with her at an intimate DJ gig in London…

The term Pop princess has been overused to oblivion, but if it was ever true, Annie is the ultimate example. From her 1999 underground club stormer *The Greatest Hit* to her 2009 Summer foot-tapper *Anthonio*, Annie has filled the gap between credible club DJ and Pop master, writing for and with catchy-chorus-connoisseurs Xenomania as well as winning the hearts of club-goers with her saintly vocals set to arpeggio'd basslines and Juno-style stabs and chords. On her 2009 album *Don't Stop* she recruited the help of long-time collaborator Richard X, the Xenomania team and current Brit Award Producer of the Year Paul Epworth. Then received rapturous acclaim across the board.

We grabbed her at a rare DJ appearance in the depths of underground London.

FM: How involved do you get with the production process in the studio?

Annie: "Well it's incredibly important to me. I know drum machines and synths of course, but I'm not really into the super technical side of things. When I write a song, I can hear exactly how I want the bass to sound, for example. It depends who you're working with though. At the moment I'm working with Fred Falke and he's got a very distinctive sound with very few elements and it builds up very cleverly. So it changes between who you're working with."

Are you working with Fred for a new album or just a new record?

"Well we're just doing some tracks together at the moment, I'm going to do a new album eventually but at the minute I just want to do loads of songs. Fred did a remix of *Anthonio* and I really liked it.

"I take a lot of influence from French music – not just French House but French music in general. It tends to be very melodic and quite naïve, so it was cool for me to work with Fred, I think we have the same ideas. He uses Ableton Live a lot for his productions and he's working a lot with Xenomania now too – I think Brian Higgins [Xenomania head-honcho] has been a big fan for a while now."

Was *Anthonio* done in London too?

"Yeah I did that with Richard X. On that song it was funny because we had the story before we had the music and it was kind of absurd. We were just talking about this guy named Anthonio. We started with the lyrics first and then it took about three days to come together. We did the Berlin version at another time, as a b-side for the release."

You worked with him on *Anniemal* too right…?

"Yeah we did at least two or three songs together on *Anniemal*. He contacted me originally because he heard *The Greatest Hit* and I did a track on his album. *Heartbeat* was actually done in Bergen [Norway] and I worked with Röyksopp on it. I wrote it when I was in Finland and it was about this time when I used to go to a club in Bergen and how special it was and all the new music I heard there.

"It started with a melody and I had this really old-school tape recorder and played some synths on it. I took that demo to the guys in Röyksopp and we recorded it properly. It took a long time to do that one."

And for your DJing, it looked like you're still using all vinyl…

"Yeah, definitely. Maybe it's because I'm a bit stubborn, I really love walking round record stores looking for a certain track. I don't know if I'd move to Serato or Traktor Scratch, I mean I sometimes play CDs but I don't think I'd ever use a laptop like that. It's not so much about the technical part, I just enjoy playing vinyl and I like the sound of it.

"I've never been the kind of DJ who wants to travel round the world and build up a career. I did release a *DJ Kicks* a few years ago and I got offers to go on a big tour with like 300 gigs a year, but I don't think I could do it every weekend. I'd like to do play with a full band more, maybe with Fred on bass, that would be awesome." FM

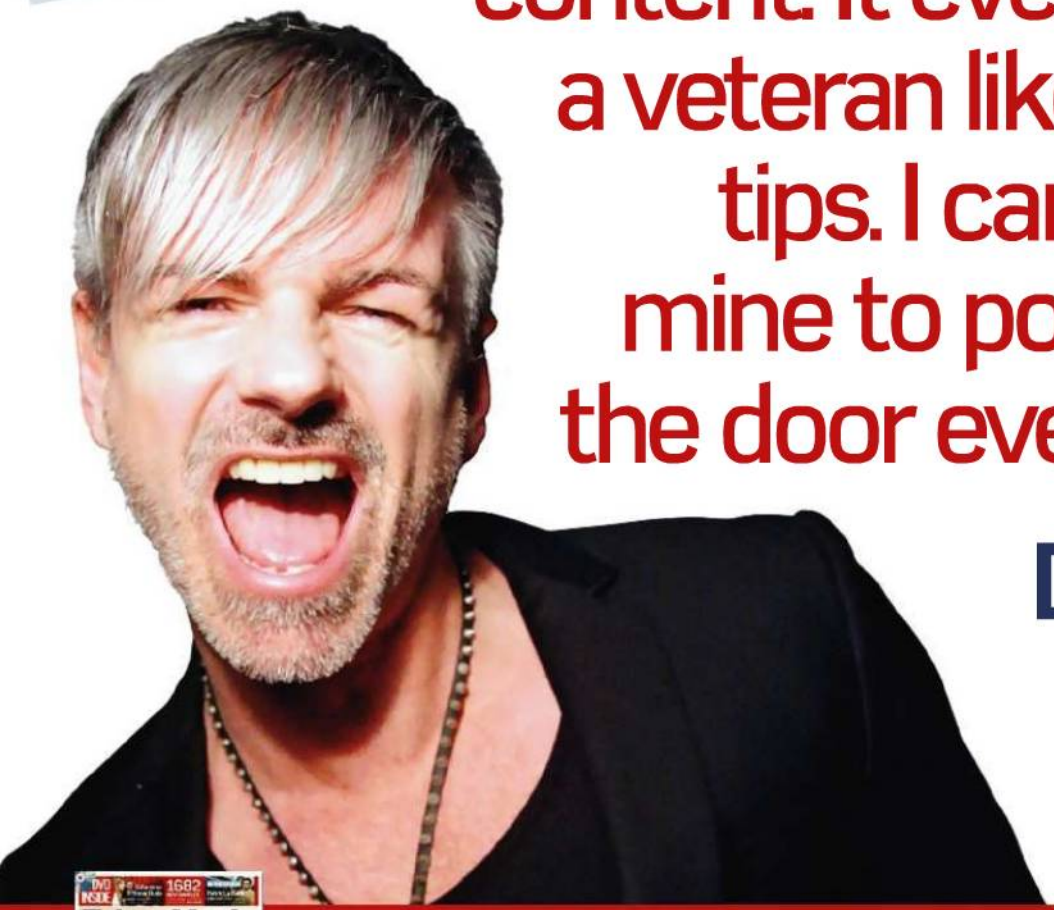
WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For Annie's latest news, upcoming releases and a host of social networking links, head to her official website at **anniemusic.no**

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FM always has excellent content. It even teaches a veteran like me new tips. I can't wait for mine to pop through the door every month



D.Ramirez
Artist and Producer



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Albums



If it's hot, it's here. Welcome to this month's new releases, all lovingly rated by the *FM* review crew

Album Of The Month



Chromeo
Business Casual

Back Yard

Returning with another polished album of Synth Pop gems, the Chromeo boys have again worked with French super-producer Philippe Zdar (one half of Cassius and the producer behind Phoenix, Cut Copy and more) whose pledge-smothered fingers have somehow managed to make the mix on *Business Casual* even glossier than his previous work on Chromeo's last album, *Fancy Footwork*.

The songwriting is still there too, with Dave 1's brilliant lyrics drifting as always between tongue-in-cheek and one-hundred-percent heartfelt. Synths stabs and trills still call-and-answer the vocals with P-Thugg wrestling the mod wheel and diving in and around the vocal melody as usual. The drum programming is some of the finest in the business, never sounding like a series of loops and grooving just enough to be human, but accurate enough to add the robototic Funk of D-Train or Roger and Zapp. Musically, it's a subtle change, with Chromeo's time at Daryl Hall's house obviously influencing them on quite a few tracks while *Grow Up*, the album's final track, sounding very similar to Huey Lewis and the News' *Stuck With You*. The plucked rhythms of Dave 1's guitar on tracks like *Don't Walk Away* looks back at their breakthrough hit *Needy Girl* from first album *She's In Control*, adding lush '70s Disco strings into the mix for extra panache. French-language ballad *J'ai Claqué La Porte* is a momentary downbeat moment where a slow attacked synth chord pounces around quickly spoken verses and 808 pops.

It's true that with *Business Casual*, Chromeo may not have pushed their sound forward much, but they produce catchy, well-written tracks so consistently, who cares? ***Chris Barker***

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:
Night By Night, Don't Turn The Lights On, Hot Mess, J'ai Claqué La Porte, Grow Up, When The Night Falls

9/10





DJ Dan
Retro Future
Nettwerk



We've already spoken to DJ Dan about the concept for his album, *Retro Future*, in *FM228*, but for those who missed it, Dan's aim was to create a mix of new original tracks with cover versions of some of the classic material that influenced him over the years with a twist of Electro House goodness.

It's a fairly eclectic selection of tracks, ranging from the fresh, commercial Electro House of *Chop Shop* to the massively retro remake of *Fascinated* by Company B. There's the usual club bangers on here with collaborations with super-producers like Dave Aude, Überzone and Haitras all present.

DJ Dan fans aren't going to be disappointed, with plenty of buzz-riddled basslines and choppy synths in action, but the real treat on this album definitely comes from the superb reworks of Dan's influences and, ironically, they will be the tracks that stand the test of time.

Well-produced and ready for a million different dancefloors around the world – for anyone who hasn't heard of DJ Dan, check this out. ***Chris Barker***

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:

In Your Area, Fascinated, Tribute To Voodoo Ray, Operator ft. Blake Lewis

8/10

Bob Sinclar with Sly & Robbie
Made in Jamaica
Yellow Productions



French producer Bob Sinclar is perhaps best known for his massively successful track *Love Generation*. Producing since 1994, Sinclar's success advocates the virtue of patience, particularly as the follow-up track *World, Hold On* beat off the likes of Madonna and Christina Aguilera to make Billboard Magazine's Club Play Single of 2006.

To benefit from his belated success, Sinclar now aims to cement his standing by having his own tracks remixed – teaming up with one of Reggae's most prolific and successful production teams, Sly and Robbie.

Made in Jamaica is therefore an album of bona fide one-drop Reggae reinterpretations, Kingston-style. The opening *I Wanna* is a great example of how Sinclar's music is receptive to different styles, combining authentic Reggae with strong, modern dancefloor and Pop sensibilities.

Even if you're not particularly a fan of Dancehall – like me – *Made in Jamaica* is so full of joyful songwriting melodies that it's impossible to dismiss outright. ***Danny Turner***

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:

Give A Lil' Love, I Wanna (Featuring Shaggy), The Beat Goes On

8/10

It's On Our iPods



Aeroplane
We Can't Fly
Wall Of Sound

Before they went their separate ways, Stephen Fasano and Vito De Luca were the famed darlings of the Indie Disco scene. The album was demoed while still a Belgian twosome, but completed by De Luca just before the duo parted ways. *We Can't Fly* will shock anyone expecting the same lush retro Disco Aeroplane sound they've come to love via their remixes.

The twelve-track LP sounds more like a mixture of Fleetwood Mac, Tina Turner, Queen and a million other Pop Rock influences. Once you get over the fact that this isn't a pure Balearic record, you'll be absorbed into the eccentric world of hooks and piano riffs. Nearly every track has the warm familiarity of a great Pop record – and the production is immaculate. The choice of sounds are particularly retro, with a slither of originality to keep things fresh. By track 11, *My Enemy* with the obvious influence of Abba's *Lay All Your Love On Me*, it feels like you've been travelling through De Luca's record collection, but the boldness in revealing his musical background quite blatantly is quite refreshing. De Luca is sticking to the mantra that got Aeroplane this far – he continues to do whatever the hell he wants, and it continues to work. ***Chris Barker***

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:

Carmellas, We Can't Fly, My Enemy, London Bridge, Without Lies

9/10

John Foxx
D.N.A.
Metamatic Records



The older John Foxx gets, the more prolific he becomes. This time, SynthPop's scholarly-looking shadow man pulls together his favourite independent filmmakers for a new CD/DVD collaboration.

The CD features music that Foxx has either had featured on film or were once intended for soundtrack. A diverse collection, *D.N.A.* varies between shimmering Electronica, bold analogue-driven blip-Pop and elegant ambient works, of which the ghostly *Kaiyagura* – with its melancholy, reverb-drenched piano – is quite exquisite. Two tracks feature ex-Japan percussionist Steve Jansen, while a blissful collaboration between Foxx and Harold Budd also debuts.

Meanwhile, the accompanying DVD mostly links the initial disc to a collection of short movie interpretations. These have quite a low-budget feel, some disappointingly so, with rather simplistic kaleidoscopic/dual-layered image collages (clouds, buildings, subways) filling the screen. Japanese film and anime director Macoto Tezka's photography is perhaps the most gratifying – utilising some effectively haunting/voyeuristic imagery to complement Foxx's poignant music.

Overall, *D.N.A.* is a rather mixed bag, its compilation of tracks do not sit together comfortably and therefore struggle to aggregate a consistent mood, even if they fare well as individual pieces of music. Meanwhile, despite Tezka's moving photography, for all its considerable effort the DVD is probably not something you would frequent very often. ***Danny Turner***

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:
Kaiyagura, Over The Mirage, Phantom Lover

7/10

Susumu Yokota
Kaleidoscope
Lo Recordings



Kaleidoscope is Yokota's 21st album in 12 years, and although the prolific Japanese musician initiated his career as a House DJ his records have mostly travailed leftfield Ambient Electronic terrains, from where he's been a consistent innovator.

Here, Yokota can be found in as uncompromising mood as ever, churning out 16 tracks of perversely imaginative ambiences that are likely to leave you as much perplexed as energised. In Yokota's world, there are no rules, his music is Ambient – but not in the traditional sense. Yokota creates wildly variable moods, constantly toying with the listeners sensory perceptions.

To describe *Kaleidoscope* is difficult – it's a bit like trying to describe the onset of sleep, that pre-dream condition where the imagination runs slightly riot.

Like the tubular mirror device the album title represents, *Kaleidoscope* brings together an ever-shifting lens of arbitrary audio arrangements created via a bed of outlandish symmetries and bizarrely polarising moods. In fact, Yokota is so successful in transmitting these imaginative 'aural tranquilisers' that you sometimes forget that you're listening to Electronic music at all.

Such a prodigious imagination is likely to leave Yokota's contemporaries feeling rather impotent, yet it's something to aspire to for anyone looking to gain credence within Electronic music's experimental realms. ***Danny Turner***

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:
Blue Moon, Metallic Energy, Your Twinkling Eyes

8/10

Danger Mouse and Sparklehorse
Dark Night of the Soul
Parlophone



Thanks to protracted legal disputes and record company wrangling, *Dark Night of the Soul* has been sitting in limbo for well over a year, only available through murky grey market internet downloads. Danger Mouse and Sparklehorse released the album's accompanying photo book, created by film director David Lynch, in 2009, packaged along with a record company-baiting blank CD-R for purchasers to create their own semi-official version.

Sparklehorse frontman Mark Linkous's suicide in March this year means the album finally sees release as a posthumous tribute to Linkous and fellow American singer-songwriter Vic Chesnutt (who died Christmas Day 2009 and who contributes vocals to *Grim Augury*), adding another layer of emotion to an already powerful collection of songs.

Producer Danger Mouse suggested to Linkous that his leftover songs could be performed by guest vocalists, and the all-star roster which the duo compiled makes impressive reading and, more importantly, excellent listening. Iggy Pop adds his trademark gravelly drawl to *Pain*, while Lynch himself makes a surprisingly excellent vocal contribution to the pyschedelic *Star Eyes (I Can't Catch It)*.

Elsewhere, ex-Grandaddy frontman Jason Lytle adds vocals to the haunting dub of *Everytime I'm With You*. Putting sentimentality aside is a lot easier said than done in the circumstances, but *Dark Night of the Soul* stands up both as an excellent album and as a moving tribute to Linkous and Chesnutt.

Greg Scarth

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:
Revenge, Pain, Insane Lullaby

8/10

Superpitcher
Kilimanjaro
Kompakt



Producing dependably on Cologne's Kompakt for years and is widely recognised as one of the label's biggest artists, Aksel Schaufler, aka Superpitcher, is back. With a style all of his own it's hard to pin down exactly what Superpitcher does, but this is beyond doubt a good thing. Vocal hooks lead you to believe tracks are commercial before heavy drum machines and slurring synths take you in a completely different direction.

The same effect occurs on the more Minimal and Ambient tracks that always seem to surprise with their choice of sounds and arrangements. Further listening locks you in to another level of this heavily-layered album. You notice subtle pads, swirls, tinkling bells and percussions before tracks like *Rabbits In A Hurry* offer a tasty kick drum and moody '70s bassline to take the mood back to the dancefloor before yet again moving in a wildly unpredictable direction.

In a time when it's difficult to be truly original, Superpitcher has managed to produce an album of variety and out-there ideas without getting lost in an artsy, nonsensical chasm of abstract music. Classy and definitely a grower.

Chris Barker

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:
Moon Fever, Rabbits In A Hurry, Country Boy, Friday Night

8/10

Retro Respect



Princess
Princess
Supreme

Before Stock, Aitken shot themselves in the face with Sonia and The Reynolds Girls they were an up-and-coming, credible production team. This was their first album, a simple combination of great tunes, a plucked-from-obscurity vocalist and a Roland D50, Yamaha DX7 and Linn 9000. They called it the "sound of a bright young Britain" and it launched UK R&B to the world. Respect is due. ***Daniel Griffiths***



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Compilations

PICK OF THE MONTH

Permanent Vacation
Selected Label Works 2
Permanent Vacation



From synth-fuelled Disco biscuits to deeper rolling nuggets of '90s inspired House, this is another fantastic double-CD compilation in the series. With artists such as Tensnake, DMX Krew, Sally Shapiro and Azari & III all making an appearance, it's not to be missed. ***Chris Barker***

Ministry Of Sound
The Underground 2010 – Techno
Ministry Of Sound



No surprises here, another on-the-money mix from Ministry. Featuring the biggest producers and remixers in Techno, Von Stroke, Speedy J, Radio Slave and more. Rock-solid supermarket-style Techno. Done. ***Chris Barker***

Bustin' Out 1983
New Wave To New Beat Volume 3
Year Zero Recordings



Journey from the arpegiatted blips of John Carpenter and Anne Clarke to the glorious shoegazing synths of the Cocteau Twins with this fantastic compilation. The tracks sound as fresh now as they did back in the '80s – no, really. ***Chris Barker***

Danny Krivit
Edits By Mr.K Vol. 2: Music Of The Earth
Strut Records



Piecing together the soulful side of Disco and Funk, Krivit chops his way through horns and bongos like nobodies business. Listen out for classic samples from your favourite House records. ***Chris Barker***

Sander van Doorn
Dusk Till Doorn
Doorn Records



Working in his unique style, SvD delivers his latest supercharged double-disc compilation. With rolling low end and sidechained synths the order of the day, it's a Techy, Trancy, trippy and progressive mix. ***Chris Barker***

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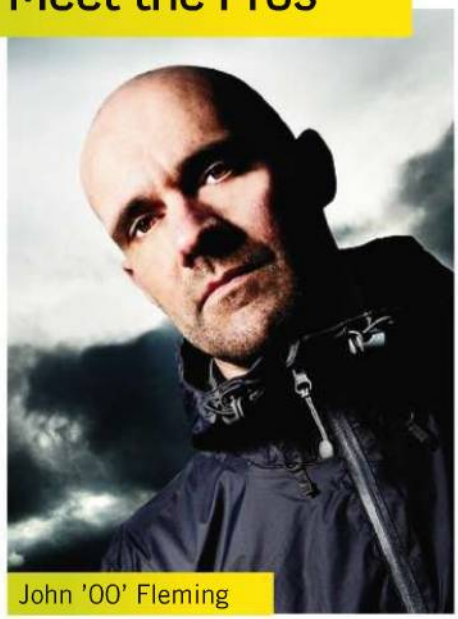
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IN THE STUDIO WITH...

Chocolate

From their early days as The Good Men to breaking into mainstream chart success, this Dance duo have seen it all. ***Chris Barker*** visits the studio of the two godfathers of Dutch House



Chocolate Puma are René 'DJ Zki' Horst (L) and Gaston 'Dobre' Steenkist (R)

© Joe Branston

VIDEO ON THE DVD

Puma



They were responsible for giving Laidback Luke his first break. Which in turn helped the likes of Bart B More and many, many other now famous producers rise to fame. Their epic career and experience in production have made Gaston 'Dobre' Steenkist and René 'DJ Zki' Horst of Chocolate Puma the original Dutch House duo. They've seen the top ten of the UK charts under three different guises – first as The Good Men with *Give It Up* in 1993, then Chocolate Puma's *I Want To Be With You* and also as Riva featuring Dannii Minogue with *Who Do You Love Now* in 2001. Their track *Give It Up* was even later sampled by Simply Red for the massive number-one hit, *Fairground* before being sampled again by Fatboy Slim and countless other acts.

With this versatility in mind we didn't quite know what to expect from the Chocolate Puma studio – would it be a fully-fledged multi-million Euro complex or a dusty basement filled with year's worth of the 'latest' technology. On arrival we discovered it was neither. The previously dusty old synthesizers and giant mixing consoles had been relegated to the attic and in place was a slick office environment with the Chocolate Puma boys now working completely in the box. With many other Dance artists going the other way and discovering a new love for hardware, *FM* was intrigued to meet the duo and find out more.

FM: So how did the Chocolate Puma guise start?

Gaston Steenkist: "Well we did a lot of projects under a lot of different names, then in early 2000 we did this record, *I Wanna Be You* and it didn't really fit into any of the other projects and names we had at the time."

René Horst: "Also the thing was that our record company in Holland at the time weren't feeling the record at all and didn't want to support it. So we gave it a name and released it on the obscure record label of our own. We set up an email address and just put that on the vinyl sleeve and put it out there. We forgot all about the record and then a few weeks later we decided to check the inbox for the email address. Inside, there was an email for Pete Tong saying that he needed another copy because he'd worn his out. A few months later, we got signed by Cream and it went to number six in the UK charts."

Did you call the record label and tell them?

GS: "[laughs] We do still occasionally rub it in! It happened before also with one of our first records for The Good Men, *Give It Up*. The record label didn't really like it but we managed to convince them to put it as a b-side to another record and it went to the number one in the billboard Dance charts in the USA and number five or something in the UK."

How was that for you? Because you obviously believed in the record but did you expect it to be that successful?

RH: "We expected a certain amount of success from the records but nothing like what we had. We have two record labels, one is called Pssst and the other is called JP and we just wanted to bring the records out. We decided that, with Pete Tong playing that record and the success it had, we should focus on that kind of sound. We also noticed that people really liked the name Chocolate Puma and remembered it."

How was the record made?

GS: "We were inspired by the whole Missy Elliot and Timbaland thing. We've always loved those really skippy beats they made. So we put together this track at 115bpm which we thought was cool, but we needed a House mix, that eventually became the single. We used Logic and three E-mu e6400 samplers and a Nord Lead.

"We actually sampled the chords from the Nord Lead and used the filters in the E-mu samplers to filter them, because the E-mu sounded so warm and nice. I think we used a [Roland TR-]909 for the drums and the big Mackie desk to mix on and record he vocals."



The Pumas use Mackie's Control Universal to ditch get hands-on



SPL's MTC-2381 takes care of monitor levels





The trusty Genelec 1031As have been a long-term choice for the Pumas

Do you feel any pressure to attack the charts?

RH: "No, what we want to do is make music for the dancefloor and sometimes the vocal tracks will cross over and we'll make a radio edit.

"The original of *I Wanna Be You* is an eight minute long progressive record that builds by using the vocal rhythm almost as an instrument, but with some cleaver editing it became radio friendly."

> When I hear the new Bart B More record I think 'damn, that's good' and I need to make an even better record

Now the American Hip Hop scene is looking to Holland and the Club scene for inspiration…

GS: "Yeah, we want to keep making our music for the dancefloor but of course I'd love to find out what Chocolate Puma could do on those Pop records. We have some contacts with record labels in the States and they are currently hunting for Dutch producers and Electronic music producers. I don't know if we're currently ready for it, but there have been offers and we'll wait for the right one."

RH: "I think the Dutch sound is actually bigger outside of Holland, because in Holland it's still viewed as 'only' Dance music. Even though the producers and artists take it seriously, I think the public here still see it differently."

GS: "We're also really friendly with all the other producers in the scene here, as well as being very competitive towards each other. So, when I hear the new Bart B More record I think 'damn, that's good' and I need to make a record that's even better.

"We think it's really cool and we feel really proud that people like Bart [B More] and Afrojack are really at the top right now. It's a really healthy open scene here."

There are no jealous regrets from helping these guys out?

RH: "Oh no, not at all."

GS: "It's really hard to DJ in Holland though because the Dutch crowd can be so reserved. They're Tweeting that they're having a good time and taking photos and things like that but you'd never be able to tell when you're DJing, so it can be tough."

RH: "It's because there's always something going on here and they're a bit spoilt for choice I think."

GS: "When we go abroad we are always amazed at the amount of energy from the crowd. Maybe that's why Dutch DJs are booked so much, because they have to work so hard when they DJ in Holland."

Does Beatport success or chart success matter to you guys?

RH: "It's doesn't matter if a record isn't successful but it does matter if it is a success as it's a really positive thing. Sometimes we know we have a good record and it's doing really well on the dancefloor but it might not sell as well as you'd expect."





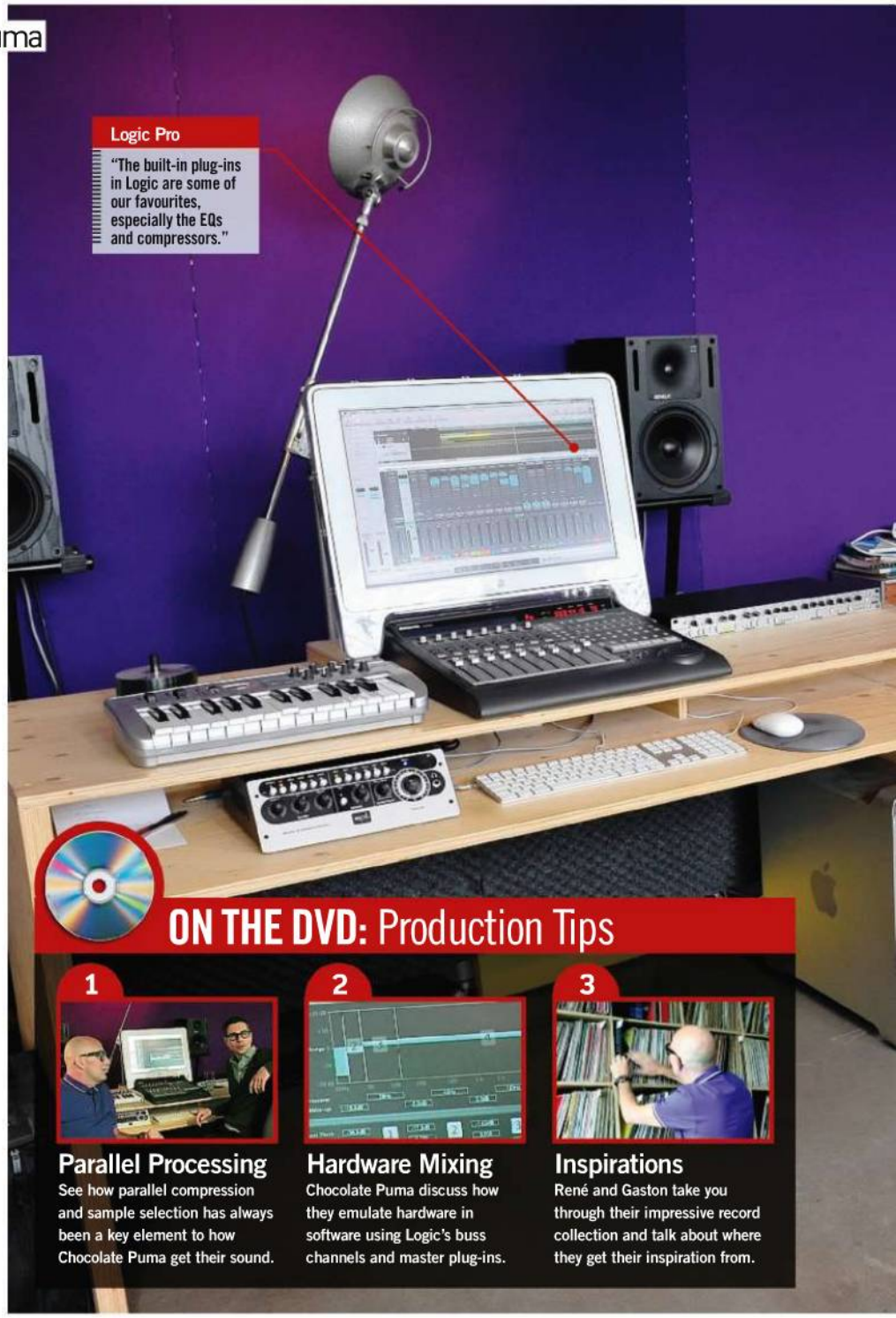
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And there's the competitiveness between Bart B More, Afrojack, [Laidback] Luke on Beatport too?
GS: "Of course, there'll always be that."

How do you keep things fresh and progress?
RH: "I think since we've been DJing again for the last three years we've been inspired again by the people and seeing them Dance to our records really motivates you to make more music. We like Dubstep a lot so we've been using those influences, but we're always influenced by Hip Hop with the Funk in the beats and the out-there production."

GS: "Plus, I just can't imagine not making music – it's just something I have to do. It's like breathing and because I'm very competitive I always want to be on top and be the best at what I do."

RH: "When we started to make music, it was in Gaston's bedroom at his parent's house and we would start at 10 and finish at midnight before burning out and having to refuel for a few days. Back then we didn't have girlfriends and it was much easier to work like that.

"Now we probably start at our own homes doing email, website stuff and label information before getting into the studio at around 12 to start making music and working on remixes. We finish around 6pm and generally do this every day, unless we've been DJing for a few days."

You said you're competitive, so what's the next goal for you guys?
GS: "There are always points in our career where you could have said, we've made it, but that's not what it's all about, is it?"

Maybe not, but where do you go next?
RH: "I guess it's to be booked in bigger or better places and to make a better Dance record than the record we made before."

GS: "I don't know what bigger is? Two years ago we joined Defected and they've been really great, helping us go to the next level. For the majority of our career we've been fairly low profile, but in the last few years we've put ourselves out there. I mean, we have pictures now, which before we never really did the PR thing. We were just in the studio nerding around doing music."

So you're really pushing the whole Chocolate Puma package?
GS: "Yeah we're doing more visual elements, t-shirts and adding visual elements to some of the DJ sets."

Why has this happened now?
RH: "It's necessary I think, in the early days we just made records and put them out to sell on vinyl."

GS: "It's also really rewarding now, and it's a new time. Being on all the social networks and communicating with the fans and getting feedback is just great fun."

Do you still get an exciting feeling when playing out a record you've just made?
RH: "Yeah, it's an excited healthy nervousness, like a birthday feeling. I've been DJing for 25 years but now it's more fun that it's ever been. One reason is because we don't have to carry all the heavy vinyl around any more. Plus, we used to DJ other people's music and try and squeeze in as many of our own records as possible, now we only play our own records, remixes and edits."

So how does it work when you're DJing?
GS: "We both have our own CDJ so it's truly back-to-back. We don't like the idea of laptop screen being between us and the crowd.

"There are really great guys using laptops but it's not for us, maybe we're missing something, I don't know… When we started we took a while to get used to DJing together."

So do you talk about what track is next, or do you just play it?
RH: "We just play it."

And are their times when one looks at the other like, 'what the hell is this?'
GS: "Yeah, sometimes [laughs]"

RH: "I never know what he's going to play, but it's not really competitive, it's about keeping the overall mix right."

GS: "Every week we're making new tracks to play too so it's always changing and evolving."

How many edits, bootlegs and such do you think you make a week?
RH: "Oh, that depends really. You get weeks when you're really not inspired."

GS: "Sometimes we make two or three records a week – sometimes it's two or three a month."

Do you have a main territory that you play?
RH: "We do a lot of gigs in Holland and Eastern Europe is also really big for us."





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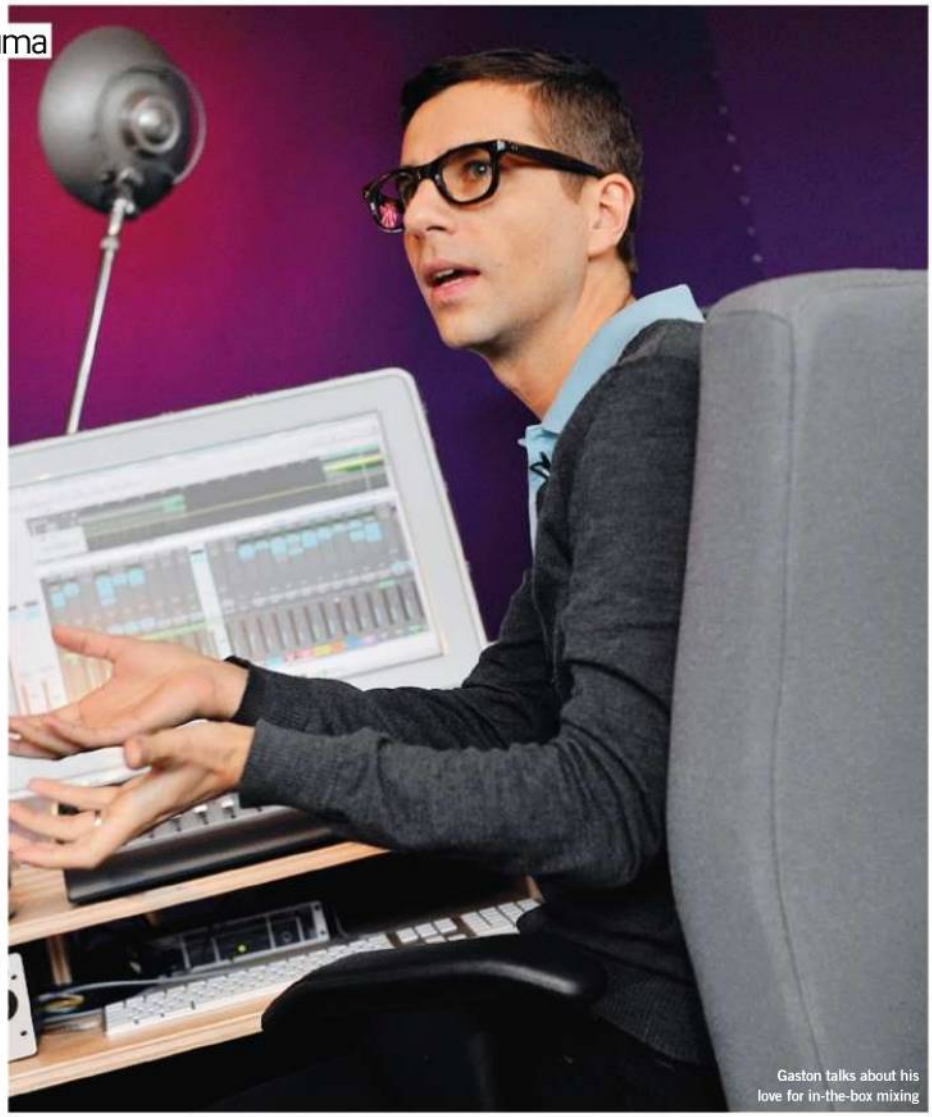
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Gaston talks about his love for in-the-box mixing

Where do you look forward to playing the most?

GS: "It's hard to say but the Eastern European crowd are crazy now, with Dance music really taking off there. We played Hungary recently and that was great. But we love playing everywhere and experiencing the subtleties of different cultures and crowds."

RH: "We've got Australian and American tours planned and we'll be going to Asia and the usual European destinations too."

And it's Top 100 time, what are your thoughts?

GS: "We've never been into the big campaigns or anything like that."

RH: "I think it's good, but it's for a different scene, the Trance guys have a big following and it's obvious that they are at the top.

GS: "It's like what we said about the Beatport chart – it's really nice if we were to be up there of course but we're not overly concerned with it. I remember when [Laidback] Luke went in at 27 last year he was really happy and I can understand that, if we went in high this year, then of course we would be happy."

RH: "But it's happiness like when people are smiling on the dancefloor that matters and people telling you they had the best night ever." FM

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For more info on Chocolate Puma's upcoming releases and DJ dates, as well as the latest news, visit their official MySpace page at: **myspace.com/chocolatepumamusic**

Buss Mixing with Chocolate Puma

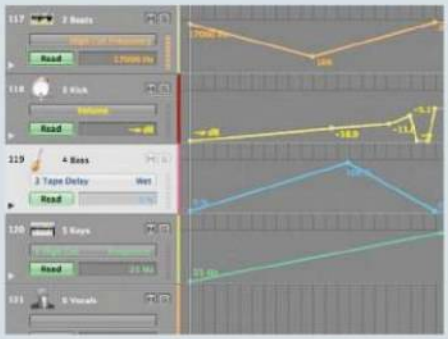
Chocolate Puma tell us how bussing and grouping your tracks can save you time and open up your mix…



1 "We use a lot of tracks for our productions, so things can get very busy. A great way of fine-tuning your mix, but also of enhancing your workflow, is to introduce an extra stage to your mix down. Instead of routing our tracks directly to our main output, we always route them to a buss channel. This way we can group all different elements into sub-groups. We created a Logic template with subgroups for kick, drums, bass, lead vocals, percussion and so on. Now if we want to solo our percussion, we just press solo on this sub-group instead of having to solo several channels. Route your channels to your sub groups as early as possible in the mix stage to keep an overview of what's going on."



2 "For drums, we always layer a lot of different sounds. First, we choose the best sounds we can find. To create more sonic depth, we tend to use analogue sounds, dusty sampled sounds and live recorded drums at the same time. We EQ them, compress them, smack them, filter them – anything goes. The danger is that it can sound disjointed. By routing all these drums to one group and putting parallel compression on the buss, we can glue them together. Another benefit is that we have greater control over the dynamics. This is very effective in the loudness war, as we now can 'pre-master' our sub groups, so the compressors and limiters on our master channel have less to worry about, which gives us a more open and dynamic mix, which is still very loud."



3 "One of the joys of working with a modern DAW is that we can automate everything pretty easily – and we use automation a lot! One of the cool things in Logic is that you also can create an arrange track of a buss channel. This way you can apply automation on your groups. So, instead of filtering 14 synths in your breakdown, you just put a filter on your synth buss and automate the cutoff, which makes things a lot easier."

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PRODUCTION ESSENTIALS

Pro Vocal Production

The art of quality vocals is strived for by almost all producers. Some have even made careers solely on their vocal production skills, so it's no secret that it's a complex process. ***Jono Buchanan*** sets you on the right path to vocal victory…

Have you ever stopped to wonder why the singer is always the most famous member of any band? Well, it's as simple as this – for every fan who can really spot a great bass player or virtuoso drummer and for the considerably greater number who find themselves playing air-guitar to their favourite solos, the vast majority of people relate to and admire singers as they are ultimately delivering 'the message' of any song. The ability to sing a song well, so that it connects with people and makes them believe you're singing for and about them is a priceless thing and it's often the difference between success and failure.

Onstage, singers are responsible for their own performances but if you're charged with getting that same energy and commitment onto a record in the studio as the producer, you need to know what you're doing. With all due respect, a fair number of the reader demos we receive every month don't do a project's chosen singer justice – rather than sounding like a fully integrated aspect of the track, vocals are frequently much too loud or too quiet, they don't match the dynamics of the track behind them and rather than pulling you into a song and producing an emotional response in a listener, too often they have the opposite effect.

So, here's the foolproof guide to all things vocal production.

Microphones and recording chains

You can only get the best from the tools you use if you know how they work and this is as true of your microphone as it is of, say, your DAW. Studio microphones fall into a number of categories and understanding the differences between these is crucial if you're to gain the best recordings possible. Dynamic microphones are often written off as exclusively a 'live' choice or a cheap alternative to condenser microphones, but this isn't strictly true.

The advantages of dynamic microphones in the studio is that they can handle a lot of gain and the slightly 'rougher' results can enhance a record, particularly if you're deliberately aiming for a result which lacks obvious 'studio sheen'. The more directional nature of them also helps if you're recording a band and the vocalist wants to jam along as the band lays down takes too, as spill can often be more carefully controlled.

That said, if you're able to control the singer's environment in a nicely balanced acoustic space, condenser microphones are often the best choice. Large-diaphragm models give a wide 'target area' for a vocal and the enhanced frequency pick-up of condenser microphones make them a must for anyone working with a particularly rich-sounding vocalist. Low volume content is also more accurately captured with condenser models so, more often than not, this will be default microphone type to choose in the studio.

As far as a recording chain is concerned, opinions differ. Preamps and channel strips with EQs and dynamics are popular but anything you add on the way in is tough to remove at the mix stage, so don't set up anything wild. At the most, some extremely gentle compression is permissible if you're working with a singer who goes from the

THE EXPERT

Jono Buchanan
producer, composer, songwriter



Jono Buchanan is a producer, composer and songwriter. Among his projects this summer is the production and mix of 'Songs From The Yellow Room' by Martin and Towers. 'Words I Can't Say', from that album, has been kindly offered by the writers to provide audio examples for this feature.



Hand-held Mics

In the right hands, dynamic hand-held microphones can provide some of the most natural performance traits on a recording

Onstage, dynamic microphones are the preferred solution, though if you're working with an artist and developing their profile by helping transform their studio work into live performances, it can be a good idea to practice the required performance techniques in the studio.

Hand-held microphones are fairly directional and they also increase their gain output quickly as you sing closer them. You'll doubtless have seen seasoned pros move their microphone further away for loud notes before coming in super-close on breathy stuff and this technique provides an extremely natural form of compression.

Taking the attributes of dynamic microphones into consideration, it should be clear that you could plug a dynamic microphone in and then invite your singer to sit down next to you and 'have a sing through' while you point out parts of the song and some considerations for their performance. This will certainly help them connect to the song and, if you're in a songwriting session with a top-line writer who suddenly hits on a good idea, having a dynamic mic lying in close proximity will help you capture ideas quickly. Equally, if you're with a band, putting the singer in the control room and asking them to sing along to help the vibe of the backing track you're recording can be effective and again, a hand-held dynamic will do the job.

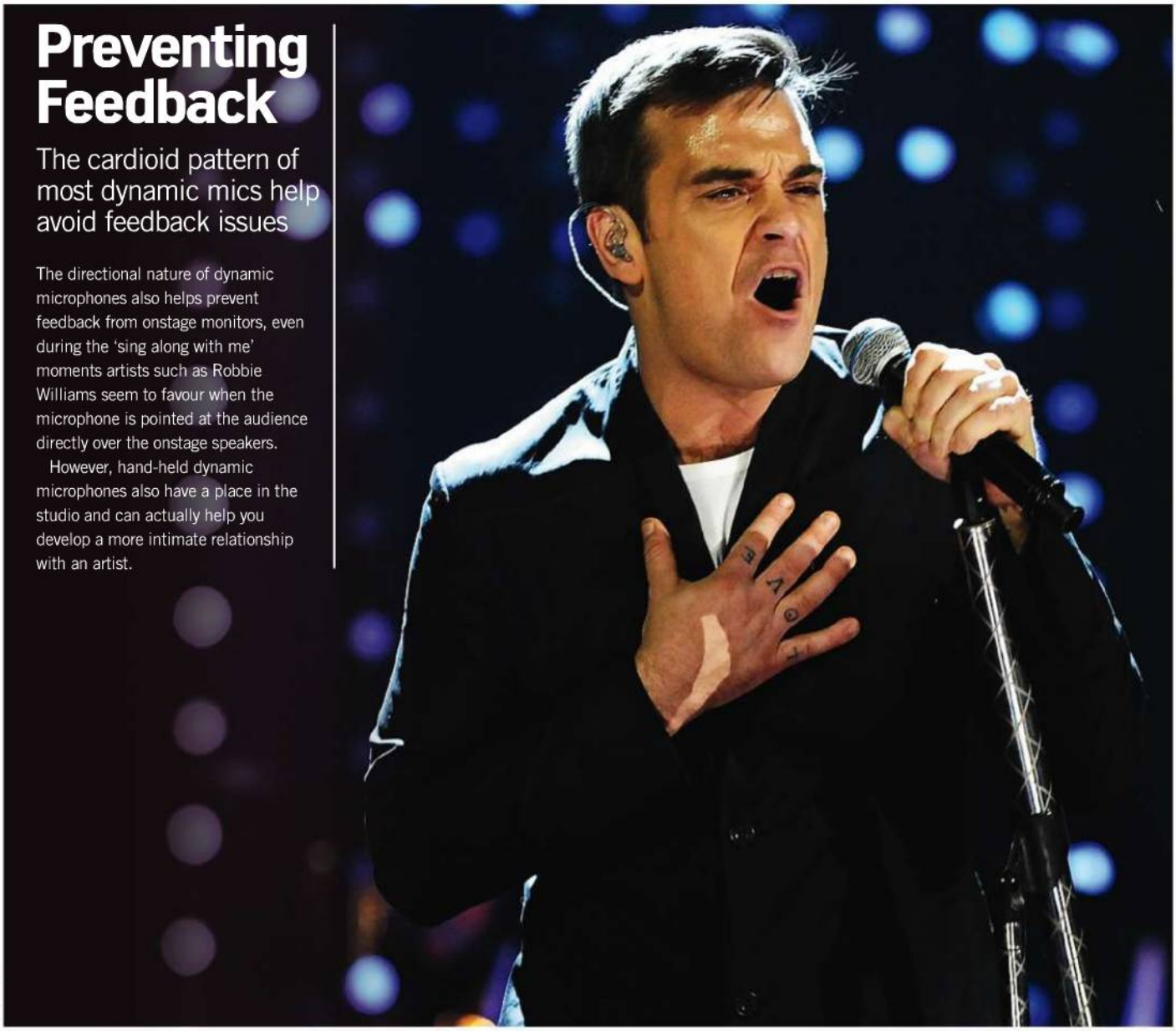
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Preventing Feedback

The cardioid pattern of most dynamic mics help avoid feedback issues

The directional nature of dynamic microphones also helps prevent feedback from onstage monitors, even during the 'sing along with me' moments artists such as Robbie Williams seem to favour when the microphone is pointed at the audience directly over the onstage speakers.

However, hand-held dynamic microphones also have a place in the studio and can actually help you develop a more intimate relationship with an artist.



© Gettyimages

dynamics equivalent of zero-to-sixty in three seconds.

Location, location, location

If you aren't lucky enough to have a bespoke vocal booth to hand, do what you can to prepare the space in which vocals will be recorded. For starters, make sure you get hold of a pop shield to catch those plosive sounds and position it to keep the vocalist at least three or four inches away from the microphone so that it's effective.

SE Electronics' Reflexion Filter and products like it are great starting points for eliminating unwanted room ambience but you can go further. If at all possible, make a corner of your production room 'the vocals area' and put foam on the walls to kill immediate reflections. While recording, one effective solution is to create a kind of 'duvet tent' to surround your vocalist within an acoustically-deadening environment, but test this for stability and 'heat issues' before going ahead! While solutions like this can often look crazy, the benefits for a nicely recorded but acoustically flat vocal are huge.

So, that's covered a few of the basics of vocal recording, but for some hands-on advice and some general tips, it's time to check out the boxes laden around this feature. As ever, compare the results of your vocal recordings and mixes with those on your favourite records and vocals on tracks in a similar genre to your own. If you don't like what you hear, stick at it – it can be elusive but the perfect vocal is a vital step in making your tracks sound as professional as possible.

By now you should be thinking about your next project – before you sit down for your next vocal session, heed the following tips well!

10 Tips on Putting A Vocalist At Ease

1. Let them warm up at their own pace. Let them teach you something about singing to build their confidence and the rapport between you.

2. Use their first take to set up levels and tell them you'll be doing that. This will let them realise you're busy 'technically' and not listening 'musically' yet – giving them a pressure-free first run through.

3. Don't offer an opinion on their performance too quickly and, ideally, until you're asked for one.

4. Have a glass or bottle of water ready for them. They'll doubtless have brought her own but this will show them you know what you're doing.

5. If you're working in the same room, position them somewhere where they won't feel you're staring at them. Somewhere

Vocal Thickening

Giving your vocals the right weight is crucial if they're to sit comfortably in your mix. Here's how to turn a thin, uninspiring vocal part into one with much more depth

ON THE DVD

> **Original Track:** Using an Apple Loop, we're going to look at ways to thicken a vocal like this to help it sit comfortably in the track behind it.

> **Low Mid EQ:** Here, using EQ, I'm enhancing the low-mid content a little.

> **Chorus:** A slightly generous Chorus treatment is added, so you can hear what it does!

> **16th note delay:** This first, 16-note delay effectively 'lengthens' each note.

> **Quarter-note echo:** This more traditional echo helps place the vocal in the mix.

> **Spreader:** Create the impression of a multi-tracked vocal with the Spreader plug-in.



1 Here's a track with a vocal taken from Logic's own loop library. As with sample CDs, I don't have the luxury of being able to ask the singer to multitrack this part, so I'm going to need to think of some ways to add weight myself.



2 Firstly, I'm going to add some EQ to the vocal part in the low-mid areas to enhance any naturally occurring content here. Rather than the vocal floating prettily on top, this should help if sit a little more comfortably. It also means the vocal can drop in volume.



3 Next, to thicken the vocal, I'm using chorus. The old rule with chorus used to be that if you can hear it, you're using too much, but I'm being a touch generous here as I actually want you to hear it! You can see the settings I've used and hear the result on the DVD.



4 Time for our first delay. Set up on the first auxiliary, this is a quick, 16th note delay with a low feedback setting which means the lead vocal is enhanced with a copy of itself almost immediately, which helps thicken it out. Note the low-pass filter removing brightness from this echo.



5 The second delay is more traditional – a quarter-note one set up on auxiliary 2. This one is also filtered but it preserves the high frequency content which adds to the smoothness of the original vocal part.



6 Lastly, we're using the Spreader plug-in to give the impression of a multi-tracked vocal. You won't need much of this and its use allows us to back down the chorus level too. An EQ tweak to add some top end and a tiny volume reduction later and here's a much fuller-sounding vocal.

Comping and Vocal Preparation

Studio vocals have the potential to be 'better than live' as by comping together the very best bits, you can create a 'super take'. Here's how comping works in Logic...

ON THE DVD

> **Comping 1:** Here's the most recent take of the vocal at the top of a comp folder.
> **Comping 2:** Here's the first comp tweak, to the third line.
> **Comping 3:** Earlier takes are often preferable if you're looking to replace a 'strained' sound.
> **Comping 4:** The last line ends up being comped from four different takes.
> **Comping 5:** The first line needs more impact, so it's back to the earlier takes.



1 Here you can see a basic take folder. A series of recordings of the lead vocal have been made onto the same track and these have stacked up in a folder. At the moment, the whole of the top recording is being used as the 'comp' take, which is the one with the red surround at the top.



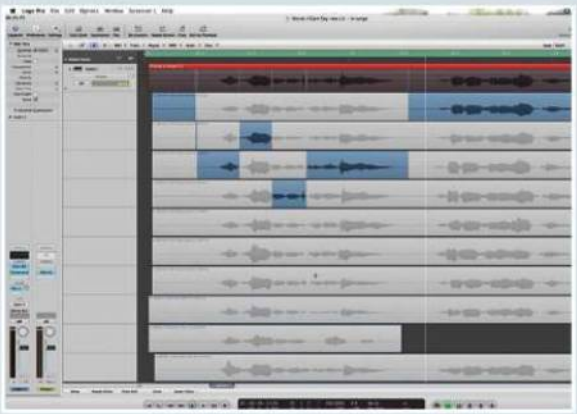
2 There are a few spots where a better take exists. The first of these is the third line 'I'm pushing you away' which lacks a bit of energy and where the tuning isn't as strong. To choose a different take, simply swipe over this section in one of the earlier performances.



3 The next problem is 'Mean so much to you' which sounds a little strained. Again, simply audition earlier takes until you find a line that feels more comfortable. In this instance, a solution is found in much earlier takes, which is often the case if it's 'strain' you're looking to replace.



4 One obvious problem is the 'I' in the final line 'Words I can't say', which sounds exposed and out of tune. Once an alternative has been found, it's obvious that the final two words would also benefit from replacement. In the end, each word has come from a different take.



5 As you fix some problems, others become more obvious. Now that the vocal in the latter stages is stronger, the first line needs more impact, so I'm searching out a better comp for this section. As before, sections from four takes yield a better result.



6 When you're happy with your comp, click the down arrow in the top-right-hand corner of the comp take and select 'Flatten'. This will bring all of your selected 'bits' into a single take, with short crossfades automatically added to ensure smooth transitions from one slice to the next.

THE LITTLE VILLAIN GROWS UP

"THE ADDED SAMPLE MEMORY AND KEYBOARD REALLY PLACE THIS WITH THE BIG BOYS." - FUTURE MUSIC 211



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Tightening and Tuning with Melodyne

Once you've got a comp you like, it's a question of turning this good performance into a 'perfect' one. With Melodyne, the ultimate vocal is only clicks away...

ON THE DVD

> **No Melodyne Yet:** Here's the vocal file we'll be running through Melodyne.
> **Melodyne Scan:** Here's how the vocal sounds after it has been scanned into Melodyne. It should be identical but it's a good idea to check.
> **Melodyne Tune:** Once any required administration has been carried out on the vocal, it's time to tune it. Here's the final result.
> **Melodyne Modulation:** I've knocked out some of the more extreme vibrato, particularly on the low notes at the end of each line.
> **Melodyne Final:** Finally the timing is corrected and a couple of notes are boosted in volume, which will help compression later.



1 Using the master comp from the Vocal and Comping Preparation box, you can see how the vocal looks once it's flattened. We could use Logic to shuttle around any notes that aren't bang in time and adjust crossfades accordingly, but this is more easily handled in Melodyne.



2 Step two is to set Melodyne up at the top of the channel strip. I'm using a little monitor EQ and compression that I'll remove later but Melodyne must go first, otherwise the EQ'd and compressed vocal will be fed into Melodyne. Then, press 'Transfer' and play the file into Melodyne.



3 The next job is to go through Melodyne's 'result' and listen carefully. Where has Melodyne assumed two separate notes are just 'vibrato' and similarly, where have two 'blobs' been allocated to a single note? Carry out any repairs before moving on by separating or joining notes as necessary.



4 Next, go through and tune. Once notes are separated, this should be relatively easy but rather than selecting all notes and double-clicking them to 'quantise tuning' in one go, it pays to treat each note individually, particularly if you want to bend one note slightly sharp or flat on purpose.



5 There are a couple of notes with wide vibrato which isn't helping the sense of this vocal being really locked in. So, switching to the pitch modulation tool, I've reduced the wobble on these notes. Be careful – too much and you're in Cher-land. A gentle amount works nicely here.



6 I need to adjust the timing of the line 'Three little words...' which rushes slightly. Using the Timing Correction tool and by switching to eighth notes, I can see what needs fixing. Lastly, I'm boosting the volume of the bottom notes, which will help my compressor later.



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Keeping Your Vocals Up-Front

Your vocal is comped and tuned, it's in time and you've even carried out some dynamics work. Now it's time to construct the channel strip to convert your vocal into the real deal

ON THE DVD

> **Bounce Melodyne:** Here's how the dry vocal sounds once it's been bounced out of Melodyne.
> **EQ'd vocal:** I'm using EQ to sweeten the vocal and remove any slight 'problem' frequencies.
> **Compressed Vocal:** The compressor is working hard to even out most dynamics.
> **De-essed Vocal:** De-essing can be effective, just don't go too far.
> **Effected Vocal:** Subtle reverb and delay are added to enhance the vocal and help it integrate into the track.
> **Automated Vocal:** Volume and an effect send are automated to really stamp the vocal's authority.



1 Firstly, you'll need to bounce your Melodyne'd vocal down as a new audio file. Put the fader at 0dB and click the 'stereo' button at the bottom of your master output so that the channel becomes mono. Then, solo the region, bounce in place and, finally, remove Melodyne.



2 Next, we're going to need an EQ. I'm using the Sonnox one but any four- or five-band model will work. I want this vocal to cut through, so I'm sweetening it with some gentle extra top-end, while removing a little bass, low-mid and dropping some volume in the 'telephone' 1-3kHz area.



3 Next, it's time for compression. I'm slamming this vocal quite hard as I want the dynamics under control. Using the Tube-Tech CL-1B, I'm setting threshold to send the entire vocal into the compressor, with fairly fast attack and release times to keep the sound punchy.



4 The vocal is a touch sibilant, which you can hear on the first line 'How hard it iS to Say' in particular. Using UAD's Precision De-esser, I'm slightly softening the 'S' sounds, though if you drop the threshold too low, the result is unnatural. Err on the side of caution here.



5 Effects next. I'm using the Lexicon VintagePlate to create a little space around the vocal. As ever, the idea isn't to send the vocalist a million miles away, so only a little is needed. As effective is a low feedback quarter-note delay. I'm using UAD's Cooper Time Cube for this.



6 The compressor is doing a great job but I'm not going to rely on it to control dynamics by itself. Switching to volume automation, I'm putting some subtle lifts and drops in the vocal. Lastly, I'm using a delay on auxiliary 3 to make the last word 'say', echo.

behind you is ideal, then you can turn around to talk to them between takes but offer privacy during recording.

6. Constructive criticism is everything and, as such, ban anyone with a loose tongue from being in the studio with you, especially managers! There are a thousand ways to say 'you're singing flat', though choosing precisely those words, particularly towards the beginning of the session, won't build confidence. Any opportunity to let singers realise this themselves is more effective, so if tuning is a problem, stop after a few takes and play some back. If they don't hear it, their tuning isn't going to get better anyway. If they do, they'll feel more confident if they point problems out to you.

7. Be ready to give them the best monitor mix possible. Some vocalists like lots of level, some very little. Some like monitor reverb, some hate it. Have all of this set up on auxiliaries on every track, so the session runs as smoothly as possible.

8. If you can do it quickly, have one channel set up with a channel strip solution, which will show how a short section will sound once the track is finished. Dry session vocals don't sound inspiring, so their confidence will shoot up if you can show how great they'll sound 'in context'.

9. Whenever they do something great, make sure that you tell them. Nothing builds confidence like a few well-placed compliments, though they won't enjoy you sucking up, so don't go overboard.

10. Remain enthusiastic and develop a poker face. Nervous singers often sound dreadful at the beginning, so as you build their confidence by reflecting your own (somewhat falsely!) they will relax, so the result will improve.

Don't wince or flinch at mistakes and don't immediately hit 'stop' either – calmly explain what wasn't right at the end of a take and give them another go. FM

Recording Raps

The unpredictable nature of rap dynamics and sibilance make it an art in itself

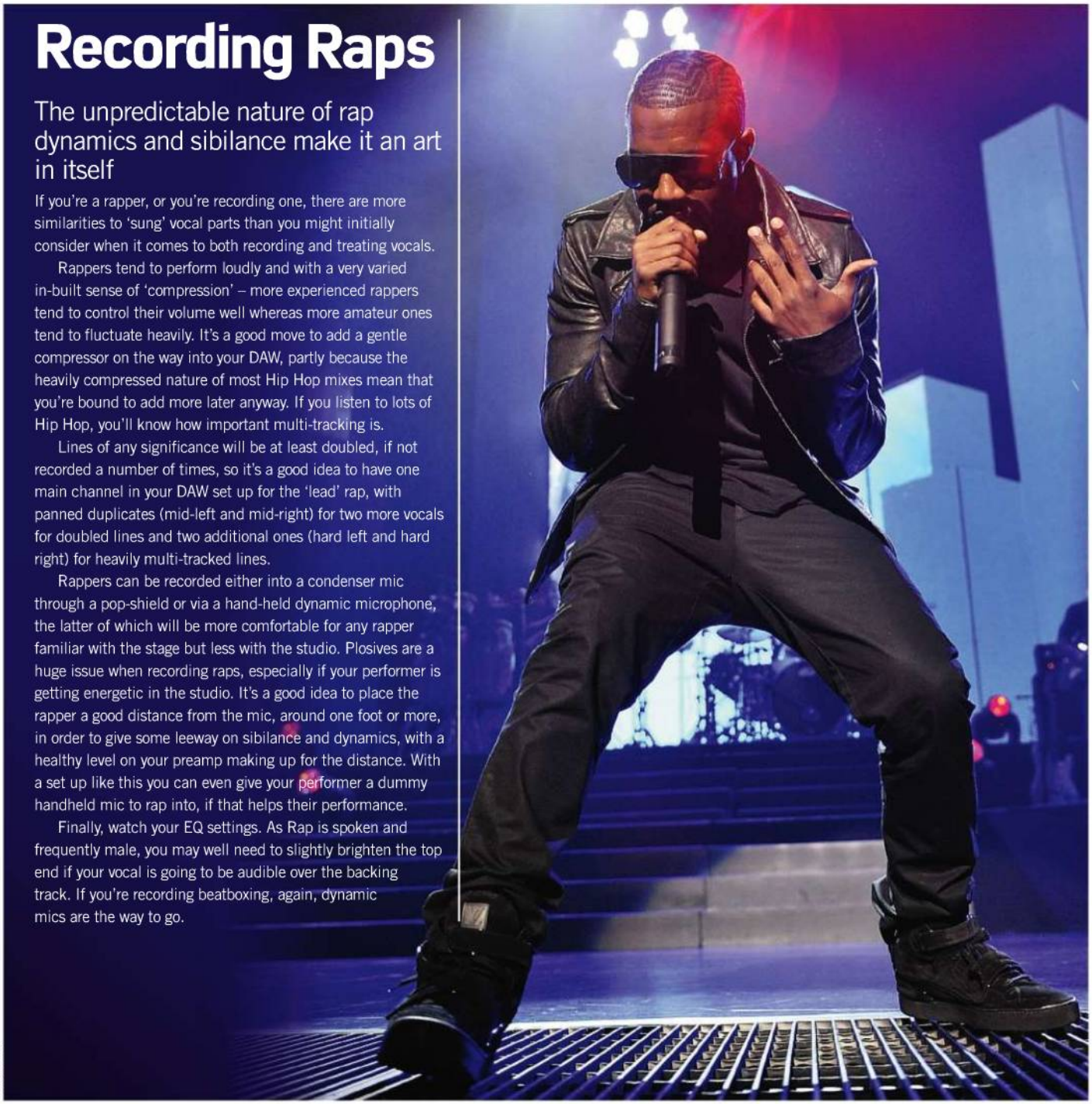
If you're a rapper, or you're recording one, there are more similarities to 'sung' vocal parts than you might initially consider when it comes to both recording and treating vocals.

Rappers tend to perform loudly and with a very varied in-built sense of 'compression' – more experienced rappers tend to control their volume well whereas more amateur ones tend to fluctuate heavily. It's a good move to add a gentle compressor on the way into your DAW, partly because the heavily compressed nature of most Hip Hop mixes mean that you're bound to add more later anyway. If you listen to lots of Hip Hop, you'll know how important multi-tracking is.

Lines of any significance will be at least doubled, if not recorded a number of times, so it's a good idea to have one main channel in your DAW set up for the 'lead' rap, with panned duplicates (mid-left and mid-right) for two more vocals for doubled lines and two additional ones (hard left and hard right) for heavily multi-tracked lines.

Rappers can be recorded either into a condenser mic through a pop-shield or via a hand-held dynamic microphone, the latter of which will be more comfortable for any rapper familiar with the stage but less with the studio. Plosives are a huge issue when recording raps, especially if your performer is getting energetic in the studio. It's a good idea to place the rapper a good distance from the mic, around one foot or more, in order to give some leeway on sibilance and dynamics, with a healthy level on your preamp making up for the distance. With a set up like this you can even give your performer a dummy handheld mic to rap into, if that helps their performance.

Finally, watch your EQ settings. As Rap is spoken and frequently male, you may well need to slightly brighten the top end if your vocal is going to be audible over the backing track. If you're recording beatboxing, again, dynamic mics are the way to go.



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CUBASE ESSENTIALS



Exploring the Updates in Cubase 5.5

This month ***Bruce Aisher*** takes a critical look at the new Cubase 5.5 update, questions and ponders the functional tweaks and is still left wondering at the wisdom of some of the cosmetic changes. Don't update until you've read on…

Steinberg have released the much-anticipated version 5.5 (from 5.1.1) update for Cubase, and many users have had a chance to use it for over a month. As always, and with many pieces of complex software, it has its lovers and haters. This is especially true (as always) when one dips into the official Steinberg forums.

The tricky part when trying to make sense of this, is deciphering the various reported problems across different operating systems and endless hardware configurations. This month, I'll try and address some of the good (and bad) aspects of the update, and we'll be dipping into some of the new features over the coming months.



Cubase's Editing > Project and Mixer window is where you'll find your GUI editing options

THE EXPERT

Bruce Aisher, producer, engineer

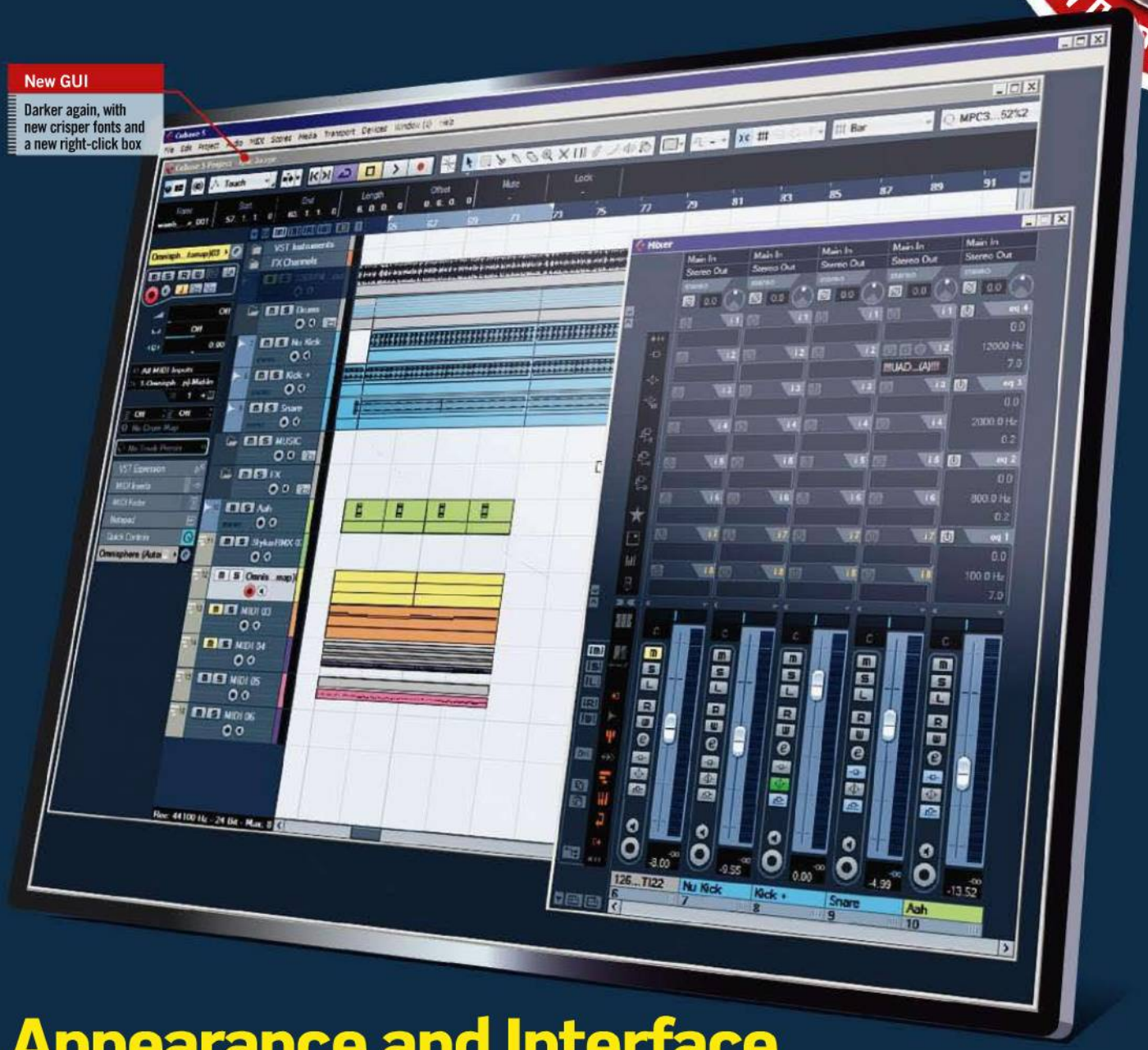


Bruce has been using Cubase since its arrival on the Atari ST in 1989. He's grown up alongside his favourite piece of software, sharing the ups (and downs) of the professional music world. The two are now inseparable.

Performing the update

1 Golden rule number one – never upgrade or update your software in the middle of a project or if time is limited and/or money is on the line. Obvious stuff, but sometimes we can't help it, especially when new features are promised and we are lured into thinking that we must have them – now! So, if you are sensible you won't dive head first into an update without checking to see what others have to say first, particularly if the software is central to your workflow.

Steinberg's updates are usually quite simple affairs, and as is the case this time involves updating eLicenser (USB dongle) software as well. Ideally you should make a backup of your main system drive before updating, and failsafe rollbacks can be achieved using a suitable drive imaging program. If you are impatient, then ensure



Appearance and Interface

2 After loading Cubase 5.5 for the first time you will be confronted with the 'new-look Cubase'. Darker again than when C4 moved to C5, but also with a larger Infoline and new (anti-aliasing) font throughout, there is certainly a new feel to this version. Depending on your OS and point of view, the font changes will range from being an improvement, to an utter disaster. I'm afraid that I am in the latter section. On my 32-bit XP system the font changes left me with a cheap looking, harder to read interface with blurred fonts. Disabling 'ClearType' globally improved things somewhat, but still left me disappointed. This issue has caused much anger and consternation on the C5 Windows forums, mainly because it appears to a future Cyrillic compatibility issue(!).

There are ways of making C5.5 use of an alternative (and much improved) font – just do a web search – but this is definitely not sanctioned by Steinberg themselves (and breaches their terms of use). There are many other cosmetic changes (and extra tweaks to reflect this), but the next most significant for me is the resizing of the right-click toolbox. It is slower to use and completely throws your workflow if, like me, you have been using Cubase for over 20 years.

ON THE DVD

> A quick perusal of the new-look Cubase interface.

that at the very least you make a copy of the 'Cubase 5' (or 'Cubase 5_64') application folder that contains the main Cubase 5 program. Under Windows this is usually found in the Steinberg subfolder in 'Program Files'. On the Mac everything is contained within the 'Cubase5.app' package.

You should also save the Preferences information that is found here:

Win: '\Documents and Settings\<user name>\Application Data\Steinberg\Cubase 5' and '/Users/<user name>/Library/Preferences/Cubase 5' on Mac.

ON THE DVD

> A video for navigating through the Cubase preference minefield on both Windows and on Mac.

After the update

3 Assuming the update went smoothly you should now be in a position to start Cubase 5.5 for the first time – and this is where some people's problems start. Depending on your existing setup, you may not get past the initial logo screen without a crash or hang-up. Most users will proceed smoothly

to the main project window with no problems whatsoever. Loading an old project should work fine if you use mostly Cubase-only plug-ins and start working on a new project. Problems have been reported under other circumstances (check the *Plug-in Compatibility* box below), and the usual response from Steinberg is to "delete your preferences". While this does not always solve problems it is a good place to start, although losing all your well-honed settings is incredibly annoying – lucky we backed them up.

Most preferences are stored in a series of .xml files in the folders that I mentioned earlier. Deleting your preferences involves deleting the whole folder (which is reconstructed when loading the first time), but individual files can be restored later if required (Key Commands.xml for example). RAMPresets.xml contains many of the C5.5 customisation options (including custom Quantise settings), and individual sections of this can be cut and pasted from the pre-update backup if you are feeling daring and have done lots of tweaking.

ON THE DVD

> **Restoring your essential preferences.**

Performance

4 One of the first wishes of any DAW user in an update that promises even a modicum of performance improvement is that it will apply to their setup as much as anyone else's.

Steinberg hailed the potentially improved multi-core performance in C5.5 for those with anything greater than a Quadcore processor. I am pleased to say that even my 'lowly' Quadcore system seems to be a bit snappier, and with less processor spiking at lower latencies. Other users have reported similar results, so good news there.



Cubase's Editing > Project and Mixer window is where you'll find your GUI editing options

On Windows systems Steinberg have also added an option to 'Disable CPU Energy Saving', which can in some cases provide more consistent performance by inhibiting CPU speed 'stepping'. They have partnered this with a recommended BIOS setup tweak of disabling 'CPU C States' (or 'CPU Idle State'). This is particularly aimed at those with i5 and i7 CPUs. Additionally, Reverence has been tweaked for better performance – something that has been called for since its inception, and always welcome in a plug-in that potentially gets more use than many others.

ON THE DVD

> **Delving into Cubase performance tweaks.**

Plug-in Compatibility

5 We now arrive at the bête noire of all DAW developers – third-party plug-ins. Despite standards such as VST 2.4, VST 3 and the like, this has always been an issue for DAW makers. Some third-party plug-ins just don't work well after an update, and one of the more high profile of these – with the arrival of C5.5 – was Celemony's Melodyne. In this case Celemony issued an update very quickly which solved the problem, but there remain issues elsewhere.

Before the finger starts being pointed, it is important to remember that this issue exists on Mac systems (which generally have their own sets of problems) and Windows XP, Vista and Windows 7 (all in 32 or 64-bit versions) – oh dear. Although 32-bit users have their fair share of issues, the water is muddied entirely by 64-bit OS users, as they have to use VST Bridge to access existing 32-bit plug-ins. VST Bridge is not particularly loved on the official Steinberg forums, but it is fair to say that it is only a bonus legacy extra rather than a complete solution. If you want full 64-bit performance, then the only true path is to only use 64-bit plug-ins, but it is still very much a game of catch-up. I am sticking with all the memory and performance limitations for now.

ON THE DVD

> **A walkthrough the latest plug-in compatibility situation.**



Plug-in clearout

6 Good practise when upgrading your DAW is to take a look at your VST plug-in folder, and give it a spring clean. If you are anything like me you'll find that it is full of plug-ins you regularly use and ones that saw the light of day only once or twice. I am a sucker for freeware plug-ins and will try any demo going in that never-ending quest for digital nirvana. The big problem though is that it can slow down the boot time of Cubase, may increase the chance of crashes occurring, and makes the creative process an even more menu-driven affair. The solution: use well-labelled folders in the first place.

When installing new plug-ins place them in pre-defined folders – 'Demo Plugs', 'Free Plugs', 'Synths', 'FX' etc. Move old or unused plug-ins to a 'Plugstore' folder elsewhere on your computer. Moving them away from the active plug-in folder means they will not appear in the program, but does mean that they can be retrieved easily for older projects if needed.

ON THE DVD

> **Taking a look at plug-in option in the Cubase Devices menu.**

Plug-in updates

7 Although C5.5 hasn't seen the arrival of any new plug-ins, there have been some tweaks to the existing stable. The AmpSimulator make-over has been discussed before, but there have been some functional changes elsewhere.

Groove Agent ONE reaches version 1.1, and adds single sample replacement on pads and layers, sample location management of missing samples, a polyphony counter and editing of sample start and end points. Usefully, all GA settings and samples can now be stored as a single 'bundle' file. GA is definitely growing-up. LoopMash has individual track volume controls, a ruler showing bars and beats in the current project and new similarity threshold control as an additional way to determine playback of slices.

REVerence now has a 'Smooth Parameter Changes' button for crossfading between programs and to utilise 'true stereo' impulse responses.

Finally we have the new 'Invert' button in Studio EQ. This merely inverts the gain of a chosen band – useful when targeting and minimising problem frequencies.

ON THE DVD

A peek at some of new plug-in features in C5.5

Video support

8 While I don't use the video features of Cubase on a daily basis, I do need to turn to them at least a couple of times a month, and it's clear that the video support is generally useable but has definitely felt slightly 'clunky' at times.

C5.5 sees a rewrite of the video engine and now passes the buffering over to the graphics card, which should hopefully see lowering of the CPU overhead.

Most importantly, HD support has been added and real-time video playback is now possible over FireWire.

Remember that it has always been possible to extract audio from video files (and in fact this happens automatically whether you like it or not), but there is also an option to replace the audio in a video file by going to the File menu and selecting 'Replace Audio in Video File...'.

ON THE DVD

> A look at the Cubase video device settings.



Automation

9 I'll be looking at Automation in more detail at a later date as this has seen some very useful improvements and features over the last few updates.

However, for the time being I'm pleased to say that the Automation Panel has seen a slight redesign and that more Automation related functions are now accessible from it. 'Show Data on Tracks' and 'Continue Writing' (previously labelled 'Allow Continue Writing after Transport Jump') have been bundled with 'Return Time' and 'Reduction Level' settings in the preferences window (bottom left). This window, like other in C5.5 re-colours the underlying window when in use, and is closed by clicking on the original window – not glamorous, but functionally useful if a little fiddly at first.

Four new automation Fill modes have been added, which determine what happens when you punch out of an automation pass.

The Trim function is now easier to use (by placing the trim curve in the middle of the automation track) and can be frozen manually or automatically for rendering an individual automation event curve.

ON THE DVD

> An overview of the now updated Automation Panel and its additional features.

Any other business?

10 The Sample Editor has had a cosmetic overhaul with improved Hitpoint Detection and Editing, although I would still like more options here. MediaBay and other related content windows have been re-designed, but older databases are not preserved. This means a re-scan and possible re-tagging of media content – not good. Channel Batch Export offers more extensive automatic file-naming, an additional 'Import into Project' option, and can stay open while working on other aspects of a project. Mouse focus zooming (using [Ctrl]/[Command] and the mouse wheel) has been enabled and various toolbars have been redesigned for a new (theoretically) more consistent feel.

Like many updates, adjusting your workflow to accommodate interface and functional changes can be a pain and only time will tell if they continue to be frustrating or agreed on as an improvement.

ON THE DVD

> A tour of some of the other more minor changes in C5.5 FM

NEXT ISSUE

Make sure you pick up *FM* next month for more Cubase tips. *FM232* **on sale 30th September**



Cubase's Editing > Project and Mixer window is where you'll find your GUI editing options

FutureMusic KNOWLEDGE BASE

The History of Sequencers

Did you know that your DAW has a family tree stretching all the way back to the '60s? ***Greg Scarth*** examines the birth of machine music…

These days, the sequencer is almost synonymous with the digital audio workstation (DAW), but its history goes back way beyond the computer era. From modular synths to '70s drum machines and '80s home computers, sequencers have been used to make life easier for musicians for nearly half a decade.

Essentially, a sequencer is a device that triggers notes to be played back by other equipment, but we'll see that there are a variety of different ways this can be achieved. Whether it's step sequencing, a simple loop-based sequencer or full-blown MIDI DAWs, sequencers are a crucial part of every studio.

Modular synths

The story of the sequencer begins in the days when all synthesizers were analogue and modular: the early 1960s. Step sequencer modules allowed synth users to program repeating loops of notes, with the module producing CV signals to send to oscillators, triggering notes as the loop played. Modular synth step sequencers typically allow the user to set the pitch for eight, 16 or 32 individual steps by adjusting knobs. Each knob controls an individual step's output voltage.

On receiving a clock trigger input, the step sequencer advances to the next step and automatically adjusts the level of the CV output accordingly. After the final step, the sequencer returns to the first step, looping infinitely as the trigger signal repeats.

Integration

As synth technology developed, so too did sequencing equipment. The modular synthesizer was largely superseded by the compact analogue synths and drum machines of the 1970s and early 1980s. The sequencer also had to move with the times. Synths such as Sequential Circuits' Pro-One (1981) and Roland's TB-303 (1982) offered integrated sequencers for triggering notes. Typically, the sequencers found in hardware around this time were basic, loop-based affairs, the TB-303's step sequencer being a great example. Later, digital technology would allow more advanced sequencers to be built into synths such as the Sequential Circuits Six-Trak (1984). Drum machines offered similar pattern-based step sequencing functionality. The Roland TR-808 and 909 in particular are famed for their implementation of versatile, expressive step sequencers.

Although the sequencers built into analogue synths were basic, many contained features which set them apart from modular analogue sequencers. Built-in glide control and accent settings allow for variations of expression, while swing settings such as the shuffle control on the TR-909 allow rudimentary control of groove. Crucially, most step sequencers built into analogue synthesizers have a significant advantage over modular equivalents in that they allow the user to store patterns to memory chips.

Song arrangements can therefore also be strung together from multiple patterns, with each pattern recalled from memory when required. However, despite the minor improvements over earlier systems, these sequencers were still not particularly flexible. For greater sequencing power, users turned to dedicated hardware sequencing units which triggered their equipment via wired CV and gate connections.

Hardware sequencers

The development of microprocessor technology meant that recording and playing back complex sequences of CV/gate data became possible in the late 1970s. Roland's MC-8 sequencer offered eight tracks of sequencing capacity but with its fiendishly difficult programming system and priced at nearly $8,000 in 1977 it wasn't a big seller.

The later four track MC-4 (1980) brought the price down and achieved much greater success, becoming particularly popular with synth-based acts such as Kraftwerk, the Human League and Depeche Mode's Vince Clarke. Around the same era, the ground breaking American company Sequential Circuits also developed a number of CV/gate sequencers in the form of units such as the Model 600/800 and Poly-Sequencer for the Prophet-5 synth, but very few were produced.

At the same time, Sequential's Dave Smith was hard at work developing technology that would have a huge impact on sequencing…



Roland's MC-4 split the market open with a more affordable four-track sequencer

MIDI revolution

The introduction of the MIDI protocol in 1982-3 changed everything. The complex information which could be transmitted over MIDI connections meant that much more powerful sequencing options became possible. When combined with digital programmers, MIDI sequencing offered a new solution to the problem of automating synths and drum machines.

Analogue and digital synth hardware continued to include built-in sequencing options, but the most powerful sequencers were to be found in dedicated hardware units designed specifically for controlling synths. The invention of MIDI brought with it vastly superior sequencing capability than anything which had gone before. Hardware MIDI sequencers offered similar recording features to their analogue predecessors but user interfaces were generally significantly more friendly. Editing features were still cumbersome at best.

It's All In The Timing

The timing of MIDI signals is inherently imprecise due to the method used to transmit data.

Timing problems are not always so acute as to be immediately obvious, but the nature of the transmission protocol means that multiple note on/off signals cannot be sent simultaneously. Furthermore, computer sequencing software and MIDI interfaces introduce their own timing errors.

Many die-hard Atari fans argue that the timing of older ST-based sequencing programs is actually more accurate than that of modern systems. It may only be a matter of milliseconds, but it could make all the difference to the your track's feel and groove.

Whether or not you believe that MIDI's timing inaccuracies are significant, there can be no arguments that analogue has the ability to be more accurate. Analogue signals offer zero latency and the ability to send multiple signals simultaneously (over separate CV and gate connections), mean that no MIDI sequencer can ever be as accurate as a well calibrated full-analogue setup. But whether it's really worth committing yourself to the tricky workflow of an all-analogue sequencing setup just for the sake of a millisecond here or there is a different matter entirely…



The software revolution

Dedicated MIDI sequencing hardware offered more power than anything the analogue world could have dreamt of at the time, but its days were numbered thanks to the imminent arrival of computer sequencing. With superior editing abilities, higher track counts, better memory features (no more backing up sequences to clunky old cassette machines!) and lower prices, computers were always destined to replace hardware sequencers.

The history of '80s computers is a story for another time, but the standout computer for musicians was undoubtedly the Atari ST, launched in 1985. The MIDI protocol had only been in existence for three years when the Atari was launched, but the ST's built-in MIDI interface made it incredibly attractive to musicians. With synths and drum machines hooked up, the computer could be used as a central control system for all the MIDI equipment. Sequencing software really started to take off once word spread of the Atari's capabilities.

> "MIDI sequencing offered a solution to automating synths and drum machines"

Other systems such as the Commodore Amiga and early Macintosh models were capable of running similar sequencing software, but the Atari's integrated MIDI ports saved the hassle and expense of adding a MIDI interface. As an aside, this is probably one of the reasons the tracker software we discussed in *FM228* thrived on the Amiga platform – even without a MIDI interface or external hardware, trackers could be used as full in the box virtual studios on the Amiga platform.

Sequencer family trees

Computer sequencing programs were initially extremely basic, but the DAWs of today have much to thank them for. Apple's Logic and Steinberg Cubase can both trace their heritage all the way back to the mid-80s. In the case of Apple's Logic, it all started when a company called C-Lab, creators of SuperTrack on the Commodore 64, released Creator for the Atari ST in 1986. Creator became Notator, then Notator SL and finally Notator Logic.

By this point the company had changed its name to Emagic, and Logic was ported to the Mac and Windows platforms. Apple purchased Emagic in 2002 and acquired the rights to Logic, dropping Windows support with the release of version six in 2004. Steinberg Cubase can be traced back to 1984, when Karl Steinberg and Manfred Rürup released their program Multitrack Recorder for the C64.

The program evolved into Pro 16 for C64 and Apple IIe that same year, then Pro 24 for the Atari ST in 1985 and Amiga in 1986. By 1989 the product had become Cubit (soon changed to Cubase thanks to legal action from a computer company with a similarly named product) and eventually it found its way onto the Windows and Mac platforms where it remains to this day.

DAWs and beyond

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, integrated sequencers saw a brief resurgence as the workstation keyboard enjoyed a wave of popularity. Keyboards such as Korg's M1 and Roland's W-30 combined synthesis with multi-track sequencing features. Up until as recently as the late 1990s, hardware sequencers still enjoyed a small but significant market share. For live performance in particular, the stability of a dedicated hardware sequencer made it a viable option. Manufacturers continued to produce hardware sequencers into the twenty-first century, but sales declined as computers became more and more powerful.

Since the turn of the century, the arguments for hardware sequencers have become weaker and weaker. The computer-based DAW is now at the heart of practically every studio setup, offering MIDI sequencing features in conjunction with multi-track audio recording and editing, digital effects and soft synth hosting. Sequencing generally takes the form of 'piano roll' notation, although musical scores and step sequencing features are also included. FM

KNOWLEDGE BASE
NEXT ISSUE

Stay tuned to *Knowledge Base* – next month we'll being our history of DAWs, starting with Logic. *FM232* **on sale 30th September**



© Myriam Santos

BT

BT is Brian Transeau. He's remixed Madonna, scored a host of major motion pictures, and has even created his own distinctive way of editing sound. Impressed yet? ***Danny Turner*** meets the man with the plans

Through sheer hard work, dedication, and an obsessive love for all things electronic, BT's career has gone from strength to strength since his Trance-influenced debut album *Ima* in 1995. In a little over 15 years, Brian Transeau has recorded six solo albums, appeared on over 50 film and video game scores/soundtracks and remixed everyone from Madonna and Tori Amos to Depeche Mode, Tom Jones and Korn. In 2009, Transeau launched his own software company, Sonik Architects, producing innovative software applications such as Sonifi (for the iPhone) and the PC plug-in, Break Tweaker. In late-2010/early-2011, BT will be releasing a highly anticipated re-imagined release of his *These Hopeful Machines* artist album on Black Hole Recordings (on Nettwerk in the U.S.). The release will include a limited-edition boxed set that will include a hand die-cut poster and unique images from BT's iPhone while travelling the world, among other goodies. *Future Music* spoke to BT to find out the latest.

FM: Who inspired you to make music?

BT: "I don't know that it was necessarily a person that inspired me to make music – it was more of an appreciation of sound, from birth. Listening, to me, has always been compelling. Literally, some of my first memories as a kid are of being absolutely riveted to what it is that's making a sound. The only things I've ever been good at are music and science, and I began to understand that sound was actually a physical event. By banging two plates together, dropping a ball bearing on a marble floor, or pinging a wire, there was this actual, physical perturbation of sound where the air was being displaced and reaching your ears. Then, there's the mechanics of what happens in human physiology when we hear. Music was like the final expression of the things that fascinated me. Music was the sentence, and sound was the language.

"At its most nefarious, you had people like the Nazis that actually used sound as weaponry. But at its most beautiful, you had sages and prophets who used music and technology to quite literally heal people or induce a common brain state among a group. So, music is powerful stuff, and there's a lot of responsibility that comes with using it."

I presume that Electronic music allows you limitless scope to experiment with that language?

"Yeah, you're absolutely right! The only other way I could see expressing the love that I have for organised sound, is really through some of the things I experiment with regularly. One of them is building my own instruments, both software and hardware. You should see my garage! It's scary [laughs]. Everything from circuit-bending to taking wires and stringing them around trees and putting up contact mics. I inevitably landed here because my interest is in pushing sound as far as it can be pushed."

Was there a particular music scene that you initially channelled your interest into?

"There have been moments where I've dipped my toe into something that's held my interest for a period of time, but once there, I'd lose interest.

"What interests me more than anything is finding new ways of taking age-old emotional states and finding new paths by which to convey them. Once it becomes a thing that you can point a finger at and say, 'Oh, the snare goes on the three, and you want to make sure you have eighth-note triplet wobbles', then it doesn't hold its interest for me any longer."

Your debut album was released in 1995, but I noticed that you'd remixed for a number of artists that year, too. How did you get into that side of the industry so quickly?

"Everything's changed over the last three years, not to mention the last 15-20. Early on, I was asked to do remixes because the DJs were playing my stuff and other artists wanted their songs to sound like my songs. Quickly after that, it became a really formulaic thing that other producers started to copy: the big breakdown and the big builds and this style of complex, melodic acid-line programming. That's when I tapped out of it."

One of you your earliest remixes was for Diana Ross. That must have been daunting.

"With most artists, having a degree of confidence in what you do is really important. As musicians, in order to interpolate the exterior world and say something evocative and meaningful through music, we're all a bit of a raw nerve. Not a lot of people talk about that, but it certainly is true among all the musicians I've met. In the early days, it was extraordinary to get phone calls from Tori Amos or Peter Gabriel. Really early on Martin Gore called me, and to get those sort of phone calls where somebody says, 'Hey, I like what you're doing,' you remember them your whole life."

I was always under the impression that most remixes are organised by the labels and the artists in question never get to meet or speak.

"Again, it's really different now. Even in the mid- and late-nineties, it was just like a factory. A big remixer of that time who totally invented himself as a badass, wobble-bass madman is Armand van Helden. He was doing 10 remixes at a time for a period of three years, and I don't know how he did it. But like you said, the A&R guys were saying we want this name because we want it played in this kind of environment, but in the early days a lot of artists were interested in Dance music culture and the community, and people like Madonna were studying what people like myself and Sasha and Underworld were doing. I know this from speaking to Madonna. She was reading DJ Times to keep up on everything that was happening, so it was a really special time."

You also moved into film scoring as early as your second album, *ESCM*.

"It was something that I wanted so much to do, yet I had no idea how to get into it. It's funny now because a lot of people approach me because I am one of the guys from the Electronic music community who's scored big films. I studied this stuff my whole life and then out of the blue, a director, Doug Liman, got my name from a mutual friend. At the time, I was making demo reels of film compositional type music to score a movie, and Liman came to me and said, 'I like what you



The Stutter Effect

You use a lot of micro-editing techniques, one of which you named the Stutter Edit, correct?

"One of the things I became quickly obsessed with was this idea of lining things up so that you could make specific electronic instruments sound like they're coming from the same source. Out of that grew this time-correcting technique. It involves picking attack transients and stretching the decays using different types of time-stretching modalities, everything from granular time-stretching to phase vocoding or wave cycle repetitions.

"For example, I would never try to stretch a kick drum with a hi-hat on top using granular time-stretching, because you'd get that Drum 'n' Bass intentional time-stretch sound. Where I would use granular processing is for an analogue synth sound. So this whole technique of correcting things in time was born from this idea of wanting electronic and acoustic instruments to have this symbiotic relationship where they sound like they're coming from the same place. As that evolved, I became more and more interested with micro-rhythmic editing and what was happening in-between these dominant rhythmic figures, i.e. what's going on between the 16th and 32nd notes.

"In nature, if you examine the sound of a cricket, it's an incredible train of exponential pulses. That's how that sound is made. You can also organise a sound like that. I began to look at the waveform of a door creaking, or rain, thinking that if you took some of these things that are happening organically in nature and played around with simple math, you could create these Stutter Edit and nano-rhythmic sounds. Both on *These Hopeful Machines* and particularly on *This Binary Universe*, you can hear me exploring those concepts."

do. I'd like you to score my film.' But after that, I did have to work very hard, because coming from my background, people assumed I was a DJ or a 'Dance music guy' and wouldn't be able to write for strings or an orchestra. I had to do a couple of jobs for free. I worked my ass off and did everything that my teachers had taught me. I ended up being able to compose for big movies where I got to write for an orchestra, so it was a bit of a two-fold process."

How big a difference is it between working on a soundtrack and making a traditional album?

"It is really different! It's not to be underestimated how different it is. It's so easy to be over the top with film composition, whereas on an album all the focus is on the music.

"On a film like Monster, you have someone standing over a body and there's silence and it's an insanely complicated situation. And now you have to write a piece of music that speaks to this scene! It's called, writing to picture. It's very different from writing an album. In film, it's all about subtlety."

Was working in film a major factor towards leading you to make your own audio/DVD album, *This Binary Universe*?

"Yes, that was an inevitable extension of all my studies in film and academic Electronic stuff. At the time I wrote that, I'd been learning to use some of the more esoteric music programming languages like Csound, SuperCollider and Max/MSP. I'd been studying them with a teacher for about four years up to that point. Hacking around in C++, I've finally just about wrapped my head around the syntax. At any rate, I was spending a lot of time programming and building my own instruments, and also this traditional, classical writing for films, so it really was a meeting point of the two things."

And your music took a more Ambient direction. Is that because you thought it would be easier to create film for that type of music?

"It's weird, but it wasn't intentional. The interesting thing about that album was, as I began to write it, I started to play it for the people who represented me at the time, and everyone had this very vocal, violent reaction. They were like, 'You can't do this!' The album before that, *Emotional Technology* in 2003 had a song that was a hit on American radio, so my manager, my agents and my attorneys expected me to hand in an album filled with Pop songs. They all told me that it was shit and shouldn't come out and I shouldn't even finish working on it, so I just stopped playing it for them.

"My record label turned it down flat, so I had to find all the animators myself. Had I listened to the people around me at the time, it would never have existed. There's this wonderful film called Microcosmos, about the life of insects, and in it there's a dung beetle that spends its entire portion of the film trying to roll a ball of shit up a hill, and that's what that project felt like to me. It was probably the hardest thing I've ever done."

How involved were you on the graphical side?

"Hyper-involved! I was a part of every single one of the pieces, working with the illustrators and animators. I even did bits of after-effects stuff and was very involved in the filmmaking process, too. There were a couple of moments when we had to re-edit a piece of the music to fit the visual, but more often than not, the visual follows the music."

Is your home studio software-based or a mixture of software and external hardware?

"Basically, my rig is a 96-channel Apogee rig with a G5 running Logic 7. I can't stand Logic 8, and have dabbled a little bit with 9. I also run a 24-bit Pro Tools rig, and that's probably my favourite because I can destructively edit things. In Logic 9 you can, too, but it's just not how I think. I wanna be able to flange things, flip it, reverse reverb, flip it back, do a low-fi/high-pass filter, bang, bang, bang! And that's just for one sound that lasts one-hundredth of a second.

"I've quite literally got a wall of analogue synthesizers that I've collected since I was a kid. I've got everything from an Alesis Andromeda and

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Schwimmen right through to an Oberheim Four Voice, a Sequential Circuits Pro-One, a Roland Jupiter-8, Jupiter-4, a Putney… piles of synths that I have collected since I was a 12-year-old boy."


BT's slick set-up of much-loved gear keeps productivity at an all-time high

Any room for a Moog?

"You know what? I do not own a single Moog! I only have a Moogerfooger pedal. I've used Moogs so many times in the studio but never gone out and bought one. I could point you to records of mine where I've used a Minimoog or a Memorymoog in the studio, even a Moog Modular, but I've never owned one."

What do you think about software plug-ins that emulate analogue synthesis? Are they 100% accurate or is something missing?

"Well my thought is that it's just different. To say it is better or worse is subjective. Personally, I'm not a big fan of subtractive synthesis emulation. It just holds no appeal to me. Do I use things that do that? Yes, sometimes. Something like Native Instrument's Massive or an Access Virus for that matter, you know they're doing a lot of new styles of synthesis too, but their purpose is emulating subtractive synthesis.

"What sounds good about those instruments is they bite like hell. Soft synths tend to cut through a mix with no EQ or compression, but you can't use that for everything. The sound of analogue synths has so much more character. If you put up a saw wave on a Pro-One and a saw wave on an Emagic ES1 and listen to the difference, it's so shocking as to not even be related.

"I have a little bit of sadness that people's introduction to synthesis now is soft synthesis, because there's so much joy in just putting your hands on a physical instrument with knobs, and they just sound so expressive and powerful. So, I see the strengths in both and try to use them to their strengths."

> "If you play a saw wave on a Pro-One and one in ES1 and listen to the difference, it's so shocking as to not even be related"

And do you mix everything on a larger console or in the box?

"I do it on the computer. There was a period when I used a board and in various stages I will mix on a board. For example, on a film where we're recording a live orchestra, I'll go into a studio and sit there for 10 hours and mix everything on a Neve desk because it sounds absolutely spectacular. I'll turn it into stems and bring it home to work with it. Same thing with live drums – I also record them to tape. I prefer to record to two-inch running 15 IPS, and then bounce out of two-inch to half-inch at 15 IPS – and then pre-mix to a half-inch master on a board like an old Neve or SSL console. Especially for drums and strings, you can twiddle around with EQ and compression, but if you just put up 20 mics off an orchestra on a Neve, then 80% of your work is done for you. The sound is so rich and compelling for dynamic, broad-spectrum instruments like strings, brass, woodwind and live drums."

What's your starting point for laying down a track? Do you have a clear idea of what you want right from the start?

"It varies and can go either way. For my current album, *These Hopeful Machines*, I knew that I wanted to write a bunch of memorable songs that were really personal due to what was going on in my life at the time. And then I also knew some things I wanted to experiment with, like using a lot of guitars, but with Dance music oriented rhythms.

"So this was very sort of planned, to write and then record all of the guitars dry and run them through a ton of amplifiers and mics and patch everything together."

How do you think Electronic music has developed and will continue to develop?

"I think it's developing beautifully, but I take one issue with Electronic music scene. It can be really up its own ass in a way that is detrimental to the music and the culture. We have all this incredible music being made from Drum'n'Bass, to IDM. There's also some amazing Trance being made and guys like Deadmau5 are innovating in House music. But everybody gets so caught up in their own little pocket that they start hating on the others. I'd love to encourage people that make Electronic music to find something they like about music that is not like the music they make and talk about that, instead of hating on other subsets of Electronic music.

"But speaking of what is actually being made, where I think the producers are strongly innovating is in Dubstep. Akira Kiteshi is doing some of the craziest stuff I've ever heard. I have to say, for the first time in 10 years, I've been hearing Trance records that I like. The productions now are so vibrant."

What are you working on next?

"I'm super-excited about the limited-edition, re-imagined boxed set release we're doing for *These Hopeful Machines*! This will be a digital release of the re-imagined album, too, but the boxed set is really special in that each one will be like a keepsake that you want to keep forever. Each boxed set will be serial numbered and personally signed by me and contain hand die-cut posters and visuals from my iPhone taken while traveling the world. It'll also have about 40-50 completely re-imagined edits of the tracks from *These Hopeful Machines*, which is why it's way more than just a re-release. Some of these re-imaged versions sound like completely new tracks compared with my original album!

"I'll also be touring to support the re-imagined release and I'll be announcing some big shows soon on my website. I have even bigger news to announce in early 2011, but I can't tell you about that, just yet." FM

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

BT's re-imagined and boxset versions of *These Hopeful Machines* are out now **btmusic.com**

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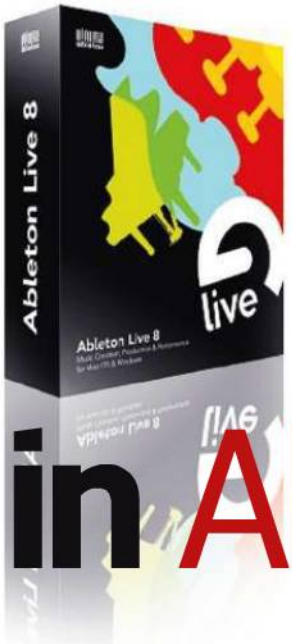


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ABLETON LIVE ESSENTIALS



Vital Key Commands in Ableton Live 8

It's like eating your greens – learning about keyboard commands might be dull, but it's good for you. Memorise the main Ableton Live keyboard shortcuts and you'll save thousands of mouse moves. ***Martin Delaney*** goes all QWERTY…

You can control Ableton Live with a hardware MIDI controller, connected by USB, thanks to MIDI Map Mode. You can also control most of Live's functions with the keyboard on your computer, thanks to Key Map Mode – or both MIDI and keyboard keys at the same time – but there's yet another layer of control you can add to that, where you might want to avoid touching the computer keyboard – during a live show for example.

This might be because you have a phobia of the checking-your-email-during-a-gig look, or simply because your hands are too busy playing keyboards or guitar.

Just ASCII

From here on in, let's call the letters, symbols, and numbers sent from your computer keyboard, ASCII – American Standard Code for Information Interchange, to give it the full name. You might also call it QWERTY, as folks do… the top row of letters on the keyboard.

Live isn't the only music program to have keyboard commands, not by a long shot, but it has a high level of control, straight out of the box, and that's multiplied when you count in the extra user-defined control that comes through Key Map Mode. At a pinch, you can run an entire Live set from a computer keyboard – I've done it plenty of times. The truth is, the main thing you miss isn't the extra functionality as such, and it's more the 'showbiz' of being seen to do something from the audience's POV.

I reckon Live's keyboard-friendliness was developed with laptop performance in mind – not every Live user needs to haul a MIDI keyboard around with them!



There are times when the humble computer keyboard is the best controller a Live user could have

THE EXPERT

Martin Delaney
performer, educator, producer



Martin, aka mindlobster, has produced Live training material for MacProVideo and PC Publishing, and has personally taught Live to musicians, DJs, kids, and prisoners. He also designed the Kenton Killamix Mini MIDI controller and is one of the UK's first certified Ableton Live trainers.

Get started

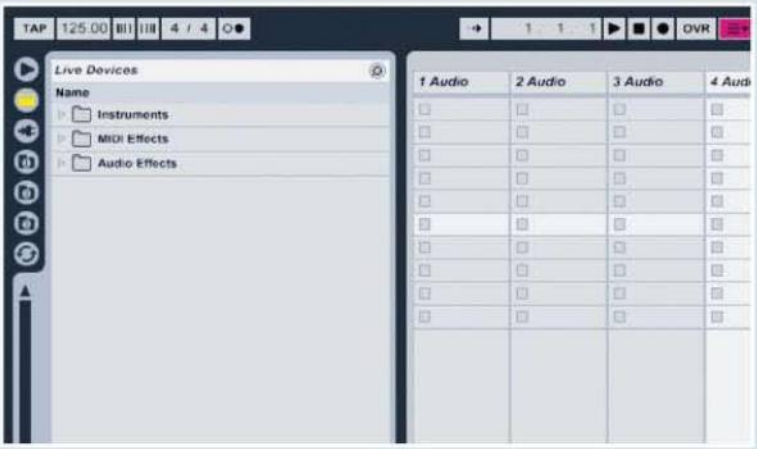
There are two steps to getting started with Ableton Live key commands: next time you pull down a menu in Live, check out the keyboard symbols next to the functions in the menu, and read the list of keyboard shortcuts in the back of the Live manual. Even if you are sure that you know them all already, go and check it out, you might be surprised at what you find and what might save you heaps of time. FM

LIVE ESSENTIALS NEXT ISSUE

Make sure you pick up *Future Music* next month as we take a deep journey through Live's looping functions. *FM232* **on sale 30th September**

Live's Pseudo-MIDI Keyboard

Using ASCII letters to trigger drum pads and keyboards notes in Live



1 With Live, your computer keyboard doubles as a MIDI keyboard too. Hit Shift-cmd/ctrl-K, or click the little keyboard icon at the top left of the screen. Now the rows A-L and W-O are like the black and white keys on a piano.



2 Create a new MIDI track, load your chosen instrument, and arm the track for monitor or record, depending on what you need. From the MIDI In/Out Chooser, select Computer Keyboard if you don't need any other active MIDI Ins at the same time.



3 Now you can start playing! Use the bottom row – Z and X to change octaves down/up, and C and V to change velocity down/up. Keep checking the status bar at the bottom of the screen as you change these. Impulse slot notes begin at C3.

ON THE DVD

As usual, we've got a tutorial movie as well as an example Live set for you to load and try out. If you don't already have Live, you can get the demo from ableton.com

MIDI to ASCII and Back

For a long time there have been applications that convert ASCII to MIDI, or vice versa – like the virtual keyboards in most DAWs, and utility applications like midiStroke (charlie-roberts.com), or VMK (fredrikolofsson.com) and MIDIKeys (manyetas.com) which both flip the concept over, so a computer keyboard sends MIDI notes. In the six-step walkthrough on page 65, I talk about using Novation's Launchpad, alongside Novation's own Automap Pro software, to send ASCII key commands to Ableton Live, making it possible to do some very unusual things, especially given that your 'command chain' can include alt-cmd-up-down, etc – so one Launchpad button can trigger a number of events that includes opening and closing windows, creating and renaming tracks, launching specific clips, activating devices, and so on.

Incorporate this with Live's Key Map Mode, and there's a lot of potential there. You should also try upgrading to Pro for £19.99 which will offer you ASCII conversion, but if you already own a Launchpad plus another Novation controller, you can get it free – see novationmusic.com for full details. The only 'uh oh' to speak of is that, although you can save Automap presets and distribute them, they don't translate well between keyboards that aren't identical in layout, so you might have to do some editing to make them work across different computer keyboards, so bear that in mind.

iControl

Don't forget that there's now an Automap app for iPhone and iPad too, and that most Novation controllers are now Automap-friendly – check their website. M-Audio's Axiom Pro keyboards can also send individual ASCII characters, from their F-Keys and drum pads, but I don't think there's any way to send chains of them, as you can with Automap. On the Mac OS X side, as if that isn't enough control for you already, you could also look at Quicksilver (blacktree.com), a utility dedicated to reducing keystrokes, and Automator, which will let you include keyboard actions in chains involving application launches, file opening, batch file processing, and so on.

ASCIIom Pro

M-Audio's Axiom keyboards can send QWERTY commands
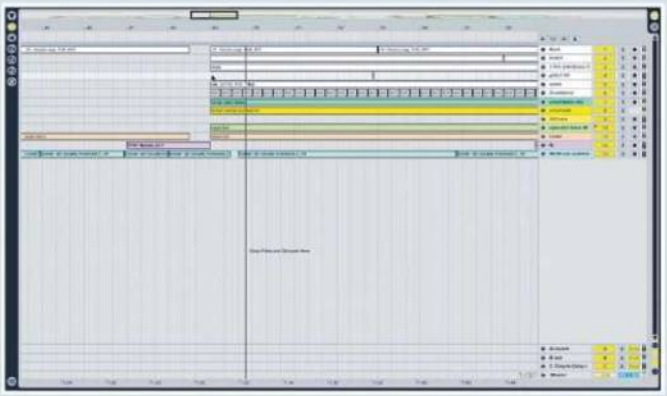


Key Commands You Need To Know

Make sure you learn these basic key commands for quick Live control. Before long you'll be leaving your mouse at home…



1 In Live, your computer's function keys, from F1 to F8, are hard-wired to toggle track activation on/off. To get this working on a laptop or notebook computer you'll probably have to hold down the Fn key at the same time, which takes away some of the convenience, but it's still useful.



2 If you're playing through something in Arrangement View, and you tap the spacebar to pause, then you'll be irritated to find that, when you tap the spacebar again, playback continues from the beginning of the song, or your last insert marker. Use shift-spacebar to continue from where you left off!



3 Use Alt, then arrow up-down-left-or right, to move between Live's main 'regions', like the Browser, Tracks, Master Track, Detail View, etc. Once you've moved to your chosen region, let's say the Session View tracks for example, continue using the arrow keys to quickly move around.



4 When you're in Key Map Mode, Live's Browser will show you a list of all of your current key map assignments, with the info displayed in five columns. To sort the info, click on the title bar for any particular parameter, 'Name' for example, to put the list into a new order.



5 The Min and Max columns are interesting. Usually, assigning ASCII to a knob or fader instead of an 'on/off' type control like a switch, would be a funny thing to do – you don't want a volume fader to jump ALL the way on or ALL the way off. But there are some reasons...



6 …like if you want to do the quick send effect 'ping' I mentioned in the other walkthrough. You might want to limit the range of the upper level, so type in the Min and Max values you want, then, no matter how hard you try, you can't send a control beyond the new Max level.

Sending ASCII from the Launchpad

Stay mouse-free: send computer key commands from a Novation Launchpad for ultimate hardware control



1 Novation's Launchpad, designed primarily to work with Ableton Live, is an amazingly flexible little gadget, especially when it's combined with Novation's Automap Pro software – you can go as far as using the Launchpad's User Mode 2 as a ASCII remote control. Start by upgrading from the free Automap to the Pro version.



2 Once Automap Pro is installed and updated, and your Launchpad is connected to your computer, launch Live. Go to the MIDI Sync tab in Preferences, and select the Launchpad as your Control Surface. Then, below that, set up the Launchpad and Automap MIDI ins and outs as in the screen shot here.



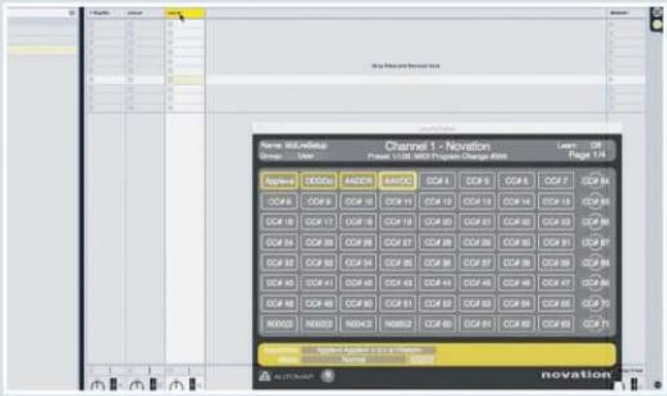
3 Close Live's Preferences, and press the 'user 2' button on the Launchpad, and make sure you can see the Automap Pro window on your computer screen. You can hide or move this window, and change its size and transparency. Hopefully, you can see an 8x8 grid that represents the Launchpad's, uh, pads



4 If it says 'Launchpad offline', press 'user 2' and the Launchpad's down arrow button. Now we can assign any of these to ASCII commands. Click the top-left pad – CC#0 and a red bar appears at the bottom, with a teeny keyboard icon. Click that, and type your computer key or combinations at the same time.



5 Try it with alt-cmd/ctrl-B – the letters will appear in the yellow bar. Now, as you press that pad, Live's Browser opens and closes. Now do the same with CC#1, but type 'right arrow, right arrow, down arrow, down arrow, down arrow'. Click the track header for your first Live Session View track, then hit pad 2, and watch what happens.



6 This has so much potential – just one pad can, for example, create a new audio track, go into rename, and assign a custom name to it. Or it could open the Browser, then navigate to, and load, a particular device, into the current track...it's crazy. Who, I ask you, needs Max For Live?!

FutureMusic KNOWLEDGE BASE

The Science Behind Vocoders

With a history stretching back to the late 1920s, the vocoder is one of the oldest musical effects. ***Greg Scarth*** takes us back to the old school

Over the last forty years, the vocoder has helped to create some of the most enduringly popular sounds in Electronic music. Singing pads, talking basslines and countless other effects can be achieved using subtly different techniques based around the same principles.

The story of the vocoder starts in the 1920s and includes everything from military voice scrambling techniques to more musical '80s Electro-Funk stylings.

In this article, we ll look at the history of the technology, see how the sounds are created and look at ways they can be used in your productions. We'll also take a quick look at related vocal effects such as the talkbox and the Sonovox before rounding up some of the hardware and software vocoder options currently available.

Mil-spec

The vocoder's invention took place over the course of the 1930s, a decade of intense interest in voice transmission and synthesis. By 1939, the American telecommunications company AT&T publicly demonstrated their Voder (Voice Operating DEmonstratoR) voice synthesiser, a robotic device that could replicate the sound of a human speaking voice with some success.

Around the same time, work was being carried out on reduced bandwidth transmission of speech, which would allow more information to be sent over a given number of phone lines. Early research was also being undertaken on pulse code modulation and digital transmission of sound. The story of the vocoder itself starts in 1928, when Bell Labs engineer Homer W Dudley began working on techniques that allowed sounds to be reproduced using basic forms of spectral resynthesis.

The first major use of vocoder technology came during the 1940s, as the need to transmit speech securely became a top priority for telecommunications experts worldwide. The SIGSALY 'speech encipherment system', developed for the Allies by Bell Labs in 1942, used vocoding techniques to encrypt important speech prior to transmission and decrypt it at the other end. Unlike previous voice scrambling systems, SIGSALY was practically impossible to crack.

The end results may be very different to what we're looking for as musicians, but these projects directly led to the vocoders we know today.

Modulation time

The operating principles of the vocoder aren't particularly difficult to understand when broken down into sections – the basic concepts and technology should be familiar from our studies of subtractive and FM synthesis. Like frequency modulation synthesis, vocoding works using two signals: the modulator and the carrier.

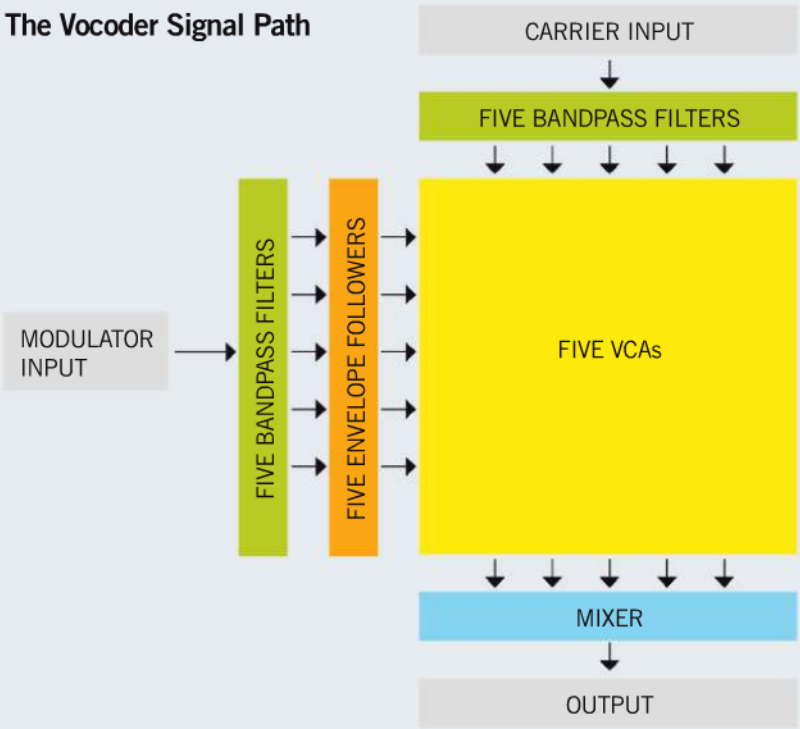
First, the modulator signal is fed into a series of bandpass filters in order to split it into bands. Each of these bands is then fed into an envelope follower that generates a control voltage based upon the amplitude of the input signal. The carrier signal is then broken down into frequency bands to match those of the modulator signal.

Each of these bands is fed into a voltage controlled amplifier (VCA) with its level controlled by the output of the corresponding envelope follower. Each band of the modulator input is thus resynthesised using the equivalent band of the carrier signal. Because the envelope followers only respond to changes in amplitude, the frequency content of the modulator input is effectively discarded.

The carrier isn't modulated by the pitch of the modulator signal but solely by its amplitude and spectral characteristics (the relative levels of each of the frequency bands). The result is a modulated version of the carrier signal which mirrors the amplitude and spectral characteristics of the modulator signal but takes its frequency content from the carrier signal.

For a common example of the effect in action, consider the use of a voice as the modulator signal and a harmonically rich synth pad as the carrier. The synth will only be heard when a voice signal is present, and

The Vocoder Signal Path



its harmonic content will mirror that of the voice. This combination is probably the most common use of the vocoder, but there are a great number of alternative methods which affect the sound of the output, from the type of carrier signal to the number of bands and the cutoff frequencies of the filters. Some of the most intelligible recreations of human voices are achieved using a noise source as the carrier, but intelligibility is not necessarily the main objective for musicians.

Likewise, higher numbers of frequency bands will provide a more accurate recreation of the modulator's spectral content, but lower numbers of bands are often considered to offer a more musical sound. Synth-based vocoders offer convenient built-in carrier signal generators and keyboards in order to control the carrier's pitch, but the use of external inputs for both modulator and carrier is perhaps even more versatile.

Nocoder

The vocoder's status as a household name has meant that it occasionally gets incorrectly used as a generic term for vocal effects. Over the years, everything from flangers to talkboxes have erroneously been referred to as a vocoder. More recently, the auto tune effect first heard on Cher's 1998 hit *Believe* has caused no end of confusion. Cher's vocal effect was widely believed to be a vocoder, thanks in large part to producers Mark Taylor and Brian Rawling spreading misinformation in an effort to hide their techniques. In fact, the harshly quantised sound can be achieved by using software such as Antares AutoTune and Celemony Melodyne with extreme settings. The effect has been popular in the Hip Hop world for the last few years, becoming T-Pain's trademark and featuring on Kanye West's *808s and Heartbreak* album.



Cher's famous *Believe* vocal effect is often mistakenly referred to as a vocoder

The vocal effect heard on Imogen Heap's *Hide and Seek* is the latest sound to be incorrectly attributed to the vocoder. A quick look at Heap's live performances should dispel that myth – the vocal is processed with a TC Helicon VoiceLive processor, which creates a harmonised backing based on chord inputs. The effect has a vocoder-esque quality, but like auto tune and talkboxes it shouldn't be confused with the real thing.

Mass market

Given that the transistor wasn't invented until the late 1940s, the first experimental vocoders and military voice encoders were constructed using complex valve circuitry. Hence, these early forebears of the synth-style vocoder or rackmount effect were significantly bigger than the typical piece of music gear. It would be a matter of decades before transistor-based equivalents arrived on the market. Early vocoders designed specifically for musicians included Robert Moog's 10-band prototype unit developed in conjunction with synth pioneer Walter Carlos (check it out on the soundtrack to *A Clockwork Orange*) and various other custom-made units from American, German and Japanese companies.

> "The vocoder's output mirrors the amplitude and spectrality of the modulator signal"

By the time the vocoder reached the mass market, a number of manufacturers each offered their own take on the concept. Most notably, these included EMS's staggeringly powerful Vocoder 5000 (1976, followed in 1977 by the cheaper and more widely available Vocoder 2000), Sennheiser's VSM201 (1978), Korg's VC-10 (1978), Roland's VP-330 (1979) and the Moog Vocoder (1980). The best way to get a feel for the characteristic vocoder sound is to listen to some of the classics. '80s Electro is an obvious first port of call – Afrika Bambaataa's *Planet Rock* and the Jonzun Crew's *Pack Jam (Look Out For The OVC)*, both released in 1982, helped to define the classic vocoder sound. More recently, check out Daft Punk's *Around The World* and *Harder Better Faster Stronger*, Air's *Sexy Boy* and *Kelly Watch The Stars*, and MSTRKRFT's *Easy Love*.

A razor head

A variety of effects use broadly similar principles as the vocoder or create similar sounds. The Sonovox, invented by Gilbert H Wright in 1939, is less famous than the vocoder but equally as important. The Sonovox, works by feeding signals through small speakers pressed against the neck, allowing the user to manipulate the sound as if it were their own voice. A similar method is employed by the talkbox. Rather than electronically manipulating sounds, the talkbox operates by feeding an amplified signal through a tube held in the user's mouth. As the sound emerges from the end of the tube, mouth movements allow it to be shaped and articulated.

Speech can be thought of as a form of subtractive synthesis, with the larynx operating as the oscillator, the lungs and diaphragm controlling amplitude, and the mouth, lips and tongue filtering the sound. The talkbox first gained notoriety in the early 1970s when it took off as a special effect for guitarists. Hits such as Joe Walsh's *Life's Been Good* (1973) and Peter Frampton's *Show Me The Way* (1975) prominently featured the device, and Frampton's 1976 album *Frampton Comes Alive!* would remain the most well known example of the talkbox sound until Roger Troutman of Ohio Funk legends Zapp arrived on the scene in the late '70s. The group's debut single, *More Bounce To The Ounce* (1980) laid the groundwork for the definitive talkbox sound, with Roger's synth being fed into a talkbox and expertly manipulated into a lead vocal.

ON THE DVD

01 Drum modulator synth pad carrier: A great use for the vocoder is to add harmony to percussive parts. Here a drum pattern is the modulator input and chords are the carrier input.

02 Drum resynthesis: Sending identical drum signals to the carrier and modulator we can adjust the vocoder to resynthesise it.

03 Gated pads: Using a vocoder to control the rhythmic variation of a pad.

04 Automated formant shift: Formant shift and bandpass frequencies allows you to add movement.

05 LFO filtered white noise: A white noise modulator with an LFO-controlled low pass filter.

Hardware and software

Most people's idea of a classic vocoder is an analogue unit, ideally with a built-in synth and keyboard to act as the carrier signal. You can take your pick from a variety of vintage options, but if you're willing to consider digital vocoders you'll have a lot more options, from the humble microKorg upwards. Hardware vocoders might be the connoisseur's choice, but software provides a cheaper, easier alternative for beginners.

Most modern DAWs include a built-in vocoder plug-in, but the commercial options typically offer a number of more advanced options for adjusting everything from the frequency ranges of the bands to the attack and release times of the envelope followers. VirSyn's Matrix (**virsyn.de**), Prosoniq's OrangeVocoder (**prosoniq.com**), Sugar Bytes' Robotronic (**sugar-bytes.de**), and Eiosis' ELS (**eiosis.com**) are all worth checking out. FM

KNOWLEDGE BASE NEXT ISSUE

Catch up with *Knowledge Base* next month when we'll be taking a long hard look at the depths of sub bass. *FM232* **on sale 30th September**



IN THE STUDIO WITH...

Marcel Woods

Known for delivering huge club anthems, this Eindhoven-based producer continues to explore the boundaries of what Trance is. ***Chris Barker*** heads to The Netherlands for a Dutch buffet and some studio action

© Joe Branston



VIDEO ON THE DVD

Based in a quite area on the outskirts of Eindhoven, Marcel Woods runs his studio and office complex. It's from here, alongside fellow producer, engineer and one-half of Hardstyle act Showtek, Walt Jenssen, he makes his thunderous club hits. Woods' first major success came in 2001 with the track *De Bom* and since then he's climbed the DJ elite list with productions regularly on the playlists of the world's biggest DJs.

Woods' studio is a tidy, professional affair with Woods being very particular about keeping a clean and neat studio environment. It's always a pleasant surprise to see racks of hardware synths stacked up ready for action and there's a few monsters here including the massive Alesis Andromeda and Access Virus. After the brief tour of the label offices, it was time to get a privileged insight into Woods' and Jenssen's production process.

FM: How did producing begin for you?

Marcel Woods: "It began from a simple love of music and of course, Dance music. Initially I was never that interested in making music, it was a residency in Eindhoven I had as a DJ that sparked that interest further. The lighting guy there was really into the production and had an 808, 909, 303 etc and he started bringing them in to the club when I was DJing. It was really cool so after a while I decided to go out and get my own kit."

So you bought your first studio all in one go?

"Yeah I got the big Mackie mixing console and the rest of the gear. But my lack of experience on the keyboards was obvious and it wasn't till I met Walt that the combination was right."

When was your first big release?

"My first track was actually pretty big and I stupidly thought, oh that was easy. But then the second release wasn't big and I had a bit of a struggle until things went really well with *De Bom* in 2001. My break was simply because I worked really hard and had the right people around me. I still spend every day in the studio, nine to six, and then at the weekends I'm DJing and playing my music out."

Would you have preferred to have stayed as a DJ?

"No, I love making music it was just I was really focussed on the DJing and it wasn't until I began

making a track and playing it at the club that I realised how amazing that was. The first track I made was only easy because I sampled Da Hool *Meet Her At The Love Parade* and just looped it up. Then as time goes on you realise that sampling isn't that cool and you try to make your own stuff. At the time, I didn't understand that you had to clear samples, but you learn as you go."

How has your style of production changed?

"I'm now working more with vocal tracks and trying to crossover more on to the radio. I still want my tracks to have the firm bottom end and for them to work in the clubs but with the right vocal and lead lines so you can create radio edits that crossover more. I'm not going to create anything that loses its credibility in the clubs, because I could lose my original fan base.

"You can put my music right between House and Trance I think and I can play with the big House DJs or the big Trance DJs. I start most of my sets around 128bpm and rise to maybe 135bpm but I never go faster than that anymore. Back in the day you would play 140bpm and it was a bit of a tougher sound."

Does what other people do affect how you produce?

"I never took that much interest in what everyone else is doing in terms of trying to copy it. I'm really open minded and I try to take on board influences from different genres to keep looking forward and being innovative."

Are crowds more open minded now?

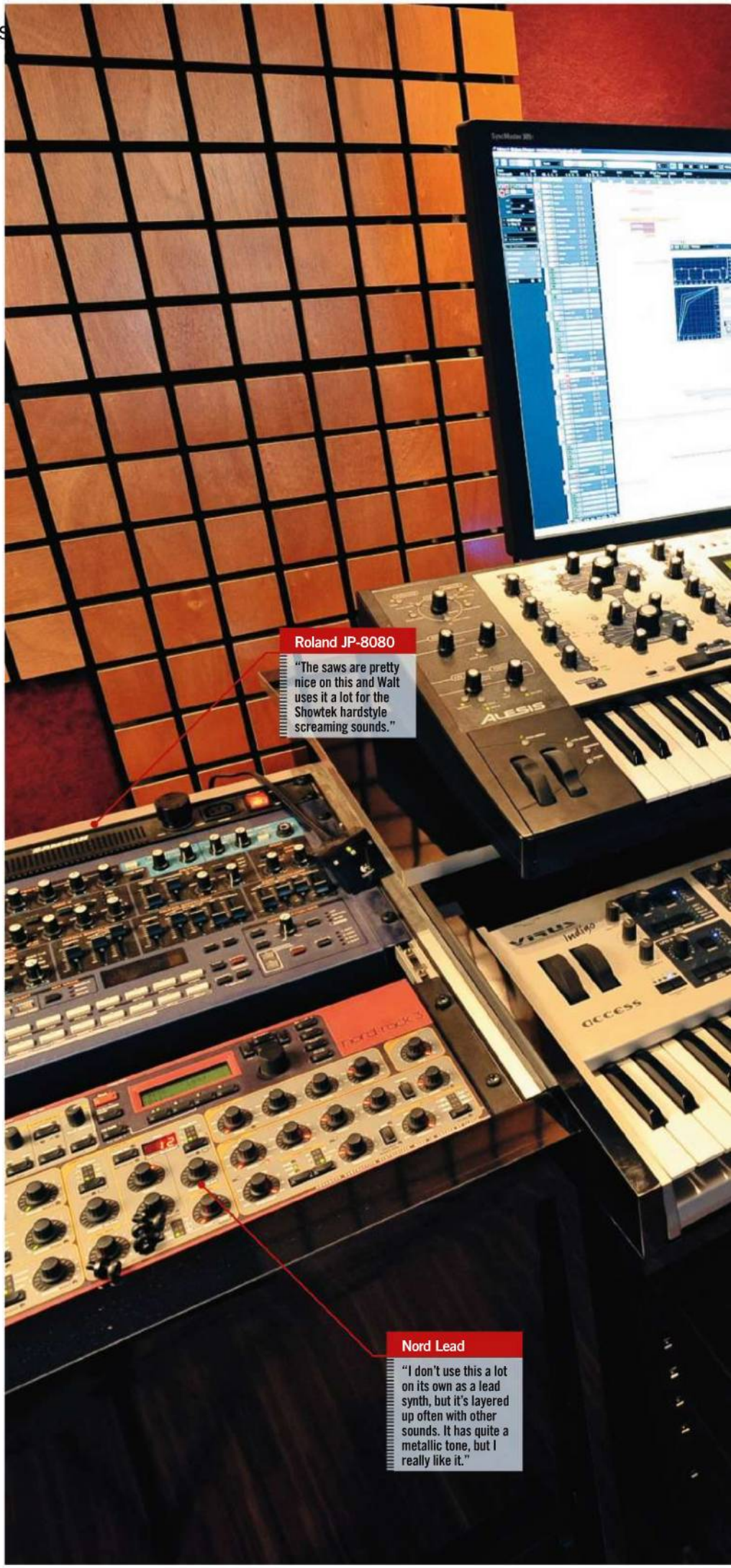
"Sometimes, but not everywhere. It's the promoters that you sometimes have to fight against who try and put you slap bang in a niche. The promoters will know you for your big tracks and try to put you in a genre. I've always fought really hard against being boxed in. I really like creating and playing all genres of Dance music but it's not until people hear me play that they realise."

In the studio, who chooses what new kit to get? Is Walt in charge of that?

"No it's always been something we'd look at together, although Walt is usually the guy who checks out the plug-ins first. For hardware, we'll both go to the local music shop and check out what they have. We've really noticed the difference since changing our clocking and interface, and new kit is really important to keep you sounding fresh, moving your sound forward and staying inspired."

It's DJ Top 100 time again – do you keep track?

"Even though the DJ Top 100 is cool, it's never been an important thing for me. It's nice when you're in there but you have to make a decision to how hard you want to market yourself to be voted for. Just because you're high in the top 100 doesn't necessarily mean you're super popular. Take Fatboy Slim for example – he's not that high in the DJ Top 100, but he throws a party on Brighton beach and 250,000 people show up. So, the poll is not always the best representation."





Alesis Andromeda

"This is a story on its own because you just can't trust it – it's like a really hot girl when she's not on your arm [laughs]. You make a sound and you have to record it because if you go to it the next day it will sound slightly different."

DSI Poly Evolver

"We got this recommended to us by Sander Van Doorn and it's truly amazing. The drive is brilliant. It gives you a creamy punch to the sound without crushing your tone."

Access Virus Indigo

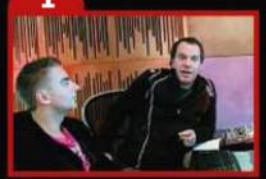
"It's got really fat sounds that we use for main leads and riffs. I've never really found the right bassline in there for us. But for other stuff, it's rock solid"

Access Virus TI

"The TI is mostly controlled using the VST interface in the computer and we love working with it."

ON THE DVD: Marcel Woods' Production Secrets

1



Producing Vocals

Marcel takes you through a track they are currently working on to show how they treat vocals.

2



Retro Re-work

Taking the classic *Music is the Answer* from Danny Tenaglia, we see how Marcel updates the track for today's crowd.

3



Important EQing

Marcel breaks down his track *Inside Me* and shows us how cutting frequencies can let elements breathe in your mix.

4



Make Some Noise

Marcel shows you the difference that white noise can make to the dynamics of a drop in a track.

5



Lead The Way

Using layered sounds from the Access Virus with reverb and judicious use of EQ, we see how to create a great lead line.



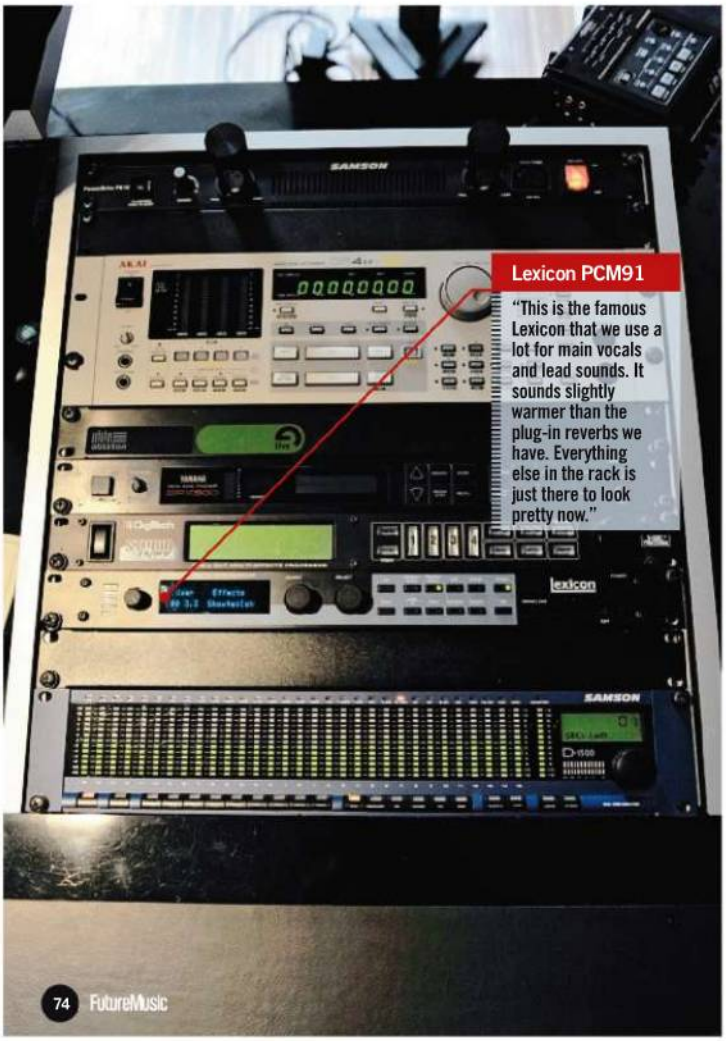
Marcel and Walt still insist on a hardware console for their productions

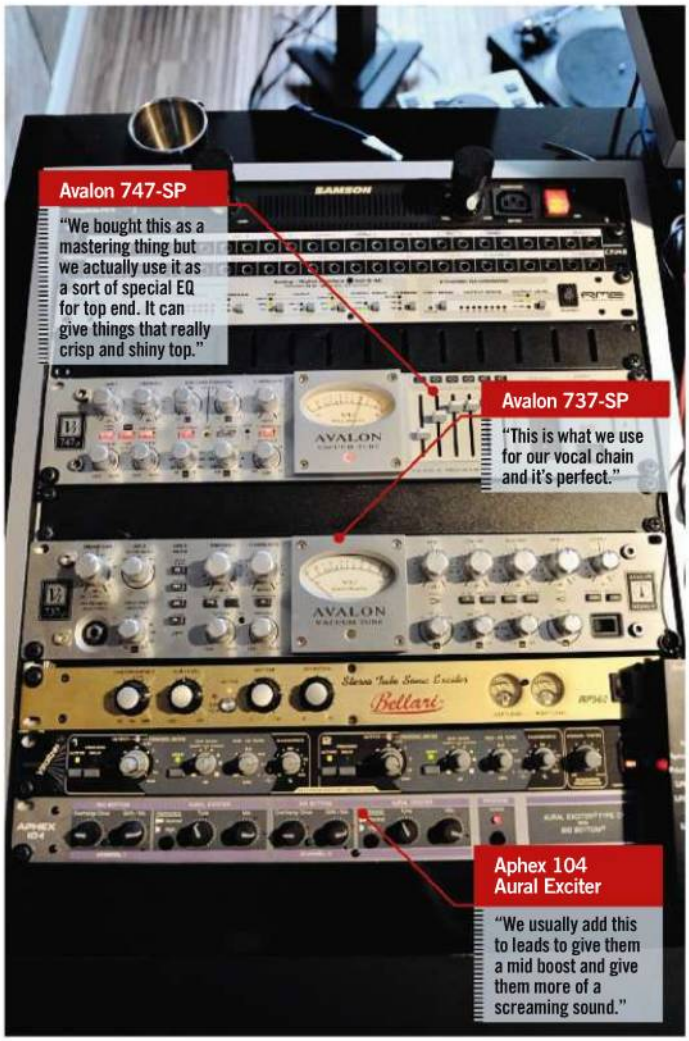




The Roland JP-808 classic '90s synth is a big hit for making House, Trance and more







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Creativity First

Do you see yourself in the Top 100 this year? Is it frustrating that the same names rotate the Top 10?
"No it's not frustrating, and since last year many things have changed. In some ways, it's become quite an unrealistic list nowadays, I mean how can you even begin to compare enormous crowd pullers like Tiësto with Fatboy Slim or any other given big name from the old days?

"There's such a big difference between these artists, in terms of their own identity, that it's virtually impossible to even begin. However, it's still very important list for us DJs as a lot of promoters still take a look at this list when they book. If not taken too seriously, then the list is a bit fun and a healthy view point of what has been or will be popular over the year. Hopefully your readers will vote for the Woodsman!"

How do you think you make that leap to megastar DJ? It seems like few manage it even though there are many people making great records and DJing to a high standard. Is it just PR and marketing?
"You need to develop the whole package from producing those big records that capture peoples imagination to nurturing a presence with your profile that fits with the music and in turn the people who support you. It's virtually impossible to achieve any of this without a solid team behind you. In my eyes this is what makes the difference between the top elite and the rest, most of the big name DJs, in fact all artists whether in Dance music or not, have been with their management teams etc for a lengthy amount of time.

"You're right though, there are many artists out there making incredible music to a high standard and perhaps not getting the recognition but that's the beauty of this crazy world of Dance music, it's unpredictable and constantly evolving."

It's strange because the big names are Popstars now without actually acting like Popstars.
"It's all about the internet and building up a following and awareness among the people. What Deadmau5 did with the big head was a smart move because now everyone knows him for it, but it would be harder when you're established to add something like that, without it seeming strange."

What have been the most important bits of studio gear for you in the last six months?
"It's still the Access Virus, as it's such a diverse synthesizer – it almost looks like it's endless when it comes to creating different sounds. In each of my releases the Virus is in there, without a doubt."

Do you think you'll continue to work with Walt? Would you work with other producer/engineers?
"Yes I will continue working with him as he's a very enjoyable guy to work with, plus we both are involved in business together. And above all he's one of the most talented people I can think of. If I have to do a track without him, it will be much less about melody, and more about the drive and beats. I'm definitely not the DJ in this. When I'm in the studio I have a clear understanding of what I want and how to achieve that from the gear. I am always the engineer in sound, EQing etc. However, there is no denying that Walt is definitely the wonder boy on the keys."

What are the biggest challenges facing new up-and-coming producers now?
"To find that healthy balance between being successful but not cheesy with an obvious vocal track or trying to find that perfect dynamic warm sound. It was a big struggle for us to say the least [laughs]. Also, trying to find your own sound is very difficult but I strongly recommend that people own identity with your music, this gives you a strong foundation to build your name with."

What's the biggest problem with most of the demos you get sent?
"I don't know what the biggest problem is as generally I always receive really good demos these days. But what I hate is people who send me a 'track' and add the line: 'It's not finished yet, I need to do some proper mixing and I'm only sending you the break, but what do you think?'

"Oh my God, is what I think, are you lazy? Or do you even like to produce? Just finish that damn track and don't send it before you are 100% convinced it's done. Needless to say, I even don't listen to demos like this."

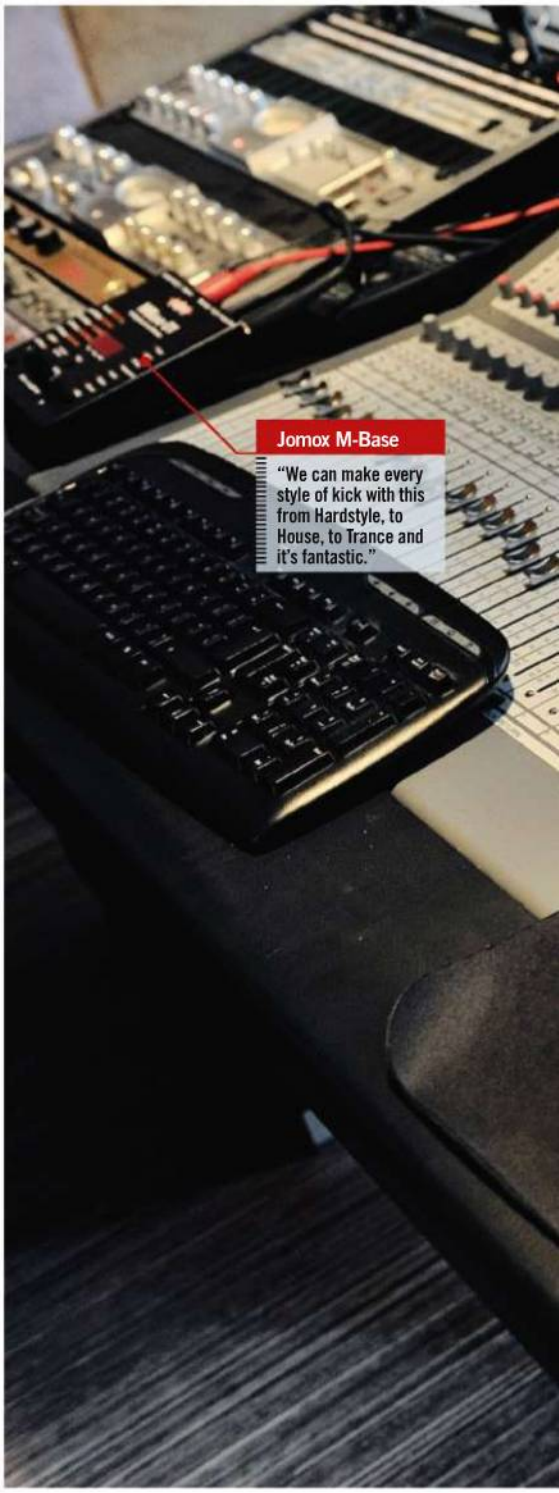
Whose production style do you really admire?
"Marco V – he's the man!"

Where do you see yourself in ten years? With record sales dropping and DJing being the main income, do you think DJs will be spinnin' 'til they're old men?
"I will keep on spinning until I don't enjoy it anymore. Should the day come when I just don't enjoy DJing then I will stop. Dance music and DJing is a passion for me and I don't see it as anything else. I'm lucky though, because I'm busy with other related businesses in the scene that allow me the liberty to not be completely reliant on my DJ income to survive. But in the same way, this also allows me to 100% enjoy my DJing for the love of it and not the profit margins. The blueprint over the next few years will definitely change and perhaps for the better in the long term. While sales may still be dropping I do believe the scene is incredible healthy right now, in fact it's probably the healthiest it has been for some 10 years."

What releases are coming up for you?
"I'm busy collaborating with a very huge name and it will be released soon, but my new single called *Tomorrow* has just been released. In October, I'm releasing a mix CD in co-operation with Godskitchen and Ministry of Sound Australia, plus I'll be touring Australia at the same time." FM

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For all the latest info on Marcel's releases and for upcoming DJ dates take a trip to his official MySpace page at: **myspace.com/marcelwoods**







Sony DMXR-100 Desk

"This desk is great for getting hold of the mix without using the mouse, plus the compressors and EQ that come on board are really good."

Mackie HR-824 Monitors

"We just changed to these from a set of KRKs. They lose a bit of mid-range so you need to be aware of that and make sure you mix with extra mid. They have a really good balance between hi-fi, club speakers and monitors."

Introducing: Walt Jenssen

Marcel's studio partner and collaborator

Although Marcel is quite happy producing on his own, he'll admit that when it comes to melody, instrumentation and keyboard skills, he's got a helping hand. Wouter Janssen aka Walt Jenssen has been working alongside Marcel Woods in the studio for the past ten years. Janssen's own project Showtek, where he produces and DJs alongside brother Sjoerd Janssen, aka DJ Duro, has been kicking out anthems in the Hard Dance and Hardstyle scenes since 2001. Together, they've produced three successful albums.

Showtek were also the first Hardstyle act to ever do a BBC Radio One Essential Mix, after they won best DJs at the 2009 Hardstyle awards. They've also got some huge-selling tracks within the scene.

It's no surprise then that when it comes to Marcel Wood's productions, Janssen is the secret weapon on the keyboards and in the studio.



"It's not plugged in right now, but it's getting installed again as it still offers those fat basslines"



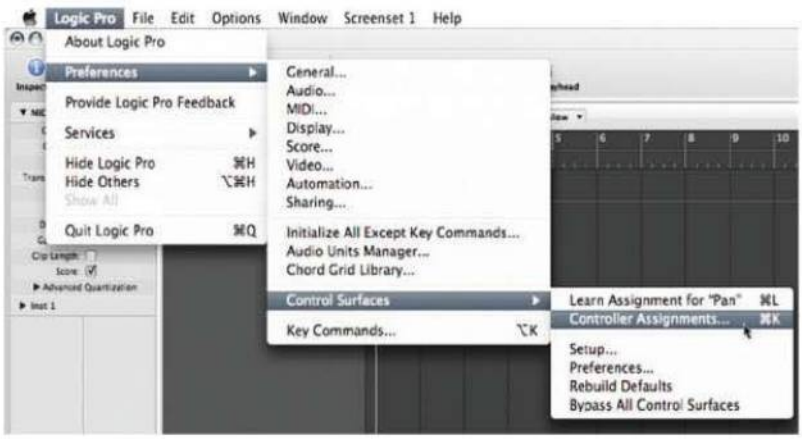
LOGIC ESSENTIALS



Get Creative With MIDI Control in Logic 9

Grabbing hold of your mixes and effects by working with MIDI controllers is an intuitive way to form a physical connection with your sessions, but it's easy to forget that MIDI control has some tricks up its sleeve. ***Jono Buchanan*** gets hands-on…

All you seasoned Logic users know that any production is made up from a number of key 'food groups' – instrument and audio files providing musical content, inserts and auxiliary effects to provide sonic shaping and depth and automation, principally, to make sounds dynamic or keep them in check. In the not too distant past, before automation data appeared in lines sitting atop Logic arrangements, those parameters which could be modified in real-time were assigned to MIDI controllers, with lines of CC (continuous control) data mapped to essentials such as volume, pan, and the 'more important' tone controls such as cutoff and resonance. With nearly every parameter of Logic's synths and effects now automatable on a 'per track' basis, for studio-based Logic users, MIDI control has dropped down the pecking order in terms of 'must have' features and this is reflected in other DAWs too.



You'll find the Controller pages in Logic's Preferences

THE EXPERT

Jono Buchanan
composer, producer



Jono is a songwriter, composer and producer. Think of him as Butch Cassidy to Logic's Sundance Kid if you like. Or Fred to Logic's Ginger. Or… oh you get it.

However, the popularity of 'dial and slider' laden keyboard controllers hints at the fact that hardware control of parameters remains popular and as Logic started life as a MIDI sequencer, it would have to have forgotten its roots pretty considerably if such control was no longer possible.

Fortunately, it is, and so this month's tips are dedicated to encouraging you to scratch beneath the surface and get busy with your MIDI controllers.

Learning assignments

Loads of controller surfaces ship with their own 'translation' codes, such as M-Audio's HyperControl surfaces, or the Automap functionality of Novation's controllers. However, any MIDI controller dial or slider

No Controller?

Just because you don't have a controller with hardware dials and sliders doesn't mean MIDI controller assignments are irrelevant to your day-to-day Logic use. All kinds of interesting musical effects can be achieved to your sound design by using controllers and many have more immediate benefits than using automation-based parameter control.

Take the EXS24 as an example. If you click in the router section, you'll see that once you've chosen a parameter 'target', if you drop down to the source options, all 128 MIDI controller numbers are there for you to choose from. Let's supposed you've selected filter cutoff as your source, this means you can pick any number from the list you'd like to act as your control source for the brightness of the sound.

So far, you might well be wondering why this could possibly be of interest as you can automate filter changes so easily in the arrange page. True but what automation is less intuitive at doing is creating 'tempo-locked' effects and this is where controllers come in.

I'm going to be traditional and use MIDI controller #74 as a filter controller and as soon as I've played my EXS24 piano part into Logic and quantised it, I'm going to open up the Hyper Editor and create a new 'lane' of MIDI information underneath 'All Velocities' by double-clicking the empty space below that lane. By default a new lane also entitled 'All Velocities' appears but I can modify this by highlighting my new lane, changing status from 'Note' to 'Control', then checking the controller number box at the bottom and selecting Controller 74 from the drop-down list over in the Inspector. Then, I can draw controller changes with a resolution of a default 16th note. Move the green 'flag' in the EXS24 router all the way up to ensure these changes are having an effect (and also make sure the filter is switched on!) and you should, on playback, hear the brightness of your sound opening and closing with each value you've drawn in. If you create a block that is too 'wide' for the grid width, adjust the 'pen width' in the Inspector. Of course, there's nothing to stop you continuing.

Select a second router location, set up Resonance as your target and assign another controller to it. Again, double-click in the Hyper Editor and create another set of values so that, once again, you've got a static sound becoming more animated with each new lane of information. You'll need to adjust the 'static' starting points of each of the parameters you're automating, so drag dials away from minimum or maximum values until you can hear the changes you've programmed.





More sophisticated assignments can be made by switching to Expert Mode

can be mapped to any Logic parameter you like, so if you've got an older MIDI keyboard with a few dials and sliders lying around, plug them in and we'll get started. The key command to open Logic's Controller Assignment window is Command-L but if this doesn't work, go to the Preferences > Control Surfaces > Controller Assignments. In this window, you'll find two options – Easy and Expert View.

Let's start out with an easy assignment mapping, for example, any rotary MIDI control dial to filter cutoff in Autofilter. Open the Autofilter on your current instrument or audio track and click on the filter cutoff dial.

You should see that the 'Easy View' parameter pane automatically shows the name of this parameter. To assign it, simply click the 'Learn' button in the bottom right-hand corner of this window and dial in some values from whichever dial you've chosen. Easy as pie, this dial is now mapped. You can then unclick 'Learn' or continue, by simply clicking on other parameters, then assigning alternative controllers to each one as before.

ON THE DVD

1 EXS24 Piano Warp: A simple part becomes more 'electronic' as a result of 'quantised' filter cutoff and resonance changes via the Hyper Editor and some careful controller routing.

2 EXS24 HyperControl: A simple sequence is transformed by lanes of Hyper Editor controller

Go controller pro

If you want to set up a collection of assignments and have visual feedback of many of them, and particularly if you're using a couple of control surfaces to carry out controller duty, 'Expert View' is for you. Click this tab and you'll be greeted with a collection of empty columns.

Here, assignments can be placed into categories of Zones and Modes, so that you can organise individual groups of assignments if you want. There's no need to do this, however, as Expert View also contains a Learn mode that gets you up and running very quickly. As before, click on the



Orbital use a mix of hardware analogue gear and state-of-the-art controllers

© Getty Images

Onstage Control

Controllers are vital for live performance versatility

One of the main reasons why control surfaces and assigning controllers to 'musically useful' parameters remains so popular is that, with so many of us now producing on laptops, the switch from seeing DAWs solely as studio instruments is changing. While it's perfectly fair to say that Logic is intuitively less of a 'live-ready' DAW than at least one of its competitors, it's equally true that there's no reason to assume its control set won't work onstage. This issue has been smudged further by the fact that MainStage ships with Logic Studio and is seen as the Studio's 'Live' application but it's certainly not a DJ-friendly program out of the box.

In fact, Logic can more readily be prepared for live sets if you make Electronic Dance music and, as I hope this month's tips have shown, needs only a moderately well-spec'd controller to unlock some serious real-time tricks which can keep your audience entertained.

However, this type of control is also of huge benefit in the studio as it keeps workflow 'performance' based. Jamming with technology is much less easy than jamming with other musicians, partly because we like our instruments and effects to be set up and to then do our bidding, often using a fixed parameter set from the start of a musical part until the end. Being able to 'reach inside' an instrument and grab core aspects of its sound can provide a degree of experimentation, which is often hugely to the benefit of the musical end result, so whether you're in the studio or considering a Logic-based live show, plug in a controller and get busy!

Drawbar Control

If your controller has lots of sliders, bring the EVB3's drawbars alive and unlock the power of this instrument.



The A-F of the ES2

In the bottom-left-hand corner of the ES2, the 'MIDI' button unlocks six assignable controllers which can be used to route controller sources to targets and this is a great way to use physical sliders to aid your sound design exploits, particularly with this popular synthesizer.

Once you've clicked the MIDI button, six controllers can be automatically mapped as Controllers A-F, with drop down menus allowing you to select which specific MIDI controller numbers you want to use.

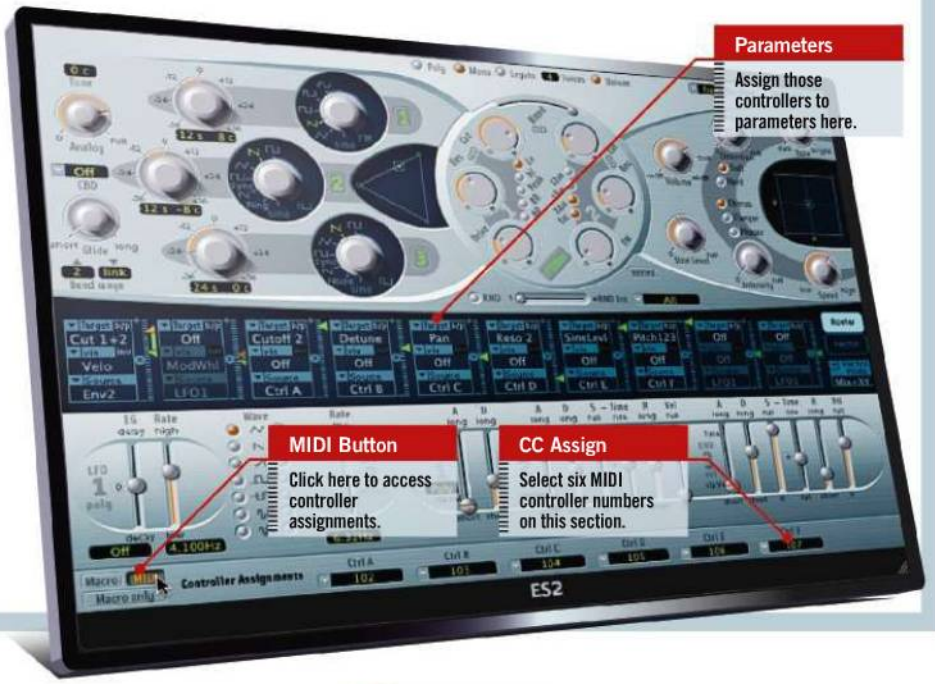
Some controller keyboards don't make it particularly easy to know which default controllers they automatically assign to each physical dial or slider but the transport bar can help you here.

Provided your keyboard is connected to your computer, a simple turn of a dial or push of a slider will display the incoming MIDI controller value so you can easily jot these down or assign these one at a time to the six ES2 locations once you've identified the right numbers.

Once you've set up all six, you'll find controllers A-F are listed as potential sources in the drop-down list in each of the router locations, so you can pick your parameters, set up these targets and then record a phrase. Once it's in, loop it and then move your physical controllers to hear the targets you've set move.

This also unlocks the ES2's potential as a live performance synthesizer, as you can move several parameters at once, rather than relying on your mouse to modify one parameter at a time.

You can hear a sequence part I've created, with controllers assigned for cutoff, resonance, pan, pitch, sine level and detune, demonstrated on the DVD. If through moving controller dials, you stumble across a great 'new' sound, simply save it as a preset.



parameter you want to assign, make sure Learn mode is activated and then move the appropriate slider. The third column will show the name of the parameter you've selected and next to it, the 'Learned' script shows that the assignment has been successful. The advantage of carrying out assignments in this window is that a long list will appear as you make assignments, allowing you to see exactly which physical dial or slider you've mapped to each parameter as well as being able to make some crucial 'changes' to the metadata for each assignment.

For instance, the natural 'range' of values for each MIDI controller is from '0' to '127' but let's suppose you want to cap 'how loud' your volume sliders can get, you could reduce the maximum value for each here to 93 or thereabouts, to ensure that the maximum travel was to 0dB rather than +6. This is also useful is you're assigning parameters such as resonance, where you want a dial to operate within a specific 'travel' between a minimum value above 0% and a maximum value below 100%. You can also use multipliers to widen or narrow the assignments and variously change the behaviour of the controller you've chosen using the options in the 'Mode' drop-down menu. Deleting an assignment is easy – simply highlight the one you want to lose and hit backspace.

What's clear is that there's scope to 'go deep' into MIDI assignments or simply to set up a few key parameters, target them with sliders or dials and get busy with a more directly physical connection to Logic's vast array of controllable parameters than you ever will with a mouse and the 'active' automation modes. FM

ON THE DVD

information. Amp Attack, Decay and Release are modified, along with LFO1 speed and resonance. No effects are being used!

3 ES2 Controller Assign: Hear a sequence go nuts with help from controllers.

4 ESP Buttons: The ES P's sound sources are toggled on and off using controller buttons, creating a dynamic result.

LOGIC TIPS NEXT ISSUE

Jono returns with another collection of video tips. He'll be making sounds again next month, we promise. *FM232* **on sale 30th September**

Buttons or Sliders?

If you're lucky enough to have a control surface with buttons, dials and sliders, think carefully before making your assignments. Some parameters automatically suggest that one type of controller will be better than another, with volume faders suggesting slider control or buttons suggesting muting or transport options, for instance.

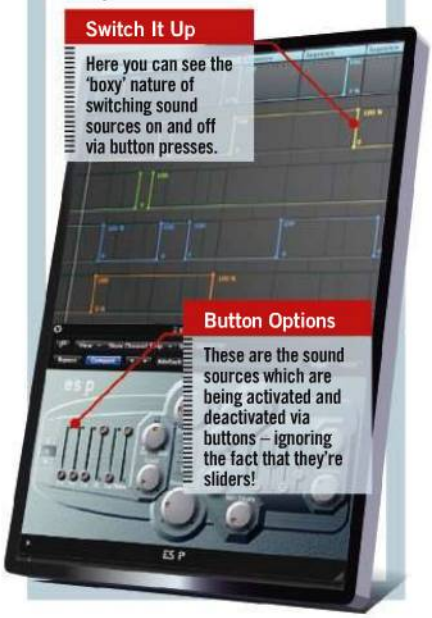
However, the advantage of using buttons to control 'slider' style parameters is that you can jump from one extreme to another with a simple press of a button and for as long as you hold that button down, you'll stay at that extreme. Letting go will return you to the 'opposite' value. This can be very handy for extreme and instant sound modifications – plus, the minimum and maximum values can be set up beforehand.

Double map

As you can hear on the DVD, I've used this trick in the ES P, where I've routed the six sound sources on the left-hand side to consecutive buttons on my controller keyboard. I've then recorded a sequence and have then had some fun warping the sound of this sequence in realtime simply by pressing buttons and recording these changes via automation's Latch mode.

Remember too that you can assign multiple controllers to the same parameter, so if you want a simple way to get your volume sliders 'back to zero' as well as having control over dynamics smoothly, why not assign both a button and a slider to each of Logic's faders?

The same thing is true with dials – with buttons providing an easy way to jump between two fixed values so that you can toggle easily between notes which, for example, have long or short decays or release values.



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Reviews

The month's studio essentials on the *FM* test bench...













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86 The soft-synth maestros add keys to their desktop modeller. It's big and bold but is it beautiful?

Native Instruments Reaktor 5.5
90 The modular software finally gets an update. Find out what's new...

Roland Juno Gi
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98 Korg's Electribe range gets brought in to the new decade with a snazzy SD card slot.

Reason 5 & Record 1.5
102 The Swedish software team return with a vital update for the Reason community.

Arturia Origin Keyboard | £2,499

The 'software-gone-hard' Origin gets mounted onto a keyboard to form a new performance heavyweight. ***Robbie Stamp*** investigates Arturia's new prizefighter

ON THE DVD

WHAT IS IT?

Digital hardware analogue emulation synthesizer

CONTACT

Who: 2Twenty2
Tel: +44 (0)845 299 4222
Web: arturia.com

HIGHLIGHTS

1 Superb analogue synth emulation
2 Large ribbon controller
3 Seemingly limitless modular combinations

The Arturia software synthesizer emulations have become classics in their own right. In 2008, the company rolled the essential elements of these emulations into a single unit: the Origin. Grafting it onto a keyboard has taken almost two years and added 15kg along with five octaves of keys, pitch and mod wheels and a ribbon controller. The Origin firmware has also undergone a series of updates over this time, further expanding the performance and programming capabilities. Though these capabilities remain ostensibly the same the emphasis has shifted from a mainly studio-based tool to a complete synth performance solution.

The most noticeable aspect of the Origin keyboard is the weight, which at 23kg is considerable. It needs a sturdy keyboard stand and sizeable flight case to take the extra height provided by the fold out control panel/synth brain. This does, however, lend it a professional feel that it well deserves, though a couple of design elements detract slightly. Firstly the keys aren't weighted as I would expect from a keyboard of this price and calibre, though they aren't the flimsy type either. Secondly it draws its current from a 6.5v external PSU which is an odd value that cannot be easily/quickly replaced – a standard IEC cable and internal PSU would be so much better.

Despite these two grumbles the build quality is excellent throughout. The pitch and mod wheels on the keyboard surface are sturdy while the large ribbon controller is gratifyingly sensitive, allowing the user to indulge in a more complete CS-80 emulation experience. Grumbles about weighting aside the keys are responsive with plenty of travel for the aftertouch. The velocity scaling is fully user configurable and the aftertouch has a 'duophonic' function wherein control can be set to only affect the key in question allowing individual note pitch modulation, for instance. There are easily enough controllers on board for most performance needs, from the joystick to the four possible key mapping splits.

Hands on

In programming and performance, the Origin Keyboard is surprisingly easy to work with and the tilting display/control surface allows for a range of working heights (for the stand and the user). It seems easier to use than the rack/desktop unit because the issue of mounting it by the controller keyboard is already solved. The screen, as with all the controls, remains unchanged and will still challenge those who have neglected the opticians! There are frankly too many controls to list in any detail here, but suffice to say the sheer depth of synthesis available is very well catered for by the inputs to hand.





The essential operating system is biased towards the jog wheel and cursors but there are a whole host of dedicated knobs and switches to prevent the menu-page-based editing becoming too frustrating – short cuts soon become second nature. A criticism levelled at the Origin desktop unit is that the oscillator, filter, LFO and envelope controls are singular and thus separate hands on control of, for instance, two filter cutoffs cannot be instantly achieved. These knobs are designed as 'macro' controls which allow simultaneous alteration of the same parameter in any combination of elements within a Program, e.g. the attack time of some or all of the ADSR envelopes. This makes for a useful performance control, the effect of which can be set to absolute or relative values across the assigned elements.

These macro assignments are accessed via the Live menu screen which also features joystick control assignment, MIDI mapping and an overall view of the performance controls. This overview shows the assignments for the eight live encoders that flank the LCD screen which are easily assigned to any single parameter and thus help overcome the single control issues for filter and envelope adjustment.

The Origin takes some getting used to and one cannot expect instant familiarity, but with time the programming and performance fluency grows. The initial shock of the comprehensive control layout and menu system soon subsides as the operating system is logical and intuitive enough to make programming relatively simple – it's only the sheer depth of possibility that creates a sense of complexity.

The potentially fiddly Sequencer section has a long set of 16 input step value knobs and associated parameter controls. Editing sequences (up to 32 steps and three per Program) is quick and easy thanks to the control layout, so much so that editing on the fly is easily achievable making performance a whole load more fun.

Modular Structure

The essential synthesis structure of a Program comes in two forms: the modular and the Minimoog template. The latter provides the user with the familiar form of the Minimoog on the Edit screen. This is currently the only complete emulation available as a template as it's the simplest (not sure a full CS-80 could be condensed into one Edit screen!). The modular patch form is a little more complex, though it only occupies two Edit screen tabs (Rack and Patch). The Rack displays the 24 module slots that can be filled with a range of emulated synthesis building blocks (oscillators, filters, mixers, etc). These can be selected and edited either via the dedicated control knobs (oscillator, envelope, etc.) or with the jog wheel/cursor combo. Modules can easily be added, removed or changed for a different model (e.g. from a CS-80 filter to a Jupiter-8 version). The Patch screen displays the modules in 'wired' form to highlight the interconnections (colour coded by connection type) and allows the user to isolate modules and their routings.



> You can treat any external source to the filters and effects just like an oscillator and it sounds amazing!

Modular modes

The Origin has two modes for synthesis: the single Program mode (see the *Modular Structure* box above) and the Multi mode. Both have dedicated menu access buttons beneath the LCD screen which bring up a series of tabbed pages for getting to the essential programming and tweakery. The sheer depth of synthesis available does mean that unknitting a preset can be lengthy work for the newcomer, and creating from scratch can be time consuming, but familiarity is key and patience is definitely rewarded. With good single Programs, (there are plenty in the factory settings and many more can be downloaded) the next step, especially to use the Origin as a performance instrument, is to create and edit Multis.

A Multi has four Program slots each of which corresponds to the four Mixer channels controlled at the right of the main interface. These slots can be played from any of the four possible keyboard splits, each with independently assignable note and controller MIDI channels. The four slots are also available independently via the eight auxiliary audio outputs at the rear of the keyboard.

Thickness

The levels of the main stereo output and the eight auxiliary outputs are healthy



SPECS

Keyboard: 61 keys (5 octaves) – velocity sensitive with aftertouch

Polyphony: 32 voices

Modular Structure: 24 slots for oscillators, envelopes, LFOs, filters, mixers, ring mods, etc.

Minimoog Structure: Up to 3 oscillators, 1 4-pole LP filter, 1 mixer, 2 envelopes, 1 LFO and a mod. matrix

Multi Structure: Up to 4 Programs per Multi with comprehensive keyboard split and MIDI assignment options

Effects: BitCrusher, chorus, delay, distortion, dual phaser, rotary speaker, parametric EQ, reverb and ring mod. (3 per Program)

Controllers (rack): 21 potentiometers, 33 rotary encoders, 81 switches and 1 joystick

Controllers (keyboard): Pitch wheel, mod. wheel, ribbon controller (40cm) and octave up/down switches

Memory: 1,000 Program slots (400 factory, 600 user), 256 multi slots (100 factory, 156 user)

Sequencing: 3 sequencers (32 step) and 1 arpeggiator per Program

Audio Inputs: 2x ¼" TS jacks (left and right input)

Audio Outputs: 2x ¼" TRS jacks (main stereo out), 8x ¼" TRS jacks (auxiliary outs), 1x ¼" TRS jack (headphone out), 1x RCA S/PDIF (main out)

MIDI: In, Out and Thru

Controller Input: 1x ¼" TRS jacks for footswitch (sustain), 1x ¼" TRS jack for footpedal (expression)

Interface: 1x USB 2 for computer connection (preset and firmware management) and MIDI

Compatibility: Windows XP(SP3)/Vista & Mac OS X 10.3.9 or higher and Universal Binary

Screen: 320x236 pixel colour LCD (122mm x 87mm)

Dimensions:
1020 x 330 x 160mm
(when folded down)

Weight:
23kg

ALTERNATIVES



Arturia Origin

£1,899

The desktop/rack version saves £600 and sounds exactly the same. Might make more sense in the studio, or as part of a larger live synth setup.

arturia.com



Moog Minimoog Voyager Performer Edition

£2,860

This may only offer one monosynth at a time, but classic Moog sounds in a performance oriented package. A lot more expensive for the real thing, but can you tell the difference?

moogmusic.com



Dave Smith Instruments Poly Evolver PE

£1,949

A five-octave potentiometer encrusted analogue/digital hybrid synth that flies the flag of the classic Sequential Circuits oscillators and filters. Four voices with four VCO/DCOs per voice with external audio input processing.

davesmithinstruments.com

but not overpowering so that the headroom needed for highly resonant filter settings, for instance, do not distort either the Origin amps or the proceeding line amp/mixer.

The audio input (yes, you can treat any external source to the filters and effects just like an oscillator, and yes, it sounds amazing!) has plenty of gain available for most sources. The S/PDIF output cannot be externally clocked, so the recipient device must be able to act as clock slave.

On the subject of sound, it must be said that the Origin keyboard is awesome and as good an emulation of classic analogue synths as you will find right now. The TAE (True Analog Emulation) algorithm keeps the digitally created sound convincingly analogue and the amount of instability or 'thickness' can be altered in each Program via the TAE control.

To key or not to key?

As a digital hardware synthesizer the Origin keyboard is in a field of its own, possessed of a truly pleasing sound quality coupled with a high degree of tweakability. The keyboard may not be of the fully weighted variety, but then nor were most of the synths it's emulating. The mounting of the Origin on to the keyboard section does make it portable, but the weight and odd shape will necessitate a specific flight case.

One could get a decent controller keyboard for less than the £600 price difference from the desktop Origin, but the positioning of the hinged mount make it more convenient for performance and programming.

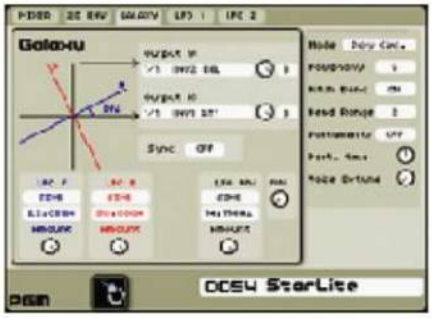
As for the price, the original Origin is definitely not cheap either and this is no wonder considering the range and quality of analogue synthesis emulation and build that's provided, and so the same is true of this new keyboard version.

This is a fantastic and rewarding instrument with a sound that is unrivalled in the emulation stakes – just don't skimp on the flight case. FM

Galaxy and 2D Envelope

In among the classic synthesis control sources (LFOs, envelopes, etc.) are two unique functions that can really add real spice to even the simplest of Programs.

The Galaxy module combines three LFOs to produce complex modulations to two multi-destination outputs (X and Y). The output of two LFOs (A and B) are plotted as coordinates on a two dimensional plane which are further modulated by a third LFO (Phi), which itself can be skewed with relation to the X-Y plane. The result is a constantly evolving modulator that can drive sequences wild. The 2D Envelope is a looped multistage modulator with four separate outputs (A to D) arranged around a circle (N, S, E & W). Within the circle are five linked points that can be placed anywhere via the joystick. The 'modulation' loops between these points continuously (based on a specific input source) over user-defined time periods (up to 13.6 seconds) and thus passes the 'modulation' between the four outputs according to their relativity to the five loop points. The overall loop time can be shifted by a multiplier too and thus produce some very slow (r)evolutions, with the results being rich non-linear modulations.



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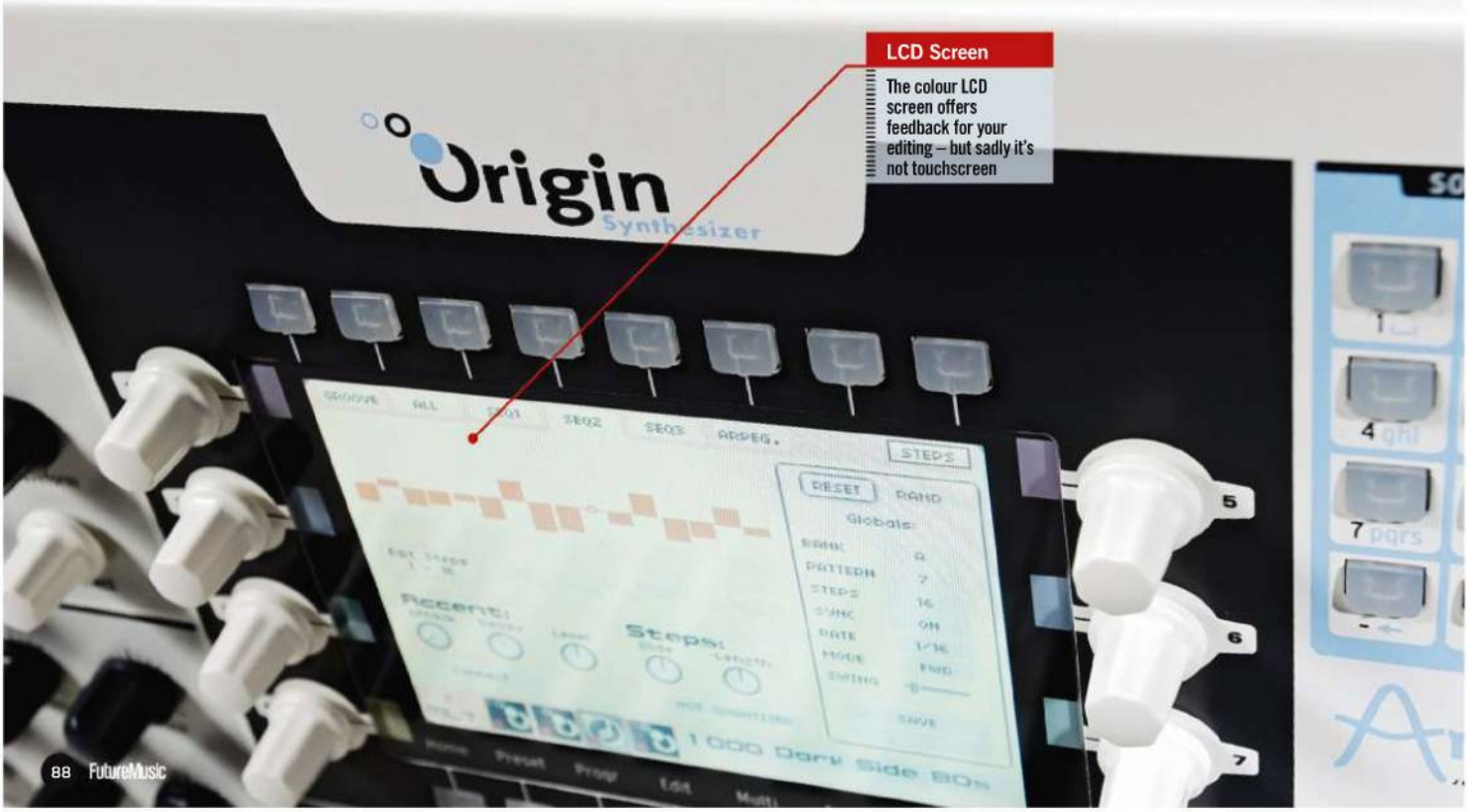
VALUE

EASE OF USE

VERSATILITY

RESULTS

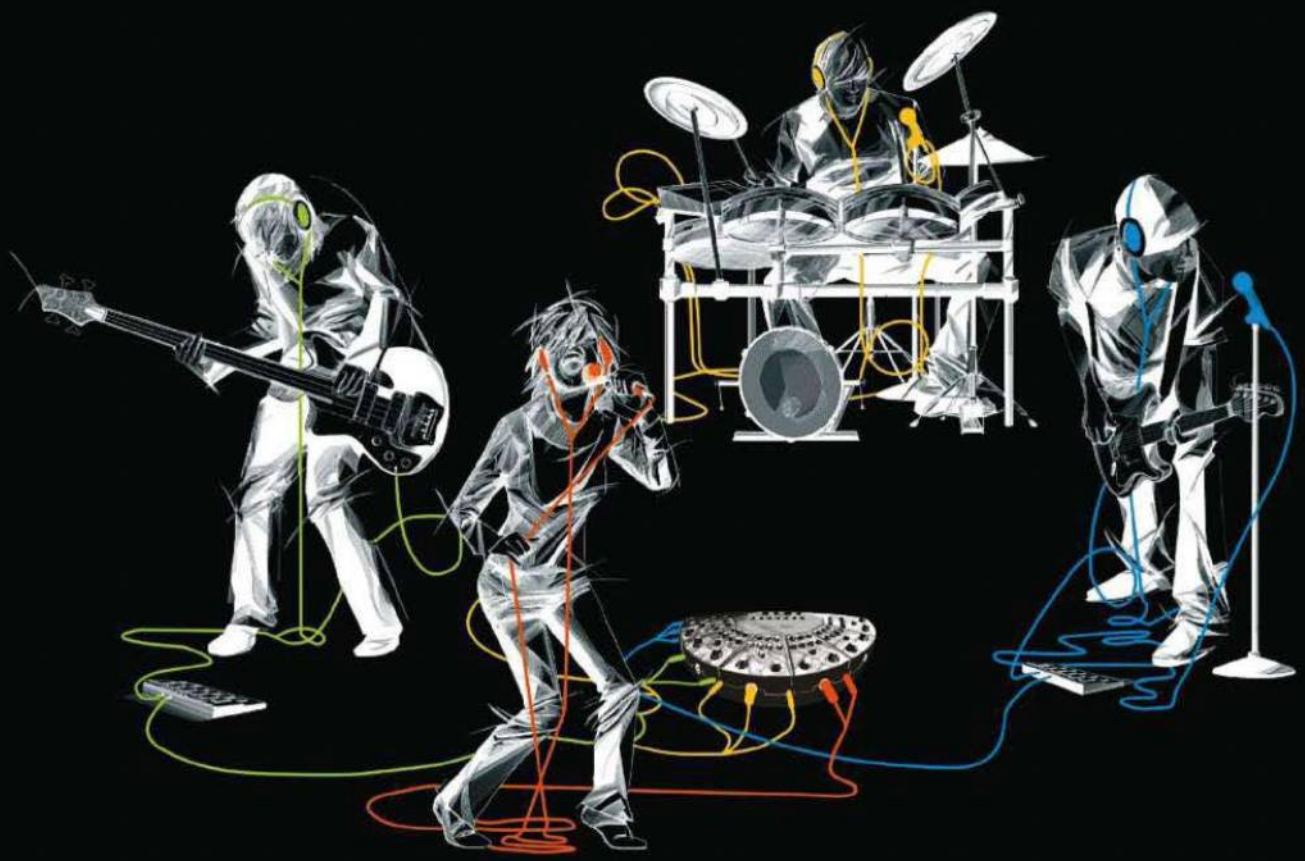
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ON THE DVD

WHAT IS IT?

Update with refreshed UI, plus synthesis and ensemble library additions

CONTACT

Who: 2twenty2
Tel: +44 (0)845 299 4222
Web: native-instruments.com

HIGHLIGHTS

1 User interface changes foster improved workflow, especially for casual users

2 New Sine Bank and Modal Bank modules open up new synthesis and processing vistas

3 Lazerbass, plus other library additions, increase an already bountiful collection of well-crafted synths, sequencers, samplers, and effects



NI Reaktor 5.5 | £379

Reaktor's long-awaited makeover finally lands at *FM*. ***Doug Kraul*** goes right to the core…

Reaktor is Native Instruments' metaphorical Lucy, the genetic ancestor of their products. It debuted in 1996 as the pioneering software synthesizer Generator.

Nine years of improvements (and name changes) later it became Reaktor 5. Then progress stopped.

Anxiety seeped in to the user community: five years is a long time between substantive updates, so when NI announced Reaktor 5.5, it fostered both excitement and trepidation: something new, but why just a 'dot' update? However, Reaktor 5.5 is much more than a maintenance release. It combines usability improvements, fresh graphics, new synthesis options, and valuable additional content.

In the flow

If the Reaktor 5.5 update has a theme its 'workflow improvements'. These grab you the first time you launch the Reaktor application after a painless installation. Gone is multiple window clutter, replaced by a sleek, attractive single window user interface (UI).

Plug-ins users are in for a treat: its UI is finally consistent with the standalone version. Multiple panes are revealed or hidden as needed. Focused on tweaking or performance? Show only the ensemble panel. Need to find something? Unhide the left-side tabbed panel that contains the Browser, Snapshot Management, Panelsets and Inspector. Time to do some rewiring under the bonnet? Switch to Structure View, or as needed, display both the panel and a structure in a split view. Special structure 'bookmarks' make it dead easy to jet around within a complex multi-level patch.

The refreshed UI imparts Reaktor with a more modern, up-to-date feel. A single window approach is a boon to laptop and single display users. Users with multiple displays may be less enthused: you cannot separate panes into separate windows. Some serious workflow improvements accrue from

reworked instrument and ensemble file loading functions. Prior to Reaktor 5.5 this was an impediment to causal use. Reaktor 5.5 now helpfully creates a full ensemble when you 'import' an instrument, and finally offers an easy way to incorporate an existing ensemble within another.

Off to the library

For many users, Reaktor's biggest selling point is its bundled and community libraries. So what is new on the shelves? In a word: Lazerbass.

Load Lazerbass and you are first struck by its ultramodern, 'I demand to be run on a touchscreen' UI. Select a few snapshots, press some keys, and it's readily apparent that Lazerbass is not just an old-school modelling bass synth. Have a listen on the DVD.

Lazerbass is a showcase for Sine Module, Reaktor's new additive synthesis subsystem. All sound generation and processing, even filtering and effects, are accomplished through this one module. It is an additive tour de force! If Reaktor 5.5 was a West End show Lazerbass would appear prominently on the marquee.

Also included are two previous 'for purchase' libraries, Electronic Instruments 1 and 2. This treasure trove offers synthesizers, effects, grooveboxes, sequencers, and, a couple 'hard to categorise' items. Previous users will be very familiar with what it has to offer.

Descend into the core

Reaktor 5.5 introduces two powerful synthesis modules, Sine Bank, and Modal Bank. Sine Bank specialises in 'additive synthesis', a technique that has proved to be a hard beast to tame. Sine Bank may be the whip you need.

Modal Bank is the gateway to a magic land of organic and lively sounds created using the 'resonant modes' of physical objects like blown pipes and struck metal bars. It will be interesting to see what the builder community does with this one.

The sum of its parts

Reaktor 5.5 lacks a true headline addition (the impressive Lazerbass is close) but the real story is how Reaktor has improved as a whole. The UI changes materially enhance workflow, especially for casual users. Reaktor has always offered excellent value and the additions to Reaktor 5.5 only make it more so for new customers. The fact that NI chose to infuse a free update with so much shows excellent commitment to its users. Yet, five years is a long time and existing customers are perhaps a bit underwhelmed – oft-requested improvements, like 64-bit support, are nowhere found. But, Reaktor 5.5 signals NI's continued committed to the platform and begins a hopefully grand chapter in the Reaktor story. FM

> The fact NI chose to infuse a free update with so much shows excellent commitment to its users

Reaktor for the Masses

Reaktor 5 Player is NI's third attempt at Reaktor for all. Reaktor Session tried but even its reduced cost was beyond some budgets. Next, NI offered Reaktor ensembles disguised as Kore Sounds but the selection is limited, and the user has no direct access to the panel. Now comes Player, like Session, except it exclusively supports the new 'Powered by Reaktor' file format. NI is also offering Player as a free download, and generously includes three instruments with over 200 patches as part of the package. Announced 'for pay' titles include Prism (modal synthesizer), The Finger (performance effects), and Spark (synth). NI clearly has big plans for Reaktor Player.





Using Reaktor previously often resulted in a very cluttered screen. The new UI puts needed features at hand in a tidy single window

FutureMusic VERDICT

STABILITY
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

A compelling update that improves workflow, adds new synthesis, plus other welcome additions.

SPECS

VST/AU/RTAS for OS X, VST/RTAS for Windows. Standalone operation on either platform.

Minimum requirements:

PC: Windows XP (SP2, 32-bit), Vista (SP1, 32/64-bit), Windows 7 (32/64-bit). For plug-in operation, a 32-bit compatible VST or RTAS host. 1GB RAM and 1GB free HDD space. DVD drive

Mac: OS X 10.5 or higher running on Intel platform. AU or RTAS compatible host is required for plug-in usage. 1GB RAM and 1GB free HDD space. DVD drive

ALTERNATIVES

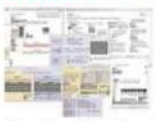


Applied Acoustics Systems Tassman

£254

A more traditional modular synthesizer workflow that includes interesting physical modelling modules. Lacks an extensive community library, though.

applied-acoustics.com



Cycling '74 Max/MSP

£403

Powerful visual programming environment provides a different take. An active user community helps you climb its steep learning curve.

cycling74.com



AudioMulch

$189 USD

Appealing, less renowned modular environment combines synthesis, processing, sequencing, and VST/VSTi/AU hosting to create a comprehensive sound design, composition, and performance tool.

audiomulch.com

MFB Nanozwerg | £175

Marc '01' clears a little desktop space and plugs in yet another pocket-sized synth from MFB

ON THE DVD

WHAT IS IT?

Analogue mono synth

CONTACT

Who: MFB
Tel: +49 (0)30 801 5652
Web: mfberlin.de

HIGHLIGHTS

1 Multi-mode filter
2 Fat sub oscillators
3 LFO can be used as an oscillator

SPECS

VCO: Triangle, Saw, Square, Pulse, PWM, Sub Osc
VCO modulation destinations: Pitch or PWM, ADSR, VCA / Gate Mode
Filter: 4 modes, LP, HP, BP, Notch
LFO types: Tri, Saw, Square, S/H, LFO One-shot mode
Inputs/Outputs: CV in, Gate in, VCF in, VCA in, LFO I/O, Audio I/O
Dimensions: 140 x 130 x 35mm
Weight: 0.56kg

The folk behind MFB seem to be on a tear in 2010, with an ever-expanding range of analogue synths, modules, filters, drum machines and sequencer boxes. Perhaps the resurgence of interest in modular synths has influenced the design of these new synth boxes, as they are sporting more patch points and routing options for integrating units together.

The Nanozwerg is the baby of the bunch. Identifiable by its bright yellow top plate, it's housed in a hand-sized plastic project case.

MFB's no-frills build quality gets the job done without dazzling you, but the saving is definitely reflected in its price, balancing its overall value.

Little box, big filter

Inside you'll find a single oscillator with a pair of switches offering a choice of four waveforms over four octaves. Sounds can be modified through PWM and VCO modulation, both of which use the LFO as the source. This can be reinforced by a choice of half or quarter divide-down sub oscillators, a mix of both or plain old noise. Alternately the audio input can be mixed in, so it can also be used as a stand-alone filter box.

Speaking of which, finally someone has included a multi-mode filter in a mini synth and this one feature is enough to set it apart from the competition. If, like me, you find the low-pass filter just doesn't give you enough scope for sound design, then the four modes on offer here will whet your appetite, and add to the overall value of the deal. The 12dB design is capable of both fat and squelchy tones and offers low, high, band and notch flavours. The gentler cutoff slope keeps the sound harmonically rich and satisfying and the resonance can be dialled right up to self-oscillation.

You can hear the filter by itself by turning off the sub oscillator and setting the VCO mixer dial to the sub position. The filter fits three modulation sources into two rotary controllers. The Contour knob uses the ADSR as its source, and can be shaped in both positive and negative directions with the middle point turning modulation off. The other knob offers an either/or selection between VCO and LFO as mod sources with depth at zero on the centre point.

One shot LFO

The LFO is quite interesting because it offers a few useable extras. There are a couple of patch points for the LFO, an input to modulate the speed, plus an output. This is interesting because it can be routed back in through the audio input, as it also goes well into audio rate. It can also be used in one-shot mode.

While the design manages to squeeze a lot out of the limited feature set, I found there is a problem with one. Namely the way it uses MIDI CC#1 / Modulation for both the filter cutoff and the LFO speed without giving you the option to choose between them. This might only affect the MIDI guys, but it makes more sense to allocate a separate MIDI CC number for each one.

The internal sequencer is more of a utility than a creative feature. There are four simple presets (check the audio demos on the disc to hear them), which can be transposed using MIDI/CV and the speed is set using the LFO dial while holding the one shot button, but it doesn't affect the LFO speed. One of the presets simply keeps the gate open which can be handy for when you want to process external audio through the filter without having to trigger it. For the price and the features, MFB have created a bargain analogue synth with additional features usually seen on more expensive units, to seal the deal. A serious contender in a crowded mini mono synth market. **FM**



FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

It's definitely a bargain, but the multi-mode filter makes this stand out from the crowd.

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Roland Juno-Gi | £999

Roland's Juno brand has seen its fair share of changes since the Juno-6 back in 1982. ***Dan 'JD73' Goldman*** inspects the latest in the legendary line

ON THE DVD

WHAT IS IT?

Synth with effects, arpeggiator, eight-track diGital recorder and more

CONTACT

Who: Roland UK
Tel: +44 (0)1792 702701
Web: roland.co.uk

HIGHLIGHTS

1 Lightweight and generally easy to use
2 A large number of sounds onboard to suit most styles
3 DiGital recorder is a bonus high-quality composing tool

Since the recent resurrection of the Juno line in 2005, Roland have been busy honing and updating the range to keep it fresh. The Gi is the latest addition to the seemingly ever-expanding Juno range. To quickly put things into context, the Juno-D was the first of the new digital Juno's followed by the Di. Then came the G (the D's bigger brother with more sounds and features) and now the Gi.

After the release of Roland's step-in-the-right-direction Gaia earlier this year, we were hoping that the 'new Juno' would be a call-back to the brand's celebrated 6, 60 and 106 past. Perhaps a high-end version of the Gaia? Maybe with some analogue chorus to boot? Maybe next time.

So what's different about the G and the Gi? Well, quite a bit it. First off, the Gi has double the waveform ROM (128MB vs 64MB in the G, so there are plenty of new sounds onboard (over 1,300 in fact). Secondly, Roland have done away with the sequencing and sampling and instead added a powerful eight-track digital recorder which can record to high capacity SDHC cards for quick and easy access (see the *DiGital Recorder* box on page 96).

On top of this, sounds are now called 'live sets' and allow stacking of up to four tones/layers and the option for battery power has also been added.

Lightweight

Out of the box, I'm still amazed by how light these Juno boards are. So light in fact, that it can easily be picked up with one hand. Obviously with this lack of mass comes my first concern – build quality. Overall, it's not bad but at a list price of £999 (street price £849) I was expecting something a little sturdier than a thin plastic case. In particular the sliders for the new digital recorder are too flimsy for my liking, though the dials and switchgear feel pretty solid.

The keyboard is a five-octave affair (why no aftertouch?) but it's not the best action in the world being a bit too stiffly sprung which impedes its playability. Certainly some sounds that have velocity layers react a little unpredictably – I was really expecting something more responsive and expensive-feeling at this price point.

Front-panel wise there's a lot crammed in with all available space used up. On the left is a door concealing the USB slot for a memory stick and from which you can also play MIDI files (SMF) or MP3/WAV/AIFF files for jamming along to. This is a handy feature particularly for solo performers (though the diGital recorder will not record to USB memory, only to the SDHC card/slot) though you could just take the Juno, a memory stick and

Arpeggiator and Chord Memory Functions

Everyone loves an arpeggiator and despite their clichéd use in lots of Dance and Electronic Pop music, they can actually be great fun to play with for creating secondary rhythms during live shows, as well as to use in tracks.

The arpeggiator onboard the Gi is pretty powerful and has several modes including up, down, up and down, random, note order (notes will sound in the order you press them) glissando (notes will glide between the highest and lowest notes pressed) chord (where all the notes you press sound simultaneously, great for chord riffs) plus auto and phrase modes too. You can also choose from preset and user arpeggio styles, each with several variations.

Further parameters can also be edited including octave range, velocity, accent, shuffle (swing) rate and resolution (ninth note, 16th note etc) and the arpeggiator can also be directed to only affect certain tones within a live set.



microphone and perform a full-sounding gig on your own regardless. I can see the Gi getting a lot of love from cruise ship and hotel entertainers. I'll let you decide whether that's a good thing or not.

Next is the D-Beam for air control of sounds, the volume control and then a section labelled keyboard that deals with MIDI control (this button puts the Gi in MIDI controller mode for controlling other MIDI equipment using the front panel switches, dials and sliders), a split button (the Gi can have a up to two sounds layered each side of a user definable split point), a tempo button for controlling tempo of the arpeggiator and recorder independently (or you can sync them together), plus octave up and down and transpose.

Finally, there's the chord memory and arpeggiator section (see the box on the previous page for more).

> "I can see the Roland Gi getting a lot of love from cruise ship and hotel entertainers"

Digging deeper

The display is a large monochrome affair and does a fair job of cramming in lots of info but the Gi could have really done with a better-featured (colour?) screen, particularly when using the digital recorder and effects. Surrounding the display are several key buttons including 'menu' which takes you into the heart of the Gi's sounds and function editing, a preview button for auditioning sounds on the fly, a favourite function which allows quick selection of your most used/favourite sounds and under the display are 10 categorised sound selection buttons.

Categories include rhythm set select (rhythm sets have a different rhythm sound per key) or live set select (1-9) which are split into piano, keyboard/organ/ bass, guitar/plucked, strings/orchestra, brass/wind, vocal/choir, synth/pad, FX/other categories for quick access to the 1,000+ sounds onboard. A live set is a sound comprising of up to four layers or tones and they are pretty straightforward to set up. There are three basic categories: Preset (which can't be edited) Special Live Sets (which are complex layered sounds that can comprise auto accompanying chords, arpeggios, rhythms and other sounds) and User, which is where you store all your edited sounds.

In terms of editing sounds (live sets) there's plenty under the hood including, level/ pan of layers, velocity response per layer, layer specific MIDI info mono/poly/legato/ portamento modes, amplifier pitch and filter envelopes, filter type edit (including three LPF types plus BPF and Peak Filter) and two LFO's syncable to internal and MIDI tempo.

Effects-wise, there are 79 types available including the usual reverbs, delays, choruses and phasers and more unusual effects too, such as phone filters, step-ring-modulators, slicers, plus speaker simulators, enhancers, a decent vocoder (use with the rear mic input) and modelled distortions/amp models. There's a hell of a lot on board and they all sound very good, though some of the distortion effects sounded a bit harsh on certain presets, but a little digging into the settings provided much better results. Digging, though, is not exactly a live-performance trait

SPECS

Keyboard – 61 notes with velocity
Polyphony – Max 128 notes
Parts – 4 layers+16 parts
Wave Memory – 128MB
Preset Memory:
Live Set – 1379
Tone – 788+256 (GM2)
Rhythm Set – 14+9 (GM2)
User Memory:
Live Set – 256
Multi Effects: 2 systems, 79 types Chorus: 3 types Reverb: 5 types
Rhythm Patterns- Preset: 371 User: 99 Song (Digital Recorder) 99
Arpeggiator – Preset: 128 User: 64
Pitch Bend/Mod Lever, D-Beam, S1/S2 buttons, Sound Modify knobs x 6
Display – 240x64 dot graphic with backlight
External Memory – SD/ SDHC Card
Connections-L/R output jacks, Phones, Song/Click output, Line In, Hi-Z Guitar/ Mic In with switch-able phantom power, Control pedal jack, Hold pedal jack, MIDI In/Out, USB computer connector, DC in jack
Battery Power-AA (HR6 type only) x8
Digital Recorder Section
8 tracks with 8 virtual tracks per track
2 track simultaneous recording
99 songs maximum
Rhythm track
Records to SD or SDHC memory cards up to a max 32GB
Sample rate 16-bit 44.1kHz
Effects section – 3 banks (guitar/mic/line) plus reverb and mastering toolkit
USB Song Player
Supports WAV, AIFF and MP3 plus standard MIDI file playback

Dimensions
1008 x 300 x 105mm

Weight
5.7kg



you want to adopt. It's slightly annoying that there's no more than EQ, Reverb and filter controls on the front. A traditional amp envelope would certainly have been welcome.

In fairness to the Gi, the presets themselves are generally very good and the new extra-large ROM means there's something for every purpose. My favourites include some really excellent pianos and Rhodes (with some great authentic panning effects too) some lovely orchestral strings and woodwinds, very useable drum/percussion sounds, some great guitars and basses and synth pad/brass sounds too. The weakest sounds for me are the Hammond organ emulations which just don't feel or sound very authentic and there are only a handful of useable analogue synth leads too.

> "It's not cheap and I have concerns about its gig-ready ruggedness but the Gi is capable of great results"

Juno's best

Finally, the onboard filter is very capable and musical on the whole (though I did hear some very occasional stepping at high resonance settings) but overall the sound quality is excellent and the sound set very thorough, versatile and workhorse-like. If you need a motherload of useful, current and frequently impressive 'synth sounds' and need them 'quick and easy' then the Gi is ideal. For anyone who's interested in synthesis though the lack of true editing options will turn you off.

In summary, the Gi is a powerful keyboard and that digital recorder that will suit stage performers, and singer songwriters alike, but it's basically a portable preset board with multi-track functions.

It's not cheap and I have some minor concerns with its overall gig-ready ruggedness but the Gi is capable of great results all round if you put some time into learning how to get the most out of it. FM

ALTERNATIVES



Korg M50-61
£870
Same sound engine as the flagship M3 series. Also has a 16-track sequencer onboard and an 88-note weighted key version too.
korg.co.uk



Roland Gaia
£579
Seemingly 'less' but in terms of controls, fun and editability so much 'more'. A similar rich sound only much more 'touchable'.
roland.co.uk



Clavia Nord Wave
£1,489
Analogue modelling synth, with user sample-import and large sound library.
nordkeyboards.com

DiGital Recorder

The DiGital Recorder is a new feature unique to the Juno Gi. It's an eight-track recorder (with a further virtual eight tracks per channel totalling 64 tracks) and can hold a maximum number of 99 songs, while the maximum recording time for any one song is a total of 12 hours onto a 2GB SDHC card. The sound quality is excellent and records at 16-bit 44.1kHz.

Simply plug into the line or mic/Hi-Z inputs and record. Up to two tracks can be recorded simultaneously, tracks can be bounced together to create more space and you can also record direct from the synth itself.

Further to this, the recorder has its own dedicated rhythm track and you can add insert effects to the input and record them too, then master and export. The end result is a 16-bit WAV file and can be imported to your computer for burning to a CD, or for further editing.

Editing is basic compared to a DAW but functions include punch in/out, bounce, copy/move tracks plus loop recording.

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

A feature-laden board that appeals to songwriters and performers who need good presets fast.



“I lean on Sonnox Plug-Ins”



Florian Ammon
U2, Lifehouse, Rammstein

Sonnox
Oxford Plugins

www.sonnoxplugins.com

Korg Electribe ESX-1 SD and EMX-1 SD | £516

It's been six years since their last refresh, but the Electribes are back and ready for the new decade. ***Greg Scarth*** steps, synths and samples...

Nearly a decade on from their initial release, Korg have once again refreshed their enduringly popular Electribe range. With the hardware groovebox apparently declining over recent years, it's the perfect opportunity for us to take a fresh look at the popular sequencer and see how they shape up in 2010. What do they have to offer? More importantly, are they still relevant to the producers of today?

Elec-what?

Given that it's been a while let's start with a quick recap to see what the whole Electribe concept is all about. The story begins in 1999, when Korg released the original Electribe A-1 analogue modelling synthesizer and Electribe R-1 rhythm synthesizer.

Based around a classic step sequencer layout, the EA-1 and ER-1 were an instant hit. Two more models,

ON THE DVD

WHAT IS IT?

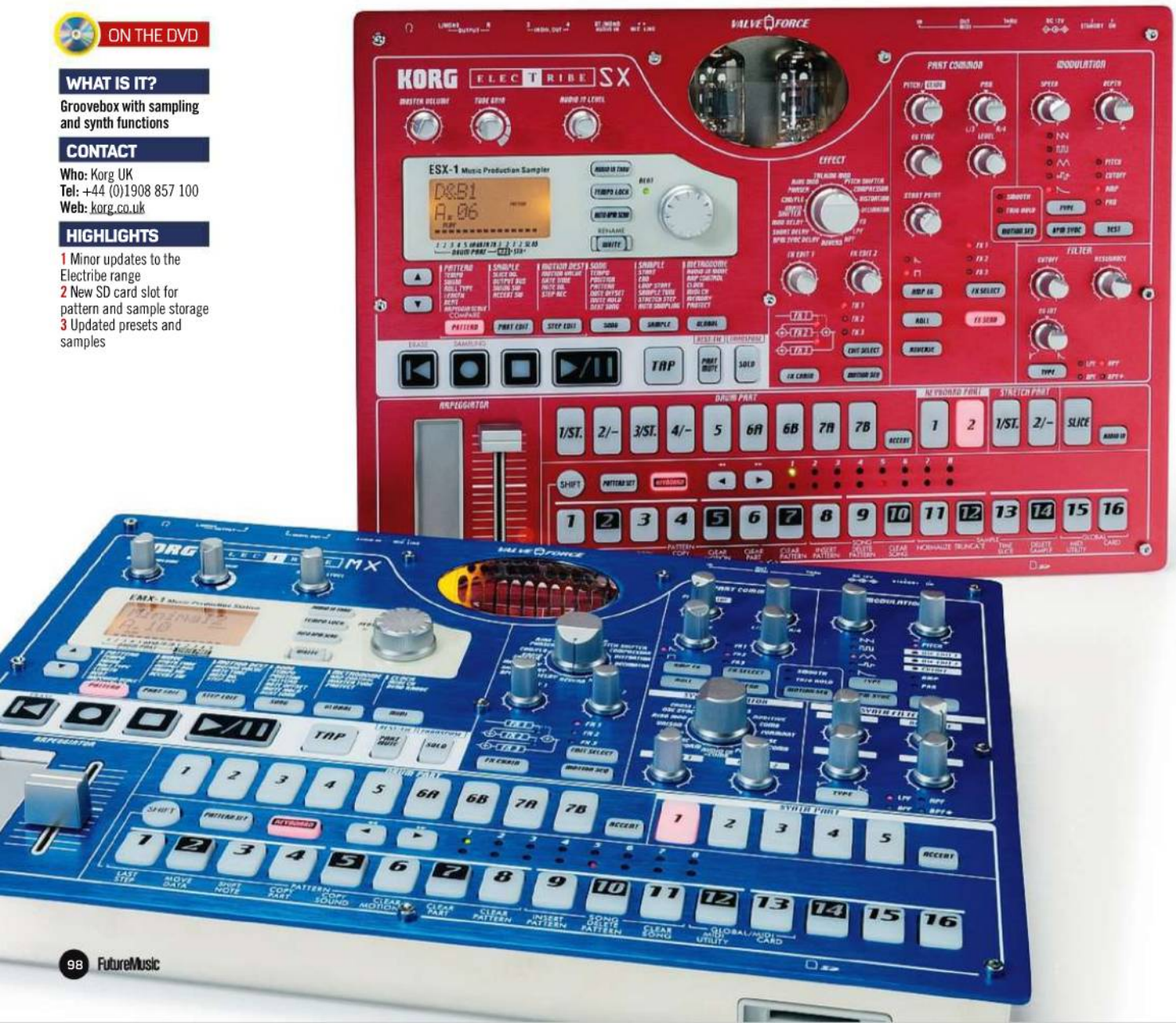
Groovebox with sampling and synth functions

CONTACT

Who: Korg UK
Tel: +44 (0)1908 857 100
Web: korg.co.uk

HIGHLIGHTS

1 Minor updates to the Electribe range
2 New SD card slot for pattern and sample storage
3 Updated presets and samples



the ES-1 rhythm production sampler and EM-1 music production station followed in 2000 and 2001 respectively, introducing sampling features and the excellent 'motion sequencer' automation feature.

The ES-1 and EM-1 each received major updates three years after their introduction and the EMX-1 and ESX-1 really brought the Electribe concept to its logical conclusion as fully featured all-in-one production environments. Both units offered a single box solution for Dance music production, with drum and synth features, arpeggiator, a good selection of real-time effects and the all-important 'Valve Force' tube gain. The EMX (blue) focused on Korg's MMT (multiple modelling technology) synthesis approach, whereas the ESX (red) is the sample specialist.

New for 2010 are the EMX-1 SD and ESX-1 SD but there's more going on here than just the addition of an SD card slot.

The next sequence

Both Electribes are based around their built-in step sequencer, which allows patterns and loops to be strung together to create songs. Patterns can either be played live and recorded into the sequencer for each part (in which case each of your notes is quantised to the closest step) or entered directly in step time using the 16 buttons along the bottom of the unit. The vast majority of sequencing options are intuitive, but the synthesis and sampling features of the two devices take a bit more getting used to. The EMX-1 uses a combination of PCM drum samples and digital wave shapes for sound generation.

Basic envelope generator controls and filter options allow the sound to be shaped, but the real power lies in the modulation section in the top-right-hand corner. Here, an oscillator (LFO all the way up to audio rate, with BPM sync option) can be used to modulate parameters such as pitch, filter cutoff or oscillator settings. It's a relatively simple but highly effective system and the range of sounds on offer is phenomenal.

The ESX-1's sample manipulation options are fairly similar to the EMX-1's synthesis methods but the sound sources are samples rather than waveforms. Instead of the EMX's nine drum parts and five synth parts, the ESX features nine regular sample parts (primarily intended to be used for drum samples), two keyboard parts for playing back melodies, two stretch parts for tempo-synced timestretch effects and a slice part which allows you to chop a single sample up into a series of steps.

Motion sickness

A number of options are available to add interest to your sounds and patterns. Most notably, the arpeggiator found on both units is rather unique, featuring a slider and a ribbon control which combine to offer control of note length and pitch. In use it's surprisingly intuitive, made more powerful by the fact that movements can be recorded directly into patterns for automated playback. This goes hand in hand with the so-called motion sequencing feature, essentially a form of automation which allows you to record knob movements and parameter changes as part of your patterns.

The central effects sections on the EMX-1 and ESX-1 are identical, offering a wide variety of options for manipulating your sounds. Effects range from subtle reverb and compression to outrageous bitcrushing and pitchshift. However, it's the master Valve Force tube saturation option that draws the most attention. Essentially a budget tube overdrive unit tacked onto the master output, the signal is run through a pair of 12AX7 valves to add a bit of analogue dirt. I'm sure plenty of users will enjoy the grit and drive the valves can add, but I can't help but feel the front panel real estate could be better employed.

The LCD screen in particular is a little on the small side and a bigger display could help make things clearer when working with the more advanced features of each unit.

New and improved

The only significant external update for the 2010 models is the move from SmartMedia to an SD card slot for data storage. SmartMedia was always a pretty ropey storage format, the expensive flash cards offering a maximum capacity of just 128MB. Now that it's obsolete, the move to an SD card slot makes total sense. Not only are SD cards cheap and widely available, but the new Electribes can handle cards with up to 32GB capacity. There should be no need to worry about running out of storage space for your patterns or samples. It also makes it a lot easier to transfer data (such as AIFF or WAV samples) from your computer.

With such a huge increase in storage space, you'd be forgiven for assuming

> Users will enjoy the drive valves can add, but the front panel real estate could have been better employed

Electribe Vs DAW



When the first Electribes hit the market back in the late '90s, computer music software was only just starting to mature. With computers still expensive and limited by relatively slow CPUs and expensive RAM, hardware grooveboxes were pitched as an alternative to computer-based music making. These days, things are very different – you could buy a basic computer and a couple of nice pieces of software for the price of an Electribe. As such, the Electribe should no longer really be considered an alternative to your computer and DAW. Beginners would almost certainly be better off starting out with a laptop and Ableton Live (above) than either Electribe model. Instead, think of it them as a different workflow. An inspirational tool with unique sound design features and outstanding step sequencer. For that they're great option.

SPECS

MX: 16 total parts – 5 synth parts, 9 drum parts, 1 synthesizer accent part, 1 drum accent part

SX: 16 total parts; 2 synth parts, 9 drum parts, 1 drum accent part, 2 stretch part, 1 slice part, 1 audio in part

Memory: 256 patterns (192 preload), 64 songs (3 preload)

Outputs: L/Mono, R (2 x ¼" mono), 4 (2 x ¼" mono), Headphone (¼" stereo). Audio In (¼" mono). MIDI In, Out, Thru

Effects: talking mod, pitch shifter, compressor, distortion, decimator, EQ, LPF, HPF, reverb, BPM sync delay, short delay, mod delay, grain shifter, chorus/flanger, phaser, ring modulator, Valve Force tube saturation

Dimensions:
358 x 256 x 62mm

Weight:
3.1kg

the ESX-1 SD would offer increased sample time. Unfortunately, you're out of luck – the SX uses its internal RAM for sample storage, so the maximum sampling time remains 285 seconds (in mono). This really seems like a missed opportunity.

Those hoping for new features, software updates to fix known glitches or increased processing power will be sorely disappointed. As it turns out, the internal upgrades are limited to the preset patterns, sounds and samples. Korg have enlisted the help of some of the best Electribe programmers in order to create sets of cutting-edge preset patterns that reflect the current trends in every genre from House to Chiptune, Dubstep to Minimal.

However, let's be honest: if you're buying an Electribe for the presets you've got the wrong end of the stick. These machines are intended to be used for in-depth programming and composition, not preset noodling.

> The SD models should be seen as refreshed versions of the original MX and SX rather than overhauls

Into the future

The SD models should really be seen as refreshed versions of the original EMX-1 and ESX-1 rather than huge overhauls. There's no word as to whether the Electribe range will see any major updates in future, but we'd love to see Korg introduce some of the last decade's technological innovations to the Electribe format. Combine the synthesis power of the EMX-1 and the sampling capabilities of the ESX-1, fit a bigger LCD screen, expand the effects selection, throw in a Kaoss Pad-style XY controller and you'd be getting very close to the ultimate groovebox. While we're at it why not offer a USB connection and an editor or even a plug-in-based software controller to run the unit in sync with your DAW? There's so much potential here that it seems a real shame the updates are so minor at this stage in the Electribes' lifespan.

Elec-vibes

The recommended retail price of both Electribe models is £516, but you should already be able to find them available at a street price under £450. It's a reasonable pricing level, if not quite a bargain but if you're an existing Electribe owner, the SD card slot and new presets almost certainly won't be enough to make you want to upgrade. Newcomers to the Electribe will benefit from the increased storage capacity and more contemporary patterns and samples, but whether they'll be enough to attract a new generation of groovebox fans is highly questionable.

Still, the Electribes show why they've remained so popular for the last decade. The outstanding step sequencer is the star of the show, making either unit a great choice for creating loop-based music. We'll have to keep waiting for a proper update, but for now this minor revision makes a small improvement to what was already a good pair of products. FM

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD

VALUE

EASE OF USE

VERSATILITY

RESULTS

Nothing earth shattering, but the updates to the Electribe's patterns ensure they stay fresh.

iElectribe

Mischievously announced on April Fools' Day, Korg's iElectribe app for the Apple iPad turned out to be completely genuine and one of the device's standout titles.



iElectribe is a virtual recreation of an Electribe-inspired groovebox, transforming the iPad into a fully featured sequencer with built-in real-time synthesis and effects. Cynics might see the app as a toy, but it's actually a surprisingly powerful piece of software. All of the basic Electribe features are included, making it a viable option for creating tracks, working on ideas or live performance.

Tracks can also be exported as audio, allowing you to continue working on them in your DAW. iElectribe may offer a limited feature set in comparison to the hardware, but at £11.99, it's a great way to try out the concept.

ALTERNATIVES



Korg Kaossilator Pro

£350

Korg's own Kaossilator Pro offers an interesting alternative approach. The workflow is completely different, but the Kaossilator's sound options make it a great choice for single-box production.

korg.co.uk



Roland MC-808

£849

Roland's groovebox range started back in 1996 with the MC-303 but ended with the discontinuation of the MC-808 last year. Some dead stock may still be available.

roland.co.uk



Quasimidi Rave-o-lution 309

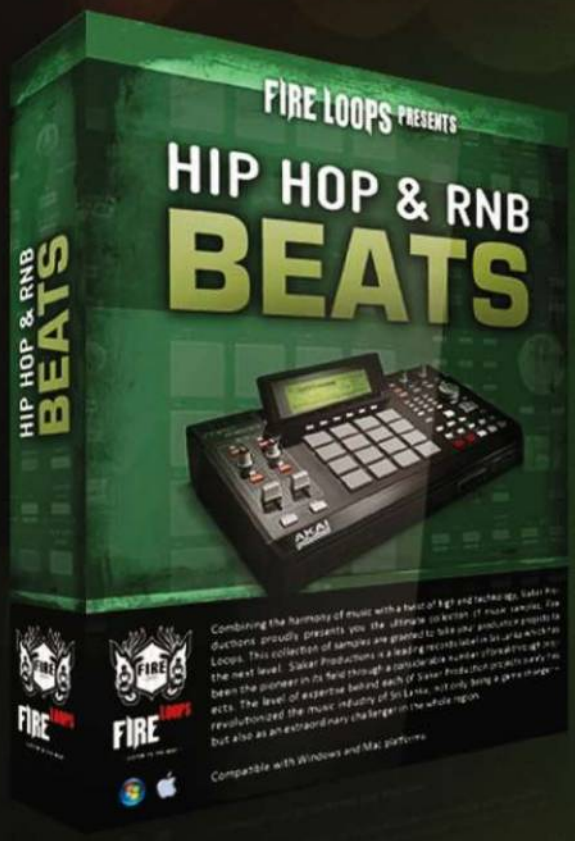
£150+

The second-hand market throws up plenty of options, but this relatively obscure mid-90s German offering is well worth investigating. Expect to pay somewhere between £150 and £250 depending on condition.

ebay.co.uk



LOOKING FOR BEATS?



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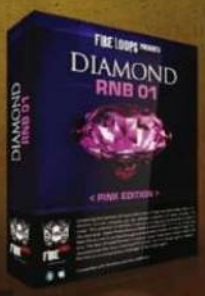
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WHAT IS IT?

A major update to the classic synth rack/ sequencer, introducing a monster drum machine, audio sampling, Record 1.5 compatibility, and the Dr Octo Rex loop player

CONTACT

Who: Sound Technology Ltd
Tel: + 44 (0)146 2480 000
Web: propellerheads.se

HIGHLIGHTS

1 Audio sampling
2 Blocks arrangement
3 Kong drum machine



Propellerhead Reason 5 | €305

With audio routing and sampling, this might be the most important update to Reason ever. It's only taken 10 years. ***Martin Delaney*** investigates...

Reason's 'synths in a rack with cables round the back' philosophy has been in place for ten years, and it's still going strong. It has remained separate from the DAW pack, though, firstly because it's never been able to record audio, and secondly because it's a self-contained system. Propellerhead realised that they could create a stable music-making experience by excluding VSTs, Audio Units or third-party plug-ins of any kind, in fact. The only way to 'expand' Reason has been by ReWiring it to other DAWs.

This introversion's made it easy to exchange Reason files with other users, because everybody's got the same devices. Reason remains popular in all styles of Electronic music, including Dubstep, Drum'n'Bass, Trance, and House, and it's used by artists such as The Prodigy, Pendulum, Claude Von Stroke (of course), Dave Spoon, Luke Vibert, and Armin van Buuren. It can be applied to other genres, though – to prove the point, Propellerhead's Refill titles (collections of add-on presets) include Soul School, Electric Bass, Abbey Road Keyboards, Pianos, Drum Kits and Strings.

Now we've got a major update to Reason, as well as the first update to their newest product – Record – which can integrate with Reason or run as a totally standalone program. You can read about Record elsewhere in this review, but I'm going to ignore it here (mostly), because Reason is still sold as a standalone product.

Revisiting Reason

The core devices remain in Reason 5: synths like Malstrom, Thor, and Subtractor, the Redrum drum machine – the NN-19/XT samplers, and effects and assorted other devices including reverb, a vocoder, delay, an arpeggiator, and a pattern sequencer. There's one massive change, though – after 10 years of waiting, you can now record straight into Reason's sample-based devices, in addition to processing incoming audio signals in real time, giving Reason a new lease of life as an audio effects rack.

The other new features ain't so trivial, either – the impressive Kong drum machine; Blocks, a new pattern-based song structure tool; the Dr Octo Rex loop player; multiprocessor support, and many small workflow improvements.



Reason 5's new Kong drum generates great classic synthesised sounds to strengthen your samples

Reason 5's Top 5 New Features

Reason 5 is full of new stuff. You've got audio inputs, the Big Meter, Blocks, Kong, and multicore processing, as well as many smaller developments, like dragging notes between clips. That's only part of it, of course, because Reason also integrates with Record – see page 105 for more on that



Kong

Everybody's doing big software drum machines these days (don't worry, Redrum is still there). Sample to one of Kong's 16 pads courtesy of Reason's new audio inputs, or browse the library and load a single hit or an entire kit.

As well as this, you can use your favourite REX files, physical drum modelling, or synthesized drums and combine them in one kit. Kong has nine audio effects – you can apply two of these at a time to each pad, as well as global buss and master effects. The two-tone generators are awesome for fattening up drum hits!



Audio Sampling

The thing that has most been missing from Reason over the years is here. Sampling can now be performed directly into any Reason sample playback device. Check the Hardware Interface – it's got a Sampling Input section with monitoring options and level controls, with extensive input/output metering. Any relevant device now has a little sampling button – click on it and Reason begins sampling straightaway.

You can then opt to open the new Sample Editor, but you'll discover that the sample might be ready to rock already, because playback starts automatically from the first detected transient.



Dr Octo Rex

Remember Dr Rex, the REX file player? Well, forget it, because it's gone. Dr Octo Rex has moved in and taken over, effectively combining eight REX players, but alongside the sound design features, there's a new intention behind it – probably driven by developments with Record. Propellerhead are pushing this as a songwriting tool, suggesting that you could use an array of Dr Octo Rexes to trigger loops and create new song structures. Record these actions into a sequencer track, and you can still edit the timing and content of the patterns, so you get the benefits of jamming and careful timeline editing.



On-screen Piano Keys

As a laptop geek, this is the kind of feature I love. Just like Logic, GarageBand and Ableton Live, Reason now has a virtual MIDI keyboard – just hit F4 to summon it. View a piano keyboard where notes are triggered with mouse clicks, or play notes in real-time from your computer keyboard. Use shift as a sustain 'pedal', change octaves using Z and X, and type in a fixed velocity value, as well as choosing from three levels of velocity randomisation.

Combine this with Reason's many keyboard shortcuts and you've got a very usable mobile laptop control system.



Expanded Sound Bank

The Reason Factory Sound Bank has been bumped up in size. It now measures over 1.5GB, and this seems to be mostly down to drums – new samples and patches for the Kong drum machine, and Dr Octo Rex.

The drum section of the Sound Bank has been restructured, to make it easy to keep track of these new additions, and maybe this is a good time to mention that file browsing works the same whether you're navigating from Reason or Record.

SPECS

System Requirements:
PC: Intel P4/AMD Athlon XP at 2GHz or better (multiple cores highly recommended), 1GB RAM or more, DVD drive, 3GB free hard disk space, Windows XP SP3, Vista, Windows 7, Monitor with at least 1024x768 resoluton, Audio interface with ASIO driver, USB port for Ignition Key, Internet connection

Mac: Intel Mac (multiple cores highly recommended), 1GB RAM or more, DVD drive, GB hard disk space, OS X 10.4 or higher, Monitor with at least 1024x768 resolution, CoreAudio compliant audio interface, USB port for Ignition Key, Internet connection

Reason 5 continues to be CPU-friendly, and just as stable as previous versions – that's the no-plug-in rule paying off again. Just as well, because the Propellerhead have been boasting lately (in an understated Swedish way) about the stability of their app, which is a dangerous thing in the software business, especially when a certain other DAW has been plagued with bugs recently.

King Kong

Honestly, I wasn't excited by the idea of dealing with another new software drum machine, but I liked the Kong drum designer. It's easy to get around, and to figure out what everything does, and the library patches sound great. If you don't have a controller connected, you can audition pads by clicking, getting different velocities depending on where you click. This might be a good time to mention that Reason, more than most DAWs, needs an integrated hardware controller. For the test, I used the M-Audio Axiom Pro 49, which is supported by Reason's Remote protocol. As soon as it was selected in Preferences, the Axiom's LCD displayed device names, and the parameters that were available to the knobs and faders.

I could also use the Bank buttons to navigate device presets...nice to be able to do this without any configuration. Kong is now the first call for drums in Reason – see the *Top Five New Features* box on page 103 for a bit more Kong action. Dr Rex has upgraded to Dr Octo Rex, and is now being promoted as a songwriting tool. It's a REX playback machine with eight slots, and the idea is that you can build arrangements by triggering loops within the device, so you'd have one Dr Octo Rex containing beats, another containing bass parts, and so on. The loop triggers can then be quantised. It keeps full editing functions for each slot, with nine parameters that can be applied to each slice. I wasn't sold on this as an arrangement tool, but it works for building beats, and the slice editing tools are a solid way to change the nature of an imported loop.



Kong is a big drum machine, alright. With samples, modelling or synthesis options, it's a beat source solution

Blocks are like a hybrid of pattern-based and linear sequencing – create your sequencer parts as usual, then paste them into blocks, and rearrange them to taste – see the *Blocks Party* boxout for a bit more info.

Moving forward

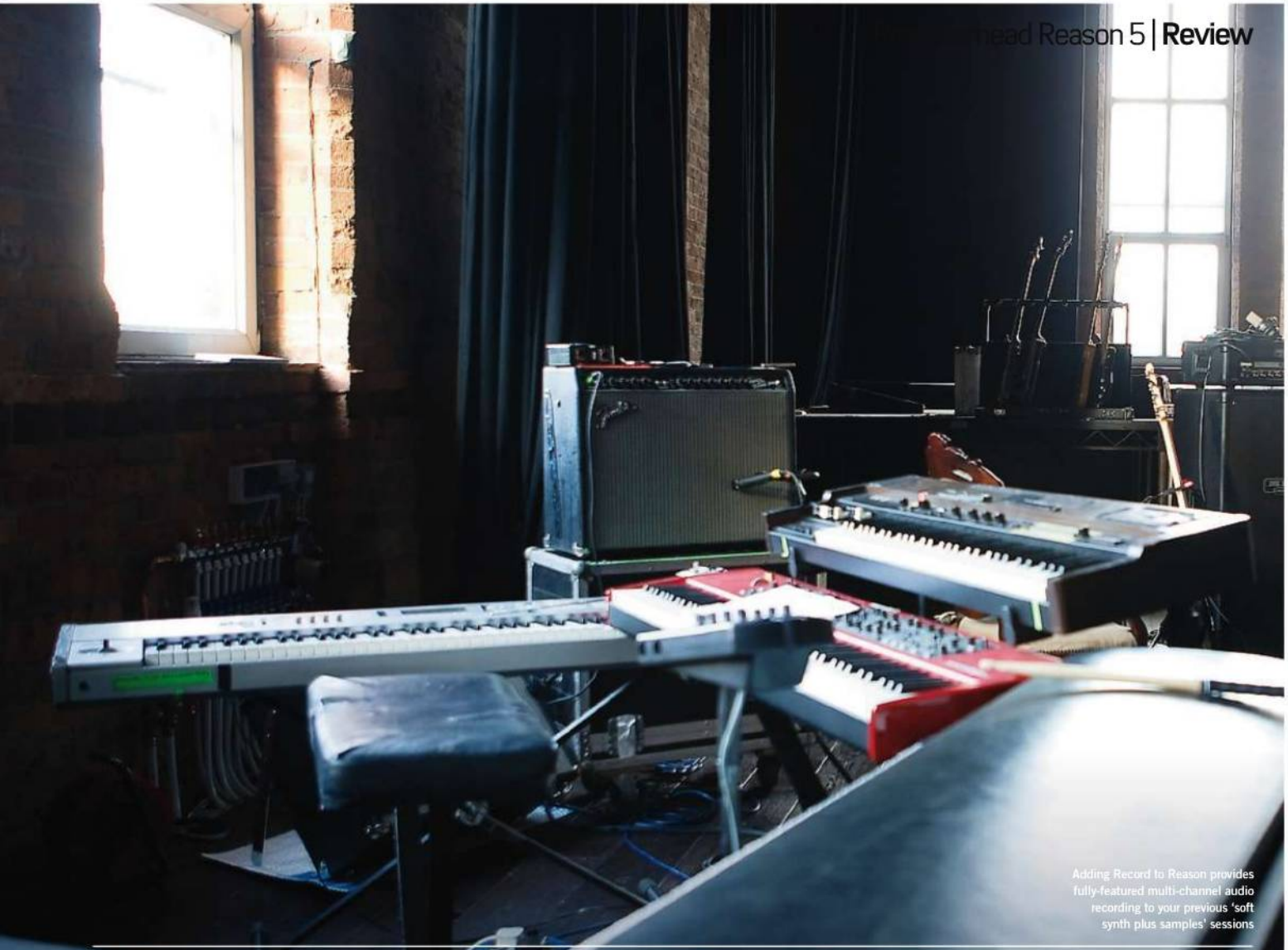
There are workflow changes, too – like the way that clips are created automatically as soon as you start drawing-in notes. Right-click on the end of a cable, choose 'Scroll to Connected Device', and the other end of the cable is highlighted automatically – good for those times when you have a big rack with a lot of cables trailing all over the place. Among other things, there are new MIDI sequencing tools, like 'Move Selected Notes to New Lane' in the context menu.

Some of these new features are going to be pretty useful on stage too. I can imagine syncing Kong with Traktor Pro, actually – it'd be a great

Audio Sampling in Reason 5



It's such a relief to be able to record audio directly into Reason's instruments. The process is relatively simple, too – it doesn't do anything weird if you're used to the way Reason works. Let's take the NN-19 sampler, for example. Load it in a new rack, and initialise the patch. Set up your audio inputs in Reason's Preferences, then go to the Hardware Interface at the top of the rack, and set an input level. Click on the Big Meter button, so you can view a clearer input level. Go to the NN-19, and click on the Start Sampling button next to the Browse Sample button. Sampling will begin instantly and a little pop up window will show the waveform as the recording continues. You can hit Stop, to go directly back to the sampler – the waveform will automatically be cropped at the start of the first transient. Otherwise you can click Edit, opening the Sample Editor, where you can crop, normalise, reverse and fade your new sample, as well as setting loop points. Close the editor, and your sample is ready to go. Reason will keep running during all this, and it's cool to grab bits of audio in a spontaneous way – this is the beginning of using Reason as a live performance sampler!



Adding Record to Reason provides fully-featured multi-channel audio recording to your previous 'soft synth plus samples' sessions

What's New in Record 1.5?

Already perfect partners, now Reason and the latest Record 1.5 integrate even better

Before Record was released in September 2009, if you liked Reason but wanted to branch out into audio recording and other expanded DAW functions, your only option was to ReWire to another DAW, like Ableton Live (they're a very good combo, actually), Cubase, or Logic. Record (now in 1.5 guise) offers and altogether slicker option. Record is an audio-focused DAW that integrates with Reason perfectly. If you have a registered copy of Reason, you can view the Reason rack from inside Record, and unlike ReWire, you don't need to have Reason running separately in the background, either.

In version 1.5, Record introduces a more evolved sequencer layout and shares the new Blocks feature with Reason. There's also a comp editor, great time stretching, the Nepture pitch correction tool, a mixer that emulates the classic SSL 9000k, guitar and bass amps from Line 6 and the ID8 'songwriting' synth, which gives fast access to a range of commonly-used instrument sounds for when you want to quickly sketch out a tune.



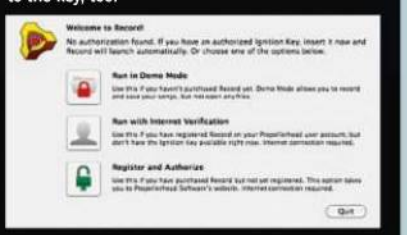
Without Reason

Record is quite well-equipped on its own, without Reason, but I guess most buyers will be using it alongside Reason, encouraged by the upgrade and crossgrading pricing, and the tight relationship between the two programs that creates a true DAW experience. It's clearly a killer upgrade for Reason users, and very tempting (and recommended) for production newcomers, but probably won't make any Logic, Pro Tools or Cubase users jump ship just yet.

Record costs 279 Euros, or you can buy it with Reason in Duo pack for 405 Euros. Meanwhile existing Reason users can add Record for only 149 Euros, which is a great price in our book.

Dongle Duty

Record uses a USB dongle: the Propellerhead Ignition Key. This system's very flexible – after you've completed the initial online registration, if you lose/forget the key, you can run Record in demo mode. If you're online, you can verify Record through propellerheads.se. If the connection drops later, Record keeps running, and lets you save your work. If you aim to use Reason with Record, you've got to add Reason to the key, too.





We've been waiting for this – live audio routing into sample-based Reason instruments, and a Sample Editor to go with it!

way to add drum machine functionality to that DJ program. Audio routing will be cool for live shows, especially once you start doing things like using the Matrix device to sequence filter effect parameters. Let's quickly quit Reason, and launch Record. If you've got Reason on your computer (and added it to the Ignition key), Record can access Reason's instruments and effects – the rack is viewable just like the Record mixer or sequencer windows, so it feels totally integrated. Record also opens Reason songs that you made earlier, using them as the basis for new projects.

Must be the Reason

There's no doubt that Reason 5 is an essential upgrade. Current Reason users should snap this up, and grab Record to boot. If you haven't looked at Reason for a while, it's time to check it out again. If you're a DAW newb, the Duo is a great production and recording setup. Unless you've got a very, good motive to jump over from Logic or Ableton Live, the Duo isn't for you (but Reason might be).

For song creation and live on stage, Reason adds yet another dimension and continues to delight. It's happy doing its own thing and keeps getting all the better for it. FM

> There's no doubt Reason 5 is an essential upgrade. Current users should snap it up and grab Record

Blocks Party

As an Ableton Live fan, I was curious about the new Blocks feature. Blocks aren't like Live's Session View clips or Scenes in Live (the Dr Octo Rex player is probably closer to Session View), but they are a new way of working with song structures in Reason's sequencer.

The idea is that you'd use Blocks when you've got a few bars of parts that fit together, but don't have any structure – they just all play at once and loop round. Click the big Blocks button at the bottom of the rack, and view a new Blocks lane at the top of the sequencer, with buttons to toggle Block or Sequence view. Copy and paste your parts into a block, name and colour the block, then copy and paste it.

Use the new mute tool to silence parts within the blocks, so as they play through, your various parts will come and go.

You can give this a more organic feel by dragging regular song clips anywhere on top of the blocks, to insert little one-off events and it all works pretty well.



FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD

VALUE

EASE OF USE

VERSATILITY

RESULTS

Long-overdue audio sampling and continued integration with Record make this an essential update.

ALTERNATIVES



Ableton Live 8

from 449Euros

Sometimes Ableton Live and Reason are buddies that play together, sometimes they're rivals. If you're more into the audio manipulation side of things than the synth rack business, you might be better off with Live – and of course Live has some pretty powerful instruments of its own.

ableton.com



Numerology

£81

We reviewed the latest version of Numerology a few issues back. This is another angle on the rack/looping/sequencing device, differing from both Live and Reason. You could compare it to an open version of the Reason rack, as it contains its own instruments as well as supporting Audio Units. Mac only, though.

five12.com



Logic Studio

£408

This is more an alternative to the Reason/Record combo, than to Reason itself. In fact there's nothing to stop you ReWiring Reason and Logic together. Logic has it all, including the brilliant MainStage performance tools, but it doesn't have any serious loop-playback tools compared to Reason.

apple.com

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ON THE DVD

WHAT IS IT?

Steinberg's latest virtual workstation hardware with powerful sample-based sounds, virtual analogue modelling and a whole bag of deep features!

CONTACT

Who: Steinberg
Tel: +49 (0)40 42236 115
Web: steinberg.net

HIGHLIGHTS

1 Sensibly priced and feature-laden
2 Sounds very good indeed
3 Stable



Steinberg Halion Sonic | £212

With 1,000s of sounds and presets, Halion Sonic aims to be your go-to production palette and workstation. ***Dan 'JD73' Goldman*** explores…

Steinberg's successor to Hypersonic 2 is a cross platform virtual workstation which includes well over 1,000 instrument sounds, a multi-timbral sample based audio engine, virtual analogue synth engine, morphing filters, Flexphrase module for creating arpeggiations and phrases, direct-disk-streaming and more.

Many of its sounds have been designed by Steinberg's owner/partner Yamaha, who obviously make great sounding boards such as the Motif range, so it'll certainly be interesting to see how things stack up. The installation process was surprisingly painless. I already had an eLicenser USB key (which is needed to download the license onto) but if you don't you'll have to purchase one from Steinberg for £18. Once the license is downloaded onto your key, you can then open Halion Sonic as a virtual instrument in your DAW of choice, or run it standalone mode.

For this review, I've been using Halion Sonic within Logic 9 on a Core 2 Duo MacBook Pro with 2GB of RAM and I'm happy to report it works smoothly. Loading times for the 12GB sound content using the new disk-streaming feature is fairly snappy too, though more complex sounds can take a few seconds to load.

The interface is a little overwhelming at first and many key parameters are written in very small print but generally the layout is pretty good, though the window takes up a lot of screen real estate (but thankfully it can be resized).

Workstation it, baby

On the left of the window is the multi-program rack, where you can drag-and-drop sounds from the Media Bay, or you can just load them from the Media Bay itself, which is broken down into categories and sub-categories of instrument, to make life a little easier. The multi-program rack enables you to line up 16 programs, each on its own MIDI channel, which can then be stepped through using your controller and sequenced using your DAW (this works great in Logic). There's also a multi-chaining option/page that allows you to set up multi's comprising of splits and layers for live performance, which is great (and is pretty similar to Apple's MainStage in this respect).

The edit tab accesses all the deeper aspects of sound editing and the list of editable features changes corresponding to the type of sound selected. Any combination of sounds can be built up within a program, with velocity switching and layering (up to a

total of four layers) enabling some really deep sounds. It's easy to layer an electric bass with a virtual analogue oscillator or two, or layer piano and strings, much as you would in a hardware workstation.

Pretty much every parameter you could hope for is there to edit, including triggering, poly/mono modes and pitch, filter and amplifier envelopes per part, plus panning, detuning, key on delays and more-plenty to keep even the hungriest programmers occupied!

Oscillator-wise, there are three per-voice, with variable waveform shapes, sub oscillators noise and ring modulation and these sound superb, really meaty and phat! With a little judicious programming you can really extract some of the nicest virtual analogue tones around.

Filter-wise there are 23 filter shapes including LP, BP, HF, AP and BP/BR types, so nothing's lacking in this department. On top of this, there are serial, parallel and morphing filter modes that can use the 'sphere' morphing-ball to the right of the virtual keyboard display. To sum up, both oscillators and filters sound great, though I'm afraid fast cutoff changes did produce some audible stepping.

Modulation Effects and Nifty Tricks

Modulation and effects-wise, Halion Sonic is very fully-featured, even putting some hardware workstations to shame! There are four LFOs plus a comprehensive modulation matrix, with 32 sources/modifiers and destinations and a rhythmic step modulator/sequencer for creating complex evolving sounds in a jiffy. The effects include Steinberg's REVerence convolution reverb and there are some high quality phasers, choruses, stereo panners, amp models, delays, comps, rotary cabs and more. Again, the scope is huge, not to mention the fact that there are four aux effect busses, each with four effect slots. Other nifty features onboard include eight virtual pads which can be set up to trigger any chord of your choice, plus the Flexphrase module is very powerful, enabling super complex arpeggiations and phrases to be triggered with one finger, at the same time as playing a lead line and drum loops, all mapped across your keyboard controller. Finally, expression templates can bring another dimension to sounds adding further realism.

Sample magic

The sample-based sounds are generally high quality, useable and suitable for many styles of music and there are some truly outstanding sounds. These include some damn fine acoustic and decent electric pianos (though some of the EPs have lumpy velocity layer switching) some expressive orchestral strings and brass, plus some of the best acoustic guitar samples about.

Further to this, the saxes and woodwinds are brilliant (and I generally am always disappointed with these types of sound) while there are some nice tuned percussion sounds (a marvellous vibraphone to name one) and some OK drum samples/loops too, though these aren't the strongest aspect, sonically speaking. Note that all the loops on board can be broken down into their component slices and sped up and down to fit with your tunes as required.

To sum up, this is one very impressive piece of software that's been well thought out and has a comprehensive and deep feature set. The interface takes a little time to get to grips with but, in general, it does a great job of cramming so much in. On top of this, it sounds polished and authentic, with only a couple of minor gripes (which include the aforementioned filter stepping, plus some cryptic labelling issues) and the fact you can't sample or import your own sounds is a shame.

> A very impressive piece of software that's well thought out with a comprehensive feature set

However, if you work a lot with sample libraries and need soundtracking sounds fast and need an all-encompassing sound palette that surpasses hardware workstations in terms of functionality and sounds pretty much on par (and perhaps better in some respects), Halion Sonic really delivers. FM



All of Halion Sonic's sounds and presets can be organised into specific categories and sub categories for easy search and recall functionality

FutureMusic VERDICT

STABILITY
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

Halion Sonic sounds good, works smoothly and has bags of really useful features.

SPECS

Over 1,000 sounds, including sample-based and virtual synthesis sounds, with editable smart articulation

Multimode filter with over 20 filter types

Wide range of effects including REVerence convolution reverb

Flexphrase module for arpeggiating and phrase manipulation

PC: Windows Vista and Windows 7, Pentium/Athlon 2.0 GHz dual-core CPU, 2GB RAM, 12GB free of HD space, VST2 or VST3 compatible host for using as plug-in

Mac: OS X 10.5 and 10.6, Intel Core Duo 2.0 GHz processor, 2GB RAM, 12GB of free HD space

ALTERNATIVES



Vir2 instruments VI.One

£195

Kontakt-engine-powered virtual workstation, with over 2,000 sounds on board. Incorporates a wide range of sounds including acoustic instruments, FX, synths, drums and loops.

vir2.com



IK Multimedia Sonik Synth 2

£133

This SampleTank-powered virtual synth workstation has over 5,000 sounds onboard. Includes a vast array of synths, acoustic, vocal and ethnic instruments, plus FX and many synthesis types.

ikmultimedia.com



Yamaha Motif Range

£2,000 upwards

Range of highly-respected workstations, with sounds onboard from the same team behind Halion Sonic. Also includes expanded articulation, real-time controllers, drums, sequencing, sampling and effects.

yamahasynth.com

Korg MR2 High Resolution Mobile Recorder | £645

The MR2 is a compact, high-fidelity portable recorder, suitable for capturing sounds just about anywhere. ***Dan 'JD73' Goldman*** gives it a whirl

WHAT IS IT?

A handheld and high-quality battery-powered digital recorder, with built in XY mic for location recording

CONTACT

Who: Korg UK
Tel: +44 (0)1908 857 100
Web: korg.co.uk

HIGHLIGHTS

1 Battery powered with USB drag-and-drop to computer
2 Versatile, with 1-bit recording options
3 Records to SD card in several formats including MP3, WAV and DSD

SPECS

Number of tracks: 2 tracks

Display: 128 x 128 pixel LCD with backlight

Power supply: AA alkaline battery x 2 or AA nickel-metal hydride battery x 2

USB bus power

Recording formats:

MP2, MP3, WAV, 1-bit (1-bit DSDIFF format, DSF, WSD)

Recording:

Maximum six hours @ 44.1 kHz/16-bit

Supported cards: SD and SDHC cards 512MB – 32GB

Connectivity:

Mic input – 3.5mm stereo mini phone jack
Line input – 3.5mm stereo mini phone jack
Stereo headphone jack

Dimensions
60 x 133 x 28mm

Weight
135g

Housed in a high-quality casing, the MR2 looks and feels top notch, while being compact enough to fit into a large-ish pocket. This makes it perfect for carrying around with you, ready to record anything at any time.

Unlike the MR1, the MR2 does away with hard disk recording altogether and instead opts for SD or SDHD cards (up to 32GB in size). This makes a lot of sense, as hard drives are fragile at the best of times, while SD cards have no moving parts, which is very important for longevity, particularly for a recorder that isn't cheap, and is largely designed to be moved around and thus likely to be knocked over or dropped on the ground.

The MR2 can record in MP2, MP3, WAV (BWF broadcast wave format) DSDIFF (which is a 1-bit audio file format used in pro audio SACD devices), DSF (another direct streaming digital format found in Sony devices) and WSD (which is yet another 1-bit audio file format).

Hit record

Recording times differ according to the recording format used and size of SD card but a project can be anywhere up to six hours in length and typical figures (per 1GB of card memory) are around 600 minutes for recording in MP3 format at 44.1/192kbps, 55 minutes for WAV at 48kHz (24-bit) and up to 22 minutes per gig of card memory using the highest quality 1-bit Direct Stream Digital formats.

All-in-all there's plenty of time available in all formats. Power-wise, the MR2 can run off USB bus power or three AA batteries. The MR2's screen is fairly easy to read and informative, while the learning curve is pleasingly small and I was recording and playing back in seconds. Thankfully, the interface is slick on the whole too and the function hierarchy is pretty easy to get your head round – perfect for when you may only have seconds to set up and capture.

One of the most appealing features of the MR is the built-in stereo XY configuration mic, which can be rotated in 30 degree clicks (up to a total rotation of 210 degrees) so that it's always pointing at the source regardless of the unit's placement.

There's also a line input, external mic input (with plug in power for powering certain condenser mics, but no full 48v phantom power) and a headphone output. Note that the MR2 can also be mounted on a camera tripod for stability and to help with rumble elimination.



1-bit better

Sound-wise, the microphone performed excellently in just about any context, either moving around recording noises outside for sound library work or capturing piano in the studio, the line input produced very high-quality results too.

Nuances in sounds and dynamics are captured well, the stereo imaging is great and I would have no hesitation using recordings made with the MR2 in any commercial releases. You could easily record a string quartet or percussionist with just the MR2 and bring the files straight back into your computer using the provided USB 2.0 connection (the MR2 shows up as a standard hard drive on your computer for drag-and-drop convenience).

In all, the MR2 is versatile, generally easy to use and a very good sounding product, though it's not cheap – only regular field and library recorders will see the real value in portable 1-bit – but it's one of the best and its flexible features will only sweeten the deal. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

Fairly expensive but completely worth the investment for those with 1-bit desires.

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James Slater – Starlight Discos

ON THE DVD

WHAT IS IT?

A highly comprehensive guitar and bass amp and FX modelling plug

CONTACT

Who: IK Multimedia
Tel: +44 (0)1223 234414
Web: ikmultimedia.com

HIGHLIGHTS

1 A very large number of accurate emulations
2 Huge number of available sounds
3 Great new patch management system

UPGRADES

Crossgrade from any other IK product
200 Euros
Upgrade from previous Amplitubes
150 Euros



IK Multimedia Amplitube 3 | €270

With over 160 models of amps and FX and a major re-design, Amplitube 3 looks to take the emulation crown. ***Stuart Bruce*** polishes his plectrum

Over the past years, Amplitube has built up quite a following among guitar and bass players with its various emulations of classic amps and pedals both old and new. These have been split across various Amplitube versions: Amplitube 2, Jimi Hendrix, Fender, Metal and Ampeg SVX. Amplitube 3 has a new open architecture that means if you already have the Fender or the Ampeg they now all appear in v3, allowing you to access all your amps and FX easily in one package. In addition they have thrown in all the Hendrix and Metal emulations and some 30 odd new versions of classic amps, cabs and pedals including guitar amps from MESA and Orange, bass amps from Acoustic and Trace Elliot and pedals from Electro Harmonix, among others. They have also updated many of the other features so let's dive in.

On the opening page, the controls are very familiar to users of previous versions but there are some new features. Firstly, there's the quality buttons. Version three is very processor heavy, especially when you start making big stereo rigs so you can now choose between Hi, Mid and Economy settings. Once you have set your sound flick over to Economy while you record (when your processor will be working hardest) and then when you are satisfied with the performance go back to High for playback and bouncing out. Switching is instant and sound differences are pretty small. Next comes the Save As dialogue, which has been updated so you can now put in plenty of detail about what that sound was used for and which guitar you were playing. In conjunction with the new preset browser, it's really simple to find a sound. Returning to that great sound you made six months ago has never been simpler.

Pedal pusher

The pedal board has had a bit of a revamp too. Lots of classics like the MXR Phase 100 and the Electric Mistress through to the Hendrix pedals like the Octavia and a fabulous Univibe emulation. I've already mentioned a few of the new pedals but of particular note is the Step Filter which as you will hear in the audio examples on the DVD, takes you well out of the realms of standard guitar. The other main feature of the stomp section is the ability to drag and drop pedals once they have been selected so experimenting with the order of them has never been simpler.

Moving on to the Amp section there are some very notable new additions. For guitarists there are two Mesa models, a clean and a lead, a great Roland JC-120, which is modelled all the way down to the chorus only coming out of one of the two speakers in the cab, an AC30 top boost and an Orange

which gives you Brit Pop crunch at the touch of a button. For bassists there is a Trace Elliot, a Gallien-Krueger and an Acoustic 360. I'm pleased to report that they sound great. The Mesa's have all the bite and tonal variation you would expect, the lead having the ability to do that ridiculous flat out overblown tone on the neck pickup beloved of our American Blues Rock cousins, and the Vox and Orange sound as English as you want. The Acoustic is a real revelation – fat swampy Reggae tones from what we used to lovingly nickname 'the Brixton Wardrobe', but it's also capable of some lovely warm fretless sounds too.

The Krueger has loads of tonal variation and works great with both fingers and plectrum.

Clean tones

If I had a criticism of Amplitube 2 it was that clean tones were not so easy to find. With the addition of the JC-120 and the Mesa Clean, and their new revised audio engine this is no longer the case. I found loads of lovely clean sounds in the preset menus and with a bit of tweaking quickly found what I was looking for.

Loudspeakers and Mics

Aside from all the changes elsewhere, the cabs section has also had a major overhaul. Unlike previous incarnations of Amplitube, two mics can be selected, they can be moved continuously across the cones and balance and phase can be changed for both of them.

The ambient mics can be given different widths and you can change the room types. You can also change the size of the cabinet making it larger and smaller. This gives you yet another way of affecting the tone of the guitar and even more possibilities when trying to sit it in the mix. If you listen to the audio files 'Stereo JC close' and 'Stereo JC ambient' you can hear how the room ambience can set a sound back into the stereo picture. The other possibility is when mixing two amps together. Each cabinet can have its own position in the stereo image and you can even adjust the phase between them. Listen to the two 'Phase Demo' files to hear how this small phase change can alter the sound – it's a trick studio engineers use all the time to get the tone they need.



> I subjected studio clients to a blind listening test and most of them guessed the right amp every time

Having all this tonal power in one plug means that you won't just want to use it on guitar and bass. The designers at IK have realised this and put in a few very useful extra features. Firstly, you now have a stereo input so you can stick true stereo signals like drum ambience or synths through it. Secondly, being able to automate easily is a real bonus and here you have two methods. Opening the Auto dialogue, you can assign different functions to up to 16 different parameter controllers that you then access from the automation of your DAW. Alternatively you can use MIDI.

By right-clicking over any control Amplitube will learn whichever MIDI controller you next move. These are stored as part of a patch or alternatively, you can set up global commands for patch change, wah pedals, stomp box bypasses etc.

The designers at IK have really got version three right. I've used Amplitube for years now and have always been happy with it. With Amplitube 3 they've managed to get a better tone from their existing emulations and put in some fabulous new ones which leave me in no doubt that anyone looking for an amp simulator plug-in would be a fool to ignore it.

I had a lot of visitors through the studio recently, a mix of engineers, producers and guitarists. I subjected them to a blind listening test and most of them guessed the right amp every time. It's that good. Highly recommended. **FM**



Save your custom sounds with plenty of extra information for quick searching

FutureMusic VERDICT

STABILITY
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

With Amplitube 3, IK Multimedia have turned a great product into something very special indeed.

SPECS

PC: Formats VST and RTAS, Pentium 4 / Athlon 64 processor, 1GB RAM, Windows XP, Vista or 7

Mac: Formats AU, RTAS and VST, Power PC, minimum dual 1GHz G4 with 1GB RAM, OS X 10.4 or later, Intel-based, minimum 1.5GHz processor with 1GB RAM

ALTERNATIVES



Native Instruments Guitar Rig 4 Pro

179 Euros

Another big, comprehensive guitar production suite. Not as many different emulations as Amplitube but its equal in quality. Well worth checking out.

nativeinstruments.com



Peavey Revalver

$300

Again, not as many emulations as Amplitube 3 but sounds great and allows you to go as far as tweaking and swapping valves and other elements within each amp. Another plug that deserves a thorough look.

peavey.com



E-mu Longboard 61 | £312

A controller keybaord with a built-in synth. ***Jono Buchanan*** investigates

WHAT IS IT?
A controller keyboard with a basic synth onboard

CONTACT
Who: Sonic 8
Tel: +44 (0)8701 657456
Web: sonic8.eu

HIGHLIGHTS
1 High-quality keyboard
2 Built-in synth
3 Layering capabilities

SPECS
I/O: Audio line output (left and right) quarter-inch unbalanced jacks, sustain foot pedal input jack, volume control pedal input jack, MIDI in/out jacks, two quarter-inch stereo headphone output jacks
Connectivity: PIPEline wireless transmitter channel selector (three-channels)
Eight velocity curves
Dimensions:
990 x 292 x 76mm
Weight:
6.3kg

PRICING
Shortboard
£235

The bus-powered E-mu Longboard 61, as the name suggests, this is a 61-key affair that combines its role as a USB controller keyboard with that of a basic synthesizer. There's a 64MB sound engine onboard, whose sounds are accessed via an 8 x 4 matrix in the central section, which clearly labels the tones available. These can be modified, with each sound containing an aftertouch assignment, as well as controls to the left for the filter (cutoff and resonance), envelope (attack and release), with additional 'amount' dials for the onboard chorus and reverb modules. It's easy to layer sounds either across the entire keyboard range or to set up your own split points and on the far left, a slider allows you to dial in values for program change, MIDI channel assignments or velocity curves.

The keyboard has a nice feel, offering enough resistance to be really playable, though the slider isn't so smooth and, on the review unit, the pitch bend wheel featured an audible mechanical click. The Longboard attempts to cover two bases and if you're a live player needing a limited selection of reasonable 'commonplace' internal sounds but also want control over your laptop, this might not be a bad choice, though do be aware that control of external gear is limited to the instrument's sound editing dials. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

High-quality controller keyboard but the synth only offers basic editing options.



Alesis Q49 | £80

Alesis' bargain board aims to tick the boxes for beginners

WHAT IS IT?
Alesis' budget MIDI controller keyboard

CONTACT
Who: Numark Alesis
Tel: +44 (0)1252 896000
Web: alesis.com

HIGHLIGHTS
1 Under £100
2 Four octaves
3 Portable

SPECS
Keyboard: 49 keys
MIDI Outputs: One 5-pin jack
USB: 1 slave connector (MIDI over USB)
Dimensions:
812 x 190 x 63mm
Weight:
2.3kg

Alesis' Q49 is similarly bus-powered but is a slimmer beast with four octaves of full-size keys, pitch and mod wheels, one assignable slider and three rubber buttons completing its modest hardware control set. Appearances can be deceptive however, as the legending along the top of all but two of the keys displays the relevant MIDI function which can be triggered directly from the keys.

The slight frustration here is that you're either in play mode or control mode, in that the MIDI/Select button on the left switches these control assignments on but at the expense of the keyboard working. If you want to adjust volume for an instrument you're playing, it's a touch annoying temporarily muting the keyboard to assign the right control and move the slider, before moving back into keyboard mode. However, the range of parameters is impressive and the quality of the keyboard is fine for the price.

While the touch is substantially lighter than the Longboard, it's consistent and far better than others I've tried that are under £100.

Two final, welcome additions: the provision of a MIDI Out port alongside the USB connector, which is good news for those of us with older gear. Secondly, Ableton Live Lite is bundled to get newbies up and running. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

Not too intuitive in its controller functions, but accurately priced for what you get...

PRIME LOOPS

WE'RE IN THE MIX

Prime Loops provide award-winning sound libraries, fresh in-tune with the evolving music scene. We are an extremely passionate team of engineers, sound designers & DJs, hailing from London, UK



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£21.95



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Ready for some serious R&B beatsmith talent? Prime Loops' brand new "R&B Beat Programmer" sample pack delivers over 170 professionally programmed R&B drum loops to get you vibing on the spot, including many variations for fills or verse/chorus switch-ups!

£14.95



DA SOUND OF BOUNCE

This brand new, mainroom-ready sample pack experience delivers over 300 sidechained, gated synth loops & patches, gritty electro basslines, pounding drum loops, hard-hitting drum shots, powerful FX plus a large selection of full-fat vocal samples, including energetic call-and-chant group shouts!

£24.95



REGGAETON MOVEMENTS

Bring out the sun-drenched summer vibes all year round with this fully loaded and totally royalty free reggaeton sample pack. With over 200MB of authentic reggaeton drum loops, synth hooks, basslines and SFX one-shots "Reggaeton Movements" will provide instant inspiration to any MC who rides your riddims.

£17.95

FutureMusic

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www.primeloops.com

Mini Reviews

The latest musical bits and pieces racked and rated



OOVJ | £2,995 + VAT

oovj.co.uk

Back when the first OODJ was launched in 2005, the digital DJing market was in its unstable infancy and a product custom-built to the needs to the digital DJ seemed a reasonable proposition. Now, in 2010 with laptops and MacBooks visible left right and centre the benefits of the OOVJ are rather harder to spot.

The OOVJ is a case with a PC and monitor inside. It's part metal, part plastic and weighs in at an incredible 13Kg. So far so 'rugged' but the fact that the ports are open on the sides mean that if you were to check it in on a plane (or even walk down the street in the rain) you'd then be in the bizarre situation of requiring a hardcase *to put your hardcase* into…

The gaping fan holes on the top surface mean that the unit can be swiftly assassinated with liquids and spills and despite the bulk and amount of free space available there are no pre-mapped MIDI controls on board. So you need a MIDI controller. And a case to put that in too.

Sure, the fact that the machine is already plugged together (so there's no messing with a soundcard) may attract some, but compared to the benefits of any modern laptop it's hard to see any appeal. With a 2TB hard drive, HDMI and DVI out and a built-in M-Audio Delta soundcard, the specs are good but not mind blowing.

Ultimately it's the combination of price, bulk and questionable build that sound the alarm. If you're a karaoke DJ or wedding DJ, and have never seen a laptop before then this might be for you. But be assured, there are thousands of better DJ or VJ options available. ***Chris Barker***

2/10



Radiopaq Dots | £15

radiopaqproducts.com

At not much bigger than your average baked bean, these tiny little in-ears seem like they might disappear when you pop them in your lugs. Instead, they deliver a great sound considering the very reasonable price. There was a strange peak around 7/8kHz that was kind of wince inducing every time a sharp snare and hi-hat cracked. But, a dab of EQ took this away and for £15, I was still mightily impressed. The main benefit of these tiny earphones was that while travelling, you can get your head down without these poking into the side of your head.

A range of colours are available including red, green, blue, pink, purple and a modest black. Bargain.

Chris Barker

9/10

EFX 365 DJ Pack | $249

monocase.com

Travelling with equipment for DJing or performing can take its toll and finding the ideal solution is never an easy task. Mono have taken this challenge to heart and put some serious grey matter in action to offer the best possible solution.

The 365 DJ pack is the top of their EFX range and offers the most options of storage in a bag that might actually survive more than a few gigs and a couple of flights. Primarily designed for the Digital DJ, this bag is as equally useful for the digital performer. A well-protected and easily accessible laptop section makes airport security not such a fraught affair and the variety of pockets mean that all your accessories will easily find a home. The addition of a cable hook allows you to actually store cables without creating spaghetti.

Other touches that make this such a useful option are the slim profile, meaning it fits in an overhead locker. If you travel a lot for your DJing or performing then you really should consider this bag – simply put, it makes your life easier. ***Will Seelig***

8/10



Dance Beats and Breaks | $34

fireloops.com



Fire Loops are a new UK-based online sample company offering a selection of products ranging from Crunk construction kits to percussion and drum loop packs. This, their latest release, is an all-round Dance drum package including complete beats, tops, percussion and FX loops suitable for everything from House to Drum'n'Bass.

The 565 high-quality loops are supplied as WAV, REX or Apple Loops format downloads. Perhaps most enticingly, Fire Loops are offering a 50% introductory discount on all their products (discount included in the advertised price) so this one's a real bargain. ***Greg Scarth***

8/10

Synth Bass Analogy | £13

primeloops.com



Multi-samples used to be all the rage back in the days of hardware samplers but they seem to have disappeared a bit recently.

Luckily for us, Prime Loops have resurrected the idea, taking 80 classic analogue synth bass sounds and multi-sampling them so they slot straight into your software sampler to play as instruments. The resulting Juno 106, Super Bass Station, Polyvox, MonoPoly and MKS30 patches really do justice to the original sources, offering seriously beefy bass sounds and authentic analogue fuzziness. Infinitely more versatile than a standard loop pack and much cheaper than real analogue synths.

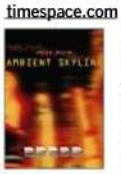
Available in Kontakt, Halion, NN-XT and EXS-24 format, at just £12.95 *Synth Bass Analogy* is a bargain.

Greg Scarth

10/10

Ambient Skyline | £86

timespace.com



The ever-reliable Big Fish Audio come through with the goods yet again, delivering a monster collection of 2,266 loops and samples which should suit any Ambient producer and could easily fit into a variety of other genres.

You'll find everything here from kick drums to field recordings of New York streets, but the live instrument samples are particularly good, with a plethora of electric guitar, bass, Rhodes and sax samples to choose from.

A total of 10.88GB of WAV, REX, Apple Loops and RMX files are included. It's not cheap, but this really is a huge, high-quality package of Ambient sounds.

Greg Scarth

8/10

Riemann Kollektion Tech House Beats vol 1-5 | £50

soundstosample.com



Bargain hunters ahoy – you can now get volumes one to five of the best selling Riemann Kollektion for under £50. Martin Eyerer, Ramon Tapia, Format:B and Florian Meindl's volumes all in one – tasty.

1.6GB gives you over 1,500 'zeigeist-wrenching' beats, basslines, tops, perc loops and bag loads more.

If like me you're not quite sure what 'zeigeist wrenching' means, then rest assured, the samples on offer here are top drawer and feature a groundbreaking first – Surround Sound one shots. It'll be interesting to see how many more follow.

Another great feature of this 'Kollektion' is the fact that within volume one, Florian Meindl has the kick split into transients, sound character and low end, the hi-hat into high, mid and low, and likewise with the claps. This allows you to really get your hands dirty playing in the sonic clay and create some properly 'wrong' sounds. Always a plus point! Thumbs up all round.

Roger Watson

9/10

Ultimate FX – Sample Magic | £43

soundstosample.com



Over 1GB of special FX – sounds interesting, but what to you get?

11 separate fields of joy as it were – the obvious 'Risers and Lifters', 'Falls and Descends' and 'Fills'. Then you move onto 'Impacts and Bombs' and 'Tape and Vinyl'. All in all, a great go-to bag which will no doubt save hours of programming and faffing around.

I'm a big fan of just being able to open a folder try a random few and then settle on one that does the job. Spend your time elsewhere on the track! A sonic Swiss army knife. ***Roger Watson***

8/10

Deep House Synths & Stabs 2 – Sounds to Sample | £13

soundstosample.com



By far the cheapest of this month's offerings – 200 one shot chords and stabs with 96 loops and the all-important MIDI files. Once more, the Rhodes and Juno-106s have been pulled out of the cupboard. The inclusion of the MIDI files gets extra points from me as it allows you to tweak above and beyond. Load up the sampler and set the controls for the heart of the sun! ***Roger Watson***

8/10

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VISIT

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Q&A

Our panel of experts answer your music-making questions, from hardware issues to software ideas, with tips and tricks along the way

DJing in the (Sound) Cloud

Gordon McCrae asks:

Q I've been discovering a lot of new music (particularly remixes) on SoundCloud recently, but the trouble is that a lot of them aren't available for download. This got me thinking: is there a way that I could DJ using SoundCloud tracks without having them on my hard disk?

Mark Gyver replies:

A SoundCloud is rapidly becoming the place for producers to put their music, so its growing popularity is no surprise. The DJing idea you mention is a good one, and I can tell you that it's just started to be explored by a company called Musikame. Their web-based SoundCloud DJ Player is currently in beta and is hardly what you'd call fully featured, but it does enable you to cue up one SoundCloud track while you're playing another so that they can be mixed together. Crossfading takes place automatically, though you can tell the Player how long (in seconds) you want this to last. Other options include a simple looper, pitch adjustment, reverse and an FX pad.

SoundCloud DJ Player certainly isn't going to replace your copy of Traktor or Ableton Live, but it's free, it works fine (providing you've got Flash installed) and looks ripe for further development.

Sharing audio on iOS

Ricky Hopkins asks:

Q I recently bought an iPod Touch for the purpose of music-making, and so far I've been very happy with the apps that I've downloaded. One thing annoys me, though: I'd often like to be able to use the audio files I create in one app in another, but in order to do this, I have to copy them back to my PC and then back onto the iPod Touch into the other app (if you see what I mean).

This seems a bit weird to me – is there any way around the problem?

Mark Gyver replies:

A Weird it certainly is, but unfortunately, because of the way the apps in Apple's iOS exist in their own little sandboxes, the kind of interoperability you crave doesn't exist, so audio files will have to be transferred back and forth between your iPod Touch and PC.

However, it's worth mentioning that Sonoma Wire Works has done something to address the problem by developing the AudioCopy/AudioPaste functionality and are releasing the SDK for other developers to use. What this means is that apps that support this functionality can share audio.

At the moment, only a limited number of these are available (go to **bit.ly/9JlzwP** for the full list), but if you want to create a convenient 'iOS studio', it might be worth cherry-picking the best of them so that you've got a mobile music-making environment that can be used totally independently of your PC.

FourTracks



THE EXPERTS

Mark Gyver
computer music expert



With 15 years of music production experience, Mark knows everything (and more) about the current and classic software market.

Doug Kraul
technology author



Doug Kraul is an electronics and computer industry innovator, who has designed analogue modular synthesizers and MIDI devices.

Dan Goldman
artist/producer



Aka JD73, Dan is a session keyboardist, producer and remixer, specialising in vintage gear, mixing and production techniques.

To send in your queries you can email us at **futuremusic@futurenet.co.uk** and we'll pass them on to the relevant expert. Or write to *Future Music* Q&A, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW

Virtual keys for Reason

Pete Murray asks:

Q I use Propellerhead's Reason 4 on my MacBook and when I'm at home I have an M-Audio MIDI keyboard that I use to control it. However, I'm travelling around a fair bit at the moment without my keyboard, so I was wondering if there was any way to set up a 'virtual keyboard' (one that I can click with my mouse) within Reason. I know some DAWs have them built-in, but Reason doesn't.

I'm guessing this might not be possible because Reason doesn't support plug-ins, but I thought I'd ask anyway.

Mark Gyver replies:

A Happily, the all-new Reason 5 does have its own onscreen keyboard, but to get one in previous versions, you'll need to download, install and set up a couple of bits of free software. These are the Granucon Virtual MIDI Keyboard (**granucon.com/vmk.html**) and MIDI-OX MIDI Yoke (**midiox.com**).

Basically, what you need to do is set the Granucon Keyboard up as a Control Surface within Reason. To do this, install both the apps then open Granucon, go to Settings and select Out To MIDI Yoke 1 as the MIDI Port.

Next, in Reason go to Edit>Preferences, choose Keyboard and Control Surfaces, click Add and select Other as the Manufacturer. The Model should be set to MIDI Control Keyboard, and the MIDI Input to In from MIDI Yoke 1.

You should now be able to play Reason's instruments from the Virtual MIDI Keyboard, either with your mouse or QWERTY keys.

Old skool sequencing

Steve Hall asks:

Q I need some expert advice please. I like old school Berlin sequencer music. i.e. Tangerine Dream, Klaus Schulze etc. I would like a method of producing sequencer loops in the above style. While I have

Can I Improve Latency by Running at 96kHz?

Francis Ball asks:

Q I'm running Ableton Live 8 on my Windows 7 PC and often use Live's Drum Racks with my USB drum pad controller to record percussion. The time delay between hitting the pad and hearing the sound is very annoying. Will using a higher sampling rate, like 96kHz, help?

Doug Kraul replies:

A It might but you may find that your CPU utilisation climbs dramatically, leaving you with less instrument polyphony and less playback tracks.

It may also introduce pops and crackles in the audio. Here's why: Your audio software and the soundcard's driver must provide a new sample to the soundcard digital-to-analogue converters once per sampling interval. A 'sample buffer' is used to insure smooth, uninterrupted sample flow.

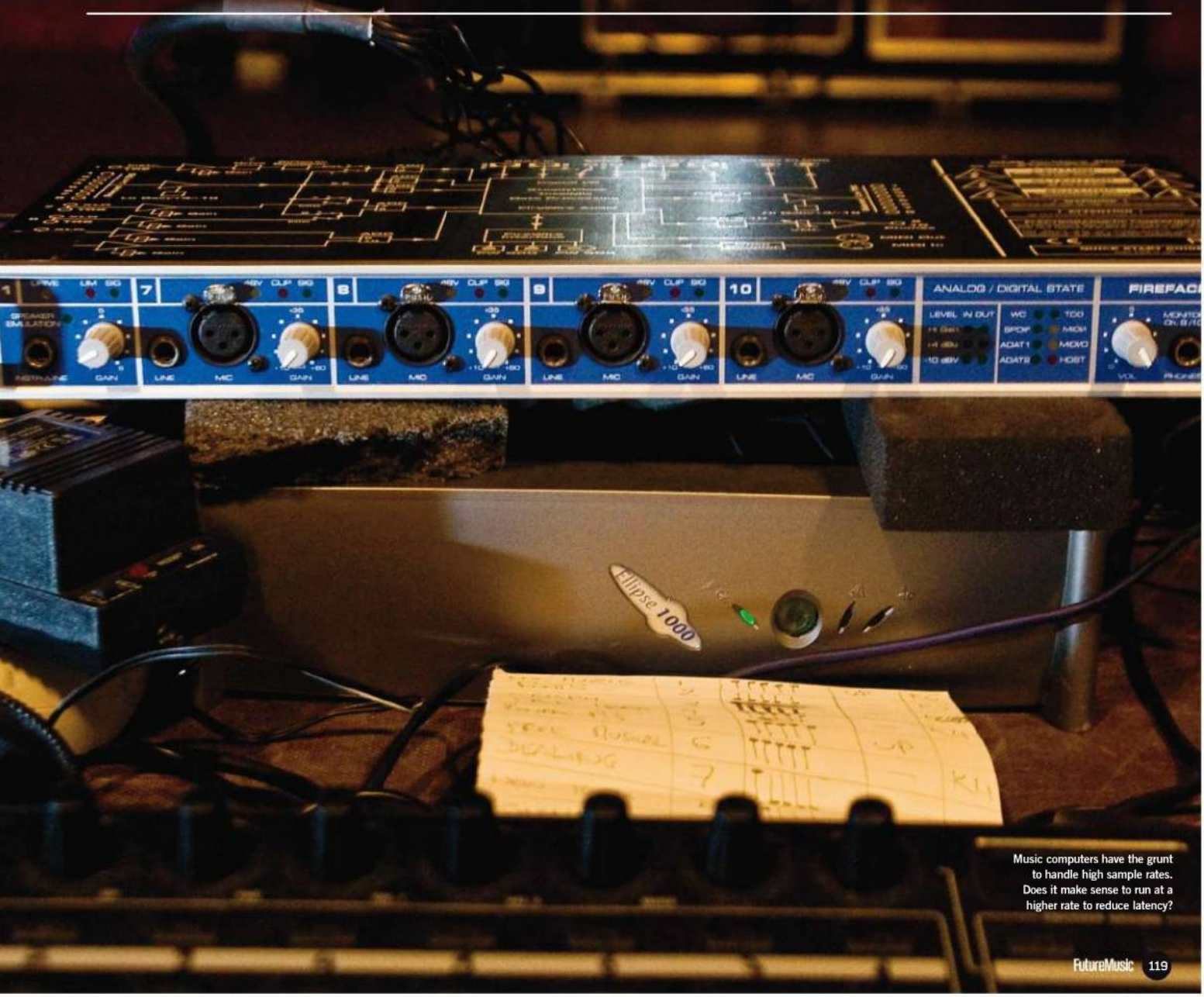
This means that the CPU only has to, on average, handle the audio processing workload, provided it always replenishes the buffer before it is completely consumed.

When it fails, you hear clicks, pops, or dropouts, and the buffer size must be increased.

A larger buffer has greater latency – a small buffer has less. Double the sampling rate and buffer latency drops in half. But there is a problem: your computer must now finish its work in less time. This increases CPU load and the buffer refill time must decrease by one-half. If your computer can support this faster sample rate without a proportionate increase in the buffer size, then you will have less latency.

However, if that is true, then you probably could have operated with a lower buffer setting at the original sample rate. In other words, your latency improvement resulted from not having optimised the buffer value in the first place!

There are other places, such as your soundcard's digital-to-analogue converters, that have their own buffering delays, and those may well reduce at higher sampling rates without any issues. But, in most setups, the largest component of latency comes from the system's buffering, and in a well-tuned system, that will need to be increased to ensure reliable operation at the higher sampling rate, leaving little room to improve the overall latency delay of your system.



Music computers have the grunt to handle high sample rates. Does it make sense to run at a higher rate to reduce latency?

a second-hand Korg Triton LE, I find this difficult to program, to get the sounds I'm looking for and to get the sequenced loops I require.

I am looking to get further hardware if necessary. Would a Korg Electribe or Roland-style Groovebox be capable of this, or can you recommend a synth module that would be suitable? Maybe I would be better off with some software for my PC to accomplish it?

The Novation Launchpad controller and some dedicated software could surely do this? I only use my synths at home for relaxation, so my budget is limited, approx. £200. If it's used off of eBay, that's fine too! Thanks for your help!

Dan Goldman replies:

A There are few hardware sequencing options that should work well for you. First off, you could grab the MFB Berlin Step Sequencer for around £200 new, which is a simple MIDI/CV 64-step sequencer that you could connect to any sound source you like, including your Triton LE, computer or any other MIDI synth or drum module.

Next up, you could grab a Roland MC-303 or MC-307 Groovebox second-hand, which can be found for around £150 on eBay or otherwise. These do step sequencing pretty well, plus they have good drum and synth sounds onboard with filtering and effects too.

In a similar vein, there's also the popular Korg Electribe EA-1mk2, which is a solid analogue synth modelling groovebox and again can be found pretty cheap these days, though there's also the Korg Electribe M/EM-1 that does sequencing, drums and synth sounds, plus filtering, so is a better bet all round. Do keep in mind that the Electribe's have recently seen an update – see page 98 for the full review.

Finally, one other often-overlooked groovebox is the Yamaha AN200 (Yamaha's answer to the Electribe) that does sequencing plus synth/drum sounds too. Unfortunately there aren't many options around for your budget, so perhaps the most flexible option is to grab the MFB sequencer and then you can expand your sound palette in the future by buying different modules to go with it.

Modules worth checking include the Novation Bass station and Clavia Nord Lead Rack, but there are many others too. Visit **vintagesynth.com** to check out some of the options.

Otherwise, the Novation Launchpad together with Ableton Live Intro is just over budget but includes a heck of a lot for the money and will cover all your needs. Good luck.



© Gerald Moore

What is ring modulation?

Anna Lee asks:

Q A couple of my software instruments have a feature called 'ring modulation'. What is this, and what is it good for?

Doug Kraul replies:

A Ring modulation is the common way of saying 'balanced amplitude modulation (AM)'. Historically, it described a particular 'diode ring' circuit used to perform balanced AM. Mathematically, it's nothing more than multiplying one audio signal by another.

When two signals are multiplied the result is a new signal whose frequency spectrum contains the sum and difference of all original frequency components. Suppose the two inputs are a 1000Hz sine wave and a 200Hz sine wave. The output of the ring modulator is a signal with frequency components at 800Hz and 1200Hz. Notice that the original frequency components are absent. This is a characteristic of balanced (ring) modulation that differentiates it from other types of AM.

Probably the most common use of ring modulation is to create inharmonic ('clangorous') sounds

Gliding by Bending

Samuel Adams asks:

Q I am finding it difficult to get the exact type of portamento effect that I want. It seems like each synth has a different way of doing this, and sometimes their time values can seem like meaningless numbers.

Is there another way to go about this?

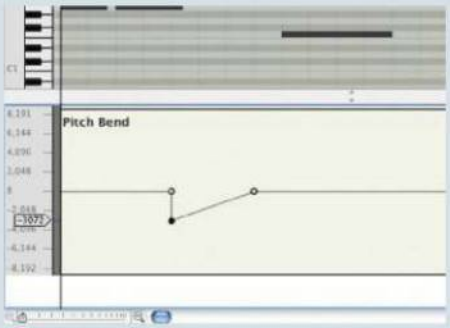
Doug Kraul replies:

A Since pitch glide is nothing more than a special type of pitch bend effect, you may find it easier to program pitch bend changes in your sequencer instead of using the synth's portamento feature. This way you can get more specific with your timing and lengths. This approach works with any synth (even external MIDI ones) sporting a pitch bend feature, including those without portamento.

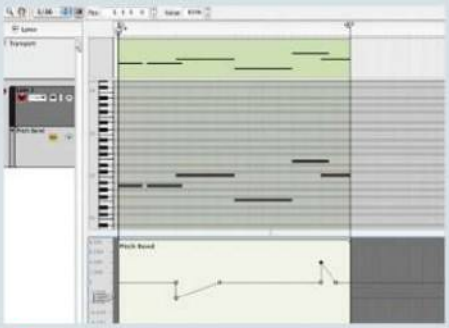
Let's look at an example using Reason's venerable Subtractor synth.



1 A crucial first step is to set a convenient bend range. A range of +/- eight semitones offers sufficient range in most uses. Since MIDI pitchbend varies from -8192 to 8192 each semitone change is 1024, an easy to find value in Reason's automation editor.



2 The first glide is between note two and three, an interval up three semitones. You want the glide to start at the previous note's pitch so add an instantaneous pitch bend down the same interval, minus three semitones (-3072). End the glide at 0 pitch bend.



3 When the note change is downward, you must start the glide by bending the note up. Here a four semitone change downward requires a bend value of 4096. For fast, accurate glide programming, use direct numeric entry if your sequencer supports it.



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from harmonic ones. The result usually sounds 'bell-like'. In the past, it's been a popular way to process speech and vocal parts, an effect you may have noticed in old science Fiction movies.

You can use ring modulation to create richer harmonic sounds, or to harmonically shift a source. Suppose the ring modulator inputs are the same 250Hz sine wave. The output will be a 500Hz (sum) and 0Hz (difference) sine. Remove the DC component (the 0 Hz portion) and you have doubled the input waveform's frequency. This is called 'frequency doubling'.

Or, modulate a 100Hz square wave oscillator with a 50Hz sine wave oscillator. The square wave's components at 100Hz, 300Hz, 500Hz, and so on will be shifted up by 50Hz to 150Hz, 350Hz, 550Hz, and down by 50Hz to 50Hz, 250Hz, 450. The net result is square wave at half the original frequency, a suboctave effect. Slightly detune both oscillators to enrich the sound with a gentle phasing effect. If you ring modulate two complex sounds the results are hard to predict and is generally quite complex.

Do not overlook more subtle uses like applying a slow 1Hz to 6Hz sine wave to impart a tremolo effect. Ring modulation is a welcome addition to any synthesis toolkit, once you understand its principles.

CD markers on MP3s

David Harris asks:

Q I have a large DJ set over two hours long and I want to convert it into an MP3 file with CD tracks, so I can burn it into CD and listen to it in any MP3 player. The problem is that I cannot find how to add CD-style tracks into the MP3 file!

I'm looking for something similar to CD Architect on the PC but for MP3 files. Can you please show me, step-by-step, with what software I can convert the large WAV file into a playable MP3 and then add tracks? Kind regards!

Dan Goldman replies:

A There's some great free software that will do this job for you easily. It's called Audacity and can be found here: **audacity.sourceforge.net**

This software allows you to import your mix then add track markers, finally allowing you to export the whole thing to CD as an MP3. The software is available for Windows, Mac and Linux.

Here's the basic way to do it:

1 First off, open your mix into Audacity as one long track. Once the file is imported, you use the 'Labels' feature to mark where you'd like the track markers to be.

2 Next, click at the start of the first track you want to have a marker on. Go to the project menu and click on 'Add label at selection' that will add a label/track marker at the point where you've just clicked (at the start of the track). A nameable flag will appear at each of these points.

3 Repeat with each track you want to mark and then use the 'Export multiple' option from the file menu to export. The labels will have created track markers for you!

4 Once exported you can then just drop the audio files into Toast or iTunes or any MP3 playback software and burn to CD.

This is the basic way it works but for detailed info, follow this link and you should have it sorted in no time at all: **http://bit.ly/8YgSyq**



Audacity is a free option for creating CD markers



Soft Synth Success

If it's a great subtractive soft synth you're looking for, try out Sylenth1.

Best 'Analogue' Soft Synth

Dan Fowler asks:

Q As someone who doesn't know a lot about synths and their sounds, I'm hoping you can help me. I've often heard it said that the best synth sounds come from old hardware models, so is it the case that the best software synths are the ones that emulate these old bits of hardware?

I've been looking at the plug-in versions of the Minimoog and things like that – is this what I should buy if I want to create 'classic' synth sounds?

Mark Gyver replies:

A Software developers often claim that their emulations of old analogue synths are 'totally authentic', using technical jargon and diagrams to prove their point. However, you'll also hear hardware aficionados claiming that software emulations of their beloved gear are pale imitations. So where does that leave you? While it's true to say that many plug-in developers have come close to capturing the sounds and character of vintage synths, it's better to think of their emulations as products in their own right, and ones that should be judged in comparison to other software synths that don't simply emulate one piece of gear. This, after all, is what you're choosing between. If we're basing our decision on quality of results – and if it's timeless, juicy analogue-style sounds you're after – the current king is probably LennarDigital's Sylenth1 (**lennardigital.com**).

This isn't designed to look like hardware, but it sounds fantastic and will give you Minimoog-style sounds and many more besides. It costs 139 Euros, but there's a demo so you can try it out before you buy.

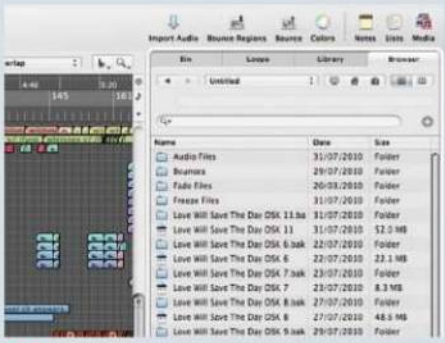
Importing Between Sessions

Q Brian Belbury asks: I'm currently working on a track but I've had a change of heart and want to incorporate some of the bits from earlier versions. Is there any easy way to do this quickly in Logic? I know you can copy and paste the whole arrange page but it never seems to work how it should.

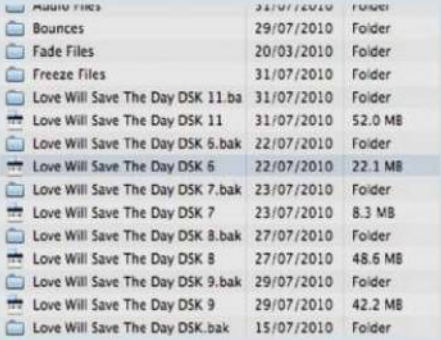
A Dan Goldman replies: You can go the whole manual copy and paste route but this can get confusing, particularly when you have two arrange pages open at the same time. On top of that, having two arranges open can put your computer under stress. Luckily, the browser feature in Logic 9 makes things a whole lot easier.



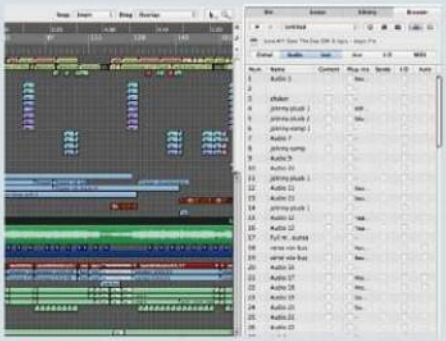
1 First of all, make sure you have the most current version of your track open. At this stage, you'll do yourself a lot of favours by doing a bit of housekeeping and naming each track clearly (at least so the names make sense to you) so that when you open the browser, it's easy to find what you're after. Also at this point, it's worth saving as a new version just to be safe!



2 Next up, navigate to Logic's Media Bay by clicking the Media button (normally at the top right of your arrange page). This opens a menu with options for the audio bin, loops, library and finally browser which is the menu you're after. Click on 'Browser' and then click on the suitcase icon which will then display all files related to the project file you are working on.



3 To make it easy to find the project you wish to copy elements from, the browser also gives you the option to sort by name, date and size too which is handy. You can also use the search field if the file you're after is in a different project. By default though, the most current file will be at the top of the list. Now navigate to the project you want to copy from and click on it to select.



4 Now that you've found and highlighted the project you want to copy from, click on the 'Import' button at the bottom right of the browser window. This effectively opens the project but without opening the arrange page.

You're now presented with the import browser window which further breaks things down to make it easy to select the info you're after. You can select exactly the info you want displayed individually (such as audio, MIDI etc), or you can display all types together at the same time.



5 You can now import the recorded info itself, the plug-ins from the relevant channel, sends, in/out settings, MIDI info and automation info. Simply tick the check boxes next to the elements you want to import, then click add, or click replace if you actually want to replace the newer version with the older one. I'm importing an older 'pluck guitar' take with its content and plug-ins. I can't import automation for this track as there wasn't any automation info in the first place.



6 In this instance, I've clicked add and Logic has now loaded the guitar track I was after with all the related plug-in info and relevant levels too. Very easy and much neater than having two arrange pages open at once! Now you can simply repeat this for any other elements you require. Note that if you click the import project settings tab at the bottom of the import window, you can also import relevant project info such as global tracks, screen sets, MIDI info and much more. FM

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Latest Release

TRIBAL PERCUSSION
5PIN MEDIA

The MIDI-mad rhythm addicts at 5Pin have been soaking up the African festivities involving a football and some controversial unmusical plastic horns. Mercifully none feature in Tribal Percussion by 5Pin Media – only crunching tribal rhythms from blistering sessions involving Djembe, Conga, Bongo, Cajon, Mandal, Pot drum and various other drums combined with exotic shakers and world percussion to provide the topping.

The Midi and Audio Loops ooze with natural unquantised grooves as captured in our live percussion sessions, recorded in 24bit quality.



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Demos



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Demo Of The Month



SELECTED KIT

Hardware

> Novation X-Station 61
> Korg DW-6000
> Octave Kitten
> Korg A4 guitar effects
> M-Audio FW410
> M-Audio BX5 monitors

Software

> Pro Tools M-Powered 7.4

FAVOURITE GEAR

> "I'm not tied to anything. In this song the centre was the X-Station but my favourite is the Kitten synthesizer. It's a little broken, but I like what occurs with this error. I use it to filter signals that come and go from Pro Tools. I use it to create effects and also as a generator of percussion and bass sounds. It only has one oscillator but with two sub-octaves it gives extra weight to the sound."



Kosmische Dans
Sebastian Cirillo

Contact: myspace.com/sebastiancirillo

READER DEMO OF THE MONTH

You can't beat a bit of old school experimentation and generally having fun and 'trying stuff out' with gear that you know and love. The result is this warm, exciting and engaging Ambient soundscape.

There's shades of Kraftwerk's *Autobahn* (courtesy of some rippling, evolving arpeggiation and dramatic filter sweeps) and the (insane) panning keeps the whole track bubbling and alive. Love the stereo delays and the way that certain reverbs and heavy feedback delays are reserved for certain sounds, keeping every new trick fresh and only ever performed once.

Perhaps most impressive is that the track was effectively performed live, showing that once you've set up a raft of great sounds you can afford to experiment and be sure that everything is going to come together in the end!

We're not sure how much of the sound is attributable to your Octave Kitten but there's a great warmth to the mix. That said you need to watch the top end. With a lot of the melody elements at play here there's just a shade of sharpness that we'd like to see rolled off. That said this a superb piece of work. Top marks.

The Artist



Name: Sebastian Cirillo
Where: Mercedes, Buenos Aires, Argentina
My track: "It's an electronic mantra, inspired by reading books by Carl Sagan and Stephen Hawking. My intention was to create a soundtrack for the landscapes I saw while reading. I was also inspired by the vintage electronic music, things like Tangerine Dream."

Which bit of this track are you most proud of?
"Probably the bass. I did it with the Novation and Korg DW-6000 doubled and slightly detuned. I am also proud of the structure of the song. There is no copy/paste, no MIDI sequences or quantisation. Everything was played live and recorded directly to Pro Tools. To keep that vintage sound I didn't use the plug-ins in Pro Tools but sent it all through the filters of the Octave Kitten and a Korg A4 guitar effects pedal."

If we were to give you £5,000 for gear what would you spend it on?
"I'd like a Mac Pro, a modular synth and some acoustic treatment."

What are you working on now?
"Right now I'm writing and producing a solo singer and a Rock band."

The Best of the Rest...

Eauriental
Dirty Trickz

myspace.com/dirtytrickz



This one's full of Eastern flavour. "It's a UK Funk track that's more like an Ambient track with tribal drums, dark pads, wooden basses, mystic vocals and bongo percussion, which creates a certain dark atmosphere," say it's makers Olaf Rubens and Stefaan Van Parys. "We tried to sound organic so we added couple of nice little details. It's not too compressed leaving some room for the nice dynamics. We are very proud of the structure of the song and the mastering that we did."

We certainly agree. The sheer range of sounds here and the source material means that the track sounds very complex and impossible to pin down. Not sure about the weird audio loop at 4:18 but when the drums drop at 4:39 it all makes sense again.

"We use an Arp 2600, Behringer Chromatic tuner, Behringer BCF 2000, Kenton Pro Solo mk2, Korg MS-20, Lexicon Lamda soundcard, microKorg, Moog Moogerfooger, Sherman Filterbank 2 and an inherited Yamaha EX42 Electone organ." Wow that's some bizarre kit list! And surprising considering the sample-based nature of the track. We're looking forward to the "all analogue" project you're working on too. Be sure to send it in.

Fallin' In Love
Leon A Valentine

leonval3ntine@aim.com



That's a real 'nosebleed' pairing of kick and snare, y'know. And the bassline doesn't hold much promise. But fortunately, once the wide gated



pad kicks in things start to take off nicely. We're reminded of old '90s ravers Jam & Spoon here.

"My intention was to make something like an old-school Trance track, but due to some problems with some of the equipment, it ended being between that and uplifting Trance," says it's maker Nasos Theocharis. We're certainly getting that vibe so mission accomplished! "Each sound has its story to tell, as it progresses in time, but I have to confess that I really love the break beat somewhere in the middle of the track and the piano melody, which came, as far as I remember by accident while playing around. I love it." And we love the old skool sweeps and – once again – gating your pad chords to percussion. Can't get enough of it. Aces.

Business Time
Menari

soundcloud.com/menari



This one only comes alive once the bass drops at 1:00 but once it's there, it doesn't let slip. "We really wanted to write a track that would be suitable for a DJ who is playing in that prime time slot around 1am," say Ryan Woollerton and Allison Scott. "We tried to give it that 'big room' sound as well as giving it a catchy overall feel. We like the way our kick interacts so well with the lead synth and bassline. It's no secret that if you get these two or three elements working well, than the rest of the track will fall in to place."

Couldn't agree more. Add in some nice arrangement tricks and some high-frequency elevators and shimmering super-hi hi-hats and percussion, and you've got the track with everything.

Lumeria
John Andio aka Cyberoptikon

myspace.com/cyberoptikon



There's a nice tune, a great choice of sounds and a clever arrangement here but it's the mix that's the first (and only) thing you notice here. Some rather



SELECTED KIT

Hardware
> Intel 2.4Ghz PC
> M-Audio Oxygen V2
> Samson Resolv 50a
> Focusrite Saffire Pro 24

Software
> Ableton Live 8.0
> Reason 4.0
> ReFX Nexus
> Sylenth1
> Rob Papen Predator
> Reaktor 5

FAVOURITE GEAR

> "Live 8. I do pretty much everything on it."

Wind Chill
Ben Lloyd

Contact: soundcloud.com/ben-lloyd

A chunk of in-the-box driving Trance for you now. If you like your tunes digital and hard then this one is for you. "The bass is probably my favourite part," says its maker Ben Evans. "Its often difficult to get the bassline to gel with the rest of the track and maintain energy. But after a few hours of fiddling with Sylenth1 and Nexus I think I got there."

We'd say so too. There's a distinct 'all in one' flavour to the tune but the bottom end certainly gels nicely. And we love the breakdown and musical progression here. Again though, we'd like a little more variation in the sounds here. Even at full tilt it never sounds like it's coming from more than one machine. Time for a bit of outboard to give the track an extra layer, we reckon.

"I'd like to invest in some new CDJ 2000s as I'm really keen to get back into DJing after selling my beloved Technic 1210s," says Ben. "I think some new monitors would defiantly be in order, maybe some Mackies or KRKs." We'd say lob a retro synth on that list too. Nice work.

Hot Pick



SELECTED KIT

Hardware
> Apple iMac 27"
> Tannoy System 800 monitors
> AKG K240 studio headphones
> M-Audio Axiom 61
> Behringer BCR2000

Software
> Logic Pro 9
> Sylenth 1
> Battery 3
> PSP Vintage Warmer
> T-Racks 3

FAVOURITE GEAR

> "That has to be the Sylenth 1. There is not one song without it."



White Desk
Mr T and Spinning Monkey

Contact: mrtea.se

We're loving the bassline here. Some smart programming – dropping in slips and skips into the bass and percussion – really gives this track a great bouncy feel. It's almost too lively and 'fun' for true Progressive but we're loving what you're doing!

There's plenty of filterwork here which keeps things bubbling along and the rock steady kick and snare gives you a great bass from which you can go crazy with some nice aggressive sounds. There's a lovely spread to your reverb and delay that opens up those synth chords nicely. Likewise are we detecting a little chorus or layered detuning on the bass? It sounds great.

Love the smooth, steady strings that, again, act as a backdrop to the movement top. The real lesson to be learned from this one is to go for it with your filters and effects sends and try a pass recording just fader movements and experimentation. This track comes alive because there's so much changing and moving. An automation masterclass indeed. Looking forward to hearing more.

The Artist



Names: Robin Tannenberg
Where: Sweden
This track: "It is a Progressive track, that has a really nice floating arrangement."

Which bit of this track are you most proud of?

"This track started with Spinning Monkey playing with his new Akai LPK25 and he ending up creating the main melody. This melody inspired me to building this song. I am most proud of all the automation in the song. Everything from programming LFOs on white noise to everything else you can automate. Trust me, there's a lot of automation going on."

If we were to give you £5,000 for gear what would you spend it on?

"I have been looking at a couple of KRK VXT6 and the KRK 10S subwoofer for a long time now. I would also buy a Virus TI keyboard and probably some plug-ins. Maybe one of the Waves bundles. I have the SSL bundle and just love it!"

heavy use of some rather heavy reverbs mean that this one always sounds like it's being played in a cavern. Ease off on your effects, reserving such heavy treatments for certain sounds and you'll have something with far more impact.

"This track has influences from uplifting Progressive Trance with a bit of Folk and New Age thrown in," says its maker, John Donadio. "Using a space flute as the lead for the earlier part of the song it reminds me of the many Peruvian Folk artist I see on the streets of New York playing the pan pipes with extreme reverbs blasting out of little amps." That explains the outdoorsy sound then!

"I love the change up when the drums stop and go into the second part. I like how I got the bass to feel almost like a big Orchestra Drum and how the piano comes right in on top of all that to make it more powerful."

There's certainly a lot going on and it's a complex bit of work but if you reigned in those effects you'd hear much more of it. Good track with a new remix, we reckon.

Tip To Soda
Spooky Radio Blare

myspace.com/spookyradioblare



Love the real-world, real sounds going on in this one. You get a real sense of the percussion being played and a great natural ebb and flow. And we always love it when someone isn't afraid to push something a 'little too far' in that mix. We're talking about those big crash cymbals! Talk about a big splash. Nice one.

"I wanted to do a fresh spin off of those early great tracks of the decade," says Luis Daniel Roca. "I started spinning Progressive House right from the start but I was always intrigued by those jams that had a break beats in them, somehow they really seem to tweak my ear. The song develops progressively, you really need to listen to the intro to understand what comes in the next section and the break down altogether."

We know what you mean. There's a real split personality at work here but overall the steady, reliable bass and drums tie some of the more wayward (dare we say it piercing) synths together. Deeply groovy.

Time To Go
Ultramk

soundcloud.com/ultramk



Let's finish with some throbbing Progressive House. There's a bit of an old skool Rave here thanks to that vocal sample and the steady pulsing sidechain keeps you nodding your head.

"I enjoyed programming the chords and bass and was aiming to get a nice atmosphere going," says Rob Wood. "I'd like to buy an Aphex Aural Exciter to add a bit more presence and punch to the mix, a decent set of monitors and a decent hardware synth. Maybe a Moog Little Phatty?" Good choice. We reckon a bit of real analogue kit would be right at home with your sound. And a new set of monitors might encourage you to push that bottom end a bit more. Your toplines will love a nice floor-filling bottom end! FM

Hot Pick





SELECTED KIT

Hardware
> M-Audio Fast Track
> M-Audio Keystation
> Shure SM58 mic

Software
> FL Studio 9
> Reason 4.0

FAVOURITE GEAR

> "Basically everything that we currently own to create music can very easily be upgraded and replaced. At the moment we make do with what we have and make the best of it."

Sideways Heart
The Idyllic Dead

Contact: myspace.com/g.jo999

The trick to this one is the brilliant, confident vocal. Proof that if you deliver with enough belief in your sound and capture it in a clean and clear way you don't need all the gear in the world to win the game.

"We call this a bit of melancholic Electro Pop that is both melodic and catchy," say it's makers Joshua Garcia and Ivan Ahumada.

"We love the sweep in between sections. The way the bass wobbles, with the white noise carrying it, into the vocals with the repetitive synth line that's pushing the track forward. I added the wobble in the bass using LFO modulation. It's quite simple I just never thought of using it before," says Joshua.

It's the wobbly vibes giving a delicate natural feel we like. This offset with the 16th-note abrasive bassline sound great. And it's always nice when someone takes the time to pan and spread some tracks too. Not sure what you've done to the snare to get it so jump out and wide (hard left and right panning with a little detune?) but we're loving it.

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4 Start work on that bio...
If your track is selected to be featured in the magazine we'll email you and ask you a whole bunch of questions such as your favourite gear, how you got your sound, you know – all the things you see us ask people! We're always up against one deadline or another here at *FM* so a rapid concise and easily understood reply to our questions is appreciated. Make sure you put your real name, artist name and track name on all correspondence!

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Marantz PMD 620
Portable SD/SDHC card recorder
Selectable stereo/mono .WAV/mp3 recording, 44.1/48 kHz, mp3 bit rates from 192kbps to 32kbps, USB 2.0 connectivity to PC for drag and drop file exchange, integrated stereo condenser microphone array, mic and line level external inputs, phantom power (5V, 1mA), includes 512MB SD card. Dimensions: 10.2 x 6.2 x 235cm (WxHxD). Weight: 110g
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Beat-synchronized sampler, 4 multi-FX sections, 2 patented BPM counters, digital crossfader and MIDI, 4x phono/line stereo channels. 2x mic inputs with gain, EQ, talk function and FX. 4x stereo channels with gain, programmable parametric 3-band EQ with kill function, fader curve control and flexible crossfader.
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o. code 237768
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Really nice compressor
Stereo compressor with two modes: ‚Normal' for effective compression and ‚Super Nice' for transparent compression. Controls: threshold, ratio, attack, release and gain. Switches: bypass & Super Nice.
€169.- £141.-
order code 179985

RNLA 7239 Really nice levelling amplifier
10Hz-100kHz 0.5dB @ 0dBu, clip point: +22.5dBu @ 3% THD.
€205.- £171.-
order code 190166

SPL GoldMike 9844
2-channel valve preamp
Discrete Class A solid state, 48V phantom power, phase reverse, pad function, flair presence enhancement, very clear and warm sound. Dimensions: 19"/2U
€425.- £355.-
order code 123370

Universal Audio 710 Twin-Fifty Bundle
1-channel mic/line/DI preamp
Dual path 310V class A valve & transimpedance solid state preamp, +70dB gain, 48V pha3ntom power, -15dB pad, phase invert, 75Hz low cut filter. Bundle includes UAD-2 Solo PCIe DSP card, VST and AU support, LiveTrack™ low-latency live monitoring/recording mode, Mix Essentials II (1176SE Limiting Amplifier Emulation, RealVerb Pro, CS-1 Channel Strip, Pultec EQP-1A EQ Emulation).
€678.- £567.-
order code 244200

KRK RP5 Rokit G2
Active studio monitor
75W, 5"+1" speakers, 53Hz-20kHz, magnetically shielded. Dimensions: 27.6 x 18.5 x 25cm. Weight: 8kg. **Unit price!**
€135.- £113.-
order code 213024

KRK RP8 Rokit G2
8"+1", 140W.
€215.- £180.-
order code 213090

Yamaha HS50M
Active 2-way studio monitor
70W bi-amped bass reflex system, 5" woofer, 3/4" tweeter, 55Hz-20kHz, XLR & jack ins, adjustable input level, mid EQ, room control, high trim, switchable low cut, fully magnetically shielded. **Unit price!**
€144.- £120.-
order code 186461

Yamaha HS80M
120W, 8"/1", unit price. €225.- £188.-
order code 186463

Genelec 8020BPM
Active 2-way studio monitor
Power switch, 66Hz-20kHz (±2.5dB), 105dB SPL peak @ 1m, 95dB SPL @ 1m, 105mm (4") high efficiency bass driver, 19mm (3/4") metal dome tweeter with Directivity Control Waveguide, 3kHz crossover, magnetically shielded, aluminium cabinet, includes wall bracket. Power per channel: 20W (bass), 20W (treble). Dimensions: 22.6 x 15.1 x 14.2mm. Weight: 3.7kg. **Unit price!**
€279.- £233.-
o. code 235038

Adam A7 Special Edition
Active nearfield studio monitor
6,5" Rohacell / kevlar sandwich woofer, A.R.T. tweeter, frequency range 46Hz to 35kHz, 100W (sin), 150W (rms), XLR and RCA input, dimensions: 18 x 33 x 28cm, weight: 8kg. **Unit price.**

black piano lacquer €377.- £315.-
order code 241073

white piano lacquer €377.- £315.-
order code 244797

Mackie HR824 MK2
Active 2-way studio nearfield monitor
8.75" low-distortion LF woofer, 1" titanium dome ferrofluid cooled tweeter, twin FR series amps (150W LF & 100W HF), passive radiator provides tight, articulate bass extension down to 35Hz, balanced XLR/TRS and unbalanced RCA inputs. **Unit price!**
€529.- £442.-
order code 138446

Gear Chart

Are you giving your music a fresh kick? In the market for new kit? Finally putting together that dream set up? Then you'll need *FM*'s exclusive guide to all our favourite gear

1 2 3 4 5

Hardware Synths



Dave Smith Instruments Tetra | £552
Review FM219 Super Mopho meets cut-down Prophet '08 in this fantastic analogue polyphonic synth.



Dave Smith Instruments Prophet 08 | £1,499
Review FM194 A beast of analogue power. Warm, fat and wooden-ended – what more do you want?



Clavia Nord Wave | £1,395
Review FM196 If you liked the Nord Lead you'll love the Wave. It's more versatile and sounds fantastic.



Moog Taurus 3 | £2042
Review FM226 With more lows than an Eastenders omnibus, this beast will blow your socks off. Modern features make this a dream to use.



Roland Gaia SH-01 | £579
Review FM227 No menus with hands-on controls all over. Despite the ropey presets, Roland are starting to get back to what they do best.

Soft Synths



FXpansion D.CAM Synth Squad | £179
Review FM217 A powerful synth collection from FXpansion, favoured by Electro House heroes.



Rob Papen SubBoomBass | £89
Review FM215 Another superb synth from Rob Papen that caters for all your bass-in-your-face needs.



Spectrasonics Trilian | £215
Review FM224 A long-awaited update to the monster of all bass software. An instant classic.



XILS Labs Poly KB | €149
Review FM228 A lush sounding recreation of the classic and rare. Poly Kobol. Great tones with the benefits of MIDI and automation.



u-he Zebra 2.1 | $199
Review FM183 Subtractive and analogue synthesis with an ultra-phat sound. Ideal for shaking ground and wrecking speakers. In a good way.

MIDI Controllers



Novation LaunchPad | £149
Review FM220 Great features at an amazing price make this Ableton controller a performance dream.



Akai APC20 | £170
Review FM227 A more compact, better-value version of Akai's Ableton front end. Robust build and great features make this very gig-worthy.



Livid Instruments Block | £349
Review FM223 Built out of wood and metal, the Block is a great alternative to the more mainstream controllers.



Native Instruments Kontrol X1 | €199
Review FM223 An intuitive, well-built controller at a great price. If you're a Traktor user, try this.



Vestax VCM-600 | £649
Review FM216 A fantastic way to control Ableton Live. Vestax deliver a well built, fun and feature packed DJ style performance controller.

How Our Chart Works

We've fought, bitched, whinged and racked-up all our favourite gear that's available today into our Gear Chart. If it makes an appearance on these pages, then it's well worth a look. We've appraised the hardware in terms of its price point, performance and usability, along with the fond memories and sheer joy factor of cranking it up for the first time. We're not saying that keyboard number six is 'better' than keyboard number seven, for example. We're saying that you should have a think about the music you want to make, read our recommendations below, and check out the gear that sounds cool. Each month we'll be updating our charts with new finds and introducing new lists to keep things fresh. Special mention to the Digital Audio Workstation bit at the back, which should help you nail your ideal recording solution. We out.

The FM Awards

Editor's choice. If you see this little flag tagged on to one of our reviews it's impressed us above and beyond the usual excellence.

Platinum. Buy these. Unless you've got a perfectly good alternative or produce your music on comb and paper.

Value. A special chapeau to bits of gear that deliver the goods without breaking the bank. Value awards mean great gear at even better prices.

The Charts This Month...

120	**Hardware Synths**	From two-octave upstarts to two-grand monsters
120	**Soft Synths**	Our pick of sound-producing software
120	**MIDI Controllers**	The best performance and studio controllers in town
122	**Monitors**	Record, mix and master with confidence
122	**Keyboard Controllers**	Everything you need from portables to studio staples
122	**Audio Interfaces**	Get audio into your computer with quality and style
122	**Effects and Manglers**	Warp your sound and break new ground
124	**Performance Samplers**	Take control of your audio live and direct
124	**High-end Audio Plug-ins**	Treat yourself to the best that money can buy
124	**Field Recorders**	Record your band or go searching for found sound
124	**Microphones**	The best mics around for everyone's budget
125	**eBay Classic Retro Finds**	Keep an eye out for our suggested list of nostalgic love
125	**Ways To Stand Out**	Dare to be different and reap the rewards
125	**Digital Audio Workstations**	Which DAW is best for the music you want to make?

6



Arturia Origin Keyboard | £2499

Review FM231 An enormous, well-built and massively in-depth synthesizer powerhouse.



Spectrsonics Omnisphere | £299

Review FM207 Great sounding, flexible and unique, this is truly a powerhouse of sound design.



Novation Nocturn | £69

Review FM199 Your cheapest entry into the world of Automap, the Nocturn is a mini bargain.

7



Waldorf Blofeld Keys | £699

Review FM211 A huge amount of exciting presets and solid good looks make for a killer all-round synth.



u-he Ace Synth | €69

Review FM227 At such a low price, you can't go wrong with this software modular synth. Patches are clear and crisp and it's all very fun to use.



Akai APC40 | £400

Review FM215 Although there's still a few things that could be addressed, this is still the best option for performing with Ableton Live.

8



Korg microKorg XL | £439

Review FM210 This fresh update of everyone's favourite mini-synth gives a new engine and a great vocoder.



Waldorf Largo | £175

Review FM217 Waldorf take their Blofeld sound and technology and create a powerful and unique soft synth. Check it out.



Akai LPD8 & LPK25 | £45 each

Review FM224 A better keyboard design and build than its rivals. Shame about the short throw rotaries.

9



MFB Kraftzwerg | €580

Reviewed FM219 German-built modular synthesis on a budget. Prepare to get addicted to analogue with this flexible patch-happy synth.



Arturia Jupiter-8V | £150

Review FM189 One of the definitive, all-time great poly synths is now a plug that delivers thunderous bass as powerful as its searing leads.



Korg nanos | from £36

Review FM209 The keyboard lets the series down, but these portable controllers are still a bargain. They're bundled with great software, too.

10



Dave Smith Mopho Keys | £550

Review FM229 Hands-on controls and wooden-ended good looks make this another winner from DSI.



Lennar Digital Sylenth1 | €139

Review FM208 This simple-to-use, Virus-like synth comes packed with a great set of presets.



Behringer BCF-2000 | £140

Review FM153 Eight 100mm motorised faders for such a low price, this is still a great controller.

Gear Chart

1	2	3	4	5

Monitors



Event Opal | £2,498
Review FM215 Easily the best active monitors you can get for this price. Our reviewer bought a pair and the rest of the *FM* team want a pair too!



Focal JM Labs Twin 6 BE | £829 each
Review FM206 These are some of the best sounding speakers we've ever heard. Worth every penny.



Genelec 8040 | £1,000
Review FM181 Genelecs are always a favourite with *FM* and most of our experts use them so it's no surprise that we love these.



Samson Rubicon R5A | £235
Review FM181 Trustworthy for reference monitoring but priced at an unbelievable level. Get some in.



Acoustic Energy AE22 | £899
Review FM201 For accurate mixing, these are one of the best sets we've used. Very highly recommended.

Keyboard Controllers



M-Audio Axiom Pro 49 | £318
Review FM216 Our reviewer found this to be the most tightly integrated DAW controller ever.



Novation Nocturn 25 | £190
Review FM221 A well-rounded well-priced controller that does plenty of great work with Automap 3.3.



Korg Kontrol 49 | £319
Review FM160 Great keys and pads, with looks and build that elevate it above the competition. But there are easier to set up controllers out there.



Akai MPK49 | £299
Review FM197 A well made deck that's the control section from the legendary MPC with 49 keys strapped to the front. Sleek.



CME VX5 | £499
Review FM192 It's built like a tank and adds some awesome motorised faders into the mix. An excellent professional choice.

Audio Interfaces



M-Audio ProFire | £359
Review FM202 A brilliant interface that includes the great Octane Mic Pres, making it a superb recording solution at an amazing price.



MOTU Traveler | £795
Review FM177 Came out on top in our FireWire group test. Enough ins and outs for any project studio and still portable too. A real all-rounder.



Apogee Duet | £329
Review FM200 Getting the quality Apogee sound on the move is now easier than ever thanks to this tiny silver wonder.



RME Fireface UC | £746
Review FM219 Robust reliability, rock-solid build quality and the trusted RME sound. Plus it's now on a lovely USB connection.



Metric Halo ULN-2 DSP | £1,279
Review FM206 Great sound, onboard DSP and some of the best pres we've ever heard inside an interface.

Effects Plug-ins and Sound Manglers



Korg Monotron | £59
Review FM229 A genuine MS20 filter with audio input, a fat analogue oscillator and LFO make this a must-have studio toy for everyone.



Rodec / Sherman Restyler | €649
Review FM219 A live filter that sounds good enough for the studio. Missing MIDI, but worth a look.



Moog MoogerFooger MIDI MuRF | £419
Review FM220 The old MuRF filters combine with the attractive features of MIDI and software patch editing.



Peavey ReValver MkIII | £179
Review FM208 This amp-modelling software lets you delve deep into the amps circuits for true soft-modding.



Evol Fucifier | £1,996
Review FM228 The oddest outboard we've reviewed produces the most inspiring sound at a price that will keep the faint-of-heart away.

6	7	8	9	10
				
PMC DB1S-AII | £2,056 **Review FM225** You get what you pay for with these monitors. Adding a PMC sub will help you feel the real bottom end though.	**KRK Rokit RP5 G2** | £270 **Review FM205** These are so nice to work with our reviewer bought a set for his own studio. Great value monitors with a great punch.	**Adam A5 Studio Monitors** | £499 **Review FM209** Though they're at the budget end of the Adam range, these compact near-fields still deliver.	**APS I0 Active Monitors** | £919 **Review FM216** These provide an honest listtening experience that could threaten the big boys.	**Focal Professional CMS65** | £1,230 **Review FM215** The natural and detailed sound of Focal, delivered in a compact and affordable package.
				
M-Audio Oxygen 49 | £228 **Review FM189** An excellent budget controller range that continues to improve. Ideal for beginners.	**Novation 49SL Compact** | £269 **Review FM193** The stripped-down alternative to a full-size SL. Cheaper, but still packed with unique features.	**Akai MPK88** | £600 **Review FM226** A few minor issues considering the high price, but a great weighted hammer action keybed redeems this controller.	**M-Audio Mid Air 25** | £199 **Review FM181** Not only can you sling it in a bag, but you can also stride to the front of the stage thanks to its wireless power too.	**Korg microKontrol** | £275 **Review FM143** Great build quality and looks and while its reduced-sized keys are an acquired taste, it's certainly more portable as a result.
				
Echo Audiofire Pre8 | £579 **Review FM228** A very high-quality interface from Echo Audio – heavy on I/O and mic pre quality.	**Mackie 1220i** | £799 **Review FM224** This hybrid mixer and interface covers all recording bases in a neat package, with the added benefit of Pro Tools compatibility.	**Apogee One** | £161 **Review FM230** The same high quality Apogee sound you'd expect but with a simple design and limited I/O to keep costs down.	**Presonus FireStudio Mobile** | £269 **Review FM224** Not the cheapest mobile interface, but great I/O make it worth a look.	**Steinberg CI2+** | £289 **Review FM230** Still lacking a MIDI interface, but a great software bundle means if you want Cubase as your DAW, then look at this package.
				
Electro-Harmonix Voice Box | £160 **Review FM213** Give this a decent input and it will output robot voices or perfect harmonies with ease.	**OTO Biscuit** | €529 **Review FM225** Gorgeous design details and fantastic for anyone who fancies a bit of lo-fi 8-bit computer game crunch in their music.	**TC Helicon VoiceTone Synth** | £225 **Review FM221** A few teething problems, but this is still a fantastic hardware vocoding and tuning tool.	**Audioease Speakerphone 2** | €400 **Review FM217** This creative and comprehensive speaker emulator adds air to your sounds and mixes.	**Avid Digidesign Eleven Rack** | £789 **Review FM222** It's a guitar processor that makes re-amping a breeze. Plus it's a Pro Tools interface to boot!

Gear Chart

1	2	3	4	5

Performance Samplers



Korg microSampler | £436
Review FM219 Easy to use sampling with some clever extras. Another micro-dominator from Korg.



Akai MPC 5000 | £1,549
Review FM203 The 5000 isn't perfect, but it's without a doubt the best pad-ridden studio-in-a-box on the market. Check it out.



Roland SP-555 | £410
Review FM195 The latest in Roland's line is packed with features. A durable and flexible partner for the loop experimentalist.



Roland SP-404SX | £289
Review FM220 This new update tweaks the original SP-404 but lacks anything really special, so it doesn't climb any places in our chart.



Korg Electribe ESX-1 SD | £516
Review FM231 This classic has been given a new lease of life with an SD card slot and new sounds.

High-end Audio Plug-ins



Celemony Melodyne Editor | £319
Review FM222 A plug-in that has the potential to change music production forever. A killer tool for every genre.



Lexicon Native Reverb Bundle | £1,174
Review FM225 The motherload of all reverbs brings the original digital algorithms straight to your DAW.



Pro Audio DSP DSM | £200
Review FM226 An incredible multi-dimensional EQ and dynamics processor that works magic!



UAD 4K SSL Plug-ins | from $199
Review FM215 Brilliantly modelled pieces of SSL goodness that are begging to be on your UAD card.



Brainworx BX Digital | €398
Review FM200 There's no other plug-in quite like BX's top of the line mastering tool – incredible software.

Field Recorders



Tascam HD-P2 | £729
Review FM186 Built to last and definitely the pro's choice. A multitude of formats and mic settings and superlative sound too.



Roland R-09HR | £259
Review FM204 This flagship recorder will produce crystal clear, 24-bit 96kHz recordings, all from the palm of your hand.



M-Audio MicroTrack II | £229
Review FM202 Not only does this new version look better, but it's also cheaper. A superb update.



Yamaha PocketTrak | £260
Review FM202 This ultra-compact 2GB recorder is a really useful weapon in your recording arsenal.



Edirol R-44 | £499
Review FM205 Record four tracks simultaneously via it's quality pre-amps. If you need the flexibility it does the lot and more besides.

Microphones



Newmann Retro NR47 | £999
Review FM225 Despite the choice of name, this mic definitely delivers the classic sound. Bargain.



sE X1 and Project Reflexion Filter Bundle | £169
Review FM223 Unbelievable value for a robust recording solution.



Blue Bottle Rocket Stage One | £600
Review FM222 Interchangeable capsules make this great sounding mic even more of a must-buy.



Sontronics Saturn | £699
Review FM227 It looks drop-dead gorgeous and has a flexible airy sound that suits many different recording situations.



AKG C214 | £450
Review FM205 As part of the classic AKG family, this mic sets itself up nicely to be a recording bargain that holds its own around the studio.

1 2 3 4 5

eBay Classic Retro Finds



Roland HS-60 | £250
Released 1984 Same guts as the Juno-106 but the ugly built-in speakers mean it's often overlooked.



Korg EX800 | £100
Released 1984 This rack-mount version of the Poly800 has a similar sound to the Roland Juno but with the added bonus of a sequencer.



Yamaha MK-100 | £30
Released 1983 Bargain analogue style workstation that has limited synthesis options but a great programmable drum computer.



Roland JX-3P | £160
Released 1983 Great presets, a quick sequencer plus a nifty DIY update to add MIDI CC messages make this one fab bargain synth.



Sequential Circuits Multi-Trak | £250
Released 1984 Easier to program than a Six Trak with a better sequencer – a gem find.

Ways To Stand Out



Apple iPad | from £429
Review FM228 The first mainstream tablet offers an unparalleled hands-on user experience that's great for making music.



Snyderphonics Manta | £398
Review FM218 Space-age-style control with incredible good looks and amazing control possibilities.



Yamaha Tenori-on | £599
Review FM193 The amazing lights-in-a-frame synth 'n' sequencer that'll test the way you think about music. Grab one while stocks last.



Jazz Mutant Lemur | £1,799
Review FM166 Techni-coloured touchscreen controller. Why not put a camera on it feeding a projector?



Percussa Audio Cubes | 399 Euros
Review FM207 Expensive, but one of the ultimate ways to stand out when performing electronic music.

Digital Audio Workstations

Best all-in-one solution



Logic Studio | £399
Review FM218
The home studio regular and all-in-one studio package goes V9.1 adding 64bit support – if your Mac can handle it.
Best features include:
> Incredible time-stretching with Flex Audio technology.
> New amp designer and pedal board options for guitarists.
> The best and biggest range of 'built-in' plugs and synths of our favourite DAWs.
Good and bad:
Fantastic Flex Audio rasies Logic's appeal even further and despite that stealthy price increase to £399 it remains a bit of a bargain all told.

Best combo of ease and power



Cubase 5 | £499
Review FM212
Cubase 5 sees Steinberg lower the price and raise the plug-in and feature list. VariAudio, Batch Export and new effects plug-ins all come bundled with 5.
Best features include:
> The new VariAudio Melodyne-style pitch editor.
> Plenty of built-in plugs to get you creating professional tracks from the moment you install the software.
Good and bad:
Although Cubase is playing catchup in terms of both bundled content and price, it's can't be argued that it's only getting better. Loyal Cubase users rejoice – Cubase 5 is a winner.

Best for recording audio



Pro Tools 8 | £319
Review FM210
The industry standard DAW gets a fresh modern update with a brand new GUI, enhanced MIDI editing capabilities, and a heap of new instruments and plug-ins.
Best features include:
> For mixing, recording, processing and editing audio there isn't anything easier to use or more stable and reliable.
> Now that it's MIDI is finally up to scratch, it's a great choice.
Good and bad:
Great performance and stability with tempting upgrade offers to a HD system. Well-conceived though limited plug-ins.

Best for jamming and creating



Ableton Live 8 | £315
Review FM214
Bigger and better than ever. If you like chucking loops together and experimenting then this is for you. Flexible and creative, it'll spark ideas you wouldn't otherwise have.
Best features include:
> Instantly beat-match any audio and trigger samples in time. DJs can use this instead of decks.
> Flexible routing and modulation options let you mess and mangle.
Good and bad:
It's a dream for mixing and messing. It's getting a little costly (thanks to that bulging library content) but the cheaper versions remain a bargain and a real studio essential.

Best bangs for your bucks



Sonar 8 | £349
Review FM207
Updated from the much loved Sonar 7, this new version adds even more features and amazingly puts less pressure on your CPU due to a streamlining of it's core. It's a firm favourite with PC-based producers.
Best features include:
> Beatscape – a fantastic slicing and warping groove-based beat and drum machine.
> The TS-64 Transient Shaper is a simple but brilliant plug-in addition.
Good and bad:
A continuous effort to streamline and an incredible amount of features make Sonar 8 a great choice DAW on PC.

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Your DVD section by section...



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Marcel Woods. The Dutch Trance master shows you his studio



Reader Demos

Check out the top 10 reader tracks sent to *FM* this month



Reviews

Hear this month's review gear including the monster-sized Arturia Origin Keyboard

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