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Left: The new DirectShow v5.1 audio setting dialogue.

Below: The Cakewalk Pro Audio 7 Console view presents a unified virtual mixer-style control surface for audio and MIDI track management.

The Magnificent Seven?

CAKEWALK PRO AUDIO 7

JANET HARNIMAN COOK goes great guns with the latest version of Twelve Tone's popular MIDI + Audio recording software for PC owners.



Although *Cakewalk Pro Audio* is regarded in Europe as very much the junior member of the big three of PC MIDI + Audio sequencing packages, *Cakewalk* so dominates the US market that it is claimed to be the world's best-selling sequencer. Whereas Steinberg's *Cubase* and Emagic's *Logic Audio* were originally developed for the Atari and Macintosh platform and subsequently ported over to the PC, *Cakewalk* is a native PC product dating back to the early days of DOS.

Cakewalk has been consistently at the forefront

of PC sequencer development and was the first PC application to provide many of the advanced sequencing features that we now take for granted, such as support for multiple MIDI ports, multi-channel audio cards, multi-track hard disk audio using internal PC soundcards, on-board real-time audio effects processing, and support for DirectX audio plug-ins.

Cakewalk Pro Audio 7 provides many additional features and represents a consolidation and streamlining of the functions introduced in v6. As most *Cakewalk Pro Audio* facilities remain

unchanged and previous versions have been covered previously in *SOS* this review will focus primarily on what is new in version 7.

PACKAGING

The *Cakewalk Pro Audio 7* package has been given a makeover, with new logos and a distinctive blue and orange packaging. Twelve Tone Systems are to be commended for bucking the current trend towards exclusively electronic documentation by continuing to provide a full printed manual. The redesigned manual, which runs to about 400 pages, is clearly written, indexed, and task-oriented, and contains a comprehensive explanation of the *Cakewalk Pro Audio 7* features and routines, plus tutorials and tips on troubleshooting, and PC system optimisation. It also contains a wealth of background information that will make an expert of any newcomers to MIDI + Audio recording.

INTERFACE

The most obvious change that existing users will notice is the vastly improved Track View graphic interface which now sports a snazzy 3D look and features ten dockable tool bars with associated tool tips. Toolbars can be placed anywhere in the workspace with the exception of those toolbars that contain time fields, such as the new, simplified Transport bar or the Tempo and Locator bars. These can only be docked to the horizontal upper and lower workspace perimeters. Especially useful is the new Views toolbar that enables instant access to the various editors.

A few menu items have been reorganised and some commands are relocated to other menus. For example, the View menu has been simplified, while CAL, Studioware and Playlist files are now to be found in the File menu. Audio housekeeping and export functions have been transferred to the Tools menu which also contains the new Global Options dialogue where the default settings for project file locations, MIDI filters and the Drag and Drop options are to be found.

TRACK SELECTION

Track selection routines have been changed to bring them into line with conventional Windows practice. Clicking on the track number now selects the track and also clears other existing selections; clicking with shift held down creates multiple selections; clicking with control held down de-selects individual tracks; and multiple selections can also be made by dragging over several track numbers. Additionally, mute and solo selection routines are improved to enable more than one track to have solo status, and the selection bar now includes Mute and Solo indicators.

PROJECTS

The new version now includes multiple song file support — in previous versions,


if you wanted to copy material between songs it was necessary to import it using the File/Merge or File/Extract commands. Now parts can be dragged between projects using cut and paste routines, in the same way as is possible between *Cubase* arrangements. Each project has its own Undo history and the Clock, Metronome and MIDI I/O information for each Project may be individually defined.

CONSOLE VIEW

The MIDI + Audio tracks contained in the *Cakewalk* song project are displayed in the new Console view. This represents the track configuration elements in the user friendly form of a virtual mixing console and many track definition routines can now be carried out from the Console view. All tracks have Name, Volume, Pan, Mute, Solo, Record Arm and Record Source control buttons. MIDI tracks additionally feature Channel, Port, Bank and Voice Parameter definition, plus

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pros & cons

CAKEWALK PRO AUDIO 7 £299

pros

- Improved 32-bit audio engine.
- New 32-bit onboard audio effects processors.
- Integrated MIDI and audio mix console.
- Improved interface.
- Elegant mix automation and editing.

cons

- No MIDI channel activity indicators.
- Limited MIDI drum editing.
- Slow zoom functions.
- No list-based global tempo editor.
- No audio track offset.

summary

Cakewalk Pro Audio 7 provides powerful, stable, easy-to-use MIDI + Audio multitrack audio recording and editing.

SOUND ON SOUND

“Cakewalk has been consistently at the forefront of PC sequencer development and was the first PC application to provide many of the advanced sequencing features that we now take for granted.”

PC REQUIREMENTS

To get a satisfactory level of performance from *Cakewalk Pro Audio 7*, a minimum specification for the PC would be: genuine Intel Pentium 233MMX processor, 64Mb RAM, 4Mb video RAM, a fast hard drive and a 17" monitor. A similarly featured Pentium II system should fly!

► Reverb and Chorus Sends. Audio tracks contain auxiliary send controls, together with insert effects and audio card output assignments.

The Console also includes audio master output faders and ladder-style LED audio output meters. The four audio auxiliary channels can be patched to multiple DirectX-compatible effects plug-in modules. The program ships with a much improved suite of seven 32-bit, floating point, stereo real-time effects processors (Reverb, Chorus, Parametric EQ, Delay, Flanger, Pitch Shifter and Time/Pitch Stretch) that feature extended parameter control. The original mono CFX modules are also included in updated versions.

Two varieties of mix automation are available: Snapshot and Real-time recording. Snapshot automation is the simpler of the two and consists of inserting mix scenes (hence 'snapshot') at designated points in time. Snapshots, which can be saved, can be taken at any time during recording or playback. Real-time recording mix automation allows you to record an evolving sequence of mix changes, in multiple passes if required, and then edit them. This is performed from the Piano Roll View Controllers panel which is opened automatically by right clicking on the Console fader or knob and selecting Edit automation data. In practice, this method of editing is both elegant and efficient.

TRACK ARMING

Cakewalk Pro Audio 7 includes track record arming, which not only acts as a safety measure to prevent the inadvertent overwriting of existing material, but also enables recording to take place simultaneously on multiple tracks. Track arming is implemented by clicking on the R button in either the Track or Console view, after which the Track Arm indicator in the status bar illuminates. To avoid unnecessary delays — for instance, during the white heat of inspiration! — the current track is automatically armed for recording if three conditions are met:

- first, the record source must be set to MIDI Omni;
- no other track is armed, and
- no other record source has been assigned.

AUDIO ENGINE

The audio mix engine has been revamped and now provides 32-bit processing throughout the effects chain bringing improved *Windows NT* performance and greater processing efficiency when using real-time effects. This means that more effects can be used. Real-time master effects can be applied to audio passing through the master outputs.

Audio levels in general feature more responsive linear scaling, making it possible to perform real-time level changes more precisely. Curiously, however, this appears to be accompanied by slightly increased timing latency that is revealed when audio tracks are muted during playback or recording. It should be noted that audio levels of parts recorded

PREVIOUS CAKEWALK PRO AUDIO FEATURES & REVIEWS IN SOS

<i>Cakewalk Pro Audio 4</i>	SOS June '96.
MIDI + Audio on the PC	SOS Feb '97.
<i>Cakewalk Pro Audio 6</i>	SOS Aug '97.

in previous non-*DirectShow* v5.1 compatible versions of *Cakewalk Pro Audio* may respond incorrectly when played back in version 7, unless the v6 compatibility option in Tools menu / Audio Hardware is selected. It is now possible to position mono parts across the stereo field, but to do so, the Mono Record/Playback option in the Tools/Audio Settings dialogue should be de-selected.

MISCELLANEOUS

There are many other small but useful changes to be found. The Insert Measures command, absent from v6 is restored; the threshold units in Edit/Audio/Remove Silence and Edit/Audio/Extract Timing are now expressed more usefully in decibels rather than as percentages; holding the Zoom button provides continuous zoom in or out (though to my mind, while this is an improvement, it is a poor substitute for PC keyboard zoom control).

The AWE 64 interface is improved and the Wave Profiler now automatically checks the accuracy of the soundcard audio out. The Auto Shuttle anomaly that reset the playback loop to the current Now position during pause has also been corrected, and customised key binds are now reflected in the menu items.

CONCLUSION

Cakewalk Pro Audio 7 addresses many of the shortcomings of previous versions and includes many excellent new features. There are still important areas that need to be tackled — most notably the lack of full-featured, multi-instrument MIDI drum mapping and editing, the lack of audio track offsets, and the absence of individual MIDI channel activity indicators. That said, *Cakewalk Pro Audio* goes from strength to strength with each new version, and presents the user with an easy-to-learn, powerful feature set that will satisfy the sequencing needs of all but the most demanding of users. Rock on Cakewalk!

(Many thanks to Riz Rizwan for additional testing.)

SOS

E *Cakewalk Pro Audio 7* £299, *Cakewalk Pro Audio 7 Deluxe* £369.

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W Twelve Tone Systems' web site: www.cakewalk.com (Additional CAL routines are available free of charge from the *Cakewalk* web site.)

info

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128 MIDI channels would have seemed like complete overkill ten years ago, but today's multitimbral voice modules can use them up at an alarming rate.

MARTIN RUSS checks out an eight-port patchbay/interface from Opcode.

Opcode's Studio 128X is the "twice-as-big" (but in the same size box) elder sibling of the Studio 64X MIDI Patchbay and Interface that I looked at in the May 1997 issue of SOS, and has eight MIDI ports instead of the 64X's four. Having an extra four MIDI ports may not seem all that significant, but it says a lot about the user's studio: four ports might be described as 'compact', but eight ports is definitely 'serious'. Welcome to the big league.

Each port on a multi-port MIDI interface/patchbay can cope with 16 separate MIDI channels. An eight-port version, therefore, can cope with 128 individual MIDI channels or multitimbral parts — which explains the Studio 128X's name. Whereas 128 channels would have seemed like complete overkill ten years ago, today's multitimbral expanders can take up alarming numbers of MIDI channels. Using an eight-port interface and patchbay like the 128X, however, should give you access to more than enough sonic armoury to cope with all but the most demanding of applications.

What a patchbay does is let you hook all of that sound-producing power together in various combinations, whilst the MIDI interface lets you drive it all from a computer sequencer. You also get straightforward sync'ing to timecode on tape. (For more sophisticated synchronisation, the four-port Studio 64XTC provides a much wider range of additional sync features like ADAT and other digital audio compatibility. Mike Collins reviewed the

64XTC in the April 1998 issue of SOS. Will we see a similar 128XTC version in the future for anyone who needs these extra sync functions?)

ROUTING & INTERFACE

The Studio 128X allows you to route any MIDI input port to any MIDI output port, with channel-changing and filtering applied along the way. It's possible to merge two or more inputs together, or alternatively to drive several outputs from one input. You can store eight of your own routing programs inside, and three utility programs are permanently stored inside, along with five SMPTE stripping programs. Editing of the user programs can only be done with a Windows or MacOS computer, but they can be used from the 128X alone once they have been stored in it.

When used with a sequencer, the Studio 128X becomes a Computer-to-MIDI Interface. Cables for serial data connection from the computer to the Studio 128X are included, and there's a 'thru' connection so that you can still use the serial port (to send to a printer, for instance) when you're not playing with MIDI. On the PC, the 128X is bound by Windows 95's device limitation of 11 MIDI ports, which can sometimes be exceeded by the combination of a sound card and a multi-port interface (the 128X actually uses nine MIDI ports, including the control port, when connected to a computer). MacOS users do not have the port limitation and can, if they so desire, use two Studio 128Xs to give a full 256 (16 ports-worth) MIDI channels.

OMS

MacOS users also get the advantages of OMS-based MIDI processing. In addition to the Routing,

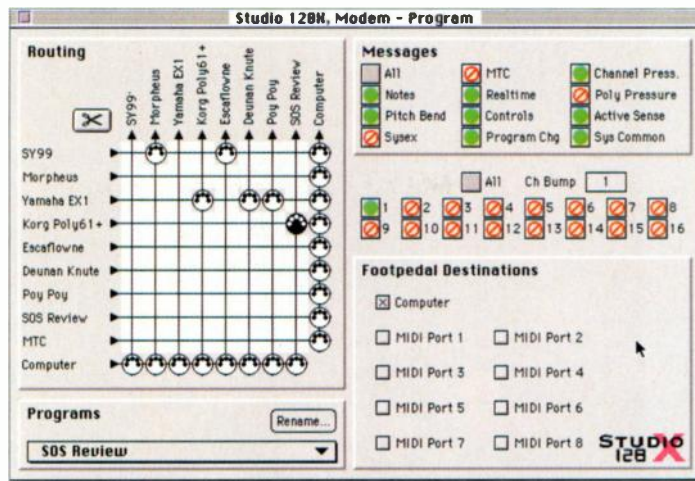
big connections

OPCODE STUDIO 128X CROSS-PLATFORM MIDI INTERFACE

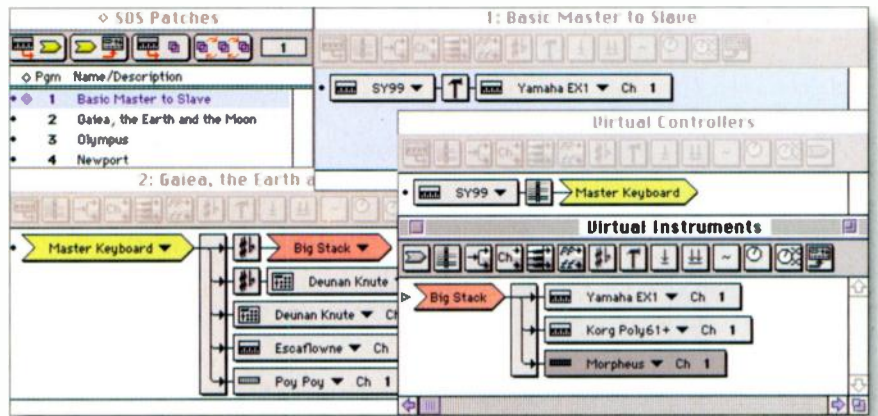


Footswitch (program advance and MIDI message send) and SMPTE windows, and the graphical representation of the studio in the Studio Setup window, the Studio Patches application allows you to use the Mac to process the MIDI information in ways that can make those eight ports much easier to live with, especially if you want to make the most of the opportunities offered by MIDI. You can define a processed version of a master keyboard with MIDI Clock filtered out, and a modified velocity curve, and then connect this 'virtual' Controller to 'virtual' instruments made up out of stacked, layered, transposed and split assemblies of expander modules, samplers, and the like. Once you've produced your own customised MIDI equipment, then hooking it together is much easier, and you have simple but detailed control over exactly what is going on — and it is all shown graphically!

The two main tests of how good patchbays and interfaces are concern the time delay through a MIDI patchbay, especially with heavy processing, and the response to merging overload. The Studio 128X MIDI In to Out delay was about 500 microseconds, which went up to about two milliseconds for Mac-based processing — more or less the same as that of the 64X. Merge loading worked okay for a typical 'real world' test in which two sets of Notes and Pitch Bends were merged. When I tried one of the more extreme System Exclusive tests (two sets of Notes, Pitch Bend, MIDI Clock and SysEx all merged) the target expander module did exhibit some of the classic 'MIDI bandwidth exceeded/buffer overflow' by-products like notes not being turned off. However, this sort of thing is less a real-world test than a test to destruction!



Left: The routing program is shown as a cross-point matrix in the control window.



Below: OMS-based routing processing on a MacOS computer. The blue area shows a basic routing, while the 'Virtual Controller' window shows how a master keyboard can be filtered and given a 'generic' name. The 'Big Stack' is merely a short-cut for a big stack of instruments.

VERDICT

I could complain a little. I want to gripe about the plug-top power supply's flawed power connector, which is located so close to the SMPTE jack sockets that it makes simultaneous sync, rack-mounting and power tricky to achieve for complex topological reasons which are obvious when you see them, but impossible to describe in words. Opcode haven't fixed the lack of a front-panel program display, nor the MIDI/Thru switches' annoying lack of any sort of easily visible indication — and these were both mentioned in my review of the 64X! But I won't press charges because...

The Studio 128X gets everything else just about perfect. It looks cool, it has flashing LEDs for each In and Out port, and the front panel operation is wonderfully simple. The eight ports will suffice for all but the biggest rigs, and the routing and filtering capabilities will cover just about any eventuality — and even if they don't, the Mac-based OMS processing will! Physically it is small and neat, and the cost fits the same descriptions. For anyone who wants to hook together more than three bits of MIDI gear, the 128X is well worth a very close examination.



pros & cons

OPCODE STUDIO 128X £389

pros

- 8 ports, 9 MIDI Outs.
- 8 user programs.
- MacOS and Windows compatible.
- Easy-to-use front panel.

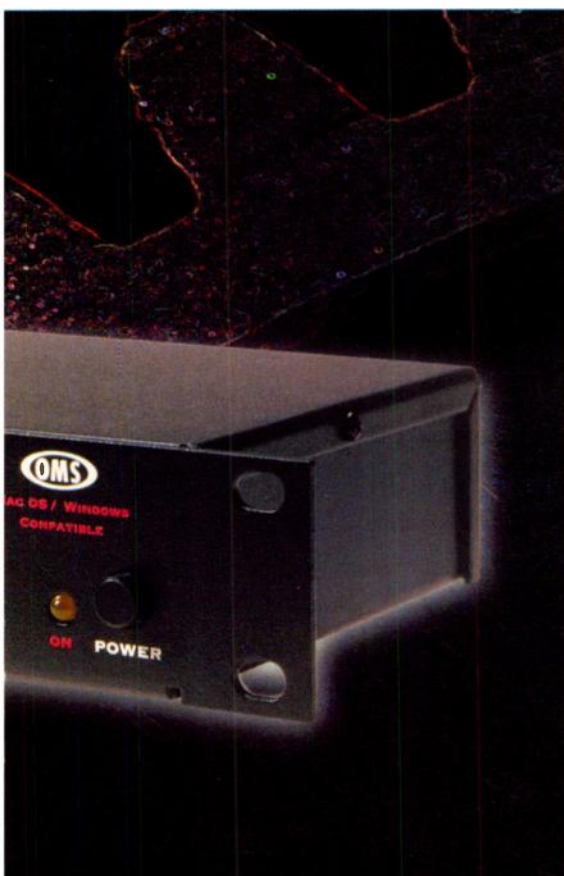
cons

- No front panel indication of current program.
- Patches can only be edited via a computer.
- Black switches and a black front panel can be tricky on a dark stage.
- The power connector topology.

summary

Well suited to the larger home studio or project studio. A worthy successor to the Studio 64.

SOUND ON SOUND



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	VS-840	Digital Tape	Mini Disk	Analog Tape
Virtual Tracks	Yes	No	No	No
Cut and Paste Song Editing	Yes	No	Limited	No
Digital Mixer	Yes	No	No	No
Digital Effects & EQ	Yes	No	No	No
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One bit at a time

ALL ABOUT DIGITAL AUDIO

PART 5: Following on from last month's look at digital tape recording formats, HUGH ROBJOHNS turns the spotlight on the techniques and technology of disk-based recording.

If you read last month's article, you will recall that there are two fundamental approaches to the design of tape-based systems: rotary head and stationary head. There is a similar dichotomy within disk-based systems, this time between optical and magnetic formats. There is also an increasingly significant third option which represents a blend of the two.

OPTICAL DISCS

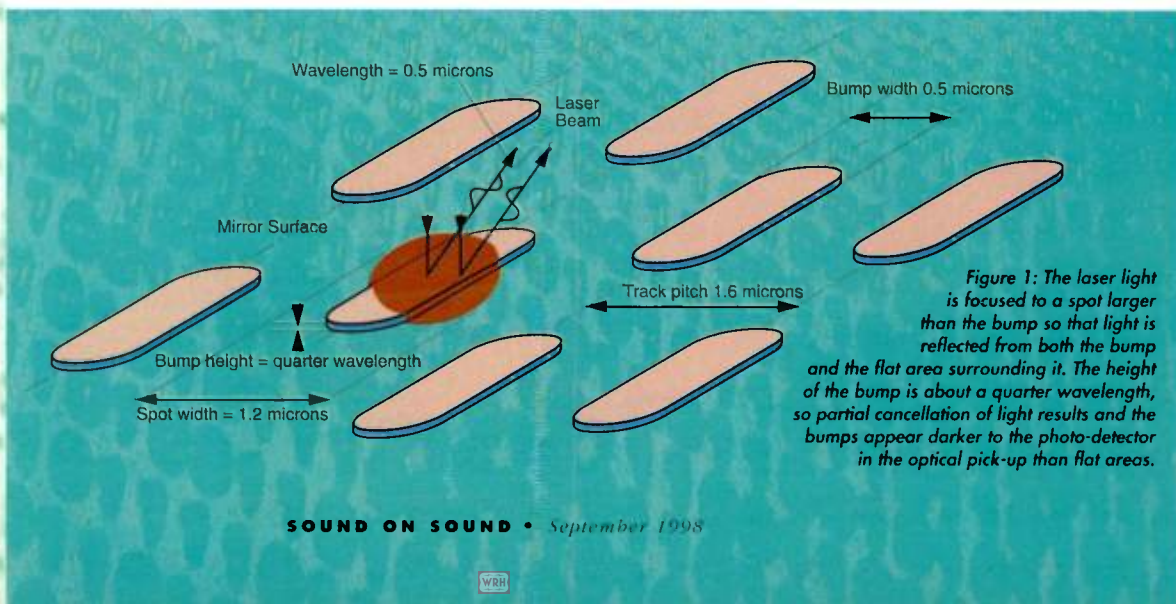
The most obvious digital disc format relying on optical technology is the CD — something which we all tend to take very much for granted fifteen years after its launch. However, it is worth revisiting the system as many of its concepts enable understanding of the newer formats.

CDs are 'pressed' in much the same way as vinyl records although the dimensions are obviously smaller and the tolerances much finer. The audio data is encoded along with timing and various other pieces of information as either pits or flats along a continuous spiral groove which starts close to the centre of the disc and works outwards at a fixed rate. The idea of starting on the inside edge of the disc was to allow production of discs with different diameters: the laser system would always start at the same point, but continue outwards until it found an 'end-of-disc' instruction. In the early days, for example, we had three-inch

CD singles. However, these never really caught on and it has subsequently proved cheaper to release singles on standard-sized discs.

Once the blank polycarbonate disc has been stamped, the surface carrying the audio data is coated with a microscopically thin layer of metal. Usually, this is aluminium, although gold and silver are also used. This is then protected from oxidation by 30µm-thick lacquer, which also carries the screen-printed labelling. Although CDs are extremely tough, damage to the lacquer layer usually means the disc no longer plays properly, so never place them label-side down. Ideally they should be put back in the caddy, or, failing that, it is safer to place them playing-side down. This might sound odd, but because the laser is focused onto the aluminium surface through 1.2mm of plastic, small scratches and marks on the 'playing' surface become insignificant (the laser beam is more than 1mm wide on the disc surface, but focused to 1.7µm on the reflecting layer). It is the same concept as not noticing the squashed bugs on the windscreen of your car while your eyes are focused on the cars in front. Small, troublesome scratches on the disc can usually be polished out quite successfully with toothpaste or the finest version of T-Cut car body paint restorer. Be warned that it takes time and patience. If it doesn't work, don't blame me or SOS.

Reading data from a CD is a marvel of modern technology and I am still impressed every time I think about it. The pressed pits in the disc are seen as raised bumps from the playing side and they are arranged to be 0.125µm high — a quarter of the wavelength of the 780nm infra-red laser light. To give



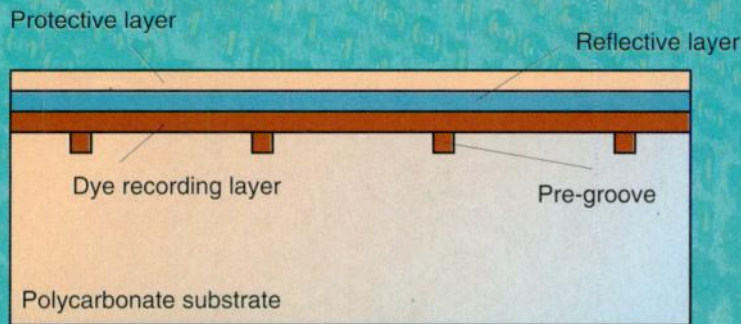


Figure 2: The pre-groove keeps the laser on track and provides timing information. The dye layer deforms under the action of a powerful laser to store the audio data.

you some idea of what that means, if the disc was scaled up so that the bumps were 1cm high, the disc would be around 10km across (just over six miles)!

A monochromatic and coherent light source is essential to 'read' the disc — the light must be at one frequency and in the same phase. The laser is focused to a spot about twice as wide as the bumps and therefore when one is encountered, light is reflected from both the top of the bump and the area around it. Since the bump is a quarter wavelength high, the light reflected from its top travels half a wavelength less than the light reflected from the surrounding surface, and is therefore out-of-phase with it, resulting in cancellation. The pressing tolerances mean that the bumps are unlikely to be exactly a quarter-wavelength high, but as long as they are close to that value, partial cancellation will result. The photo-detector in the optical pick-up simply has to be able to recognise the difference between lots of reflected light from the flat areas and the dimmer light reflected when a bump is present (see Figure 1).

Unlike vinyl records which rotate at a constant speed (33 or 45rpm), the rotational speed of a CD varies so that the laser passes over the data at a constant rate of 1.4 metres/second (1.2m/s in the case of 80-minute-plus discs). This means a rotational speed of 500rpm at the start of a disc, falling to around 200rpm at the end. It has to work this way because the size of the bumps is related to the wavelength of the laser light and cannot be changed. The mechanism for controlling speed is very simple. As the data is extracted from the disc, it is stored in a buffer memory before being passed on at the correct sampling rate to the decoding circuitry. If the disc is spinning too fast the memory fills up: if the disc is spinning too slowly the memory empties. A simple feedback system based on the memory capacity is used to control the spin-motor servo. The precise rotational speed of the disc is not important provided the data comes off at an average of 44,100 samples per second — hence the acceptability of linear speeds between 1.2 and 1.4m/s.

Embodied within the data on the disc are eight sub-code (auxiliary data) channels: P, Q, R, S, T, U, V and W. Of these, the most

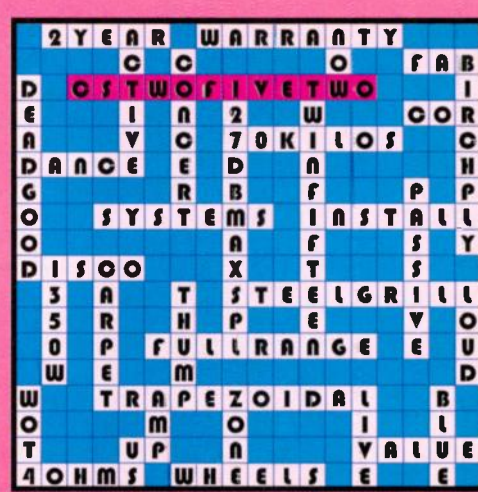
important is the Q sub-code as this carries the Table of Contents (TOC) at the start of the disc which says how many tracks there are, their timing information, running times, track and index identification, and copy-prohibit and pre-emphasis flags throughout the disc. The P sub-code, which provides a very simple means of locating the start of each track, was originally intended for 'dumb' portable players, but it is not particularly important for most machines these days. The rest of the sub-codes were unspecified in the Red Book (see the CD Colours box) and hence they are rarely used, although they have found applications in remote projector control for AV presentations, karaoke lyrics and other still graphics (the CD+G format), and computer data.

RECORDABLE CD

The CD-R is a WORM disc (write once, read many). Once an area has been recorded, it cannot be erased and re-recorded. There are no editing facilities, although discs can be recorded in stages with one or more tracks at a time up to the Red Book CD limit of 99 tracks. The prices of CD-R recorders and their blank media are similar to those of high-end cassette machines (£500 for CD recorders and less than £2 for a 74-minute blank), so they are becoming increasingly common as demo and master recorders in studios.

The construction of a CD-R disc is slightly different to that of a standard CD, featuring an additional layer in the disc construction. On top of the polycarbonate substrate (which is stamped with a 'pre-groove') a yellow/green dye layer precedes the reflecting layer (usually gold) before the standard lacquer and label printing (Figure 2).

The principle behind the CD-R is that if a high-powered laser (about 10 times stronger than a normal CD player) is focused on the dye layer, the green dye will absorb the red light and get hot. At around 250°C the dye deforms and shrinks to become much more dense and the substrate swells to fill the space, neither of which can be reversed. When played in a conventional CD player, the laser light is reflected from the gold layer in the usual way, but where the dye has deformed, less light is returned, thus resembling the appearance of a bump on a

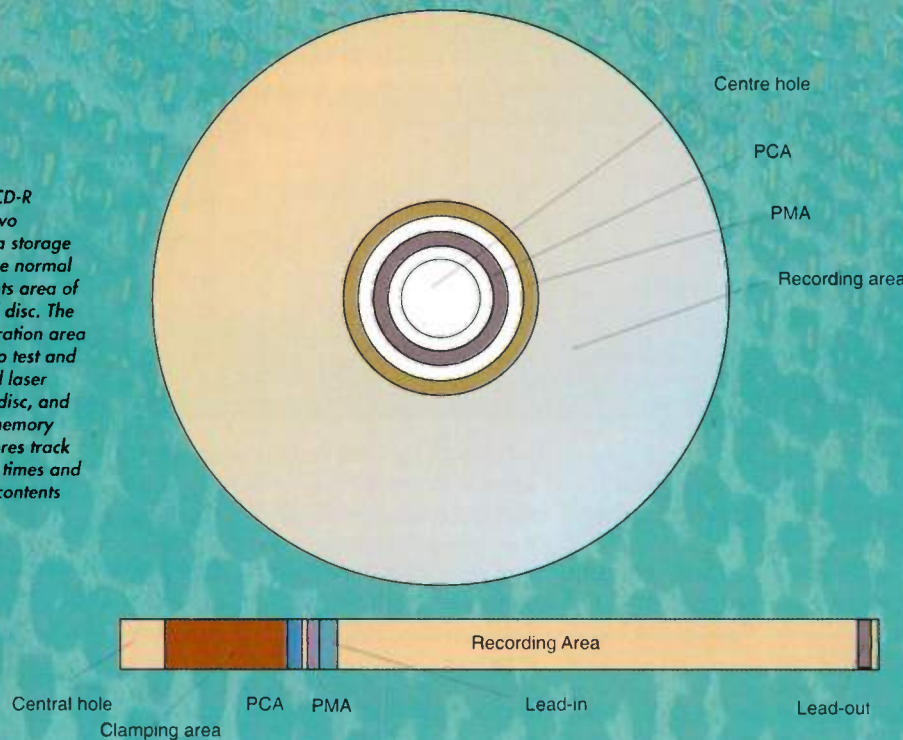


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Figure 3: The CD-R incorporates two additional data storage areas inside the normal table of contents area of a conventional disc. The program calibration area (PCA) is used to test and log the optimal laser power for the disc, and the program memory area (PMA) stores track numbers, start times and other table of contents information.



▶ conventional CD. The only snag is that because the light has to pass through the dye layer twice (ie, both on the way to the gold reflector and back again), the overall reflectivity of CD-Rs is lower than a normal CD and thus some older players are not sufficiently sensitive to read CD-Rs reliably.

Since the dye inevitably varies from batch to batch, CD recorders first perform what's called an optimum power check on each new disc to find out just how much power is required to deform the dye in the optimal way. When a new blank disc is inserted, the machine's display shows 'OPC' (or something similar) while the machine makes a series of test recordings with different laser powers in a dedicated area near the centre of the disc. The disc is then replayed to ascertain the best setting and the result is stored for reference in the Program Calibration Area (PCA) — a 'Regulo 6 for 20 minutes' kind of thing!

Once the OPC is complete, the display shows the available recording time, obtained from the data encoded in the pre-groove of the disc. The pre-groove is a wondrous thing, fulfilling several functions in a very elegant manner. It is cut at a precise pitch to define the spacing between adjacent turns of the spiral (specified as 1.6µm) which is critical to the correct tracking of the laser beam for both recording and replay. The pre-groove also has a small 'wobble' from side to side as it runs around the disc. When the disc is spinning with a linear speed of 1.4m/s, the wobble causes the tracking servos to oscillate at 22.05kHz (half the sampling rate), thus enabling the machine to maintain the correct linear disc speed throughout the recording. The wobble is itself wobbled in such a way that timing information can be encoded (known as ATIP or Absolute Time in Pre-groove) and this in turn allows the machine to know how much recording time is left and where the laser is within the disc — much the same as the Q sub-code

information on a standard CD (Figure 3).

When a recording is made on a CD-R the audio data is recorded directly to the main data area of the disc, but the TOC information (track number, duration and so forth) is stored in a temporary area near the centre of the disc. This means that a partially recorded CD-R cannot be played on a conventional player as there is no recognisable TOC from which it can ascertain the number of tracks and where they start. However, a CD-R can be made playable by going through a process known as 'Fixing Up'. This translates the temporary table of contents into a Red Book-compatible version which is recorded in the lead-in area before the audio data section of the disc. The process also writes an end-of-disc scroll after the final track. The whole process can take several minutes and once done, no further recordings can be made to the disc. To a CD player, the CD-R now appears to be perfectly normal, albeit with low reflectivity.

The specifications for the CD-R, laid down in the Orange Book, permit the use of Skip IDs which allow unwanted tracks on the disc to be passed over during replay. However, conventional Red Book players do not recognise skip instructions, so this facility is of very limited use. If you make a mistake when recording a CD-R, I would advise ejecting the disc, adding it to your beer mat collection, and starting again!

CD-RW

CD-RW or CD-Rewritable discs use a different technology called Phase Change. This is a reversible recording process taking advantage of a material which has two stable but very different states. Life expectancy of the disc is between 1000 and 10,000 recording cycles, a factor of a thousand worse than professional MO disks and MiniDiscs (described later). However, as an essentially domestic product, the CD-RW disc is perfectly adequate for typical audio and home computer

CD COLOURS

Although it was originally designed to carry audio data, other industries were quick to pick up on the CD format. We now have a range of inter-related formats, each identified by a different 'colour'. The basic audio disc is defined by the Red Book, with the Yellow Book dictating the specifications for the CD-ROM. This provides storage of either computer data or audio and video data, and has an extra degree of error protection in place of the interpolation strategies of audio-only systems.

The Yellow Book standard has been enhanced with the XA extension allowing audio and video data to be interposed with computer data on a sector-by-sector basis. This is the basis of the Kodak PhotoCD standard as well as the Green Book and White Book standards. The Green Book relates to Philip's proprietary CD-I format — a home entertainment system which has met with limited success. The same can also be said of the full-motion video format (using MPEG-1 data compression) covered by the White Book.

Writeable CDs (CD-Rs) are described by the Orange Book. This allows recordings to be made on a disc, either all at once or on a piecemeal basis — hence the term multi-session.

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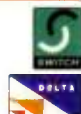
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ON TRACK

One of the biggest problems with CDs is that of mistracking, resulting in that 'stuck in a groove' effect we have all experienced. This is normally caused by tracking problems and has nothing to do with the error correction system which was essentially designed to cope with 'pin-holes' in the reflective layer which were a common problem with early discs. Try holding your oldest CD up to the light while looking at the playing side and see if there are any tiny pinpricks of light shining through. The error correction system of the CD format was designed to handle the complete absence of data caused by these kinds of gaps — a total gap of up to 2.5mm, which represents around 4000 bits of data, can be corrected perfectly.

Unfortunately, as we now know, holes in the reflecting layer are not the main problem with CDs. That honour goes to deep scratches and surface contamination by materials with optical properties such as grease... and marmalade! (So stop bringing your CDs to the breakfast table — Ed) What tends to happen is that the laser is happily tracking along the data when it comes across a scratch or patch of grease. The beam is then deflected (refracted) to some other part of the disc, typically a couple of tracks earlier or later. This does two things. First, it confuses the error detection system because the interleave structure of the data goes haywire. Second, the deflected beam probably doesn't fall exactly on the 'new' track, so the tracking servo has to re-align the beam.

With the error detection system completely confused, raw errors are going to slip through. Hence the audibility of clicks and splats because the interpolation and muting mechanisms are also both helpless. But worse is the chaos caused to the tracking servo. No sooner has it caught up and corrected the laser beam's alignment on to its new track, when the scratch or grease passes and the beam reverts to the original part of the disc, whereupon it is now misaligned with the original track. And so it all goes horribly wrong — tracking servos go into oscillation, error detection systems go home in disgust, the same bit of music is repeated over and over, and you end up hitting the box and wishing for a solid state recorder to be invented. (They have been, by the way, but they are expensive and don't play for very long... yet!)

► applications, even though the blank media are ten times more expensive than write-once CD-Rs.

In its original state, the recording layer of the CD-RW disc is polycrystalline. During recording, a high powered laser is used to change areas of the disc into an amorphous phase of the material. The amorphous areas have much lower reflectivity than the crystalline areas, so audio data is recovered as bright or dark areas, just as with CD and CD-R. When the disc is over-written, the amorphous areas can be returned to the crystalline phase by using lower intensity from the laser. CD-RW discs exhibit even lower reflectivity than CD-Rs and cannot be replayed in conventional CD players at all.

DIGITAL VERSATILE DISC

Long in gestation, the DVD has finally arrived and is now available as a format for video movies and for some computer applications. The audio-only version is still being held back because various hardware and software companies have failed to agree on a specification. Technology is available for both recordable and re-recordable versions of the DVD, but this is also being delayed to allow for greater penetration of the format into the market place.

DVD started life as two similar, but incompatible formats: the Sony/Philips Multimedia CD (MMCD) and the Toshiba/Matsushita/Time-Warner alliance format of the Super-Density Digital Video Disk (SD-DVD). Fortunately, common sense prevailed and the two formats were combined into DVD, which is now appearing on the shelves of the bigger video retailers across Europe.

DVD is nothing more than an increased density version of CD and takes advantage of improvements in CD manufacture and replay technology which have been introduced over the past 15 years. The disc structure is slightly different, comprising a pair of stamped, 0.6mm thick substrates, glued together with the data surfaces in the centre of the composite disc.

In order to accommodate smaller data bumps on the disc surface, the DVD laser operates in the visible-red at 650nm instead of the 780nm infrared of conventional CD players. This reduces the wavelength and allows the bumps to be smaller, but it also requires different optical arrangements which force the data layer to be brought closer to the pickup. A disc only 0.6mm thick is not sufficiently robust and hence the idea of gluing two together to make a composite as strong as a normal CD.

As the composite disc has two pressed surfaces, it can be made single- or double-sided (although double-sided versions don't leave anywhere for the label). There are techniques available to build up two data layers on each surface using a semi-transparent reflector and a second data layer. The laser can be focused on either layer as required.

In terms of data storage, not only are the bumps smaller (in height, width and length), but the spacing between adjacent turns of the spiral is also halved. Consequently, a single-layered disc provides 4.7Gb of storage capacity as opposed to the measly 650Mb on a standard CDs. A dual-layer disc offers 8.5Gb

which is enough to store the equivalent of about 1.5 million A4 pages of text (a pile of paper about 700 feet high) — rather more impressive than a standard CD-ROM which can hold 'only' 95,000 pages. A dual-layer, double-sided disc could potentially store 18Gb of audio, video or data.

The linear speed of the DVD has also been increased from the 1.4m/S of a CD to 4m/S in order to achieve workable data transfer rates for real-time video (albeit with MPEG data reduction) of 1.1Mb/S. This compares with 153Kb/S from a CD at standard speeds.

There are other enhancements built into the DVD format such as a different channel coding structure called EFM Plus and revised error protection which is around 10 times more robust than that of conventional CDs.

MINIDISC

Pre-recorded MiniDiscs are made in exactly the same way as a normal CD, even down to the channel coding and error protection systems. The only difference is that the disc is just 64mm (2.5 inches) in diameter, although the audio information is data-reduced by the ATRAC process to allow a full 74 minutes of replay time.

One of the recognised failings of the CD is its lack of resistance to damage on the playing surface which can result in tracking problems and replay glitches. Rather than redesign the error protection systems, the MiniDisc designers simply encased the disc in a plastic caddy to reduce the likelihood of scratches and marmalade reaching the disc surface! Re-recordable MiniDiscs will be covered in the section on magneto-optical discs.

MAGNETIC MEDIA

The alternatives to optical formats are formats that use magnetic technology similar to conventional magnetic recording on tape. However, erase heads and recording bias are not required as the digital media is fully saturated N-S or S-N. Linearity is also not required and the signal-to-noise ratio is minimal (about 10dB). Unlike tape recorders, a hard disk unit involves no contact between the record/replay head and the media surface — the head 'flies' just above the surface of the rapidly spinning disk on a cushion of air, so media wear is insignificant.

Depending on the design and capacity of a hard drive, there may be a number of aluminium disks within the unit, each coated with a magnetic layer and mounted on a common drive spindle. Each surface has its own record/replay head which is mounted on some kind of shared, movable arm assembly allowing the heads to be positioned accurately for record and replay of data (Figure 4). The main advantages of hard drives are the phenomenal storage capacity, rapid access times and high data transfer rates — all well in excess of any other medium currently available.

Data is organised on the disk according to the operating system of the controlling computer. That is the major reason for the incompatibility ►

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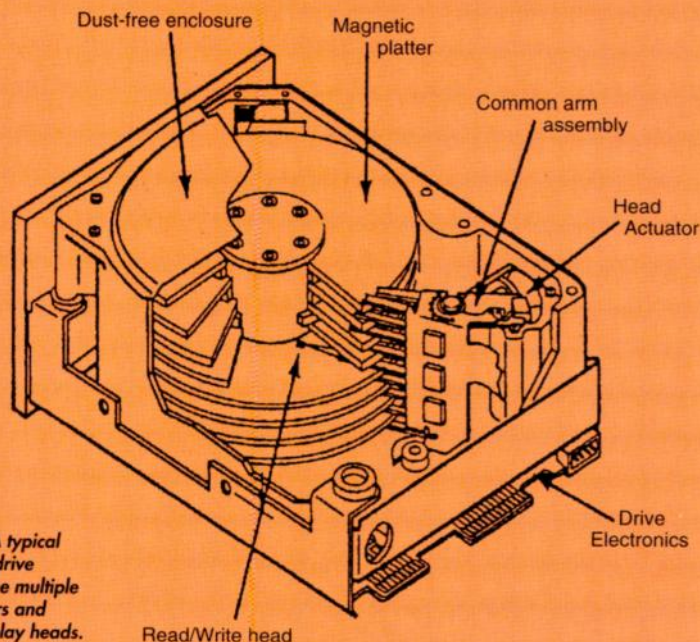


Figure 4: A typical hard disk drive showing the multiple disk platters and record/replay heads.

▶ of disk drives employed in different audio recording and editing systems. However, the basic storage structure all relies on tracks, sectors, blocks, and cylinders. The disk is divided into concentric rings called tracks, each of which is sub-divided into sectors, and within each sector, data is grouped into blocks or clusters. A vertical column of tracks across all disk surfaces is called a cylinder, and the positioning of data on the disk surfaces is logged in a special directory (known as the File Allocation Table or FAT in Microsoft-speak), without which the stored data is meaningless.

At present, hard disk storage capacity is doubling (and the cost almost halving) roughly every three years. While this situation can't go on forever, the hard disk is likely to remain the most cost-effective rapid-access storage medium for some time to come.

MAGNETO-OPTICAL DISKS

Magneto-optical (MO) disks, which derive from the computer industry, combine both magnetic and optical principles. Their advantage is portability and re-recordability, combined with a virtually unlimited life.

The earliest systems were relatively slow compared with hard disks, both in terms of their access times and transfer rates, but the technology has improved considerably in recent years, and the latest generations of MO disks are certainly closing the gap.

The basic operating principle is that data is stored by a photo-polymer layer within a glass or plastic substrate. For the chemists among you, the polymer is usually something like ferri-terbium-cobalt (FeTbCo), a substance which exhibits a property called the Kerr effect. This material is sandwiched between a reflecting layer and protective, heat shield layers, and when heated to a high temperature known as the Curie Point (between 185 and 250°C depending on its exact composition) its crystalline

structure becomes flexible and it can be altered between two stable states. The heating is achieved by a powerful laser (much like the CD-R) and the material's structure can then be changed by the application of a weak magnetic field. By switching between N-S or S-N fields, the required data can be stored in the physical structure of the polymer. Once cool, the material is perfectly stable with the data safely locked in place.

When polarised light is passed through the photo-polymer, its angle of polarisation is changed slightly, with the direction and amount depending on the magnetic field the material was exposed to. A suitable photo-detector, sensitive to light polarised in one specific direction, can be used to recover the stored data (bright where the polarisation matches that of the detector and dark where the polarisation is altered).

The life of a computer-standard MO disk is usually of the order of a million record passes and a billion replay passes — in fact, the bearings will give out before the polymer does. To give some practical meaning to these figures, a billion continuous replays of a one-second segment of audio will take more than 31 years.

The earliest computer MO drives were relatively slow, partly because of the way data was recorded. Typical systems required a three-pass approach: first, the whole disk was bathed in a fixed magnetic field and the sector to be recorded heated with the high-power laser. This effectively formatted the sector. Next, the magnetic field was reversed and specific data cells heated to change their state, thereby storing the required data. A third pass then verified the stored data. Due to this tedious process, recording took about twice as long as replay — a significant drawback in audio devices!

DIRECT-OVERWRITE MO DISKS

The big advance in MO disks has been the development of the direct-overwrite system. This is used on MiniDiscs, as well as the latest computer MO systems, and is also known as LIMDOW (light-intensity modulation direct-overwrite).

The system abandons the need for the initial formatting by modulating the magnetic field with the required data directly. The process involves heating the required sector of the disk while modulating the magnetic field to encode the data. A verify pass then confirms that the correct data is in place. It may not sound much of an improvement, but it is far faster and represents a significant step forward, allowing MO drives to take on a far more practical role in audio editing and recording systems.

Current 130mm MO disks are available in 1.3, 2.6 and 5.2Gb capacities, but disks with capacities of 7Gb up to 11Gb are being developed and there are already 640Mb versions of the 64mm MiniDiscs.

SOS

Next month I'll look at connecting digital equipment together — and overcoming the inevitable problems.

“...a billion continuous replays of a one-second segment of audio will take more than 31 years.”

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YAMAHA A3000 VERSION 2 PRO SAMPLER AND UPGRADE KIT

When Yamaha launched the A3000 a year ago their approach won quite a few fans, and now they're demonstrating their renewed commitment to sampling with a comprehensive upgrade. CHRIS CARTER's movin' on up...

general housekeeping functions, and addresses some issues in the operating system (see box for a list of features).

NEAT TWEAKS

To begin with, the handy and often-used 'Easy Edit' feature has been given a face lift — it now displays more parameters per page and is grouped on to eight pages for easier accessibility. A new Program LFO has been included which allows modulation of all samples within a program and can be synced to an external MIDI clock, and you can now set pan, filter frequency and filter Q to vary at random with each new MIDI note received. MIDI note numbers can now be used as standard controller sources to vary parameters according to the keyboard pitch. The number of controllable parameters for varying the LFO, envelope generator, filter, sample level and so on has been greatly increased. In fact, almost anything in the A3000 can now be controlled or adjusted by a staggering number of internal or external MIDI sources and controllers.

In Version 1 you could only direct the effects to the main stereo output; with Version 2 there are no routing restrictions — you can send the effects banks, which also have two new configurations, through any output, including the digital outputs. A useful inclusion (although not implemented as fully as it could be) is the new Reset Value function. This allows you to instantly reset a parameter to 0 by pushing the relevant knob; pushing it a second time reinstates the previous setting. It's also possible to set Knob 1 either to turn pages or to select samples.

MR FREEZE

An overdue addition, and something that really should have been included in Version 1, is an input level meter on both the Recording-Standby and Recording-in-Progress pages. There's also a

Exactly a year since the original was launched, Yamaha have released the new improved A3000 Version 2 sampler, plus an upgrade kit for existing A3000 owners. Current users have been waiting with breathless anticipation for this upgrade to arrive, judging by the comments on the net newsgroups.

The original A3000 had an impressive 'off the shelf' specification: 16-bit stereo sampling, AWM2 Tone Generator; 64-voice polyphony; 16-part multitimbrality; 64 digital filters; three multi-effects blocks; four individual audio outputs (expandable to eight); capacity for 128 Mb of RAM; external SCSI 2 interface (and space for an internal hard drive); real-time assignable control knobs; and a sequencer.

To briefly recap my original review (*SOS* July 1997), the A3000 is a monster of a sampler capable of some awesome sonic acrobatics, due to the impressive line-up of features above. The audio quality couldn't be faulted, and there were more than enough editing and modifying options to please anyone. What it offered compared to the competition was value for money and features galore; where it fell over, for me, was in detailed sample editing and looping, due to its small, low-resolution display and quirky operating system.

Version 2 is purely a software upgrade and doesn't change the hardware or any of the above features. However, it adds some interesting new sample and program editing options and some new filter types, tweaks some of the disk and

pros & cons

YAMAHA A3000 V2

£1299/£100

pros

- New loop creation tools give the A3000 a whole new lease of life.
- Easier and quicker to use than the original.
- Reads Roland and Emu sample disks and CD-ROMs.
- Improved Akai compatibility.
- Saves across multiple floppy disks.
- Exports AIFF files.
- Improved SCSI transfer speeds (unconfirmed).

cons

- No new effects or oscillator waveforms.
- No improvement in waveform display.
- Wave and loop editing still a bit hit-and-miss.
- Floppy disk access still slow.

summary

A worthwhile upgrade that irons out quite a few shortcomings in the original and throws in some juicy new features. The new loop-creation tools alone will be worth the cost to anyone producing dance music. If you're currently using Version 1, the V2 upgrade is a 'must have' purchase. If you were considering buying an A3000, make sure you get V2.

SOUND ON SOUND



new Map function that will automatically map a series of recorded samples across a keyboard or place them into a bank.

Sample management has been further improved with the Stereo-to-Mono option, which allows you to mix down both A3000 channels or just one channel to a single mono sample. The Move feature allows you to move samples from one program to another, or from a bank to a program, and the Freeze option allows you to transfer a program's Easy Edit settings directly into a sample, while Copy allows the copying or merging of parameters from one sample to another or one program to another. A new Arrange command will automatically remap samples within a program or bank to consecutive keys on your MIDI keyboard.

DIVIDE AND RULE

The new Divide Loop is an interesting, if slightly unpredictable feature. It splices an existing loop into bite-sized samples and automatically maps them across the keyboard as a new sample bank. The number of new individual samples produced is adjustable, from just two samples to a maximum of 32, and the length of each new sample is variable between 10% and 800%. At a default value of 100%, each consecutive sample slice exactly follows the previous one without any gaps in coverage of the original sample loop. At higher values (above 100%) each divided sample overlaps any consecutive samples, while values smaller than 100% will leave gaps in coverage of the original full-length sample. In practice it works a bit like Steinberg's ReCycle, but it's not quite as controllable, because the division points are always equally spaced and not individually adjustable, and unless your original looping points are spot-on you may find each new divided sample to be off the beat.

However, the Loop Remix function, with only two programmable parameters, is a whole lot more usable, and fun. Although Yamaha say it works best on accurately looped, rhythm-based patterns of only one or two bars, don't feel you are restricted to bass 'n' drums, as anything can benefit

from this feature — I found it great for producing experimental voice cut-ups.

Loop Remix uses "intelligent but random" remixing parameters, called Type and Vari, to create a new sample loop made from rearranged chunks of the original loop and seamlessly spliced back together again. Depending on the parameter settings, a remixed loop will contain slices of the original sample that are reversed, duplicated or just rearranged, and each time you activate the Remix function you get a different remixed

"Divide Loop and Remix Loop are brilliant sampling tools for breathing new life into over-used, old and tired loops."

loop (which is placed in a temporary memory buffer). Depending on the type of material you're working with, this process can take a little while, but most of the time the new loops emerge sounding pretty good. As soon as you find a remixed loop you're happy with, press the Create button and your new funky looping sample is placed into RAM.

Divide Loop and Remix Loop are brilliant sampling tools for breathing new life into over-used, old and tired loops; a bonus is that, if you have enough memory, they perform their magic on stereo sample loops as well.

THE NEED FOR SPEED

One of the most often-heard gripes from A3000 users is the painfully slow hard drive and floppy disk access. Version 2 promises faster loading but, to be honest, loading and saving to floppy disk appears to have changed little since Version 1. I had words with Yamaha last year about supplying review models without a hard drive (or a SCSI 1 adaptor for an external drive) but my words seem to have fallen on deaf ears, as this A3000 also came sans hard drive or

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► SCSI 1 adaptor, though hard disks of up to 8Gb, with a maximum partition size of 1Gb, are now supported. However, the lack of hard drive or SCSI 1 adaptor with the review model means that I can't tell you what sort of improvements have been implemented with SCSI transfer speeds.

A welcome improvement is a safer disk saving routine that always confirms the destination when saving to disk, just in case you're about to accidentally overwrite or erase an important file. Also, you can now save the contents of the A3000's RAM (samples, banks, programs, and so on) across more than one floppy disk. I found that this worked fine as far as saving went, but I couldn't always load multiple floppy saves back in again.

Exporting AIFF-type samples onto PC-formatted disks is now fully supported, and version 2 will at last recognise Roland and Emu sample disks and CD-ROMs. Better Akai compatibility means Akai program velocity ranges and samples not grouped within programs are now correctly recognised, and native Akai S20 sample disks can also be read. The A3000 still insists that imported WAV or AIFF files adhere to the 8.3 DOS naming standard, so if you have a lot of Mac AIFF samples to load this could become a chore.

FILTERED OR PLAIN?

Yamaha have thoughtfully included an additional 10 dynamic, assignable filter types (see 'New Features' box), which now brings the total number of digital filters to 16. Seven of the new filters are dual types, with two filters running in parallel and a Distance parameter to set the tracking offset between them. All the filters are perfectly usable, but they sound a trifle cold for my liking, and I still find them a little too easy to overload.

HITS & MISSES

I haven't covered every improvement or addition Version 2 offers — just the major ones. In fact, there are so many system changes that Yamaha have produced a second instruction manual. This is not as gigantic as the one supplied with version 1, but it still runs to 50 or so pages.

For existing A3000 Version 1 users this upgrade is going to be pretty essential, as it will undoubtedly make using the instrument easier and quicker. If you're producing dance music, in particular, the new loop-creation tools were made for you.

Personally, I'd like to have seen a few new effect algorithms and oscillator waveforms included. I also feel that sampling can still be a slow process if Auto-Normalize is active, and you

"For existing A3000 Version 1 users this upgrade is going to be pretty essential."

still can't edit a loop while pressing the Loop Monitor button. Waveform editing hasn't been improved at all, and trimming and looping can still be a little 'suck it and see'. But the inclusion of the input-level meter on the Recording Standby and In Progress pages is gratifying, and improves the sampling process no end.

There are extensive system tweaks in V2 that definitely make the instrument easier to use than the original version, but I still can't bring myself to call the A3000 exactly user-friendly, though this is mainly down to the inadequate display — at least, inadequate for a sampler with so many programmable parameters.

VERDICT

Until recently, the A3000 was beginning to look a little over-priced (only 2Mb of RAM and no digital in/out). However, anyone who keeps a keen eye on dealer ads should have noticed that sampler prices (including that of the A3000) have been falling lately, and a canny buyer could snap up an original A3000 for a knock-down price (as low as £949, if you look at the right ads). So there's a choice of ways to go — either buy a V2 off the shelf, at the same £1299 price as the original, or track down a discounted V1 A3000 and add the V2 upgrade kit for an extra £100, probably saving yourself some money in the process. But there's no doubt that potential A3000 purchasers should go for V2, however they choose to do it — it offers so much more than the original.

SOS

- E** Yamaha A3000 V2 Professional Sampler £1299; V2 Upgrade Kit £100. Prices include VAT.
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- Additional modulation matrix destinations and sources.
- New Create Oscillators function.
- More sequencer options.
- System: numerous system-wide changes and additions.
- Additional sample loop options: Loop Remix (automatically rearranges loops into new variations); Loop Divide (automatically slices and maps loops across a keyboard).
- New sample management features: Arrange Program or Sample Bank (maps all samples in a program to successive keys); Move Program or Sample Bank (automatically builds a bank from a program or vice versa); Copy Sample Parameters (copy from sample to sample); Freeze Sample Bank (writes bank offsets directly to samples).
- New Disk Features: safer disk saving routines (always confirms destination); Quick Format option; improved Akai and Roland compatibility; AIFF export; multiple floppy save (you can now save data across multiple floppy disks); larger SCSI disks (you can now use hard drives up to 8Gb); SCSI disks partition offset (allows an offset of the first partition); improved SCSI and floppy speed; improved SMIDI transmission.

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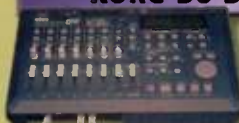


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Our regular look at the hottest new sample CDs and CD-ROMs.



**TONY MASON...
STEAMIN'**

(AUDIO CD)



Following on from volume one, *Smokin'*, AMG have invited top session drummer Tony Mason back to the studio to perform and record another selection of drum loops and breakbeats with the emphasis firmly on R&B, soul and funk. The disc starts out well with a section called 'Trigger Happy Drums', in which a contemporary set of sampled drum sounds are triggered from the live kit giving the user the best of both worlds with sounds that leap out of the speakers, but which have bags of feel and expression. Jazz funk fanatics will be extremely impressed by both the sonic depth and the funky performances that these triggered loops offer, hardly surprising when you consider that Tony has drummed with the likes of Ronnie Jordan, Gabrielle, Incognito and the Fine Young Cannibals.

The next section gives us more of the same, but this time concentrates on the sound of the acoustic kit without using triggered samples. Overall the kit sound works well and is very ambient, with more attention given to the overall sound than to boosting the kick and snare drum sounds too heavily. Following on from the massive 'boom-tick' of the triggered loops, you could argue that the acoustic kit (with minimal effects and compression) sounds a bit weak in comparison, but what you might lose in strength of sound you more than gain in the funky and expressive performances of each of the loops. The kit sound also varies quite a lot depending on the type of sound required for each loop or set of loops.

There are a large number of great live snare sounds in particular, and Tony's obvious talent

for playing each style of breakbeat with authenticity and feeling make this release (albeit within a tight R&B/funk genre) both versatile and flexible. Each of the two-bar performances are grouped together with between four and five loops per CD track and all are listed with bpm's. On the downside, however, there doesn't appear to be much in the way of a coherent structure to the layout and grouping of the loops. They just seem to 'happen' in the track listing with no hint as to their stylistic content. I can't imagine it would have been too much bother to compile the CD with all the jazz funk loops in one section, the R&B loops in another and so on. As it stands, though, flicking through all the tracks finding something suitable for your track could be a bit long-winded.

On the plus side, however, you do get a huge number of loops for your money, plus a good set of single drum hits and a few short fills as well. It would be fair to say that the sample CD market is awash with drumming CDs, but *Steamin'* stands up with the very best of them for sheer performance, versatility and value for money. It does unfortunately suffer a little from its layout and the fact that whilst it is always great to hear such an established session drummer giving us a host of instantly usable and funky beats, for my money, a little more in the way of 'wild' experimentation with both the kit and trigger sounds would have made this release absolutely fantastic as opposed to merely very, very good. Funk, soul and jazz programmers put this one very high up your 'must have' list, you won't be disappointed. *Paul Farrer*

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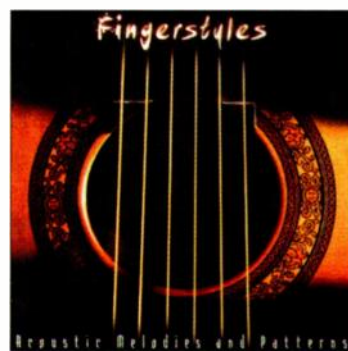
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Produced by American company Ilio, *Fingerstyles* is a compilation of fingerstyle acoustic guitar

strums, phrases and melodies that sound extremely natural when played from a keyboard. The recording and playing is to a very high standard and the playing styles range from Celtic to Nashville, some using special tunings. Obviously it would be impractical to provide every possible finger picking pattern playing every chord in any key and over a range of tempos, so what the creators have done is to deconstruct some simple tunes into strums, phrases of two or more chords, melodies, endings and so on, then present these 'sets' as programs named after the song from which they were taken. Each of the 'ingredients' is then mapped to its own key on the keyboard.

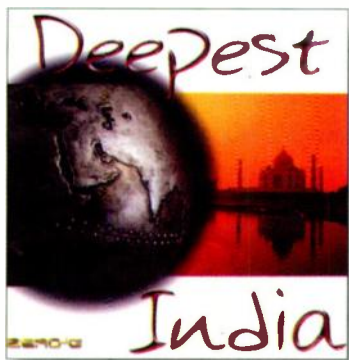
Many have a relaxing, folky feel (though some are rather more driving), so they should be useful in folk, country and even new age compositions. The tempo of each example is provided in the sleeve notes, though not the



amount of memory required, which could be rather frustrating since the programs range in size from around 6Mb to almost the full 32Mb supported by current Akai samplers. In all there are 38 different 'titles' from which to choose as well as a section of 'bonus chords'.

The results that can be achieved using this disk are both beautiful and utterly convincing — but you are committed to writing your songs around the sequences provided, which can be seriously restricting. Unfortunately that's a fact of life when working with cut and paste samples, though it is occasionally possible to combine phrases from different programs (as long as they're in the same tempo) to produce something more complex. If each example had been accompanied by two or three octaves of multisampled guitar notes, it would at least have made it possible to modify chords, add your own melodies and even play new chords, but for some reason people producing phrase sample libraries rarely think this way. Even so, the quality of material provided here is so good that this package of discs has to merit a four and a half. *Paul White*

- £ CD-ROM versions £149 each including audio CD; Audio only is £59. Prices include VAT.
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DEEPEST INDIA

(3 AUDIO CD SET)



Deepest India from Zero G is a three disc set of Audio CDs, though an Akai format CD-ROM set is expected later in the year. The three discs are divided into vocals, instruments and orchestra/ensembles, and as the name implies, all the samples hail from the Indian subcontinent.

The vocals on Disc one are mainly complete solo vocal performances or phrases, though there are some accompanied pieces in there too. Where there is a rigid tempo, the bpm is provided as is a translation of the lyrics so that you don't compile anything too embarrassing! The range of styles and emotions here is immense, from sad to exuberant, with both male and female singers, though the lyrics usually relate to that old chestnut, unrequited love! Overall, the recording standard is very good, though some pieces have obviously been close miked as part of an ensemble performance and a little of the instrumental backing is still audible.

Disc two focuses on solo instruments with phrases from flutes, dillrabar, violins, tablas, sitars and a whole host of other Indian fare. As with the vocals, the quality of the samples, both artistic and technical, is excellent, though most pieces seem to be collections of phrases from the same tune. Including multisamples of each of the instruments would have been immeasurably more useful as it would enable the composer to mix phrases and played lines freely. Perhaps the CD-ROM version will have these?

Disc three contains ensemble sections, starting out with phrases from the Bombay film orchestra — paste together the phrases to build your own symphony! The Disc actually comprises many different ensemble styles, some of which sound like Indian restaurant background music broken into sections for you to reassemble in the order of your choice. There are film orchestras, folk ensembles, brass orchestras and strangely named acoustic ensembles that all sound enchantingly authentic. Each of the discs then brings you back to earth with a 1kHz test tone at the end.

I certainly have no complaint about the quality and variety of the samples on offer here, but I'm not sure how I'd go about using

some of them as they sound rather like complete performances cut into sections. This applies particularly to the orchestral examples. The vocal and solo instrument phrases are rather more adaptable, though I stand by my earlier comment to the effect that any such samples are very restrictive unless they include a properly multisampled example of each instrument and voice to allow you to 'play' the sounds as well as the phrases. This is a purely personal observation, however, and taken at face value, *Deepest India* is hard to fault. It's also very attractively priced and well documented, so it would be churlish to award it less than four points. *Paul White*

E Set of three audio CDs £79.95; forthcoming Akai CD-ROM £249. Prices include VAT.

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SHAWN LEE'S PLANET OF THE BREAKS

(AUDIO CD)



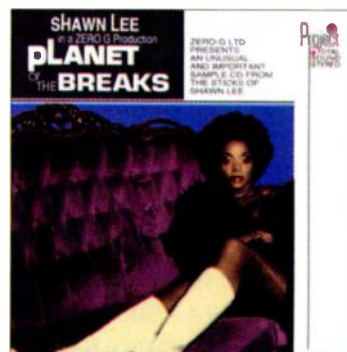
With a name like *Planet of the Breaks* and a funky retro blaxploitation cover, you get an immediate idea of what kind of drumming you might expect to find on this 61-track audio CD from sampling giants Zero-G. Shawn Lee appears to be a sort of high-octane bearded hippy for the '90s, proclaiming in the sleeve notes that each of the break beats that appear on this CD have been 'individually created with mad love'.

Mad love or otherwise, he does have an uncanny knack for giving us the kind of drumming that simply cries out to be sampled. Instead of a CD that bombards us with millions of mediocre one-bar loops, this release concentrates on 60 of his finest and presents them as fairly lengthy drum performances (some well over three minutes long) that evolve and develop without ever losing sight of the original groove. Unlike many other drummers Shawn is clearly not averse to using electronic sounds, weird microphone techniques and

even sequencing and sampling to get his rhythmic point across and all credit to him for that.

As you might imagine, there is a strong late '70s feel to many of the loops (helped greatly by the fact that the whole CD was originally mastered on to vinyl), but like all good retro releases instead of merely copying genres and styles wholesale, the beauty of these breakbeats is that they have more than enough '90s spin to make them both historically authentic, and yet scorchingly brand new at the same time.

You'll find almost every type of conceivable drum sound somewhere on this CD, but instead of trying to impress us with how much outboard gear he has to play with, the compression, distortion, reverb, flange and gate effects are all perfectly suited to the track they are used on. Performance-wise he always seems to hit the mark, and this CD is as much



about what can be achieved through classic musical understatement as it is about blindingly good dance floor material. All the loops are listed with bpm's, and sampling various sections of a long performance is an absolute doddle. This straightforward and uncluttered approach is a real breath of fresh air after so many drumming CDs that waste our time with tons of individual single shot drum samples that you know you'll never get round to sampling and badly edited and performed tom fills.

It's good to see a release that doesn't take itself too seriously, yet never loses sight of the main reason people buy drumming CDs in the first place, namely to inspire great performances throughout the rest of the track. If it's inspiration you're looking for you'll find it in *Planet of the Breaks*. It sounds great, it samples like a dream and whatever the hell 'mad love' is, Shawn Lee obviously has it by the bucket load and I WANT SOME!
Paul Farrer

E £59.95 including VAT and UK p&p.

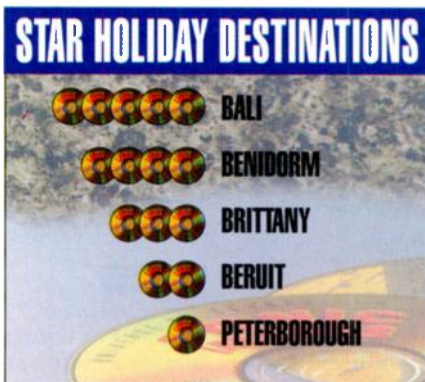
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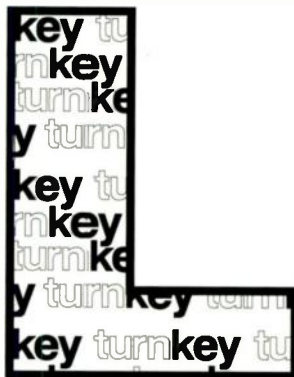
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Products are sold on a strictly first-come first-served basis. Personal callers on the evening of Thursday September 10th will take precedence. The first received telephone, fax or mail order (which must include full payment + 0.99 P&P) will be held until Monday 16th September and then only cashed if the item is still available. The items for your cheque if your are unsuccessful will be sent to you to arrive no later than the following Saturday (cheque clearance allowing).

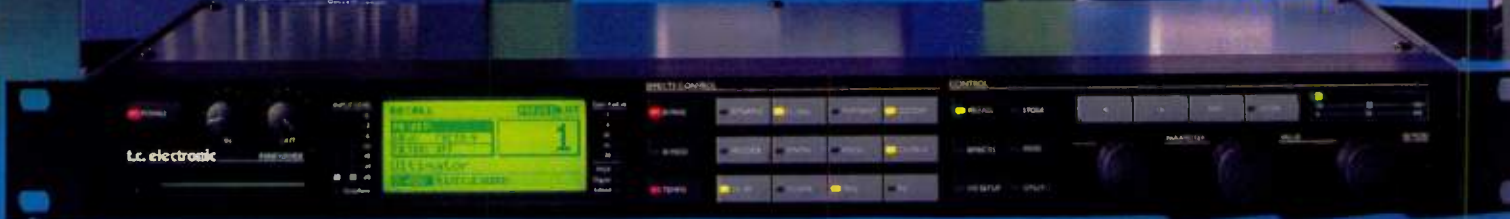
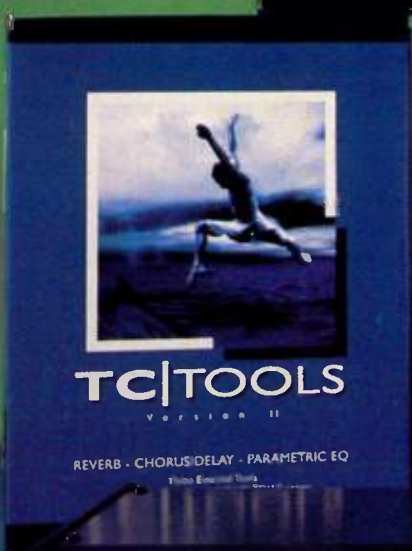
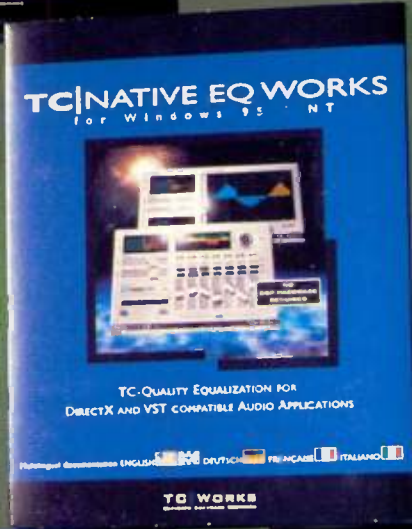
The bigger the reduction, the more likely it is that the item will be sold on the night of the 11th. Please don't waste your time enquiring about the £1 items!

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SURVEY

1 Which of these best describes your recording setup?

- Professional Studio
 Project Studio
 Home Studio

2. What segment of the market do you work in?

- Music Production
 Post Production
 Broadcast

3. What sort of computer configuration do you use? (please circle the descriptions that apply):

- Windows 3.11 / 95 / 98 / NT
 CPU: 486 / Pentium / Pentium II / Other
 RAM (Mb): 8 / 16 / 32 / 64 / more
 Clock speed (MHz): 133-200 / 233-300 / faster
- MacOS System 7.x / System 8.x
 CPU: 68K / PPC 601 / PPC 603 / PPC 604 / G3
 RAM (Mb): 8 / 16 / 32 / 64 / more
 Clock speed (MHz): 80-120 / 133-200 / faster
 Other (please specify):

4. What soundcard do you use?

- Mac internal / SoundBlaster
 Digital card
 (please specify model):
 SoundScape
 Digidesign Pro Tools NuBus / Project / PCI / 24
 (please circle)

5. Which audio recording software do you use? (please tick all that apply):

- Cakewalk
 Cubase
 Logic Audio
 Peak
 Performer
 Sound Forge
 Studio Vision
 Wavelab
 Pro Tools
 Other (please specify):

6 (i). Do you own a digital mixer?

- a. Yes
 b. Not yet, but I plan to buy one
 c. No

6 (ii). If (a) or (b), which model?

- Yamaha 02R / 03D / 01 / 01V (please circle)
 Other (please specify):

7 (i). Do you own any DSP plug-ins?

- Yes
 No

7 (ii). If yes, which plug-ins do you own?

.....

7 (iii). If yes, how happy are you with the quality of the plug-ins you use?

- Not satisfied
 Reasonably satisfied
 Very satisfied

7 (iv). If no, why don't you use plug-in effects? (tick all that apply):

- Quality
 Price
 Too complicated
 Too much processing power required
 Other (please specify):

8. What DSP effects interest you the most? (tick all that apply):

- Reverbs
 Compressors
 Maximisers
 Equalisers
 Tube EQ or Compression
 Effects (such as chorus, delay...)
 Pitch-shifters/harmony processors
 Filter effects (such as modulated filters)
 Other (please specify):

9 (i). Do you prefer plug-in or hardware effects?

- Plug-ins
 Hardware

9 (ii). If you prefer hardware effects, why?

- Better value
 Better quality
 More flexible
 Other (please specify):

9 (iii). If you prefer plug-in effects, why?

- Better value
 Better quality
 More flexible
 Other (please specify):

10. What would you like to see improved in plug-ins?

.....

TIE-BREAKER

Imagine you are in charge of product development at TC Electronic. Explain in 30 words or fewer which effect or process you would next bring out as a plug-in, and why.

.....

Would you like to receive more information on TC Electronic & TC Works products? If not, please tick this box.

Name

Address

Daytime tel. no.

The new Fireworx from TC Electronic, which was reviewed in the June 1998 issue of SOS, is one of the most versatile professional multi-effects units on the market. Its impressive DSP effects algorithms can be chained together in innumerable combinations, permitting the construction of sophisticated patches. The 12 basic blocks out of which patches are constructed include not only high-quality dynamics, EQ, chorus/flanger and delay, but also more unusual effects such as vocoder/ring modulation and formant filters which create pseudo-human vowel type sounds.

You can take the Fireworx straight out of the box and use the preset chains to obtain reverb, compression, EQ and other essential standard effects; but it's also flexible for creating, editing and fine-tuning patches to suit your exact requirements. Its powerful yet intuitive user interface includes features such as a Tempo button which is tapped to set sweep rates or delay times that complement the rhythm of your track, and there are also facilities for comprehensive control via MIDI. The alpha modulation wheel can be allocated to a huge variety of individual or multiple parameters in an effects patch, allowing fast and flexible real-time control over the sound.

The Fireworx retails at a competitive £1699 — but one fortunate SOS reader will be getting one for the price of a second-class stamp, as first prize in this month's competition. But that's not all. As well as this highly desirable unit, we also have a whole load of other goodies to give away!

In addition to making hardware effects units like the Fireworx, TC Electronic also produce a wide range of effects plug-ins for PC- and Macintosh-based digital audio recording systems through their software arm, TC Works. Thanks to their generosity, two other winners will be getting their hands on some of the best native effects packages around.

Second prize is the TC Native suite of audio plug-ins for DirectX-compatible PC applications, which contains TC Native Reverb, EQ Works and Native Essentials multi-effects. Alternatively, if you're a Mac owner, you'll get two Pro Tools plug-ins — the finalising and mastering application TC MasterX, and the TC Tools suite which offers reverb, chorus/delay and parametric EQ. Our third prize is a copy of TC Electronics' dedicated reverb plug-in TC Native Reverb or, if you're a Mac owner running Pro Tools, TC Reverb for Pro Tools.

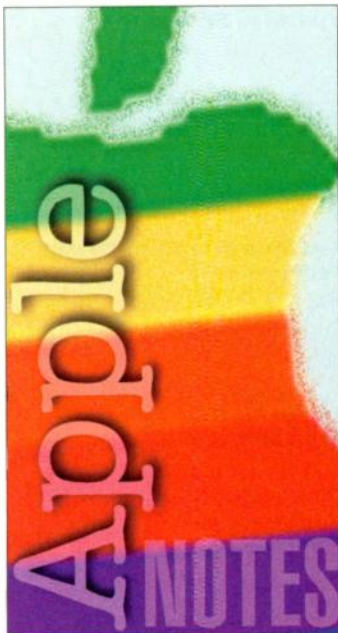
Native EQ and Native Essentials were reviewed in the August issue of SOS, and like all TC Works plug-ins are designed to provide top-class effects without eating up excessive processor power. Both Native EQ and the EQ and compressor modules included in Native Essentials employ TC Works' unique SoftSat algorithm, which aims to reproduce the warm sound usually associated with analogue EQs and compressors.

To be in with a chance of winning one of these splendid prizes, all you have to do is complete our short survey about computer audio, answer our tie-breaker, and then post your entry to the address, right.

the small print

1. Only one entry per person is permitted. 2. Employees of SOS Publications Ltd, TC Electronic / TC Works Group and their immediate families, are ineligible for entry. 3. No cash alternative is available in lieu of the stated prize. 4. The competition organisers reserve the right to change the specification of the prize offered. 5. The judges' decision is final and legally binding, and no correspondence will be entered into. 6. No other correspondence is to be included with competition entries. 7. Please ensure that you give your DAYTIME telephone number on your entry form. 8. Prize-winners must be prepared to make themselves available in the event that the competition organisers wish to make a personal presentation.

Post your entry to: SOS TC Electronic Competition, Sound On Sound, Media House, Trafalgar Way, Bar Hill, Cambridge CB3 8SQ, UK



**Good news, good news
and more good news.
MARTIN RUSS just can't
believe his luck.**

It has been a good month. First, it looks like the iMac may well turn out to be priced at just less than £1000 including VAT (and some people are apparently already taking advance orders as I type this.) Second, the influential US computer magazine *Byte* has published some interesting processor power comparisons. Third, Apple seem to be firmly back on course. And finally, I solved my SCSI problems...

THE UNIVERSAL SERIAL BUSS

It's a weird circular world. Whereas PCs have always used simple point-to-point connectors

for connecting the keyboard and the mouse to the computer itself, Apple have for a long time had the Apple Desktop Buss which is a 16-device mini-network. You've been able to buy disc drives, scanners and a few other goodies which used the Desktop Buss, but the idea never really took off.

Well, now it has. Compaq, Digital, IBM, Intel, Microsoft, NEC and Northern Telecom got together a couple of years ago and developed the Universal Serial Buss (USB), and many of the same low-bandwidth peripherals are now starting to appear with USB sockets. With the PC industry behind it, USB promises to be what Apple's Desktop Buss ought to have been in a sane world. For Mac users it opens up a world of low-cost, ubiquitous peripherals that will work on a Mac or a PC.

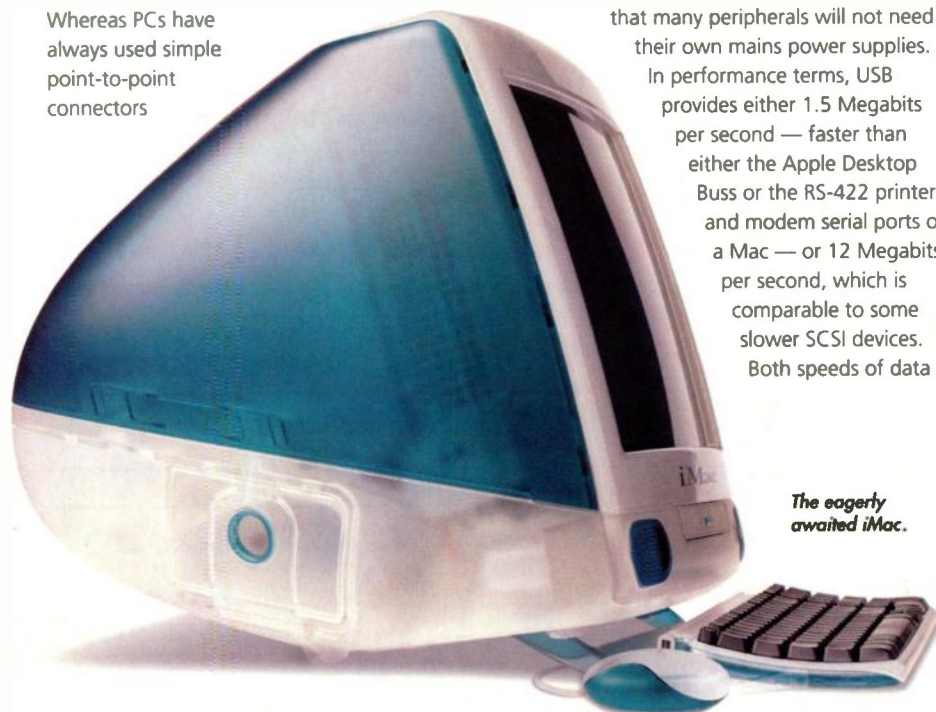
Not only will USB joysticks and other game-playing related add-ons soon be appearing, but other peripherals including printers, video cameras, hard and floppy disk drives, infra-red device interworking, digital still cameras and digital audio. Connecting a pair of digital speakers to your computer via a serial data buss might appear strange, but the Philips web site already has details! USB is designed to be completely 'plug and play', so you can simply connect your devices up and use them. No configuration, and no hassle. Innovative for PC users, normal for Mac users — but there are some surprises even for hardened Applephiles.

USB appears as a simple four-pin socket, often with two sockets together as a pair. Unlike most computer connections, USB can be 'hot-plugged', which means that you can plug and unplug at any time, and without turning the power off. If only SCSI was like this! The

USB carries 5 volt power too, which means that many peripherals will not need their own mains power supplies.

In performance terms, USB provides either 1.5 Megabits per second — faster than either the Apple Desktop Buss or the RS-422 printer and modem serial ports on a Mac — or 12 Megabits per second, which is comparable to some slower SCSI devices.

Both speeds of data



The eagerly awaited iMac.

HOW IT WORKS: COMPARISONS

You can't trust numbers. Intel Pentium IIs running at 400MHz must be faster than a 233MHz Motorola G3 chip, surely. Apparently, according to *Byte* when you measure something more related to computing power, then the reverse is true. Steve Jobs took great delight in mentioning this to July's New York MacWorld.

The speed at which a processor runs is not necessarily a good guide to how much it can actually accomplish. It has much more to do with how efficient the chip is. With the right design, a slower chip may well achieve faster raw processing. At least, that's the technologist's answer. A marketing person might well point you to phrases like: "This Operating System runs up to 33 per cent faster" where the 'up to' can include 0 per cent, or even negative speed increases.

But for the ultimate comparison-busting, power ratings for audio systems must be well in the lead. 'Total music power' and its many variants seems capable of turning a few watts of real power into something much more impressive.

Yep, numbers. Wonderful things. And in the hands of a trained expert: completely meaningless. You have been warned!

transmission can coexist on the same USB cable. Whereas SCSI is limited to seven devices, and the Apple Desktop Buss to 15, USB can potentially support up to 127 devices — you use little extender boxes called hubs.

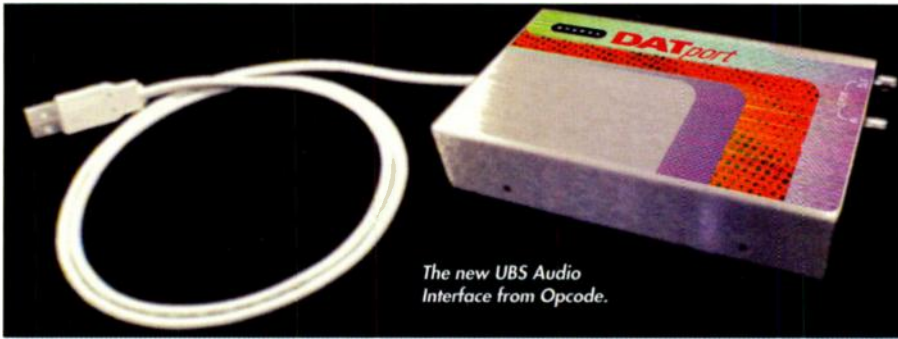
In keeping with the low-cost world of keyboards and mice, USB isn't expensive to add to a peripheral, and the volumes of the PC marketplace mean that prices will be aggressive — some US web electronics suppliers are already selling USB PCI cards for less than \$60. If digital audio cards for the PCI buss haven't completely taken over, then USB could provide a way of hooking audio into and out of your PC. Philips' digital speakers will carry digital audio over the USB — and so have no audio connections at all!

Despite what I've said in the past about using a search engine instead of explicit URLs, USB seems to be an exception. Visit these pages for more information:

- W** www.usb.org/
- W** www.developer.apple.com/dev/usb/
- W** www.amp.com/product/usb.html
- W** www.usbstuff.com/

THE IMAC

At present, some PCs are shipped with USB sockets, but not Macs. However, this situation is about to change with the introduction of the iMac. Although aimed at the mass-market with its clear plastic, all-in-one design, the iMac is actually very much in the same mould (all puns accidental) as the Mac Plus and Mac SE models that were used by MIDI professionals before software got too big for little screens and also went colour. While PCI slots have become



standard on both Macs and PCs, however, the iMac has no internal card slots at all. Nor is there the familiar SCSI socket and the printer/modem ports have also gone.

In their place, as you've probably guessed by now, comes the Universal Serial Bus. The iMac uses a USB to connect the keyboard and mouse to the main unit. It will also take a floppy disk drive (already available) and there are hard disks and more to follow. Since this is a 'Good news for Apple' month then you won't be surprised when I reveal that Opcode have just announced a brand new USB peripheral — a USB Audio Interface that, by converting between USB and S/PDIF, will enable you to connect DATs, CDs, A-D converters and other audio devices to an iMac for less than \$200. Which leaves me asking when the first USB MIDI interface is due...

PROFIT

Apple have announced their third quarterly profit — \$101 million, up from the previous quarter's \$55 million, on sales of \$1.405 billion (thousand millions!). Things have really turned around over the last year. After a period of doom and gloom, the G3 PowerMacs, PowerBook G3s and the iMac suddenly deliver leading edge performance at low prices. Although many people raised the odd eyebrow when Microsoft invested \$150 million in Apple, it has already resulted in *Office 98* appearing on the Mac first. There is now a dedicated team of

200 programmers at Microsoft who are dedicated to programming better Mac applications. Even top games are migrating back to the Mac — with PC and PlayStation favourites like *Tomb Raider II* due for Christmas.

ADVICE

I'm often asked by people which computer to buy, and I always tell them a Mac. All too often they then come back and tell me that they have bought a PC instead. Prime motivations for not following my advice are cited as low cost, easy availability and "Windows 95 being the same as Mac OS". These same people then come back later on and ask about driver problems, MIDI port limits and other niggles at which point I tell them that there are still good reasons for buying a Mac. Visit www.apple.com for some biased opinions.

THE ANSWER

After a couple of months now of living with *Studio Vision Pro v4*, I'm running v4.0.1, and looking forward to the free download of v4.1. Life with a combined MIDI and digital audio sequencer is certainly different, but I'm surprised at how MIDI retains its usefulness even in the

TIP OF THE MONTH: SCSI BUS 2

At the risk of this becoming a soap opera, I'm going to mention my long-running SCSI problems again. It started with the mysterious freezing of my PowerMac when copying files, and more recently it has caused my CD-R/hard disk combo to suffer from errors. But hey, this is a good month, and so here's how I solved everything.

Although my Mac already has an internal and an external SCSI buss, experimentation had shown that there was a limit to the number of SCSI peripherals which I could connect at once. So the solution was to add another SCSI buss via a PCI SCSI card. Installation was a 'plug and play' breeze and after rebooting I now had buss 0, buss 1 and buss 2 all up and running. With the CD-R/hard disk combo connected to the new buss card, everything worked perfectly. The new card may have represented an extra £100 or so on top of the CD-R budget, but my system is now reliable again and I don't need to replug things just to blow a CD-R.

face of very powerful audio capabilities. You see, although I can treat the audio and the MIDI with very similar processing and editing features, there are still certain times when it's useful to be able to quickly throw a generated sequence of jangly MIDI notes together. Also I'm astonished at how quickly I use up audio polyphony. It all makes me more confident that the future is increasingly about integrated MIDI+Audio sequencers, with software synthesizers available as plug-ins. All this and USB too! As increasingly seems to be the case with computers, we're going to see the development of many different elements working together as one even more capable whole.

SOS

APPLE NEWS IN BRIEF

- **56K IMAC MODEM**
Early reports of the iMac claimed that the modem would be a 33.6 kbps model, but the latest indications are that it will be 56 kbps. September should see the first of the blue and clear curvies in the UK.
- **V-TWIN**
I remember attending a talk by one of Apple's top R&D gurus about 18 months ago when he extolled the virtues of their V-Twin search engine. Well, it has taken a while to reach the real world, but it looks like System 8.5 will get the benefit of V-Twin, only renamed Sherlock. Imagine a web search engine inside your operating system and you get the flavour of this program.



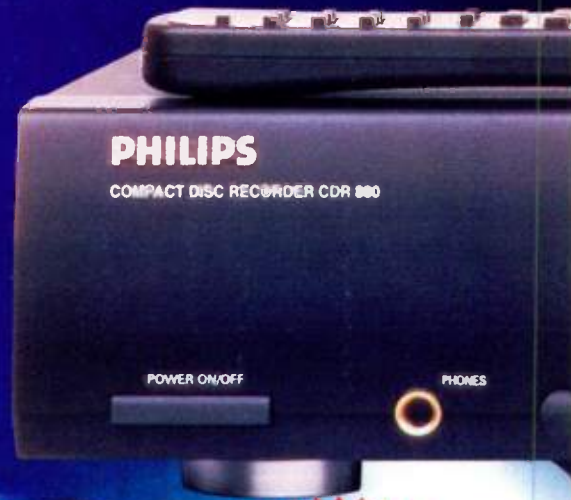
Want to know more about USB? Here's the first ever Apple Notes pointer to an Intel web page!

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Every studio needs a CD recorder, but buying a 'write once' unit, or one that needs a computer to run it is a mistake - you know how stretched your Mac or PC is running the latest MIDI/audio programs - just wait 'til the next update comes! The new Philips CDR 880 is a re-writable, stand

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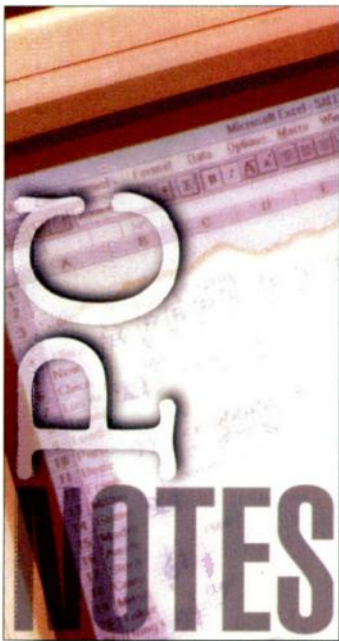
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Low Fold Audio.....Lancaster	Neath Music Centre.....Neath	River Music.....Cleethorpes
VacMusic.....Falkirk	Nevada.....Portsmouth	RnB Music.....Aberdeen
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Musicland.....Cardiff	PSS Music.....Grimstby	Sound Division.....London

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Sounds Live.....Newcastle On Tyne	The Music Station.....Bedford
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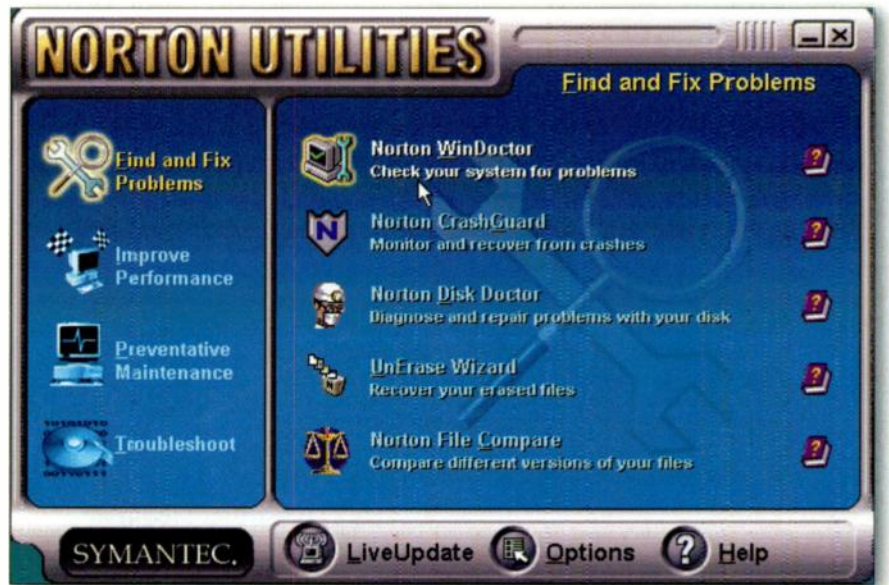


This month, after a bit of clock-watching, MARTIN WALKER looks at a utility which should keep your PC running for longer.

There seem to have been a lot of new developments in the PC world of late, and since many are relevant to PC musicians I intend to open up the cupboard, probe into its darkest recesses, and reach for a change of clothing. Yes, it's anorak time again!

CLOCKING ON

Let's dive in at the deep end. Your PC's system buss controls communication between the processor and other parts of the computer's motherboard, and for some time overall performance of PCs has been held back by the 66MHz buss speed. However, although Intel motherboard chipsets were supposed to run at a maximum of 66MHz, others have been available which can achieve higher speeds, of up to 83MHz. Some people even 'overclocked' the Intel chips, to these higher buss speeds, by



The latest version of Norton Utilities for Windows 95 has a handy front end (the Integrator) for quick access to any of its components.

changing jumpers on their motherboards, although warnings are normally issued with instructions on how to overclock, since the practice causes the processor chip to run hotter. Depending on the quality of your motherboard (and the RAM chips), you might then be prone to random crashes and other reliability problems. In other words, on your own head be it!

However, overclocking can produce problems in another area for musicians: the speed of the PCI buss is normally half the system buss speed, and some soundcards (and any other PCI card for that matter) might suffer from erratic performance after such overclocking. They're only designed to run at 33MHz (half the normal 66MHz buss speed), and although many will run at the slightly higher speeds of 37.5MHz (with a 75MHz buss speed) and 41.5MHz (with an 83MHz buss), others will exhibit glitches, or even lock up the PC altogether.

One reader recently emailed me after suffering a complete lockup every time he booted his Cyrix 6x86 PR200 MMX-powered PC after installing an Event Darla soundcard. This processor uses a 75MHz buss speed by default, so I suggested that he try reducing buss speed to 66MHz. The Darla card worked perfectly after this, although his PC would also run significantly slower. This is not a criticism of Cyrix processors — it just illustrates once again that unexpected

things can happen when you attempt to mix and match hardware from different manufacturers.

PARENT POWER

The reason I mention all this is that, along with the many new processors I discussed in last month's PC Notes, there's a significant new feature appearing on systems with the fastest 350 and 400MHz Pentium II processors — the 100MHz front-side buss (and yes, unfortunately there is a back-side buss as well). The secret is the new Intel 440BX chipset, which has been designed for these new devices. New motherboard designs based on the 440BX chipset can support any Pentium II processor, from 233MHz to 400MHz, but the two fastest models can now run with a front-side buss speed of 100MHz, rather than the 66MHz of the others.

As always, the overall system improvement is not as high as one might initially expect, but it's causing some people to worry that their existing PCI cards may not work properly if they buy a new system with a 100MHz buss. However, in such systems the PCI buss actually runs at one third of system buss speed and so returns to the safe value of 33MHz, which prevents problems with PCI expansion cards.

Mind you, the 100MHz buss is not just for those with bottomless wallets and purses who can afford the latest high-speed Intel processors, since there are various manufacturers developing a Super7 chipset, which will work with Socket 7 processors (such as the AMD K6 series). Industry experts are actually predicting that the 100MHz buss will give greater improvements for the Super7 motherboards than for Slot 1 Pentium II systems. This is because the two major areas of improvement for Super7 are the increased clock speed of the Level 2 cache, and that of the entire system RAM. Since the Pentium II chips already feature a Level 2 cache that runs either at the processor clock speed, or at half of it, the improvements with the 100MHz buss are not

MICROSOFT NEWS

Microsoft have made yet another attempt to clarify audio streaming technology: we now have DirectShow audio plug-ins. This name change does help to reduce the current confusion between the DirectX foundation layer (which includes DirectSound soundcard drivers), and the DirectX media layer (which includes DirectShow, and controls media streaming). However, the poor software houses will soon have to refer to audio plug-ins as using DirectShow — formerly known as DirectX Media Streaming Services, formerly known as ActiveMovie, formerly known as Quartz! More pleasing is the news that the infamous

Windows 95 11-device MIDI limit is reported to be vanquished forever in Windows 98. Although I haven't yet confirmed this for myself, I have just received the full shipping version of Windows 98, and hope to report on this in more detail soon. General impressions seem to be that it is more stable than Windows 95 (not surprising, since many people consider it to be a bug-fixed version of the same). No major incompatibilities with music software have apparently been reported, although I did spot one user reporting a crash with the Cool Edit Pro 1.1 Noise Generator option. Mind you, it's always wise to wait a month or two if you can, to give developers a chance to produce bug-fixes if necessary.

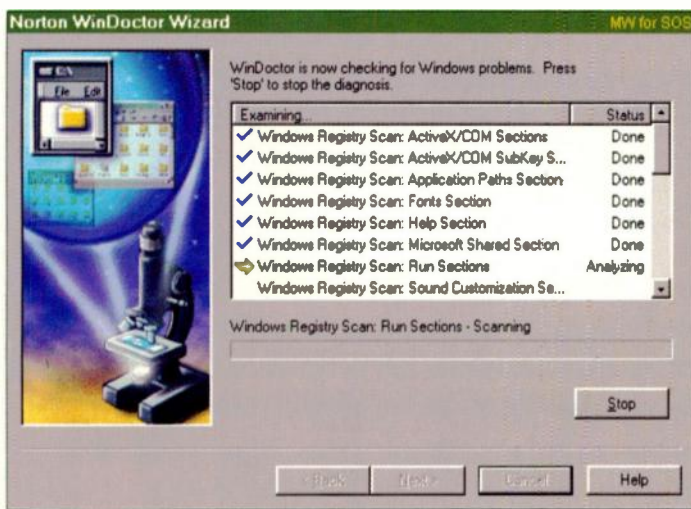
so dramatic — but, of course, the 350 and 400MHz processors themselves are faster.

Unfortunately, there are other components that will normally need upgrading to run reliably with any motherboard featuring the higher 100MHz buss speed, and the eagle-eyed among you may already have noticed PC memory ads quoting different prices for SDRAM suitable for 100MHz operation. Memory with Intel's new PC 100 spec will cost significantly more than the 66MHz-rated version, and while some people have managed to use their existing memory modules with 75 and even 83MHz buss speeds, 100MHz really does need these faster memory chips.

NORTON UTILITIES VERSION 3

The Norton Utilities suite for both the Mac and PC seems to be the standard by which most other toolkits are judged, so when a major update appears it's worth examining what's new:

- The Integrator (see screenshot, left) provides quick and easy access to the other programs in the suite, and this is similar to the approach of both *Nuts & Bolts* (which I mentioned in PC Notes October '97) and *First Aid 97* (mentioned in the May '97 PC Notes).
- System Doctor now repairs as well as detecting viruses.
- Rescue Disk (which creates floppy disks to boot into Windows 95 if your hard drive causes problems) now has options to use Zip or Jaz drives. The original floppy disk option is still available, and this will get you as far as DOS, so that you can use other DOS-based Norton Utility programs to solve your problem, but the Zip/Jaz version boots directly to Windows, where the Rescue Recovery Wizard starts up to get your system running properly.
- The Crash Guard 3.0 utility runs in the background, using 150K of memory, and intercepts crashes, with an Unfreeze option that allows you to save your work before closing the offending application.
- LiveUpdate Pro claims to find and install the latest updates for all your software applications, using the Norton Web Services web site, but as always its usefulness depends on what manufacturers it has in its database — music software is still



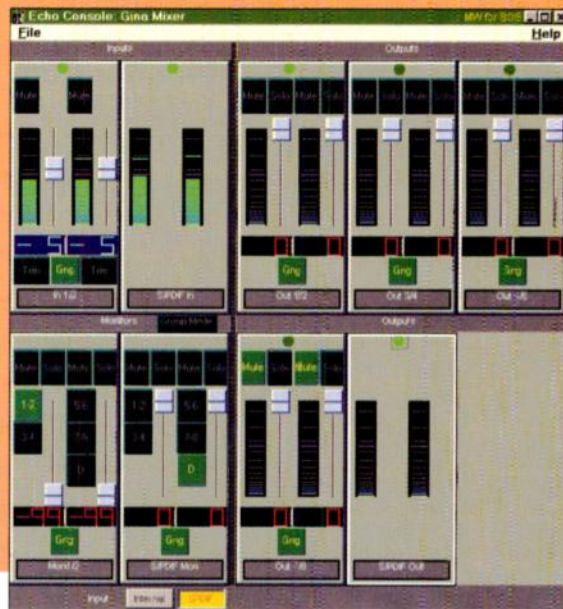
If your PC has problems, the Norton WinDoctor will diagnose and repair them. Particularly thorough is the Registry scan (shown here). Once this is complete, the repair window appears and you can decide on the best course of action for any faults found.

PC UPDATES

Akai have posted a new improved PC version 2 of their MESA sample editing software on their website (www.akai.com/akaipro). This includes many of the features of the Mac version 2, although neither the press release I have

nor the web site specify exactly what these are. Note that it still only currently supports the XL-series samplers (S2000, S3000XL, S3200XL and CD3000XL).

Now that the Layla soundcard has finally emerged from hiding, Event have released yet another



set of drivers, which work with Darla, Gina, and Layla (version 3.05). Sadly, a tiny bug has crept back into the S/PDIF input function on Gina only, but by the time you read this a fix should be available on the web site (www.event1.com). However, probably a lot more interesting to most people is that the so-called Echo Console has been released along with the drivers, and this gathers all routing and monitoring functions into one easy-to-use panel. It may look slightly 'clunky' (see screenshot), but that's because it's fully resizable (the slider caps, buttons, and meters all change to suit the current Console size), and you can change the colour scheme as well. A comprehensive Acrobat-format manual is also included, which should result in a lot less confusion all round.

The new Echo Console for the Darla, Gina, and Layla soundcards makes monitoring and metering a lot easier. Inputs are top left (with associated monitoring routing functions beneath) and outputs are on the right.

unfortunately a minority interest, so you'll probably still be better off perusing the appropriate web sites for yourself.

- Norton WinDoctor is a new addition which scans for problems with the Registry, file associations, and shortcuts, and then offers manual or automatic repair facilities. This is very similar to the approach taken by *First Aid 97*, and is just as useful.
- The Optimisation Wizard reorganises your Registry data for optimum performance (there's a similar option in *Nuts & Bolts*), as well as adjusting the swap file. This latter option is the only area in which you may want to tread carefully, since I ended up with a swap file that had a minimum size of 96Mb. The idea is that setting a large minimum swap file size reduces or eliminates swap file fragmentation. You can

benefit from this, but you may want to reduce its value (I reduced mine to 32Mb).

- The final new option is Speed Start. I made some comments about Windows 98 in the August '98 PC Notes, and consider that one of the three main reasons to buy it is its much faster loading of applications, due in part to reorganisation of the file order on the hard drive. Norton's Speed Disk has similar options, but Speed Start monitors disk accesses when loading any application, and can subsequently give much faster loading times — I certainly noticed a significant improvement, although you may want to disable this background utility when undertaking hard disk recording.

For those who have not used these utilities before, it's worth pointing out that although many of them default to being loaded automatically every time you start your PC, you can disable this and only use specific modules as and when required. This saves memory and resources, and should be the preferred option for PC musicians. The only one I leave running permanently on my system is CrashGuard, which, according to its Statistics page, has intercepted four *Cubase* crashes since its installation, letting me save my music before re-booting.

Norton Utilities 3 may be the most expensive toolkit (street price about £70, or upgrade from version 2 at £40), but it's still the best, with few unnecessary frills. For example, even though the Rescue options may rarely be used, when something goes wrong you'll be very glad that you have them. Highly recommended.

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The DS2416 offers the mixing power of the Yamaha O2R digital mixer, complete with 24 channels of digital mixing, plus 16 tracks of hard disk recording with 32 bit resolution.

Checklist approved	0%	Sutekina price
£CALL	£CALL	£CALL

KEYBOARDS

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64-voice poly, multi-mode resonant filters D-Beam Controller allows for control via hand movement over infrared light beam.



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	£82.41 x 12	

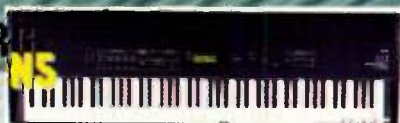
ROLAND JX 305



The JX-305 Groove Synth is a high-performance dance-orientated 61-note synthesizer with killer sounds, cutting edge pre-set patterns and massive real-time control.

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KORG N1 & NS



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Checklist approved	0%	Sutekina price
N1 £296 x 4	Dep £286, £77.50 x 12	N1 £1198 or less
NS £149 x 4	Dep £127, £78.86 x 6	NS £288 or less

KORG TR RACK



- 32MB of waveform memory
- 16 Part multitimbral
- Powerful effects section, 14 Main effects, 100 insert effects

Checklist approved	0%	Sutekina price
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EMU AUDIY 2000



Audiy 2000 is E-mu's new rhythmic synthesizer that introduces synthesis and rhythm generation technologies to give life to your music like never before.

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£324 x 4	Deposit £280	£1,299
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MACKIE 1202



- Unbeatable Sound Quality
- 12 Line Inputs
- 4 Mic Inputs
- 3 Band EQ

Checklist approved	26.8%	Sutekina price
£88 x 4	Deposit £49	£349 or less
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STEINBERG NS 333



Two pieces of classic analog synthesizer hardware incorporated as software. All the quirks and subtle qualities of analog synths, coupled with the convenience of modern computers.

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£35 x 4	N/A	£139 or less

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Hard Disk Recording
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Wide Range of Third-Party Plug Ins available.

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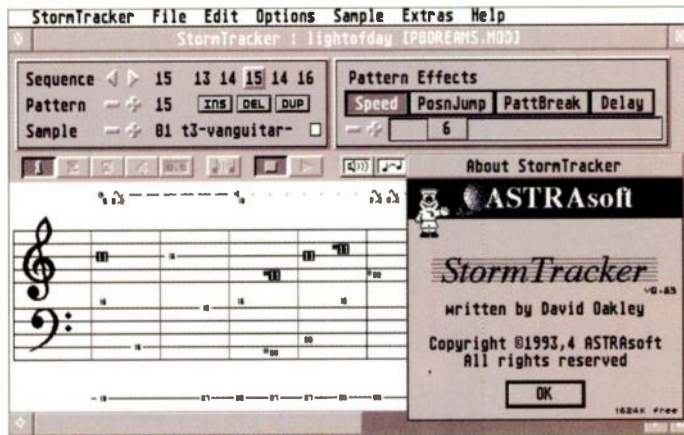
DEREK JOHNSON unearths a simple but fun Atari tracker and sound chip synth, and explains how your ST can help you train your ears...

Back in December 1994, Vic Lennard, when he was still in charge of this column, gave a rave review to a shareware 'tracker' program from AstraSoft called *StormTracker*. I mention this because in my monthly trawl around the Internet, I found the AstraSoft web page. *StormTracker* hasn't had any great developments since Vic looked at it, but it is now shareware, rather than a commercial program, with a registration fee of just £10. Trackers, for those of you who are wondering what I'm going on about, are pieces of software that let you create finished performances by layering and sequencing samples of audio. The finished product — both sounds and performance — is saved as a MOD file, which is the standard file format for trackers.

GOING DOWN A STORM

StormTracker is one of the best trackers on the ST platform, with an easy-to-navigate front end that emulates the feel of a pattern-based MIDI sequencer. Essentially, it offers four audio channels, variable-playback sample rate (to weigh sample quality against available memory), and the ability to load samples in a variety of formats (including AVR, SAM and SPL). The intuitive on-screen staff display lets you easily choose a playback pitch for your samples, and if your raw material needs tweaking, an integrated sample editor lets you do basic loop and pitch manipulation.

David Oakley, who wrote *StormTracker*, is also behind *DeskTracker* (shareware registration



Left: The MIDI sequencer-like front end gives *StormTracker* an immediately familiar feel.

£5), a simple but elegant MOD-player desk accessory. Graphically, it's straightforward: you get just the controls you need, although there is an option for a gimmicky spectrum analyser and oscilloscope. Of course, both *StormTracker* and *DeskTracker* can be downloaded from AstraSoft's web site (www.astrasoft.ml.org/index.html), but for the net-less amongst you, check out the Goodman International public domain library (16 Conrad Close, Meir Hay, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs ST3 1SW. Tel 01782 336222).

Trackers can be quite rewarding to use, especially if you have a good sampling package. Just don't expect completely pro results, especially on common-or-garden-variety STs. If you're running a Falcon, however, *StormTracker* can take advantage of that computer's vastly improved audio hardware and sound quality.

CHIPS WITH THAT?

Programs for creating music solely with the ST's built-in 3-channel sound chip often have a similar feel to trackers. Rather than chaining samples together, you're telling the sound chip what sound to make, and then defining a pattern of notes for the chip to play; such software is pretty much designed to produce music which can then be embedded in another application, typically a



Below: *DeskTracker* has a simple but elegant interface.

game or stand-alone graphics-plus-music 'demo'. *XLR8 — Chip Composer*, from Sentry NL, has been on the shareware scene for a while now (registration is US\$10). I found a link for this software lurking in the MID/audio list of the Ultimate TOS Software Index (ping4.ping.be/dipching-drulchor/PRG-IND2.HTM), during the same trawl that re-introduced me to *StormTracker*. It seems to be a superior example of its type, with an accessible and graphically interesting interface, plus the option to output your performance over MIDI (when you register, that is!). The pattern-based sequencer is joined by a complete instrument editor with tone controls, and volume control over every pattern or individual note. Accept that the sounds produced by your Atari's sound chip will pretty much always sound like they belong in a mid-'80s computer game, and you can have quite a bit of fun. Have a listen to some of the example files to hear some interesting examples of what can be achieved. Cheesy, yes, but more complicated, musically, than you'd think a 3-channel chip would be capable of.

EARING AID

There are several examples of ear training tools available for the ST, and I've just discovered a new one: *HearCoach* v0.93 is the first program from Swede Joakim Hgberg, and creditable it is too. For now, all the software will

manage is interval drills, but Joakim hopes to add rhythm, scale and chord exercises in the future. Using *HearCoach* is a doddle. First of all, you select which intervals will be played to you, via the ST's speaker or as a MIDI note; intervals from a minor second up to a perfect eleventh

are supplied. You can then choose a MIDI playback channel, along with program change and velocity, the lowest and highest note values that can be played, and note length. There's also an option to automatically play the next interval immediately after you've correctly guessed. For the completely baffled, the software will show you the correct interval, and if you want to keep track of your progress, a chart shows you which intervals you did and didn't get right.

HearCoach is actually shareware, but the registration is just US\$2! Find it at: <http://hem1.passagen.se/gokmase/atari/>

At present, *HearCoach* simply offers interval training, but it does this very well.



MIDI merge boxes

You can't combine MIDI signals just by joining the wires together. Merging MIDI datastreams is a job for a microprocessor. There is one at the heart of each model in our famous range of MIDI merge units.



The new mighty **Little 2M** handles all types of MIDI data including *MIDI Time Code* and *System Exclusive*.

The compact low-cost **Little 2M** is powered via one of its MIDI IN lines. Thus, it needs neither batteries nor an external adaptor.

Our larger merge boxes employ more conventional power supply schemes.

This means that they can support extra input and output ports.



The classic **2M** merges two sources, the **3M** merges three, the **5M** merges five, while the **9M** impressively merges nine! These devices can also handle all types of MIDI data, including *MIDI Time Code* and *System Exclusive*. Many automatic features enhance performance and convenience.

The **2M** and **3M** units have built-in mains power supplies. The **5M** and **9M** units are now supplied with external mains adaptors.

- Little 2M MIDI Merge Unit** £39.95
- 2M MIDI Merge Unit** £69.95
- 3M MIDI Merge Unit** £99.00
- 5M MIDI Merge Unit** £125.95
- 9M MIDI Merge Unit** £169.95

MIDI to CV converter



Little MCV will let your MIDI system control your analogue synths. It can generate control voltages for the 'one volt per octave' (logarithmic) or the so-called 'volts per hertz' (linear) systems. The gate output can be set to five volts positive, ten volts positive or S-trig.

There are MIDI IN, CV OUT and GATE OUT sockets. The mains power supply is built-in.

Little MCV MIDI to CV Converter.. £75.95

Talented tape sync



You can use the **TS1** to sync your MIDI sequencer to any decent tape machine. When you start, stop or shuttle your tape back and fore, **TS1** tells your sequencer

to play in time, just as if your MIDI voices were extra tracks on the tape.

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The **TS1** merges MIDI data received with its own sync data. You won't need to swap around the MIDI wiring, as **TS1** has four MIDI ports and automatic signal routing.

The **TS1** has a built-in mains power supply.

TS1 MIDI Tape Sync Unit..... £99.00

MIDI to DIN Sync box

Classic drum machines and sequencers, such as the **TB-303** and **TR-808** are equipped with Sync24 ("DIN Sync") inputs. When connected up via **MDS**, they should start, play in time, and stop automatically by remote control from MIDI master equipment.



The unit is easy-to-use, compact and contains an integral mains power supply.

MDS MIDI to Sync24 Converter.. £69.95

Long distance MIDI

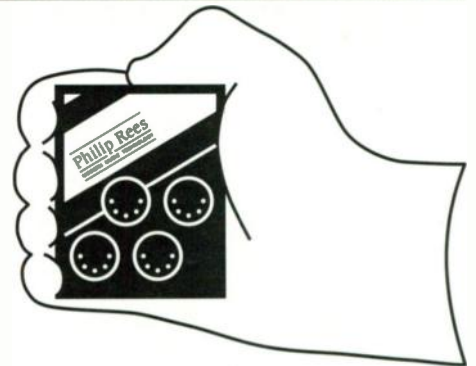
These line driver systems overcome the 15m limit of standard MIDI hardware, by converting the signal to a differential (balanced) format.



MLD is unidirectional and has a range of 1km. The bidirectional **MTR** system has a range of 150m. Both systems have built-in mains power supplies.

MLD MIDI Line Driver £89.95

MTR MIDI Line Driver £99.00



Functional simplicity

Simple MIDI switchers

These MIDI selectors could solve your MIDI routing problems and save you the inconvenience of swapping cables about.



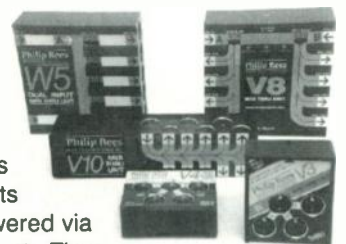
The **3B** is a novel changeover switch, which will let you bypass your computer or sequencer without moving cables.

- 2S MIDI Selector** £12.95
- 5S MIDI Selector** £29.95
- 3B MIDI Selector** £29.95
- 9S MIDI Selector** £39.95

Low cost thru units

Some MIDI gear may lack thru sockets. Chains of more than three MIDI devices can suffer from data corruption. You can solve these problems at low cost with *Philip Rees'* MIDI thru units.

The **V3** is a battery powered 1-into-3 thru box. The **V4** has four outputs and is powered via its MIDI input. The **V8**, which has 2 inputs and 8 outputs, is now supplied with an external ac adaptor. The **V10** is a mains-powered 1-into-10 unit. The mains-powered **W5** has independent source selection for each of its 5 outputs.



The **V8**, which has 2 inputs and 8 outputs, is now supplied with an external ac adaptor. The **V10** is a mains-powered 1-into-10 unit. The mains-powered **W5** has independent source selection for each of its 5 outputs.

- V3 MIDI Thru Unit** £12.95
- V4 MIDI Thru Unit** £19.95
- V8 MIDI Thru Unit** £35.95
- V10 MIDI Thru Unit** £39.95
- W5 Dual Input Thru Unit** £55.95

Philip Rees
MODERN MUSIC TECHNOLOGY



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demo DOCTOR

If you'd like our resident specialist **JOHN HARRIS** to review your demo tape, just send it on cassette or DAT, with recording details and a photograph, to: **Demo Doctor, Sound On Sound, Media House, Trafalgar Way, Bar Hill, Cambridge CB3 8SQ.**

Readers submitting demo tapes should note that SOS regards the inclusion of photos or artwork with demos as permission for the magazine to reproduce this material free of charge, as illustration, with any review of the accompanying tape.

THE NEXUS EFFECT

Recording Venue: Home.

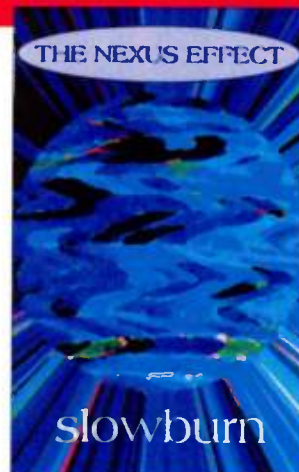
Recording Equipment: PC running *Cakewalk Home Studio* sequencer, Digitech Studio Quad V2 effects, SPL Stereo Vitalizer enhancer, Behringer Composer compressor, Tascam DA20 DAT, Samson Mixpad mixer.

I've reviewed the work of Peter Michael Rosenberg, the face behind the Nexus effect, in the quickies section before, and he seems to be going from strength to strength. His style has changed a bit, possibly because he's been listening to the Chemical Brothers and Massive Attack, to mention just two listed influences. Like many readers who send in instrumental demos, he seems to do it all himself — writing and recording the music, and even designing his own cassette covers.



This tape stands out from the bunch because it doesn't have any lengthy, overblown intros but cuts straight into a wicked groove, using carefully considered sounds that sit well together in the mix. It's immediately intriguing, and from the first ten seconds I can tell that it's going to be a good demo. A little 120Hz wide-band EQ brings out the really low bass in the mix, but it's not what I'd call an essential improvement.

Peter Rosenberg's musical strengths could, paradoxically, also be his



weaknesses. The second composition, for example, with its jazz leanings and jolly tune, takes the piece into test-card territory. This is fine if that's what you're trying to sell, but I can't help feeling that it's too much of a contrast to the first track, which definitely heads towards club. Modernising the sound of this second and subsequent compositions would require stripping them down, looking for the killer phrases and grooves, and using them to create something else.

'Cairo' is the title of the third and final composition, and it's a track that any modern jazz combo could take and cover successfully. I especially like the use of the burbling synth, strong in the lower-mid frequencies and with a modulated filter which has the effect of lifting the piece as the higher frequencies are introduced into the sound. This gives the mix a more modern edge. □

SCRT

Recording Venue: Home.

Recording Equipment: Steinberg Cubase sequencer running on Apple Mac LCII, Fostex M80 8-track, Roland 48-channel line mixer, Seck 12:8:2 mixer, Yamaha SPX90 effects, Alesis Midiverb III effects, Audio Technica AT4033 and Shure SM58 microphones.

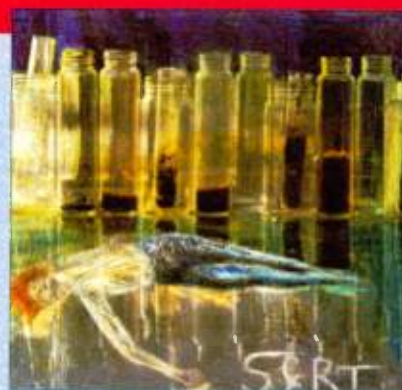
SCRT are primarily a film and TV music band who have had some success getting their music broadcast over the past four years on the BBC and independent TV. It's not hard to see why when you listen to their first non-film/TV-related EP release, because of the quality of the ideas.

Strangely, however, the recording, although clean and well balanced, lacks the hand of a producer to add that extra something to the compositions. There are times, for example, where the piano cries out for a tasteful reverb to at least give it some sustain ('Blackwater'), and the obvious penchant for backwards sounds starts to become tedious eventually. The reversed sounds, whether sampled or

taped, are nevertheless effective, especially on the opening song, a cover of the Stranglers' 'Golden Brown'. High, reversed guitar notes play the melody line, and the strange vibrato lends them a compelling, plaintive quality.

Nicki Leighton-Thomas' contribution on vocals is excellent, but she's left pretty exposed on some of the songs, and nowhere more so than on the chorus of 'World Within a World', where the arrangement fails to achieve the necessary dynamic lift into the chorus. It's simply that the backing vocals the piece cries out for arrive late and are mixed far too low. On a more positive note, the vocals have been very professionally recorded and sound great on all the songs, especially within the warm-sounding mix of 'Belle De Nuit'.

The use of guest instruments, sampled or played, gives the EP an interesting quality. I particularly liked the Middle Eastern-style violin on the aforementioned 'World Within a World'. The natural sound of the instrument is retained, with a beautiful woody tone, and the



phrase it plays is tastefully used within the song arrangement. John Phillips' trumpet on a remix of 'Blackwater' is well recorded, with a crisp upper-mid tone and fine choice of large-room reverb, giving it a place in the mix where it doesn't interfere with the vocal.

In short, this demo shows plenty of good ideas and fine musicianship but occasional lapses in arrangement, which a producer of the calibre of Rupert Hine could sort out effectively should the band get a deal. □

ROYCE

Recording Venue: Home/Sam's Studio, Newcastle.

Recording Equipment: Tascam 488 8-track, Digitech GSP 2101 effects, LA Audio 4c, SPL Vitalizer enhancer, Alesis RA100 amp and Monitor 1 speakers, Roland R5 drum machine, AKG C3000 microphone, Aphex 107 mic preamp, Alesis Quadverb effects, Sony DTC A6 DAT, Tandy PZM microphone.

The first three songs on this demo were recorded in the home studio of bassist Neil Cooke in Seaham, County Durham. A drum machine was used for these tracks but the band were able to use real drums at the session in Sam's Studio, Newcastle, for the final two songs.

Listening to the mix of the first song, 'Easy Now', it seems that the band have made tasteful use of the Vitalizer to add presence to the top end of the master. This gives a touch of class to the vocal sound and lends the guitars (recorded via the speaker-simulator output of the GSP 2101) a contemporary brightness when overdriven.

The mix balance on this first track is fine, and I can only suggest a couple of changes. Firstly, the snare could have been made more interesting by using a different sound on the alternate second and fourth beats. This is easily achieved with drum machines or sequencers triggering sound modules. The best way to retain continuity while introducing variety would be to trigger two snare samples for the fourth-beat hit and mix

the two sounds to taste. Slight changes in pitch for the same sample might also work. The result would be a more realistic drum track.

Secondly, the sound of the guitar is a touch too close in frequency range to the vocal. Both have a gravelly tone, and I would suggest finding out where the vocal grit is (my guess is around 900Hz) and making sure that the overdriven guitar leaves a little hole for the vocal by not being too active in this range. As it happens, the presence and warmth of the sound when vocalist Ian sings a less angst-ridden song helps to alleviate a potential problem, especially on some of the other mixes. However, he's got such a good rock voice that it should be the guitar that's EQ'd to make way for it.

It was interesting for me to hear the difference that real drums made on these recordings. Energy is the most obvious change, but the vocals and guitars are also benefiting from the greater separation afforded by recording in a commercial studio. Undoubtedly this is one of the improvements offered by using a good microphone, but I notice that the guitars are less distorted, and this also creates more space for Ian's gravelly vocal to work. Some of the vocal compression is over the top and has caused sibilance, but in general both the songs and production work is improved. □

UNIVERSE

Recording Venue: Home.

Recording Equipment: Tascam 2385 cassette 8-track, Alesis ADAT digital 8-track, Spirit Folio Rac Pac mixer, Allen and Heath GS1 mixer, Shure SM58 microphone, Tandy PZM microphone, AKG C1000 microphone, Yamaha FX500 effects, Zoom 1202 effects, Aphex Type C2 Aural Exciter, Alesis Nanoverb effects, ART DXR Elite effects, Phonic compressor, Marshall DRP1 guitar preamp, Philips DCC730 DCC machine, Aiwa cassette deck, Rotel RA930AX amp with Tannoy 631 monitors, Arcam Delta 290 with B&W 610 monitors, Cakewalk sequencing software running on a PC, Music X software running on an Amiga.

This band have such a large equipment list because two setups were used to record the tracks! Sequenced and backing instruments were recorded to the Tascam and then bounced to the ADAT, where vocals and final overdubs were added at a different home venue. This seems a very odd way to do things when the sequenced sounds could have been run live on the mix from timecode, to free up tracks on the recorder and preserve sound quality. Apparently it just 'happened' that way. Regardless of method, the demo doesn't seem to have suffered and is a pleasant enough slice of guitar-based pop, with piano and synth-generated strings providing the main additional instrumental interest.

'Time on my hands', the first song, is well arranged, with choruses lifting where they should, courtesy of a nice counter-melody on the strings and an organ chordal pad. The addition of congas is welcome here too, but they're mixed too low and the level could have been improved by simply nudging the fader up a bit or, better still, using some EQ. I mention EQ because the strings could also have been lifted in level, but their lower-mid frequencies would then have started to obscure the congas. A little more warmth for the strings in the lower mids, at around 500Hz, and an expansive reverb with some presence, such as a chamber or plate with a filter setting of 15kHz, would really bring out the part. This

universe



time on my star

would allow some upper-mid frequencies to be added to the congas at around 3 or 4kHz, which would bring out the slap of the conga sound itself, allowing it to cut through the mix without being turned up. As you can probably gather from the above, it's almost impossible to alter one element of a mix without considering how it will affect other sounds, so they must be made to work together.

The second song on this demo is an improvement, both in terms of the mix and of the music. Some of this improvement is attributable to the better vocal performance — the vocalist is happier singing this type of upbeat song, in this key, and it shows in the pitching and confident style. The electric guitars add more body to the sound too, and are more effective than the wispy strummed acoustic on the first song, having weight in the crucial lower-mids but also retaining the bite of the upper frequencies. I'm less impressed by the lead guitar sound, though, which has the buzz of a chainsaw due to the DI style of recording.

One of the good things about the guitar sound is the complete absence of any digital modulated effect, such as chorus, flange or phase, which would have been out of context with the retro feel of the songs. The third song is especially good in this respect, and is probably the best contender for a single, with a strong chorus and use of strings and brass to lift sections of the arrangement. The more keyboard-oriented dance feel of the final song is probably worth exploring, and I think it would be a move in the right direction for the band, providing that their guitar energy is not lost. □

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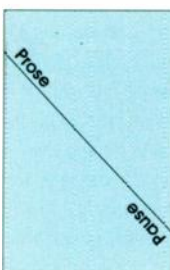
SVHS ADAT cassettes.



demo DOCTOR

▶ QUICKIES

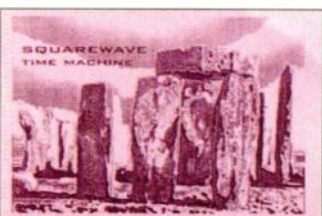
FABRICE RETKOWSKY has a pretty minimal setup, consisting of Roland JV1080 and D10 synths triggered from the Amiga *Bars & Pipes* sequencer. The instrumentals he composes are loosely classical or ambient in theme, and the mixes (recorded to Sony MiniDisc) are crystal clear but sonically small. A visit to a post-production suite could improve them if he ever felt close to releasing a CD. Certainly, wide-band EQ, with some boost at 120Hz and



12kHz and cut at 1kHz, takes the hard edge off the sound and introduces a touch of class. So don't despair if you're short of recording equipment!

The compositions feature well-chosen sounds, but the arrangements could do with tightening up — it's not enough to have one or two looped riffs for a five-minute composition of this nature.

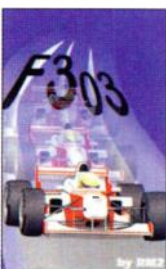
SQUAREWAVE is the keyboard project of Nick Toone, a "reformed guitarist" who decided to dabble with synthesizers after hearing Ozric Tentacles and Hawkwind. How ironic that the Ozrics, who I saw at this year's Glastonbury, played a set that comprised of many lengthy guitar solos and prog rock 'chops'! Still, Nick's demo has some fine trippy grooves that wouldn't have been out of place at the festival itself. The sound is full, with good use of stereo panning,



complementary sounds and decent breaks. I especially like the pitch-drop drum break in the first mix, which could have been an Akai sample or clever use of his Alesis SR16. Most impressive of all is the fact that the mix was achieved using a Spirit Notepad console aided by a PC running *Cubasis*. Excellent stuff!

TIM WILSON's demo develops sound textures triggered using the *KCS Omega* software picked up as a freebie disk some time back. The music is a series of probabilities defined by a non-standard modal scale, note lengths and the note presently sounding within the piece (I think!). Having established a conceptual framework, Tim writes out what is essentially computer code, feeds it into the computer and "lets it run free". No two performances are the same, and the human element is retained as Tim tweaks and tailors the sounds. This is electronic ambient music free of crass New Age-style sounds and it works very well. The recording itself is a bit noisy, due to a low recorded level on cassette and some noisy digital sound sources, but in general the relaxing nature of the triggered sounds comes across to the listener. Tim hopes to move into working with sound and light installations, so if there's anyone out there who's interested in his musical approach perhaps we could put you in touch!

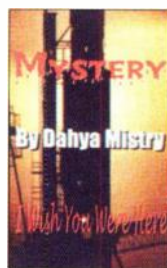
RM2: John Senior and co-conspirator Paul Burns go chiefly for the underground sound on their demo of breakbeats and electro. The 303 sounds cut through the fatter bass lines provided by the Novation Bass Station, but in truth they could mould themselves to the mix more effectively in places with extra mid around 500Hz. The mixes are



minimal, with concentration on the breaks and some nice use of sub-bass. My favourite is the frantic 'Katy The Dog', complete with phased drum loop and synthesized whistle — very droll. On this track some of the breaks are constructed in such a way that they could almost be DJ mixes between two decks, and yet there's still plenty of scope here for live performance mixing.

DAHYA MISTRY is influenced by Asian Hindi film music, and

consequently he's going for the big movie production sound, with plenty of strings, yet retaining a strong dance beat. A walking synth bass line and '70s funk drum-machine groove provide the necessary rhythm, while piano and strings take the melody lines. Here the piano could do with a



longer, more expansive reverb than the slightly pre-delayed room reverb that the preset piano patch is supplied with. This is also the case for the

second composition, an anthemic ballad requiring the 'big' reverb sound of a plate or hall algorithm. The rhythm section and bass end of the mix is very tight and compressed sounding, but the mid-range piano and strings have been mixed too low. This reduces the impact of the melody and also the dynamic effect of swelling strings. I'd give them a bit more level.

PERFECT CIRCLE: This Conway four-piece launch into the world of Celtic romanticism with their opening song, 'Dutiful Sea', recorded at Rockcliffe studios in North Wales. It's a melodic rock workout that sounds a bit boxy, but a slight cut at 1kHz sorts that out, and some 12KHz boost adds more presence. I also tried a valve compressor across the mix, which tightened up the sound and added punch, so that wouldn't be a bad post-production idea for this song. The second mix doesn't need the same treatment but is awash with reverb. The vocal is also mixed too low, so I'd go for a remix on this one. The vocal line, which shows some REM influence, needs compressing to help the dynamic, but otherwise this is a fine, powerful song. 'Always you' was the final mix I listened to. This is a bit scratchy in the upper-mid frequencies, and I think it's been over-equalised across the board, suggesting either that the monitors may be lacking in upper-mid (hardly likely with JBLs), or that the engineer had to mix the band on the same day he recorded them and consequently suffered a temporary loss of treble.

AVERAGE RADICAL: There are plenty of questions in the letter that accompanies this demo, from composer Trevor Scarrow. He thinks his vocals are over-compressed, but they sound just about right to me. He

also asks what's the point of de-essing a vocal and then enhancing it. My answer would be that just because a vocal processor has a de-esser and an enhancer, that doesn't mean you have to use both of them unless there's a problem with the vocal sound. An enhancer might help an SM58 mic to sound more classy, but you shouldn't need a lot of it. Trevor has used chorus on his vocal, and finds the effect uneven. This is because chorus actually modulates the signal sharp and flat in pitch compared to the original, and it could be that there's too much chorus and not enough dry signal in the mix. The chorus effect should be coming back on separate channels into the desk and then should be mixed against the dry signal, which is also kept on a separate channel. If you still don't like the sound I'd suggest using a pitch-shift effect instead, which keeps the effected vocal at a constant pitch above or below (or both in stereo) the original. After all this I don't seem to have much space left to review the songs, but my favourite was 'The Scene in the Court'.

PAUL KLEIN seems to have sent us in two tapes under different band names, but as both are solo projects it's easier to use his name. The first mix is a dance version of the old Minnie Ripperton song 'Loving You', in which he's gone for a rather ploddy octave-bouncing bass line and pedestrian drum beat. The emphasis on the bass end of the mix tends to



show this up too, and it's only during the middle eight section and snare build-ups of the chorus that the rhythmic groove comes to life. More syncopated snare fills and a bit more adventure on the hi-hat would do the trick. Finally, on this track, the vocal is mixed far too low. It's been well manipulated on the sampler, so let's hear it! For the second mix Paul has taken an old Foxx/Shears/Currie track 'Young Savage'. This is a much better interpretation and he's obviously more at home with this material, although it would have been better to interpret the vocal line in a more modern way, by choosing phrases rather than keeping the whole thing. ☺

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East West (USA)

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(9/10 REVIEW)
Produced by MadJef Taylor for East☆West.
MadJef Taylor's album credits include artists like Janet Jackson, Michael Jackson, Boyz II Men, New Edition, Karyn White and many of the albums produced by Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis.

This has to be one of the hottest collections of dope beatz and hip-hop grooves available anywhere. MadJef has compiled a fresh variety of beats, loops, scratches, bass and lead lines, live drums and fills, kicks, snares, and guitar samples in construction kits with MIDI-files. An absolute must for any Hip-Hop & R&B producer. His unique drum programming will put a groove in your tracks that will give you the edge you need to make great records. AUDIO CD plus MIDI-Files: £59.95

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Produced by James Bernard for East☆West. This BEST SELLING 2 CD SET has the most amazing collection of Drum 'n' Bass grooves and breakdowns all in construction kit format. It contains over two hours of the latest drum and bass grooves by NYC producer and sound designer James Bernard. First you get the complete loop, followed by the drum part, sub-bass part, synth pads and individual drum hits - everything is broken down so you can use as much, or as little of each loop as you want. This collection is huge value for money - you get two CDs for the price of one! 8/10 Review - KEYBOARD, USA. 2 CD-AUDIO Set: £59.95

HYPNOTICA
Produced by Perry Geyer and Greg Hawkes for East☆West.
"Fat phase-shifted and ring-modulated filter swoops, eerie vibrato tones bouncing through a delay line, Theremin glissandi, chuffing machine clanks, crispy white-noise explosions, distant klaxons buzzing, whippy burbles, carverous whispers - it's all here. The production values on Hypnotica are almost too high. Many of the samples consist of two or three layers of sound, almost like mini-production pieces of the trance/ambient variety. Reverb and chorusing add richness and space to a mix that glissens with high end. Truth be told Dr.Who never sounded this good. 8/10" (Keyboard USA)

New from the creators of "Technophobia" and "TeknoIndustrial" - HYPNOTICA is loaded with fresh sounding cutting edge textures, trance and ambient loops, FX, Mind blowing Sweeps, Galactic Noises, Hypnotic sequences and magical sounds for your next rave. HYPNOTICA features complete soundscapes, ambient atmospheres, electronic sample and hold, reverse FX, noise loops, underwater textures, electronic ethnic voices, ring modulation, liquid audio, laser sweeps, takeoffs, pans, white noise FX, low frequency sequences, oscillators, android heartbeats, drones, screams, synth bleeps, intergalactic textures etc. Orb meets Future Sound Of London - a magical mystery tour! CD-AUDIO: £59.95

SMOOV GROOVES
Produced by Michael Bland & Sonny Thompson for East☆West.
"This 42-track CD doesn't bother with any demos or clumsy spoken introductions: it just kicks off with the first of the loops - and what a great way to start. Slow and meaningfully funky vibes seem to pour out of every note and, despite being more laidback than an arthritic tortoise on Magodon, the timings, as you might expect, are absolutely spot-on.

The loops range from 60 to 100bpm, and vary from sort of camp '70s cop show feel right up to the familiar spaced-out jammerai-esque MTV style of the '70s. The recording quality is as good as the excellent playing. With these guys as his rhythm section Prince can justifiably sing "My name is Prince, and I am Fon-Keh", and with this CD in your collection you can now say the same thing. FIVE STARS out of five ☆☆☆☆☆. (Sound on Sound, UK)

From the rhythm section of PRINCE and the 'New Power Generation' - Michael Bland & Sonny Thompson. SMOOV GROOVES is the sequel to the critically acclaimed Funky Ass Loops CD and contains all the loops you need to lay down everything from slow grooves to 70's funk (the tempos range from 60-100 BPM). First you get a full mix of each loop, followed by the drums, bass, guitar, percussion, keys etc. SMOOV GROOVES is without doubt the finest collection of smooth laidback grooves & 70's funk available anywhere for any price!!! - and it comes to you from one of the world's funkiest rhythm sections - Sonny T. & Michael B. Audio CD: £59.95. CD-ROM (Akai or Roland): £99.00

THE ULTIMATE PIANO COLLECTION
(East☆West). REVIEWS: "The Ultimate Piano Collection is, in my experience, as close to the real thing as technology will currently allow" Sound On Sound (UK).
KEYBOARD agreed, awarding the collection 5 out of 5. This collection contains four of the best Pianos ever built. Steinway D, Steinway C, Fazioli F228, and Bösendorfer 225. Every key has been sampled in various attacks, with and without sustain pedal. There are 13 different kinds of piano sounds each with its own characteristics. These pianos start sounding really good with 24 Mb or more of RAM (16Mb minimum is required). Banks up to 64Mb are provided - the current industry standard. CD-ROM (Akai or Roland): £199.95

East West (USA)

ELECTRONICA
Produced by Perry Geyer and Greg Hawkes for East☆West.
"With a range of tempos from 60bpm to a pounding 214 bpm, the spectrum of applications for these samples is reassuringly broad, and as a mixed mode CD, Electronica not only gives you audio samples - but also all the loops as MIDI files.

allowing you to load the data into your sequencer and adapt or adjust the loops for yourself. The loops are generally excellent, and varied enough, both rhythmically and in terms of effects and production, to indicate that some serious time and effort has gone into this disc. Verdict - There's a broad range of applications for these well produced samples. The MIDI files are a big bonus as well. 9/10" - Future Music (UK). In this collection you'll find electro industrial loops & samples, many with MIDI-files (enabling you to recreate & customize these loops). There are two types of loops on ELECTRONICA, complete loops without MIDI-files that were generated 'live' in the studio using a combination of sequencing, synthesis & FX generation, and those with MIDI-files. The first group are complete, without any components: the MIDI-files loops start with the complete loop followed by each individual loop component. There are also many individual sounds at the end. Why do you need the MIDI-files and individual samples? Suppose you're working on a track, and want to combine a few different loops at a particular tempo. You can now do it using the loop sequence data from the MIDI-files to adjust the tempo of each loop in the sequencer - without altering the pitch of the individual samples! Or, you can replace individual samples or parts of the sequences to create new 'custom' loops featuring your own samples. We know some of this is possible with programs such as ReCycle, but you have much more control with the sequence data & loop components. If you don't need this feature you simply use the main loop. The musical content of ELECTRONICA is cutting edge electro industrial for the 90's and beyond. CD-AUDIO & MIDIFILES: £59.95

THE ULTIMATE STRING COLLECTION
(East☆West). The Ultimate String Collection is the new standard for string libraries. The collection is perfectly recorded and includes many unique features that put it in a class of its own. Apart from its superior sound quality, the collection features up to 34 violas. Most of the sections were recorded with double bow action - up and down strokes. This feature provides unparalleled realism for fast sequences. Every section has been recorded with up to 3 tempos. Two different layers per tone are provided for every section, pizzicato, marcato, plus the very best tremolo. The Strings have been recorded completely dry to enable users to choose their own ambience. Akai CD-ROM: £199.95. Roland CD-ROM: £199.95

SCORING TOOLS
(East☆West). Immaculately recorded with a sixty piece world class symphony orchestra, SCORING TOOLS provides you with ORIGINAL orchestral phrases, beginnings and endings, in 3 different keys, 2 different tempos and 7 different styles of music including, Adventure, Fanfare, Romantic, Magical, Mysterious, Suspense and Western. All you have to do to create finished tracks is add your own melodies. There is nothing else available, other than hiring a symphony orchestra and writing and recording the arrangements yourself that enables you to achieve such realistic results - this is the most powerful and inexpensive tool available to create ORIGINAL orchestral soundtracks. 9/10 REVIEW - KEYBOARD (USA). Akai CD-ROM: £199.95. Roland CD-ROM: £199.95

Zero-G (England)

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JUNGLE FRENZY VOLUME 2
Hot on the heels of the best selling Jungle Frenzy... The ultimate resource for drum & bass musicians. Jungle Frenzy 2 picks up where Volume 1 left off. Tons of new breaks, transformations and cuts, basses, pads, fx and vocals, infact - everything you'll need to make your mark on the Drum & Bass world. CD-Rom (Audio, WAV & AIFF) £19.95 (Available Now)

Zero-G (England)

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The Problem: Drum Loops are easy to use. Load them from CD or CD-Rom, adjust the tuning if necessary and away you go. Unfortunately loops are difficult to customise to your needs, so you never seem to have enough of them to find the perfect groove or break. Separate drum samples give you flexibility. You can change sounds, change rhythms and add FX and EQ to individual parts, but inspiration can fade away while you look for the right samples and program the right feel. Wouldn't it be great to have the convenience of loops with the flexibility of separate sounds?

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Chemical Beats: These are loops with masses of attitude. Huge drum sounds and FX crunched through advanced signal processors. Massive grooves to kick start your imagination. Years of playing, programming and engineering expertise at your fingertips, but so flexible that you may never run out of new rhythms and sounds to try! To complete this awesome package, there are extra mad percussion loops, thunderous basses, radio loops, cutting edge synth & guitar FX, plus a vast collection of drum & cymbal bits. If you're into BIG beats, this is the CD-Rom you've been waiting for! Double CD-Rom for Akai S3000 series £119.00. Audio CD (Selection of loops and sounds) £59.95 (Available Now)

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(Zero-G). The third and final chapter from the loonies who bought us the classics 'Unhinged' and 'Ghost In The Machine'. Asylum is the most insane offering yet. A wild collection of strange loops, crazed voices, twisted noise and just plain madness. Asylum is the most comprehensive of them all! In 'Ward A' you will find BPM grouped loops that will have the same effect on you as a month of electric shock therapy - in other words you will discover large selections of noises that make programming your own grooves and atmospheres in a Cuckooland style a piece of cake. Asylum is un-nerving where Unhinged was strange and Ghost In The Machine was scary. Why not visit the Cuckooland Asylum... your music will never be the same again. Audio CD: £59.95. (Available Now)

PLANET OF THE BREAKS
(Zero-G). It has become increasingly difficult to unearth both rare and unused drum breaks - in fact, almost a mission impossible. Planet Of The Breaks introduces a new generation of 'Raw-funkin-dirtyyass-boogiebeats' to sample. Original loops that mix old school style and sound with the sonic science of the new school. Drums recorded through vintage analogue and valve gear, then digitised, sliced, diced, tweaked and freaked. This ain't no ordinary sample set by some famous drummer. This shit is dope! Each break has been individually created with mad love using a wide variety of production, mixing, processing, recording and sampling techniques. Practically every make of drum kit out there has been played and recorded at twenty different studios in both London and Los Angeles. Variety of sound is a key element in any CD and a huge effort has been made to deliver lots of raw breaks for your own sonic interpretations and mutilations. Hell, Zero-G even cut to vinyl and mastered off of that! Planet Of The Breaks delivers! OUT NOW!! Audio CD: £59.95.

SKINNED
Skinned is the eagerly awaited first sample CD release from the Canadian Techno/Industrial/Noise band Skinny Puppy. This CD is for the over 18's only... Distortion, noise, metal, shock, horror, destruction, doom, warfare... they are all here in abundance. Skinned gives you the rare opportunity to access the private sample vaults of Skinny Puppy and what a worthwhile trip it is... The samples defy rational explanation, they are simply the hardest sounds you are ever likely to hear. Put your ear defenders on and sit back in your armchair ready for an aural assault... You'll not believe the aggression emanating from your speakers! We have pulled back the skin and exposed Skinny Puppy naked for the first time! Audio CD £59.95 (also available - Skinny Puppy Midman Soundsc™: £29.95)

Zero-G (England)

CUCKOOLAND "AMBIENCE"
Cuckooland are world famous for their three full length sample CDs, Unhinged, Ghost In The Machine & Asylum. Now you have access to the newest and latest offering from these talented guys... This new release in Zero-G's acclaimed Audio Creative Essentials Series is full of the most moving and emotive atmospheres, pads and drones, all looped in WAV and AIFF format, ready to load and create with. Cuckooland Ambience is equally suited to all music styles, whatever your fancy!

CD-ROM (Audio, WAV & AIFF) £19.95

U.S.B. (France)

DOPE HEADZ
This CD features hundreds of acoustic drum loops played with a strong Jungle / Trip Hop attitude. The drumming skills displayed here are for real but they defy imagination: jungle-style 160 bpm loops with a live feel, truer than real Dub loops, etc. You have to hear it to believe it! USB's goal was to provide you with loops which are very natural-sounding, as well as loops with weird and distinctive textures. Running these loops along sequences will bring a massive dose of life in your music. As an additional help, drum hits were recorded separately during the same sessions, so that they could be included as samples in the bonus section. Certainly one of the most distinctive and addictive drum library on the market. Audio CD: £59.95. Akai/Emu/ASR CD-ROM: £119.00

KITCH 70'S
Kitch 70's is the biggest collection of 70's Drumloops and Samples recorded with the best vintage equipment. Thanks to digital surgery, these loops and samples ooze authenticity. Kitch 70's is available in Akai CD-ROM format with MIDIFILES as well as audio CD. Each loop has a specific tempo and is precisely organized: a huge task to create a unique CD faithful to the sound of the seventies. The emphasis has been put on the extreme audio quality of this CD, using top of the range equipment and record players. A real jewel for Groove, House & jungle. This is for all of you dance producers! Audio CD: £59.95, Akai CD-ROM: £119.00

BASICISSIONS

The Ultimate Percussion Tools! Percussion CDs & CD-ROMs available today are great but often of limited use. USB realized this and created a percussion CD with an angle: basic loops and tons of individual samples, all handily grouped by instrument: shaker, tamborine, triangle, congas, bongos, djembe. As the name implies, the loops are very basic but eminently usable, and are all available at several tempi. Likewise, the instrument selection concentrates on all the basic percussions that are present in virtually all music styles. Basicissions is a double CD, in mixed-mode AKAI/Audio. The first disc contains the percussion loops. The second contains the individual percussion hits. Each section is devoted to one instrument (e.g. in the shaker category, there are three different instruments over nine tempi). A generous bonus drum sounds section is located at the end of CD2. A must! Audio/Akai Mixed Mode CD-ROM: £59.95.

Ilio (USA)

TRANCE FUSION
How do you make that great energy-building, heart-pounding climb from one killer groove to the next? Or add drama and intensity to keep your tracks from just sitting there? TranceFusion is 100's of noise sweeps, spectral climbs, glides, fills & morphs to carry your mix from one groove to the next, or simply to add interest to a steady pulse. Also pertrrusion sweeps (32nd notes), swell-stabs, and big hits to spice up your transitions, & rave and trance style arpeggios, pads & other madness. The sounds were created using a war chest of the hottest vintage & analog gear, from classic VCOs to physical modeling & every wavetable-vecored-linear-additive-frequency-transformed-pulse-code-modulated step in between. Truly a one-of-a-kind. TranceFusion will force its way into your head and never let go! CD-ROM: £149 (Akai/Emu/Kurzweil, Roland, SampleCell); AudioCD: £59.95

Best Service (Germany)



ADVANCED ORCHESTRA
From Germany's No.1 Sample CD developer, **BEST SERVICE**. Produced by **PETER SIEDLACZEK**. A complex yet compact and user-friendly sound library setting new standards for symphonic samples. • 5 CD-ROMs or audio CDs • 5455 samples of all instrument groups. **Vol 1** - String Ensembles. **Vol 2** - Solo Strings. **Vol 3** - Woodwinds. **Vol 4** - Brass & Effects. **Vol 5** - Percussion & Harp. Each Volume. Audio: £59.95 / ROM: £149.00. Or purchase the whole ROM set for only £599. Choose AKAI, ROLAND or EMU for the CD-ROM versions.

NEW! The first in a series of **Upgrade Sets** (3 CD-ROMs) - Upgrade '97 features new categories of Legato Strings, Fast Strings, New Acoustic Environments (large hall), New Instruments (Bass Flute, Harp Single Notes, New Percussion Instruments), with acoustic variations: 3 CD-ROM set (AKAI, or EMU/EA only), £179.00



HOUSEMASTER
NEW from Germany's No.1 Sample CD developer, **BEST SERVICE**. The ultimate collection for varied house collections. Housemaster features more than 1000 fresh drumloops from 120 - 140 bpm. Hundreds of vocal hooks and shouts, house synths and complete chords, organs and high strings, pads and disc-house-strings, kickin' basses and huge collection of superb new stereo drum sounds. This is an absolute must for the professional house producer. Audio CD: £59.95. Akai CD-ROM: £99.00



XX LARGE NO KICK
NEW from Germany's No.1 Sample CD developer, **BEST SERVICE**. Another blockbuster from the XX-Large team and this time an absolute novelty: the first drumloop collection with more than 1500 brand new add-on, percussion and effect loops without bass drums or low frequencies (85-150bpm). All of the loops are exactly tuned and sorted into bpm groups to enable you to add them easily to existing tracks. In addition you get many kickin' bass drums as a bonus. Audio CD: £59.95. Akai, Roland, or SampleCell CD-ROM: £99.00



VOICE SPECTRAL II
NEW from Germany's No.1 Sample CD developer, **BEST SERVICE**. A monster production offering over 2500 samples on 2 CDs of over 150 different voices!!! Included are atmospheric intro & break lines for dance, house & Drum'n'Bass. Psychedelic vocals, Ambient hooks. A comprehensive selection of vocals for film and commercial production, plus harmonic choir multisamples for Dance & Pop, male & female shouts, lines, hooks, scratches, laughter, bubbles, screams, computer voices, backing vocals and adlibs plus computer generated vocal transformations by Axel Resynth. 2 CD set (Audio CD & Audio/Akai CD): £59.95



REAL MEGA RHYTHM
NEW from Germany's No.1 Sample CD developer, **BEST SERVICE**. One of the highest quality and most useful sample CD-ROM sets on the market - it gives you 1500 Drum & Percussion samples, 400 loops & fills. You get 1 audio CD with demos and all loops & fills (note that most of these loops are electronic & FX loops). Also you get 2 CD-ROMs, one containing all samples, the other with all loops & fills, ready-mapped for your sampler. Brought to you by the producer of the highly successful "Real Mega Drums". 3 CD-ROM-Set (Audio/Akai/Akai): £59.95 (Also available in Audio/Emu/Audio/Yamaha/Yamaha!)



INDEPENDANCE
NEW from Germany's No.1 Sample CD developer, **BEST SERVICE**. If you have enough of those Techno and House sampling CDs which contain sounds that you feel you could easily create on your own, and you want to open your mind for ELECTRO, 70'S DISCO, BRASIL, BHANGRA, and AFRO, and you need a variety of exactly tuned Drumloops, Singleshots, Multisamples and Grooves/in in really different musical styles - then you can miss this Dance construction kit and Remixer tool for bigger beats & grooves. Audio CD: £59.95



DANCE MEGA SYNTH
NEW from Germany's No.1 Sample CD developer, **BEST SERVICE**. More than 1500 stunning stereo synth sounds: Typical dance chords, dance organs, voices, choirs, pianos, pads, basses, atmospheres, strings, pizzicato, house sounds, analog & processed synths, single sounds and multisamples. Available in mixed-mode: audio CD & free 500MB Akai ROM (ROM has over 1300 programs, hundreds of sounds - perfectly looped, envelope filters already set, program numbers given, etc. mapped to the keyboard. 2CD package (includes Audio CD and audio/Akai CD-ROM): £59.95

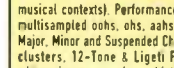


ADVANCED MEDIA TRAX
NEW from Germany's No.1 Sample CD developer, **BEST SERVICE**. It was time to take sampling to a whole new level!!! Advanced Media Trax is an unmissable collection of FIVE CDs - the new standard for film and multimedia productions and sound tracks, featuring synth pads, stacks, orchestra hits and lines, atmospheric backgrounds, single pads and multisamples, cutting edge textures and hyper-SFX. And all licence free. Includes over 1 GIGABYTE of Akai CD-ROM data!!! (also compatible for Emu and Roland versions). Five-CD-Set (Mixed Modes Audio/Akai): £149.95

Spectrasonics (USA)



SYMPHONY OF VOICES
From acclaimed developer **SPECTRASONICS** comes an epic production - the most extensive collection of voices ever assembled on CD-ROM. This massive FOUR CD-ROM SET produced by Eric Persing includes a breathtaking variety of multichannel phrases & FX from some of the world's most prestigious singers. An invaluable tool for the serious composer and producer, & destined to be inspiring for years to come. Disc 1 is devoted to richly-detailed samples of the 80-voice London Choral, recorded in a large cathedral in England - a truly sampled choir ever presented without heavy vibrato (more playable and useful in any musical context). Performance variations include multiple dynamics of multitracked oohs, ohs, aahs, ees, humming, intense staccato stabs. Major, Minor and Suspended Chords with high & low chord voicings, thick clusters, 12-Tone & Ligeti FX, natural Crescendos/die-crescendos, whispering, murmuring, whistling, accents, falls, Avante garde glides, Vertigo fx, octaves, moving vowels, swoops, chattering, guttural groans, shouts, ethereal phrases and more! Disc 2 brings the beauty and power of Classical Soloists - a wide variety of license-free Operatic Tenor & Soprano phrases (both with words and melismatic), & multisamples of each singer. This disc also has more of the London choir samples. Disc 3 focuses on an authentic English Boys' Choir and a Gregorian Mens Choir. Many of the sounds on this disc have never before been available to the electronic musician. The Boys' Choir features multisampled phrases (Kyrie, Alleluia, Amen, Agnus Dei, etc.) plus the soft and loud multisampled staccato vowels (oo, ahs, ees, mms) and moving vowels (Oh-Eh-Ah and Ah-Eh-Do). Also includes Solo Boy phrases and multisamples. The Gregorian Mens Choir is provided with multisampled soft and loud Ohs. Mms, Ees, Fifth Drones, Intervals (Half and Whole Step Up/Down), and ancient Gregorian Chants! Disc 4 offers an overwhelming variety of Lush Multitracked Pop Stacks, created from over 10,000 perfect vocal performances! These "Enya-esque" pads are a must-have for Pop, R&B and New Age music. This disc has the most comprehensive multisampled vowels in the collection including Oos, Ahs, Ees, Oos, Mms, Yvs and Zzs. Moving vowels, Washes and "Scoped" notes. Gorgeous male and female textures that will add that smooth silk to your next hit!!! **NOW IN STOCK!!!!**



Ten out of Ten!
(First 10/10 EVER!!!)
(Keyboard, USA)
FOUR CD-ROM SET: £299.00. (Choose either Roland, Akai/Emu, Kurzweil, or SampleCell). Call to check availability - there's a rush!!!!

musical contexts). Performance variations include multiple dynamics of multitracked oohs, ohs, aahs, ees, humming, intense staccato stabs. Major, Minor and Suspended Chords with high & low chord voicings, thick clusters, 12-Tone & Ligeti FX, natural Crescendos/die-crescendos, whispering, murmuring, whistling, accents, falls, Avante garde glides, Vertigo fx, octaves, moving vowels, swoops, chattering, guttural groans, shouts, ethereal phrases and more! Disc 2 brings the beauty and power of Classical Soloists - a wide variety of license-free Operatic Tenor & Soprano phrases (both with words and melismatic), & multisamples of each singer. This disc also has more of the London choir samples. Disc 3 focuses on an authentic English Boys' Choir and a Gregorian Mens Choir. Many of the sounds on this disc have never before been available to the electronic musician. The Boys' Choir features multisampled phrases (Kyrie, Alleluia, Amen, Agnus Dei, etc.) plus the soft and loud multisampled staccato vowels (oo, ahs, ees, mms) and moving vowels (Oh-Eh-Ah and Ah-Eh-Do). Also includes Solo Boy phrases and multisamples. The Gregorian Mens Choir is provided with multisampled soft and loud Ohs. Mms, Ees, Fifth Drones, Intervals (Half and Whole Step Up/Down), and ancient Gregorian Chants! Disc 4 offers an overwhelming variety of Lush Multitracked Pop Stacks, created from over 10,000 perfect vocal performances! These "Enya-esque" pads are a must-have for Pop, R&B and New Age music. This disc has the most comprehensive multisampled vowels in the collection including Oos, Ahs, Ees, Oos, Mms, Yvs and Zzs. Moving vowels, Washes and "Scoped" notes. Gorgeous male and female textures that will add that smooth silk to your next hit!!! **NOW IN STOCK!!!!**



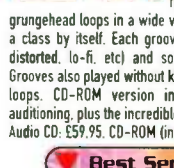
HEART OF ASIA
This product got a 5 star review in every magazine in UK, US & Germany! The most comprehensive collection of Asian instruments & phrases. This remarkable CD-ROM-2-disc set includes over 106 of exotic Chinese, Malay, Nepalese, Tibetan Japanese, Hindi, Sanskrit, Mandarin, Thai & Indian samples, including instruments, phrases, opera divas, chants, speech, gamelan orchestra, monks. Perfect for your next film score, album or remix project. "A treasure chest of lovingly sampled performances" (Keyboard, USA). "The range and subtlety is faultless. You won't find a better collection of ethnic sounds anywhere else." (Future Music, UK). Audio 2-CD set: £79.95. CD-ROM 2CD set: £249.00



BURNING GROOVES
Devoted to raw, aggressive, in-your-face energy! Blazing, all-original live drum grooves by Abe Laboriel Jr. (drummer for Seal) with extreme remixes by producer Eric Persing (who brought you Bass Legends & Distorted Reality). Unrelenting alternative, power funk, progressive soul, rock'n'roll and grungehead loops in a wide variety of tempos put this collection in a class by itself. Each groove has a unique mix, ledge, ambient, distorted, lo-fi, etc) and some have Hi-Fi and Lo-Fi re-mixes. Grooves also played without kick/snare for flexibility in customizing loops. CD-ROM version includes the Audio CD for instant auditioning, plus the incredible SMOKIN' KITS drum library. Attitude! Audio CD: £59.95. CD-ROM (includes the audio CD): £119.00



XX LARGE EXTREME 2
NEW from Germany's No.1 Sample CD developer, **BEST SERVICE**. The sequel to one of the world's greatest drum loop collections. Features 1650 brand new drum loops from 160-170 bpm. Every style is included in this brilliant collection. All of the loops are exactly tuned and sorted into bpm groups. You also get another 150 bonus sounds: synths, chords, basses, pads, organs, etc. for all current musical styles (rap, hip-hop, dance, house, jungle, drum'n'bass, rave). Each sound on the audio CD has an individual index number to make it easy to find any sample during a track. On the CD-ROM all of the drumloops are looped and arranged in programs, presets, patches or instruments up to 6MB. Audio CD: £59.95. Akai, Roland, or SampleCell CD-ROM: £99.00



ADVANCED DANCE COLLECTION
NEW from Germany's No.1 Sample CD developer, **BEST SERVICE**. Uberschall's first CD-ROM for the new Yamaha A3000 Sampler. It contains drum & instrument loops, basses, analog synthesizers, pads, vocals, ad-libs, sound effects, and drum and percussion samples for current musical styles such as house, drum'n'bass, jungle, trip hop, and electro. etc. 460 megabytes of samples and programs which have been specially tuned for the sound capabilities of the A3000. Loops are divided into four tempos: 90bpm, 126, 150 and 160 making it very easy to combine loops. Conversion values between tempi are included in the booklet. Yamaha A3000 CD-ROM: £99.00

Zero-G (England)



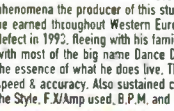
DEEPEST INDIA
"The aim of Indian music is to create spiritual awakening in man" - Sangeet Karyala, India. One of the most exquisite and beautifully recorded sets of samples ever created. A 3-CD set of original samples that explores every area of musical emotion from elation to despair - from hauntingly beautiful vocals, through countless joyous orchestral ensembles to authentic instrumental phrases. It took ZERO-G's Indian producers 2 years to record this collection - there's never been anything like it available before. A true masterpiece.

musical emotion from elation to despair - from hauntingly beautiful vocals, through countless joyous orchestral ensembles to authentic instrumental phrases. It took ZERO-G's Indian producers 2 years to record this collection - there's never been anything like it available before. A true masterpiece.

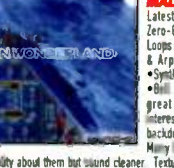
- Disc 1 - Vocals.
- Disc 2 - Instruments.
- Disc 3 - Orchestras & Ensembles
- Audio 3-disc set: £79.95
- Akai S-Series CD-ROM: £249.00
- Other formats available soon - call for details!



GUITAR ODYSSEY
REVIEW: "Very cool FX... A surprisingly versatile assortment. Perfect for anything from Trip Hop to Funky House... A highly recommended disc... PLATINUM AWARD ★★★★★ (Future Music). To give up a promising career in Brain Surgery to pursue a musical dream in pre-glasnost U.S.S.R. says what kind of phenomena the producer of this stunning collection is. The respect he earned throughout Western Europe gave him the confidence to defect in 1992, fleeing with his family to England. Dr. Ika has played with most of the big name Dance DJs in the UK. This CD captures the essence of what he does live. The Loops illustrate his effortless speed & accuracy. Also sustained chords and FX. For each sample the Style, FX/Amp used, B.P.M. and Key are given. Audio CD: £59.95



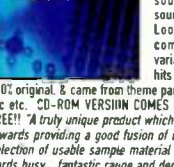
MALICE IN WONDERLAND
Latest in the "Altered States" series from Zero-G, produced by **MAN BOODY** & **HYBRID**. Loops • FX Loops • Synth Percussion Loops & Arpeggios • One-shot Percussion FX • Synth FX • Ambience & Ethereal Textures • Bill FX • Drones • Weird Voices. Lots of great unique sounds. They're weird & interesting, & the "Catcher" ones provide great backdrops to put main drum sounds around. Many loops have the "Tucklandian" organic quality about them but sound cleaner. Textures range from menacing low drones & Soaxy FX to really beautiful ambiences & arpeggios. All bpm's & keys are provided where appropriate. **REVIEW:** "A very impressive source of creative loops... Clearly & logically grouped... Excellent for the off-beat samplist... Loops are generally highly usable... Well programmed patterns... Superb FX loops... The use of effects is interesting & imaginative... Plenty of money arpeggios... Perfect atmospheric ambient layers." (Future Music, UK) Audio CD: £59.95 Akai CD-ROM (out now): £119.00



FIELDS OF MOTION
Vol.4 in (Zero-G's) "Altered States" Series is a stunningly innovative CD that utilises raw and organic sources to create rhythms and soundscapes with a creative edge. Loops come with individual components allowing infinite variation, plus lots of exciting single hits and ambiences. All material is new and exciting sonic sculptures... a rich seam of dance floor and jungle influence... a scorching collection of "happening" dance loops... layout couldn't be more logical... will provide that elusive sparkle to your tracks... In short, raw metallic, steam-driven wonderment. ★★★★★ Five Stars (Sound on Sound). Audio CD: £59.95. Akai S-1000 CD-ROM 2-disc set (includes audio CD): £119.00.



VOCAL XTC
EXTREMELY HOT dance vocal sample collection from ZERO-G (UK), performed by some of the hottest session singers from the UK! Totally original pro samples for all your music productions: Gospel choir, Ad-Libs, Melodies, Harmonies, and Backing Vocals. Styles featured include: Dance-n'R'n'B, Soul, Rock, and Indie. Both Male and Female singers. These unique vocals cover a wide spectrum of applications and are destined to appear in many a chart record in the near future. **REVIEW:** "Interesting and innovative... Impressing the pants off any listener... Accurate & beautifully arranged harmonies... Truly wonderful... The attention to detail and wide range of styles make this CD pretty damn close to perfection" (Sound on Sound, UK). Audio CD: £59.95



JUNGLE WARFARE
If you need Jungle these 3 CDs from ZERO-G are simply unmissable. Each CD features a MASSIVE set of: Loops • Rolls & fills • Perc Kits • Pads & Chords • Bass • FX • Vocals. Volume 1 is one of our all time best selling sample CDs. Vols. 2 & 3 are even BETTER! **REVIEWS** of Volume 1: "Excellent fidelity, balance & punch, & variation in feel & sound... there's no serious competition. Rated 5 stars out of 5 ☆☆☆☆ (Sound on Sound). "Kicking grooves... a wide range of styles... highly useful. AS UP-FRONT AS YOU CAN GET." (The Mix). "Jungle Warfare gives you just about everything you need to survive in the remix rain forest. KEY BUY AWARD, 9/10 (KEYBOARD, USA). CD-Audio: £59.95 each. Special offer for limited period only: Get any 2 Vols for only £99.00 - AVAILABLE NOW!

Big Fish Audio (USA)



BREAKBEAT
Breakbeats on vinyl - those absolutely authentic beats with the crispy vinyl sound used by top producers from Hip-hop to R&B to Trip-Hop have been notoriously hard to get - until now. Big Fish Audio has re-created the all time funkiest breaks - from classics to all-new - on one royalty-free audio CD, along with every hit from every loop. Breakbeat is packed with nothing but 4/4 beats - with punchy kicks, crunchy snares and sizzling hi-hats. These are the type of extended beats that work great as a complete rhythm section, but can also be augmented or edited into numerous stylistic variants. The beats to beat for 98 are all on BreakBeat Audio CD: £69.95



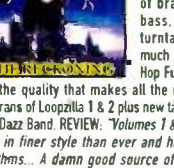
THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT
Featuring ten top sound designers and electronic music artists (including Atom Heart, Robert Rock, Danny Zelenky, Lou Reed, and Contrabass), Things That Go Bump in the Night is the ultimate two-disc resource for the producer of film or media scores, or the electronic artist searching for absolutely amazing sounds with a dark undercurrent. Including sounds comprised of pulsar data, proprietary synth engines, incredible processed effects and much more. Things That Go Bump in the Night is the most anticipated sample release of 1998 from Big Fish Audio. Choose either two audio CDs (total 140 minutes) or two CD-ROMs from SampleCell or Akai. 2-Audio CD Set: £69.95 Akai 2-CD-ROM Set: £199.95 SampleCell 2-CD-ROM Set: £199.95



THE TREASURE CHEST
Produced by The International Beatmakers
• Hip Hop / Breakbeats
• Formal Audio CD (74 Minutes)
• What happens when two of Hip Hop's top names decide to make a sample CD? The answer is International Beatmakers' Treasure Chest - packed with drum, guitar, bass, keyboard and FX breaks that set a new standard for authenticity and variety. Aimed at the Hip Hop producer, this CD is a gold mine for Trip Hop and Modern Rock producers as well. Audio CD: £59.95



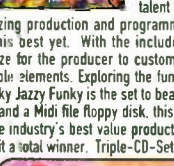
LOOPZILLA 3
Another huge 2-disc audio CD Set from BIG FISH AUDIO busts out of the cage with 140 minutes of brand new drums, guitar, bass, rhodes, vocals, horns, turntable wizardry and much more! From mad hard Hip Hop Funk to silky Hip Soul - it's the quality that makes all the difference. Featuring the veterans of Loopzilla 1 & 2 plus new talent from Boo Ya Tribe and The Dazz Band. **REVIEW:** "Volumes 1 & 2 are legendary... Volume 3 is in finer style than ever and has some seriously funky rhythms... A damn good source of breaks... many are also perfect for Drum'n'Bass... Quality is first class... Very very cool indeed." (DJ Magazine, UK). 2CD-Set, only £69.95



FREAKY JAZZY FUNKY
From Rich Mendelson, the five-star producer of Phat & Phunky and Dance Industrial, comes the new standard in construction kits. Rich assembled the East Coast's premiere session talent and contributed his own amazing production and programming skills to make this set his best yet. With the included midi-file disk, it's a breeze for the producer to customize the loops and swap sample elements. Exploring the funky side of dance music, Freaky Jazzy Funky is the set to beat for 1997 and with three CDs and a Midi file floppy disk, this collection has to be one of the industry's best value products! The best ears at 4+S rate it a total winner. Triple-CD-Set (Audio): Only £79.95



FINGERSTYLES
NEW from ILIO ENTERTAINMENTS. This approach to creating Acoustic Guitar sample libraries is so inventive, so useful, that you'll wonder why no one had thought of it before. Produced by Dan Portis-Carlson (Spectrasonics' Heart of Africa), Fingerstyles consists of Guitar Patterns, Melodies, Chords and Endings arranged in construction kits which can be assembled and overlain to create complete seamless tracks. Music styles include New Age, Blues, Folk, Country, Pop, Ballad, Rock, and others - nearly 40 compositions in all, each with as many as a dozen strings, riffs, patterns and melodies. Plus you get a variety of additional streamed chords, including extensions for more flexibility. The speed with which you can create full-length ultra-realistic guitar parts is startling. It's the perfect solution for soundtrack composers on a tight schedule, or anyone looking to add rich sounding fingerstyles to their music. The six string acoustic steel is expertly played and recorded, and each performance is tempo-tuned so you can sequence the patterns with complete confidence. Whether soloed or mixed, you won't believe the realism. A class library designed to inspire and get results. Audio CD: £59.95 (Akai CD-ROM: £149.00)



FRETWORKS
NEW from ILIO ENTERTAINMENTS. A landmark library featuring legends of the fretboard. Fretworks boasts an impressive roster of musicians playing an intriguing variety of stringed instruments, including 6-string, 12-string, and slide guitar, vintage 6-string Gibson National Steel, mandolin, custom baritone guitar, etc. This collection is a journey "off the beaten path" capturing the soulful essence of Delta Blues, Appalachian Folk, and the roots of rock, bluesgrass, swing and shuffle. The rare performances were recorded in a musical context with all the raw energy and "happy accidents" that make a track live and breathe. The phrases are tempo-tuned for easy sequencing, and most are provided in several lengths for flexibility. They're divided into 2 or 4 bar patterns and free-style riffs which can be stream in countless ways to create your own unique solos. The vast musical experience represented in these fine performances will bring your tracks to that next level of quality and musicality. Audio CD: £59.95 (call for availability/pricing of CD-ROM versions - coming soon).

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E Lab (Sweden)



VINYLISTICS 3
NEW!! Featuring Ruff-style Breaks which have crossed over in all styles. From HipHop to House to Tekno & Jungle - Vinylistics 3 is an important source of groove inspiration. Loops (with variations) plus their component drumsamples - UltraMonk5 - an experimental trip hop duo, together with DJ Toby, have made the loops as funky & rough as possible. Edited & mastered with SP1200 sample simulations & Valve ED's - so the beats are "dirty" to the bone. Often the loops have 2 variations to make them even more varied. Special Filtering gives you that HiHat/Top Loop microphone sound which makes the loops even more creatively useful as "Groove Backdrops". Use them behind a programmed beat to increase the "live" feel for your Rhythm. This CD, like the others in the Vinylistics series, utilise the "LoopMap™" system developed by e-LAB for the X-Static Goldmine series, making the loops easier to use & "intermix" with each other. If you can only afford one "Vinylistic" CD get this one. Audio CD (plus bonus demo CD): £59.95



STRICTLY HOUSE
NEW RELEASE!! Are you a Remixer? A House DJ? A PRODUCER? Maybe you are still looking for the Perfect Beat? STOP SEARCHING NOW!!! THIS IS "THE CLUB" SAMPLE CD!!! PUMPKIN HOUSE & GARAGE LOOPS 2 DA MA. A COLLECTION OF TUFF & DEEP HOUSE LOOPS (120-130 BPM) plus the Loops come WITH VARIATIONS and their component drum SAMPLES. INSPIRED TO CUT SOME RUFF & GROOVY HOUSE TRAX!!! Audio CD: £59.95. "Spot on. You can't really fault this CD" (Future Music)



X-FILES OF JUNGLE
Coming soon - Another in the new X-Files series from E-LAB in Sweden (makers of the X-Static Goldmine series). X-FILES OF JUNGLE features Drum'n'Bass & Jungle LOOPS & SAMPLES. These Rollercoaster beats will set off your system like nothing else. Super-Fast beats for anyone looking for the underground sound of Jungle or Drum'n'Bass. Loops, Samples, FX - they're all in there. Please call to check availability - scheduled release date of this HOT new title is Sep/Oct '98 (Please call for latest news). Audio CD: £59.95



X-FILES OF TECHNO
In stock NOW. Another unmissable CD from the makers of the X-Static Goldmine series. X-Files of Techno features ACID/HARDCORE/TEKNO LOOPS & SAMPLES - the styles which have been dominating Europe's underground scene for years.

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X-FILES OF HOUSE
This one's a Goldmine of Deep & Progressive House loops & samples. To give you an idea, the loops and samples are in the style and mood of Armand van Helden, Tod Terry, or Deep Dish. These loops & samples will make your Hair Stand Out - pure joy! You won't be able to stop moving your feet when you hear this one. All samples provided with variations so you can create your own deep house tune instantly - perfect for injecting the New York club sound into your music - the sound of people like "Masters at Work", OVER 1000 PHAT LOOPS AND SAMPLES. Audio CD: £59.95



STRICTLY 12-INCH
This classic from E-Lab features Dance/Remix/House LOOPS & DRUMS. WHAT VINYLISTICS IS FOR HIPHOP, THIS CD IS FOR DANCE. The idea is similar. Loops, with variations, together with separate hits. This is a Remix CD for anyone in the need for good STOMPING House & Garage Loops. Very much "DJ sounding", & produced by a Remix/DJ team. If you want the sound of the dancefloor - get this one. All Loops have been tested for reaction on the floor! Audio CD: £59.95



VINYLISTICS 1
From DJ/Producer PHAT FABE (Meneh Cherry, Shaba Ranks, Cherno, Tibo) etc. HOT Loops & samples from Jungle, breakbeat/techno to R&B and highpop. Extended variations of many loops make this CD great for club DJs, and provide the opportunity to create smaller custom loops. The loops have a vinyl quality about them. An optional floppy disk is also available featuring the MIDI-files of the loops (Specify AtariPC or Mac). REVIEW: "A real bargain... a CD that only r&b/hiphop/soul producer will be pleased to own." (The Mix, UK). Audio CD: £59.95 Akai CD-ROM: £59.95



X-STATIC GOLDMINE 1
The original dance production mega-collection, re-released by popular demand & completely reworked by creator Erik Svahn. FEATURES OVER 4000 SAMPLES & LOOPS! - an unbelievable resource. One of the most raved about & largest collections of dance samples & loops ever released. And the AKAI ST000 CD-ROM version is the same price! REVIEW: "One of the most astonishing value-for-money purchases in recent years. This is a great purchase for the first-time sample CD buyer. In the 'pound per sample' challenge, nothing else comes close." (Sound on Sound, UK). Audio CD: £59.95 Akai CD-ROM: £59.95



X-STATIC GOLDMINE 3
A journey into the clubs of the world. House, Tekno, Rave, Garage & Jungle. Over 500 stereo & mono loops - all made to fit with LoopMaps™. Plus over 1000 samples cut from extensive programming & vinyl manipulations. SubSynth Bases. Acid looses/loops. Tekno riffs/bases. Vintage analog seq hooks. Strings. Tekno FX & Perc. & more. Optional MIDI-file floppy disk (Specify AtariPC or Mac). REVIEW: "Well chosen, in-your-face dance material which you would be well advised not to be without... a collection with plenty of attitude which will not disappoint." (Sound on Sound, UK). Audio CD: £59.95 Akai CD-ROM (over 3000 samples): £59.95

E Lab (Sweden)



X-STATIC GOLDMINE Vol. 5
Another winner from the 5-star producers at e-Lab. Electro, Techno, Trance, Ambient, House - whatever your angle is, this CD is an unbelieveable resource. 1500 Loops & Samples with incredible crossover potential. e-Lab Used & Abused all kinds of Electronic gear to create the widest possible variety of Synthetic Loops, Patterns & Samples. Lots of Computer Generated Trancey Synth & Modular. Plus a Massive dose of Vintage Old Modulators - producing Zapping Blips & Twangy Bleeps. Sweezy Synthetic FX and Artificial Electronic Drum & Percussive Samples - all made to fit with the LoopMaps™ developed by e-LAB to enhance the intermingling of Loops with different BPM's. The clear links between 70's bands (like Kraftwerk) & today's techno/electro innovators (like Aphex Twin, LPD, Carl Craig) shows that electronically produced music is vital to keep the "innovative" Dance styles up-to-date with the next Millennium. So get this CD if you want the Ultimate in Artificial, Analogue & Experimental Loops & Synth samples. "Pure Artificial Intelligence" - or as Kraftwerk put it - "It's more fun to compute". Audio CD (plus bonus demo CD): £59.95



SYNTHASIA 3 - LOOPLAND
LOOKING FOR SYNTHOLOGICAL ACID TONES? EXTENDED FILTER SWEEPS? SLIDING SLURS? ACCENTED POPS? Here's 1800+ BARS OF ACID/SQUEAKS & FILTERPEAKS!!! Roland TB 303 + CLONES & MODULARS. This CD captures the Mo'1 AcidHouse/Tekno & Trance Machine - The Roland TB 303 & some of all the Clones of this Machine! The producers also Used & Abused old Modular Synths to Create a wide variety of TeeBee-like Loops & FilterSweeps, plus many hot Trance-like Patterns. The classic silver box was recorded clean & also forced thru a variety of Exclusive & Cheap FX. From Expensive Valve EQ's to LoFi fuzz boxes. e-Lab achieved the Best Variety of Loops & Sweeps possible! Audio CD: £59.95



XTORTION 1
Warning! Only for the HeadStrong! Are You ready for an Adrenalin Rush? Are You ready to be kicked by the hardest Loops & samples ever? Pounding, Fast, Hard Techno! Gabber! Jungle! Industrial! Loops that Bang the hell out of your Brancells like nothing ever did before. Rough Pounding Kicks, Hysterical Transformed Vocals, SuperDistorted Heavy Synth Loops & Guitar Loops - the list is endless. Only buy it if You have the Guts to create harder stuff than Prodigy or Ministry! Otherwise stay away!!!! Xtortion is a Killer's Nightmare. Audio CD: £59.95



SYNTHASIA 1
Welcome to FUNALOG and SYNTHASIA ONE. Analog dance / Remix sounds & samples (no drum loops, only samples). The perfect complement to all E-Lab's dance loop CD's. Analog dance samples made for Dance Producers by Dance Producers. Many dancefloor CDs lack good clean, solid & deep synth sounds. This CD will solve your problem of finding the right fun & inspiring analogue synth sample. •Tones •FX •Basslines •Arpeggios •Chords & lots more. Now new (like the Needle) to vintag (the phat Prophet 5). Also TB 303, TR 909, JUNO 106, JUPITER 8, KORG POLY 8, OBERHEIM M4, & many more. Over 1100 CLUB SAMPLES. Audio CD: £59.95



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"Back2Bass" is the FOUNDATION for all kinds of Club Music: House, Techno, Dub, Soul, Hip-hop - You name them. You're bound to find a Bass that fits your Track. Many Sample CD's miss this important part of ClubMusic but now this CD is here to help. Stop fiddling with inferior bass samples - instead get the real thing. Includes all kinds of Phat Bass tones & Loops - both single sampled & multi-sampled. To mention a few, equipment used includes SH101, Prophet 5, Matrix 12, CS70, Oscar, K2000, MKS 50, Jupiter 8 and many many more. Audio CD: £59.95



STRICTLY R'n'B
Prepare yourself & a Wu Classic Soulbreak: 004 + C-Verse Swing & Soul loops & samples (no instruments - only loops & hits). Black trax from the sons of Soul, Swingbeat & Hiphop loops all with variations plus the component drum samples. A very black-sounding CD, perfect for anyone in need of phat/slow Rumpshaker beats. Like "Vinylistics", but with a more slick R'n'B touch. Styles range from HipHop's rougher side to the slicker sound of 90's soul. From the same DJ who produced "Strictly 12-inch", this loop CD must be on top of your list! A great mixture of s&h groovy loops (60-100 BPM). Are you ready 2 make some slick black trax? Audio CD: £59.95



VINYLISTICS 2
The best-selling sequel from DJ/Producer PHAT FABE (Meneh Cherry, Shaba Ranks, Cherno, Tibo) etc. Incredible loops & samples in styles ranging from Jungle, breakbeat/techno to R & B and highpop. Once again, the extended variations of many of the loops make this CD superb for club DJs as they provide the opportunity to create custom loops by cutting out small portions of the main loop. Phat Fabe has put together another stunning collection. REVIEW: "A real bargain... the range in kit sounds can't be faulted... everything from squeaky clean to rough and raw." (The Mix, UK). Audio CD: £59.95



X-STATIC GOLDMINE 2
A journey from the JB's to Snoop, from East Coast to West Coast, a steady stream of phat loops, Grooves & of Skool Funk Samples, Deep Bass Tones & Grooves, Funky Guitar Riffs, old Clavinetts, Dusty Rhodes & Organs, Horny Horns & Saxes, Cheesy Synths, Jazzy Flutes, Vinyl FX, Rolls, Fills, Drums & Perc. - OVER 1500 KICKIN' SAMPLES. Over 3000 on the Akai CD-ROM. •Optional MIDI-file floppy disk (Specify AtariPC or Mac). "One of the most complete funk/hiphop sample discs you can buy." (Future Music). "Well composed and exciting... a wonderful resource... Buy this one for its loops - they're tough to beat." (Keyboard, USA). "As phat and funky as they come and incredibly pleasurable." (The Mix, UK). Audio CD: £59.95 Akai CD-ROM: £59.95



X-STATIC GOLDMINE 4
E-LAB have done it again! Over 1500 Ambient and Chill Out Loops & Samples from the dark side of the Moon. TRIPHOP & CHILL-OUT LOOPS. SPEEDY JUNGLE BEATS & SMOOKIN BASS BOOSTERS. ETHNIC CHANTS & BUBBLE BATH DIGGERIDDOS. WET CHILL OUT CHORDS & XPERI-MENTAL SYNTH VIBES. ANALOGUE SEQ. FX & ENO-STATIC VECTOR LOOPS. PSYCHDELIC DELAYS & DUB-ECHOS. AMBIENT BIRDS & JUNGLE WEATHER. SPOOK FX AND LOTS MORE! "I will say this just once. GO OUT & BUY THIS ONE! Absolutely brilliant." (Musiker Magazine, Sweden). Audio CD: £59.95

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brief encounters

CONCISE REVIEWS OF ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

CANFORD QUICK CHECK TEST DISC

One of the most useful things any audio engineer can carry around is a test disc to check the alignment of equipment, and to evaluate unfamiliar monitoring loudspeakers. There are many such discs around already of course, but a new one from Canford Audio is a little different to the rest.

The twelve-track *Quick Check Test Disc* has been specifically intended for line-up and subjective quality assessment of audio equipment and is available in three formats — CD, MiniDisc, and DAT. In common with most test discs, there is a full set of test signals; all are at practical levels, and with usable durations. The sleeve notes are very comprehensive, not only stating what the tones should read on a variety of common meter types, but also what an AC Voltmeter should read when

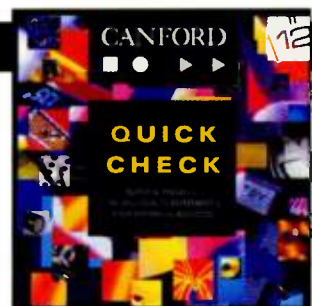
connected to 0dBu, 0dBV, or -10dBV outputs!

The test tones include a 440Hz Concert A tone which can also be used to check replay speed, and a swept frequency track which usefully starts with a reference level 1kHz tone and then switches directly to 20Hz, sweeping up to 20kHz before switching straight back to 1kHz. If you hear any gaps then either the replay system cannot reproduce, or your ears cannot hear, the signal!

In contrast to most test discs, however, *Quick Check* does not contain impressive music tracks — just superbly recorded spoken (male) voice. This might be unusual, but it is what makes the *Quick Check* disc so useful. If you think about it, virtually everyone spends much of the day listening to the spoken voice, and our hearing is very highly tuned to

spotting deficiencies or problems with its reproduction. Try it and you will quickly discover that, compared to music, the spoken voice is far more revealing of all manner of subtle flaws in loudspeakers, room acoustics, processing equipment and recording faults. The speech tracks include a channel and phase check, followed by five minutes of a prose passage by Washington Irving, followed by a further five minutes of a hypothetical shipping forecast. The recorded prose has not been limited or compressed at all, whereas the shipping forecast has been gently limited.

All in all, *Quick Check* is a very useful reference and test tool, and certainly a disc which I shall be using a lot from now on. The attention to detail is superb, the sleeve notes provide good advice and useful information, and the



quality and accuracy of the test tones and voice recordings are excellent. In my opinion, the provision of voice tracks rather than superficially impressive music makes this disc worth every penny of its asking price!

£ CD, MiniDisc and DAT £21.15 each, or £57.58 for all three. Prices include VAT.

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32MIDIWORKS DUAL PORT MACINTOSH MIDI INTERFACE

If you need to add a MIDI interface to a Mac it has to be external — there is no Mac equivalent of a Soundblaster 16 with on-board MIDI port. MIDI interfaces invariably connect to Macs via either the printer or modem ports. The 32midiworks model under review is a 'standard' Mac MIDI interface, which means it can be used with most music software (running on System 7 or above) without the need to install any drivers. It includes both modem and printer connectors, so that two 16 channel MIDI ports (32 MIDI channels) are available, and switched thru connectors are used so that

the Mac may also be used to drive a modem or printer without the need to unplug cables. When the switches are set to their Printer or Modem positions, the MIDI inputs are passed directly to the outputs, which provides a simple means to play live MIDI parts when the sequencer is switched off. Each port has one MIDI In and two MIDI Outs. Power, SMPTE Stripe and MIDI In/Out activity LEDs for both ports provide visual feedback to show what the unit is doing.

The 32midiworks has no power supply of its own, instead drawing its power directly from the Mac's ADB buss. This works by connecting the 32midiworks in series with the Mac keyboard via two ADB sockets on the box, for which the necessary cables are provided including those needed to hook up to the modem and printer sockets. In addition to its basic MIDI interface function, the 32midiworks can generate SMPTE in 30-, 30 drop frame, 25- and 24-frame formats. Code can only be generated from time zero, but another useful trick is the box's ability to covert incoming SMPTE into MTC, enabling it to double as a tape sync unit.

Physically, the 32midiworks is a simple steel

box painted in a glossy grey spatter finish with sockets on all four edges. The SMPTE In and Out connections are on jacks, there are conventional MIDI In and Out DIN connectors, and there are further sockets for connection to the computer and to a modem and printer if you have them.

I'd spent most of the day struggling with some rather intransigent software that seemed determined to thwart all my efforts to review it, so it came as a welcome relief when I unpacked the 32midiworks, plugged it in, booted up *Logic* and it worked. The SMPTE striping starts and stops at the push of a button, and if SMPTE is fed back into the unit, the computer is fed with MTC. And that's it. It says midiworks on the tin and it's true, MIDI works! *Paul White*

£ 32midiworks Dual Port Macintosh MIDI Interface £99.99 including VAT.

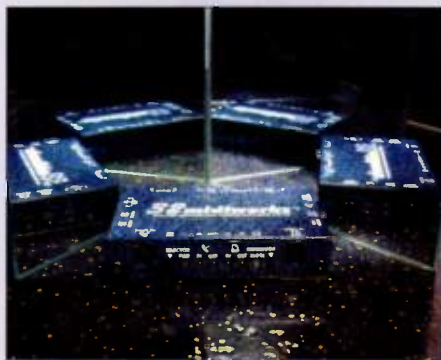
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MIT RIPCORD GUITAR LEAD

If you've ever read a hi-fi magazine, you'll have seen advertisements for cables that cost more than the gear they are connected to, which make extravagant claims about performance improvement. The Ripcord guitar cable doesn't (quite) cost as much as most guitars, but its makers certainly make extravagant claims for it. Those who've researched the subject, however, know that guitar cables do make a difference, as the cable



capacitance forms a tuned circuit with the inductance of the pickups, adding a coloration to the sound. If you put a DI box at the guitar end of the cable, you lose this effect and the tone changes, usually for the worse. MIT, however, have done a lot more than produce a cable with the right capacitance to match the guitar; they've made a cable with a passive filter network at each end which, they claim, produces a richer tone, lower noise and greater clarity.

The passive networks are contained in small plastic 'lumps' at either end of the cable. Because each is different, the cable has to be used the right way around, so the ends are obligingly marked Amp and Guitar. Obviously the company

don't tell you what's in the boxes, but there exist a number of passive, reactive components that could make a difference, including capacitors, coils and ferrite bead RF filters. Ultimately, I don't suppose it matters what's in the boxes as long as it works — so does it?

Oddly enough, the Ripcord makes more than a subtle difference, most apparent when using my Strat Plus guitar with a valve Fender Champ amplifier. With a moderately overdriven blues sound, the Ripcord seemed to reduce the gritty components of the sound in such a way that the pleasurable parts of the distortion remained while the intermodulation products and general high frequency grot were significantly reduced. The guitar also 'felt' smoother to play, a well known phenomenon when using different sounding guitar setups. The sound was audibly smoother and more even, almost like adding the mildest tube compression, with more of a ringing, singing quality to the tone.

Other tests with my Line 6 amplifier also showed a noticeable improvement, but perhaps not as great as with the Champ. Similarly, my Yamaha Pacifica guitar didn't improve as much as the Strat Plus through either amp, so it's down to trying the lead with your own gear and making up your own mind. At over £60 for the lead, the Ripcord must be considered more as a passive signal processor than as a simple connector, but the improvement it made was great enough to make me feel I have to have one. Suspend disbelief for a while and try one yourself — the difference is quite evident and very worthwhile in the studio.

Paul White

£ 10ft Ripcord £66.99, 15ft £76.99 and 20ft £87.99. Prices include VAT.

A Class A Distribution, 39c New Bridge Street, Rackclose Lane, Exeter, Devon EX4 3AH, UK.

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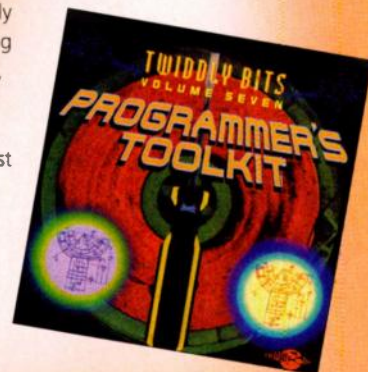
KEYFAX SOFTWARE TWIDDLY BITS VOLUME SEVEN — PROGRAMMER'S TOOLKIT

Volume Seven in the Twiddly Bits series is a real mixed bag of performance data, loops, grooves and riffs that come under the natty title of a *Programmer's Toolkit*. Whilst more up to date drum & bass and jungle styles are briefly touched upon, the main focus of the programming seems to be firmly on a retro-seventies dance floor feel.

There are a number of keyboard arpeggios, riffs and licks that all fit neatly into the dance genre and are expertly programmed, with interesting use of pitch bend and rhythm. There are 15 or so four-bar bass riffs, and the drum patterns and fills also work well.

Moving on to the other main part of the release, we find a host of complex control templates to impose over your existing keyboard parts. These come in the form of large numbers of Pan, Pitch, Portamento and Gate effects. Again, these are mostly four bars long and are designed to be simply dropped over a pre-programmed keyboard part in your sequencer. On the whole they work well and should encourage us all to think more about the host of effective control features available to even the humblest of sound modules!

The last part of the release has a large number of resonant filter sweeps designed to 'analogue-up' a MIDI performance and make it whizz and swoop with a strong retro analogue dance feel. These have largely been programmed using Non Registered Parameter Numbers (NRPNS) and are specifically created for use with Roland's GS (Sound Canvas) family and Yamaha XG format instruments (MU series and beyond). NRPNS are generally control messages that different manufacturers often like to assign to different control functions (such as LFO,



envelope or filter frequency cut-off points), and this means that other, perhaps older synth modules could well run into problems triggering these effects: via MIDI.

In addition to these there are a few other oddments including some useful synth control panels in the form of *Cubase Mixer Maps*, and some wonderful wah-wah template effects.

All in all this is an interesting, and if you have the appropriate compatible sound modules, rewarding collection of programming oddments. I felt that the actual recorded MIDI parts (drum patterns, synth riffs, and bass lines) were perhaps not as exciting or devastatingly original as I would have liked, and with so much disk space taken up with the filter and control templates you aren't exactly spoilt for choice either. Having said that, as a collection of tools to integrate into your sequenced song data, or as an indication of the clever things you can do with even the most basic sound modules, *Programmer's Toolkit* works well, and like the other Twiddly Bits offerings, is too inexpensive to consider not buying!

Paul Farrer

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FOCAL PRESS DIGITAL AUDIO CD



Over the last fifteen years or so, we have probably all gathered some awareness of the workings of digital audio systems through books and articles — indeed, *SOS* has carried numerous features on the subject in its time. The problem with the written word on audio-related subjects, however, is that you can not hear the effects being described and, just as a picture says a thousand words, a good audible example can easily be worth as much.

With this in mind, Focal Press have recently published a new CD on the topic of digital audio, as the latest addition to their Music Technology Series (see box). The new release is available in two versions: you can either get a straight demonstration CD complete with comprehensive sleeve notes, or a 'Resource

Pack' which combines around 40 pages of notes and overhead transparency masters with a copy of the CD.

The lecturers' notes are unlikely to be appropriate to the more casual reader, as a fairly high degree of prior knowledge is required to make sense of them. The stand-alone CD, however, is far more affordable, and the comprehensive sleeve notes act as a more than adequate guide to the demonstration tracks. The CD carries no fewer than 93 listening examples, which reveal the effects of different bit resolutions, truncation, dithering and noise-shaping; sampling clock jitter; word clock synchronisation errors; error correction and interpolation; pitch-shifting; and zipper noise from operational controls. The final nine tracks are configured as a "critical listening test" for the user to evaluate their ability to detect typical digital artefacts — something which is far harder than might at first appear!

Many of the demonstrations on the disc are quite subtle and a good monitoring system (speakers or headphones) is sometimes required to hear the characteristic effects. The sleeve notes do not provide any advice on what to listen out for, but the choice of demonstration material is well suited to the relevant artefacts and the

compilation has been produced to a very high standard by Markus Erne, chairman of the Swiss branch of the Audio Engineering Society.

If you are interested in developing your understanding of digital audio, want to be better able to recognise some of its quirks, or just like listening to the hi-fi in your anorak, this very reasonably priced CD would certainly be a worthwhile purchase. *Hugh Robjohns*

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SERIOUS SERIES

The Focal Press Music Technology Series also includes books on the subjects of: MIDI Systems And Control, Sound and Recording (3rd edition), Sound Synthesis and Sampling, Acoustics and Psychoacoustics, and the Audio Workstation Handbook.

BBE DI-10 DI BOX WITH SPEAKER SIMULATOR

DI boxes are essential pieces of studio kit, but they don't all do the same job. For DI'ing an electric guitar or bass that doesn't have active circuitry, you'll need a DI box with a high input impedance, whereas for a line level signal (such as is produced by a guitar preamp),

bypasses the speaker, some form of speaker simulation filtering will be necessary to restore a natural amp tone. Valve amplifiers don't like running without a speaker, so you either have to provide a dummy load or fit a thru socket so that the original speaker can be left

there is no high impedance instrument input. Being an active DI box it needs a power source, and can run from either batteries, phantom power or an external mains adapter. A switchable speaker simulation filter is included, based on a 24dB/octave low-pass network with a 4kHz cutoff frequency. This may seem rather severe, but in practice most guitar speakers roll off quite steeply above 3kHz. If they didn't, the overdrive harmonics would sound raspy and unpleasant.

Packaged in a neat but tough steel box, the DI-10 has an unbalanced line input jack, speaker in and thru jacks and a balanced XLR output as well as an unbalanced jack output. A DC inlet accepts a 9V DC power supply and a slide switch brings in the speaker simulator.

lively basic tone with a decent amount of bite and no nasty high end rasp. I did an A/B comparison with my passive Palmer Junction box using a Boogie V Twin preamp as the source, and though there was a notable difference in tone, I wouldn't say that either one was more or less authentic than the other — it was more like the effect of using a different mic on the same amp. The Palmer had more low end punch, but I felt the BBE was better at putting over the top end ring and bite while at the same time keeping the tone smooth and natural.

In all, the DI-10 is a good instrument amp or preamp DI box, with a speaker simulator that sounds better than some dedicated units I've tried — a very pleasant surprise! *Paul White*



an impedance of around 47kΩ is more common. What's more, if you're DI'ing a guitar amplifier, it's useful to be able to take a feed from the speaker output so as to retain the coloration of the amp's output stage, but because DI'ing

connected (BBE have taken the latter approach).

The BBE DI-10 is designed specifically for use with line or loudspeaker level signals, which suggests that it was designed with instrument amplifiers in mind —

USABILITY

The DI-10 works fine in both straight and filtered modes, and the speaker simulation provides a

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Tom Oberheim entered the synthesiser business with his SEM and 4-Voice models in the mid 1970s, and achieved considerable success. Oberheim synths quickly became known for a fat warm sound, raunchy brass and full strings, not to mention great bell and Hammond sounds. In 1978, however, their place at the cutting edge was threatened by the arrival of the milestone Prophet 5, the first of the microprocessor-programmable and homogeneous-sounding polyphonic synths we take for granted today. The OBX, unveiled in July the following year, was Oberheim's response.

of questionable reliability. The whole voice chain uses analogue components, with Curtis chips employed only for the envelopes. Perhaps as a consequence of this, every individual OBX can sound slightly different.

VOICE ARCHITECTURE — OBERHEIM'S VIEW

Although the OB series evolved over the years, and substantial improvements were made to the control system, the layout of the front panel remained remarkably consistent, and most of the OBX's panel features survived into the OBXa and OB8.

First of all, you got two VCOs delivering sawtooth or variable pulse waveforms. These were supplemented on the OBX by cross modulation and sync switches. Then came the mixer — not the OBX's most exciting feature,

consisting as it did of just four switches. You could turn OSC 1, OSC 2 and white noise on or off, or use OSC 2 at half volume. Although this mixer attracted a fair amount of criticism over the years, Oberheim decided not to change it (for whatever reason) and kept the design for the subsequent OBXa and OB8.

The filter on the OBX was a resonant 12dB/octave lowpass, with cut-off controllable from the dedicated filter ADSR. LFO modulation was also possible, and the filter's keyboard tracking was either on 100 percent or off. Although the VCF on the OBX was apparently related to the filter on the SEM, it lacked the latter's multimode settings, which I always thought was a bit of a shame. No doubt cost came into it, especially as the OBX was not cheap. The VCA had its own dedicated ADSR, and the single LFO offers triangle, square, and sample and hold waveforms for the usual duties, which included a big, swirly and effective PWM.

PERFORMANCE TIME

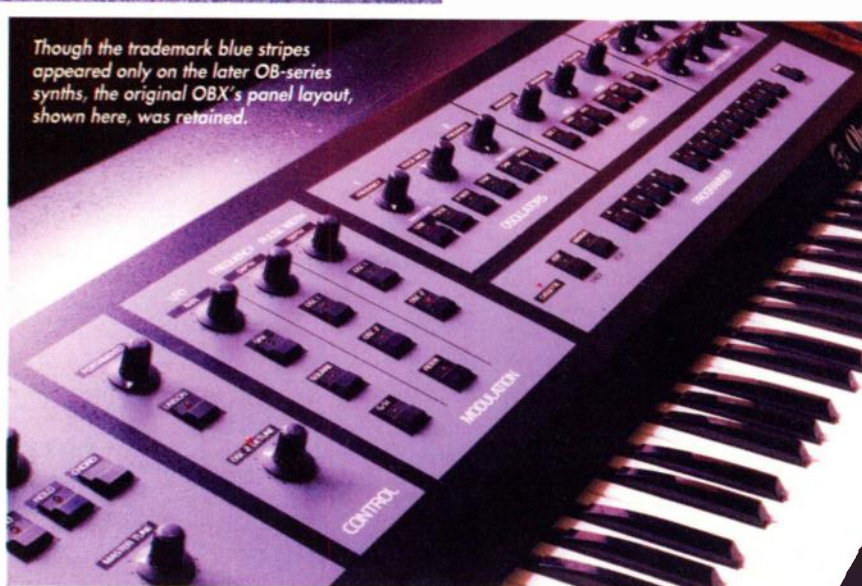
A major innovation on the OBX were the performance controllers, which took the form of two sprung paddles to the left of the keyboard. Though there was some doubt about these paddles at first, as Moog style pitch and mod wheels were very much the accepted standard, they proved to give such a balanced resistance, making control expressive and intuitive, that most players just loved them. There was also polyphonic portamento, which excited magazine reviewers at the time, unison for monster mono lines, and a nifty chord memory for huge one-finger stab sounds. The later effect is great, especially for dance music.



The Oberheim OBX. Picture courtesy of the EMIS Synthesizer Museum.

OBX

The OBX had similar audio paths to the earlier SEM; on the OBX, however, they came under microprocessor control for full programmability. There were 32 programs storable in four banks of eight, named A, B, C and D. Continuing a tradition which had begun with the SEM, you could choose a four, six, or eight-voice instrument and buy additional voice cards later, bank manager or album advances permitting. It was also quite easy to open up the OBX's hood to get inside, either to make quick repairs, defeat a wobbly voice, or get at the memory-protect switch. If you ever do see an OBX opened up, you'll notice that there is an awful lot in there, which makes them big, heavy, and unfortunately



Though the trademark blue stripes appeared only on the later OB-series synths, the original OBX's panel layout, shown here, was retained.

On the back panel were sockets for vibrato, filter, hold and program advance. Interestingly, the OB series was stereo from the outset, with Left, Right and Mono outputs, but Oberheim never got round to putting a headphone socket on.

Though the OBX may seem pretty light on features by today's standards, it still possesses one overwhelming plus point — it sounds huge.

UPDATE TIME

It's generally true that a new product has to have some strong features to succeed against an established market leader, and Oberheim clearly knew that the OBX was not enough to take the crown from the Prophet 5. Early in 1981, therefore, the OBXa was introduced. Its appearance, like its name, did not suggest radical alterations — but Oberheim's improvements made all the difference. For one thing, it looked smarter, sporting the now-famous black body with blue strips. For another, you could now split or layer two sounds on the keyboard, and 8 of each were storable, which was big news at that time on this sort of synth. It was, if not a first, a pretty close thing.

Beyond that, the synth engine had also been upgraded. The filter now had selectable 12dB or 24dB (2- or 4-pole) rolloff, giving a nice choice of tone colours (apparently JL Cooper had already been doing this as a third party modification for OBX owners who wanted a 4-pole Moog type sound). The cross-modulation switch on the OBX was reassigned, and now connected the filter envelope to sweep the pitch of Oscillator 2, for those screaming sync sounds. Though the loss of cross-modulation was a shame, I think this made up for it.

Inside, there had been a major overhaul, with Curtis chips employed throughout (buyers still got to choose a six- or eight-voice instrument). Such a radical change of components meant that there was inevitably a change of tone, but it was a subtler one than might have been expected, and the OBXa had a wonderfully fat, powerful sound. An unequivocally positive consequence of the component change was that it made the OBXa lighter and a bit more reliable than its predecessor (though only a bit, as the availability of an optional road repair kit might suggest).

EXTRA PERFORMANCE

The OBXa also benefited from significant improvements to the performance panel. The paddles could now modulate each VCO and split or layered part independently. There were also now three LFOs, one on the performance panel, and a programmable one for each of the two voice boards. Though there was only one set of controls on the main panel, each half of a split or layer could have its own modulation settings.

MAJOR PLAYERS

The OB series boasted lots of high profile users, and was a major contributor to the Minneapolis and Los Angeles sound of the 1980s.

- OBX — Tangerine Dream, Youth, Japan.
- OBXa — New Order, Stranglers, Thompson Twins (basses), Prince, Queen ('Flash Gordon'), Cliff Richard, Gary Numan, Van Halen (The infamous 'Jump' is preset A1), Jam and Lewis.
- OB8 — Soul to Soul, KLF, Pet Shop Boys, lots of Italian dance stuff, Art of Noise.

The OBXa's designers had also come up with some clever ideas to get more out of the available hardware. If you pulled the performance panel LFO knobs, they clicked upwards, whereupon the LFO depth knob now set the LFO depth directly, bypassing the paddle for continuous two-LFO sounds. Raising the speed knob changed the waveform to sawtooth, and transpose and pitch bend were implemented on the second VCO. This was surprisingly effective, whether you used it when the VCOs were sync'ed or for expressively bending VCOs against each other. All of these were nice touches typical of a maturing system.

EDITING TIME

On the original OBX, you had to enter edit mode by pressing a special button. The OBXa's controls, on the other hand, were always active. If you liked your edit, you could just write it in. Edits were very smooth, since moving a knob added or subtracted from the value stored in memory rather than jumping to the physical setting of the knob like a Jupiter or Prophet. If you wanted to clear the value and show the true setting, you turned the control fully left then right. For hard core programmers, there was a manual switch which disconnected the programmer so you could start from scratch.

The OBXa's auto-tune feature is worth mentioning. Not only is it faster than that of the Prophet, but it is also more user-friendly. When the tune button is pressed, the synth strolls through the voices displayed by the programmer LEDs so you can see its progress. Failed voices continue to flash when the autotuning is over, and if any are getting wobbly the tuner spends more time working on them, hovering on that voice while passing through. I much prefer this system to that of Memorymoogs and Prophets, which just shut down while tuning and can take quite a few seconds, leaving you to wonder if it will work out OK or not.

On the back panel, a 37-pin computer interface appeared, designed specifically to link the OBXa to another OBXa/OB8 or to other Oberheim products like the DMX drum machine and DSX sequencer in what was termed the Oberheim System. While

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OBERHEIM OB SERIES



The OB8 offered even more features, and greater reliability, than the earlier OBX and OBXa; some, however, would argue that it lacked their sonic punch.

▶ this was cutting edge technology at the time (remember, we are talking well over a year before the introduction of MIDI), it's unlikely to get used much today. Various updates increased patch memory from 32 to 120 programs, and improved the general running of the autotune and cassette interface. The extra sounds were selected by holding down multiple bank switches and then choosing 1 to 8. While the extra capacity was useful, patch names could get long winded (ACD5, for example), and sometimes you just couldn't remember where you'd put that sound!

With the OBXa Oberheim were back on the map, and customers flocked in.

OB8

There is something of a difference of opinion about the OB8 amongst OBie aficionados. It was, undoubtedly, much more sophisticated, and the operating system give it more features than the OBXa and a more modern feel. Some say it was the best of the series, being a lot lighter (it had same box as the OBXa, but put less in it), more flexible, and more stable (one of Oberheim's goals in increasing the degree of software control). The fall in component prices that had occurred throughout the '80s meant that the OB8 was cheaper to make than its predecessors, and so was bound to sell well.

There is, however, a body of opinion which says that the OB8 lacks power in the sound department compared to the OBXa and its forefathers, and it is possible that some of the very clever software calibration routines that give reliability do also contribute to a less vibrant sound.

THE SOUND

Before we consider the features which were new to the OB8, let's look at the argument about sounds. For annihilating heavy metal

guitarists in a live mix, the OBXa or OBX is the one. Think Van Halen. The OBXa does seem to have shorter attack times than the OB8 and a fuller, gutsier sound. However, I have found that the OB8 can sit better in a mix when working with more recent synths, though I don't really know why. I've always found the OB8 strings smoother, and the extra modulation options lend themselves to a more polished and interesting sound. Tom



Each new model in the series added new features to the performance panel (this is the OB8's), but retained the OBX's innovative paddle controllers.

VARIATIONS ON THE THEME

A number of variations on these three basic models were produced at one point or another. The OB-Sx was a preset four-octave OBXa. The OBXpander, not to be confused with the Xpander, was shown at trade shows, and seemed to be a four-voice multitimbral OB8 with the keyboard removed — I suspect it never saw proper production. Studio Electronics of Minimoog rackmount fame also offered a racked OB8, though they probably produced only a handful. For those of a brave disposition, there are a number of OB8 modifications posted on the web. You can beef up the outputs, and even add multimode filters if you don't mind losing white noise on the way.

Oberheim himself allegedly had some retrospective misgivings about the OB8 sound, claiming that the OBXa sound is fatter because its tuning is less perfect. The only answer, really, is to play both of them and see what you think. There is a difference and, though both are great, each has its own strengths and weaknesses.

In appearance, the OB8 is remarkably similar to the OBXa. There are more features to list on the front panel, and an end cheek is cutaway to reveal pan knobs for each of the eight voices. Apart from the early units, OB8s were factory fitted with MIDI. Mine has sockets on the other end cheek, while on later units MIDI moved to the back panel.

The idea of adding voice cards had been dropped, and the OB8 was, as the name suggests, an eight-voice synth. In terms of programmability, it was considerably more versatile than the OBXa, offering seven LFO waveforms which could also be routed to the VCA for tremolo. Its VCOs could mix sawtooth and pulse waveforms for a fatter sound, and you also got a triangle wave. It's also worth noting that the OB8's memory-protect switch was externally mounted on the rear of the unit.

Once again the performance panel had been upgraded, giving its LFO more waveforms (including white noise), and a rather fab Arpeggiator. Externally clockable, though unfortunately not by MIDI, it could control either or both parts of a split or layer, and memorise up to five preset transpositions as well as note order. This was way beyond usual Arpeggiator expectations, though sadly it only remembered its current setting.

A SECOND PAGE

Another feature of the OB8, which was very remarkable at the time, was that pressing the chord button twice in quick succession assigned most of the controls completely new functions — a halfway house towards parameter access. It was clear when the jump had been made because all the LEDs immediately switched to show new settings. The eight programmer LED's also came on, showing that voices were active. You could turn voices on or off with these, which was very comforting for live performers. If you're buying an OB8, it's worth checking here to see if any dodgy voices have been deactivated. On earlier OB8s none of these Page Two features were labelled, while on some later units they were detailed in faint blue writing, though I'm not sure how common these were. Apparently you could pay, in the States at least, to have the writing put on as a retrofit.

The OB8's second page adds a lot of control and modulation extras. You could detune the VCOs in unison mode for a mega sound, quantise the LFO modulation into semitones,

BUYING AN OB TODAY

"Reliable" isn't the first word that comes to mind when I think about the OB series. Neither is "compact". If you're looking at one as a prospective purchase, remember to check the polyphony if it's an earlier one. Some have been on heavy world tours and may show it. I bought an OBXa again last year having sold one some years ago, and I am left thinking that you really do get rather a lot for your money. Which one to go for depends on what is important to you. If reliability is the key, buy

as late an example as possible. If, on the other hand, you want the powerful Oberheim sound then although they all sound like Obies, the earlier ones sound more so. Giggling? Come on, be sensible. My personal opinion is that the OBX is perhaps best left to collectors.

What Price?
At Launch: OBX £2608
(1979-81) OBXa £3499 (1981-83)
OB8 £2995 (1983-85)
Today: OBX £350-600 OBXa
£550-750 OB8 (assuming MIDI)
£575-875. Add a bit more if MIDI is retrofitted on an OBX or OBXa.

even put the LFOs out of phase with each other and set them to track the keyboard, so that the higher you played, the faster the LFO went — in a musical fashion too. There was a pair of software generated delay and attack envelopes for controlling LFO depth and frequency for anything from subtle expression to wild VCS3 impressions. These envelopes could be inverted for attack, hold and decay.

You could also mess with the portamento, choosing whether you wanted notes to arrive at the same time or not, pre-programming slurs, and quantising to create glissando. Blind twiddling (my favourite form of editing) produced a stream of sounds that just seemed to spark the musical imagination.

The MIDI settings are also accessed from Page Two. You can select any MIDI channel from 1 to 8 as the basic channel, or opt for Omni mode if you prefer. When the synth is in split or layer mode you get true bi-timbral operation, with MIDI data being sent and received on adjacent channels for each half of a split or layer. I must say that having each part of a layer responding to different MIDI channels can be plain confusing when used with a sequencer! A pleasant surprise, however, is SysEx, which allows patch dumping of the current patch via MIDI.

What is great about Page Two is that if you want to get on and play you can completely ignore it, but programmers can really dive in and have fun. Oberheim continually improved the software on the OB8, adding some features and debugging others. You can check the revision of any OB8 by pressing the Page Two button twice, holding it the second time, then pressing the sync button. The Programmer LEDs then show the version — B5 was the last.

The OB8 is the most modern-feeling of the OB series, with features today's users expect, like programmable program volume, balancing of parts in a split or layer, and remembering many settings you had even after powering down. Like its predecessors, however, the OB8 lacked a touch-sensitive keyboard. It still had a distinctive Oberheim sound, but one which I would describe as lighter than those of its predecessors.

CONCLUSIONS

The OB series are undoubtedly some of the great analogue synths, refined through their heyday from 1979 to 1985, and are probably the foundation of Oberheim's reputation today. The sound is big, bold, fat, and full. No doubt you have seen OB this or that in patch names on synths over the years, in the same way people talk of Moog bass, and although not as punchy as a Moog, for sheer power an OBXa or OBX is a valid alternative to a Memorymoog. As the series progressed, design and production improvements brought costs down, and improved reliability by using fewer actual parts inside, while increasing features and control with the clever use of software. The OBX, OBXa, and OB8 shared a similar voice architecture, which represented a frustrating mix of rash simplification and genius. Today this charms you and your creativity down interesting sonic avenues. If you are looking for an analogue synth, they are class acts.



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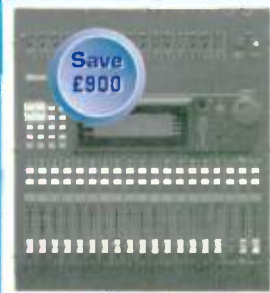
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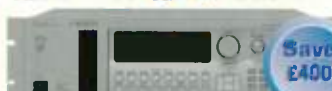
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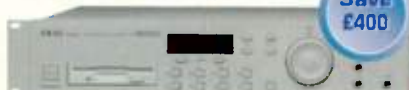
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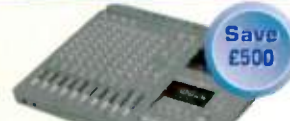
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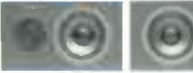
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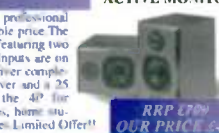


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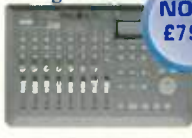
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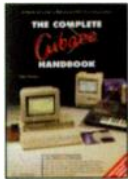
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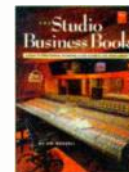


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Written & compiled by Anne Gunning
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aims to educate composers of all kinds of music in the operation of the music publishing business to help them obtain, negotiate and benefit from publishing agreements and avoid expensive mistakes. Apart from publishing, the book also covers copyright legislation, performing and mechanical rights, the royalty administration societies, music in film, broadcasting, theatre and ballet and commissioning agreements. There is also advice for composers setting up their own publishing companies. An exhaustive and useful book.

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EMAGIC

THE EMAGIC LOGIC TUTORIAL VIDEO

Produced by Emagic themselves, this video once again sees Ten Water in the tutorial chair. This takes you through the first steps of getting the software up and running, and covers virtually all the controls you'll need. This video is valid for all versions of Logic, whether being run on an ST, Mac or PC. Presentation is rather intriguing, with a mobile camera that helps to hold the interest more than the average training video and some interesting graphics that aid comprehension and help to quickly and specifically tutorials and bits inside tutorials. Contents as follows:

- Tutorial 1: The Arrange window and basic sequencing
- Tutorial 2: Playback parameters & Toolbox
- Tutorial 3: Controlling MIDI data flow
- Tutorial 4: Manipulating sequence data
- Tutorial 5: Moving around in Logic
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The manual is presented by Chris West, Steinberg expert. It's very much a practical 'get up and running' video, showing the novice user exactly how to install and begin using Cubase, whether they're running the program on an ST, Mac or PC computer — there's even a basic background on using the computer themselves! All of Cubase's controls are shown, explained and demonstrated in depth. Once you're familiar with the basic controls, Chris takes you slowly through recording your first session, followed by overviews of the various edit screens. It's rather like having an expert tutorial that you can run again and again in the comfort of your home, until you can use Cubase like a true pro.

Topics covered include: the main screen, customising names and outputs, copying and pasting between arrangements, MIDI filter, cycle mode recording, the tool box, all edit screens.

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SYNTHESIZERS

ROLAND XP-80

In association with Roland UK & Roland Corp USA you will have the knowledge of an experienced Product Specialist permanently available in your own home when you purchase this essential video. It enables you to quickly grasp the knowledge of the many functions, and how to use your newly acquired knowledge. The video also incorporates Labyrinth's unique Video Index System VIS TM, which uses a combination of permanently on screen Time Code together with a Contents Listing.

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ROLAND XP-50

This XP-50 video owners manual is produced by Roland Corporation USA and covers all the major features of the instrument in detail. This is an application based video that provides many examples of how your new found knowledge can be applied. Just a few of the 30 separate topic areas covered are: Effects, Choosing Sounds, Loading a Song, Loop Recording, Copying a Track to Pattern, Making an RPS Set, Track Editing, Multitrack Recording, Patch Editing, Creating Spits & Layers in a Patch.

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ROLAND JV-1080 VIDEO MANUAL

Roland's amazing JV-1080 synthesizer module is covered in detail in this informative video. Presented by Ten Water in the video the video guides you through the basics, and leads you parriesly onto the advanced features. The video even shows you how to fit the expansion boards & gives demonstrations of some of the wonderful sounds they contain. Once again this video has been produced in association with Roland UK & USA to ensure that everything it contains is accurate, and relevant to the new and more experienced users alike.

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by Sam West
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VIDEO CODE V067 £22.95
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Cassette/CD

by Sam West
Although covered towards singers of varying abilities, voices and styles, the contents of this recording are often challenging even to the professional singer! The video (code V067) goes into most technical detail, whereas the CD or Cassette concentrate on more intensive practising. First of all the exercises are sung, in various keys and then with musical accompaniment and melody line, so you can concentrate more on your voice while practicing (karaoke style). Vocal exercises can be boring, but this studio recording has been produced and presented to a very high standard, with interesting musical accompaniments to the exercises.

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CODE V005 £24.95
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This is, in our opinion, the best ever guide to the equipment and skills needed to produce high quality results from a home studio. Full of clear examples and graphic information, the video majors on effects and how to use them well. It also covers the do's and don'ts of track bouncing, microphones and mic techniques for different applications, getting the most out of multi effects units, plus an analysis of guitar effects with top session guitarist Milton MacDonald and an engineering interview with ace producer Alan Parsons. Writer/presenter Julian Cobbleck packs the programme with professional tips, allowing musicians of all kinds to get the most out of their home studio.

CODE V006 £24.95
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LEVEL THREE

This video is packed with information and professional tips on advanced MIDI applications in the home studio, including interfacing with sequencers, which sync code is best for which application and why. Hit producer Martin Phillips (Earsax, London Beat) discusses modern recording techniques, and top programmer Paul Wilton examines the opportunities and benefits offered by hard disk recording. It offers practical advice on sampling - how to save time and tracks; plus professional tips on advanced arranging and mixing techniques, including spectrum mixing.

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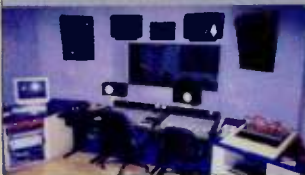
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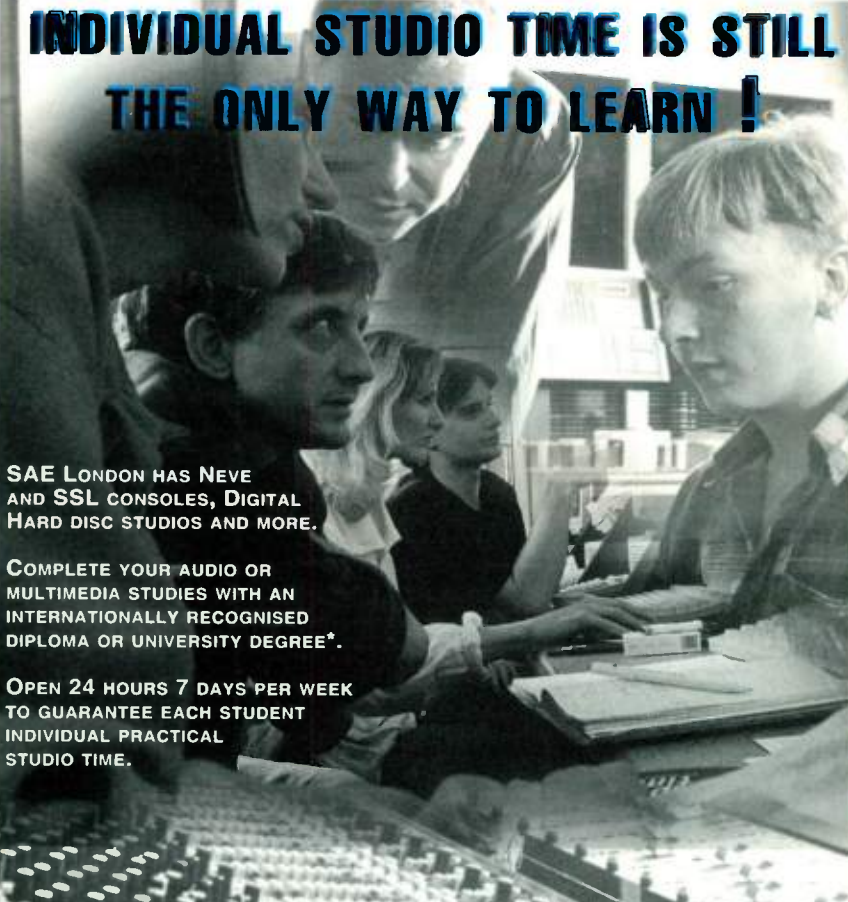
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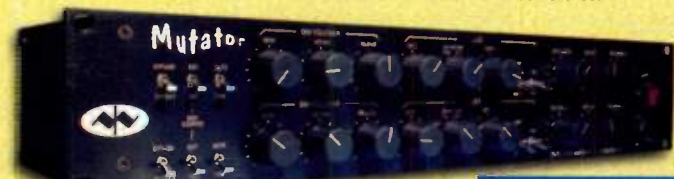


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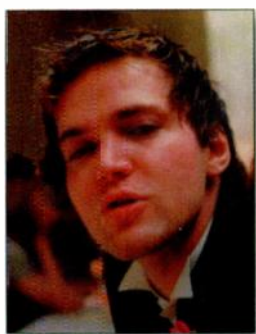
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THE ADVERTISERS INDEX

A1 Music	☎ 0161 236 0340	269
Academy of Sound / Carlsbro Retail	☎ 0116 262 4183	155, 156-157, 158-159
Akai UK	☎ 0181 897 6388	13
Alchemia School of Recording	☎ 0171 359 3988	263
Andertons Music Company	☎ 01483 456777	109, 210-211
Arbiter PLC	☎ 0181 202 1199	15, 136-137
Area 51	☎ 01442 235151	43
Audie-Technica	☎ 0113 277 1441	33
BCK Products	☎ 01992 524442	267
Beyerdynamic GB	☎ 01444 258258	39, *45
Blue Systems	☎ 01799 584095	37
Brandni Music	☎ 0181 908 2323	169
Brixton Exchange Mart (BEM)	☎ 0171 733 6821	133
Computer Audio Warehouse	☎ 0181 400 1234	1
Concert Systems	☎ 0161 927 7700	221, 361
DACS	☎ 0191 438 5585	97
Dawmans Music	☎ 01925 632591	163, 164-165
Digital Village	☎ 0181 440 3440	112-113, 114-115, 116-117
Drammer Distribution	☎ 01924 378669	45
E-MU Systems Incorporated	☎ 001 831 438 1921	130-131, 231
Eddie Mocs Music	☎ 01202 395135	276-277, 278-279
EMTEC Magnetics GmbH	☎ 00 49 621 5920 276	49
Exclusive Distribution	☎ 01462 481148	79, 87, 187
G & N Computers	☎ 01324 887007	97, 261
Gig Sources	☎ 0181 769 6496	103
Guitar, Amp & Keyboard Centre	☎ 01273 676835	264-265
HB Communications	☎ 0181 962 5000	40-41, 82-83
Isotrack	☎ 01202 247 000	101
Kenton Electronics	☎ 0181 337 0333	223
Key Audio Systems	☎ 01245 344001	7, 143, 167, 185, 203
Korg UK	☎ 01908 857100	0BC, 73, 182-183
M Corporation	☎ 01425 480569	88-89, 90-91
Marantz Professional UK	☎ 01753 688668	19
Midiman UK	☎ 01205 290680	207
Millennium Music Software	☎ 0115 955 2200	51, 53
Music Connections	☎ 01245 354777	55, 56-57, 58-59, 60-61, 62-63, 64-65, 66
Music Lab	☎ 0171 388 5392	Loose Insertion
Music Village	☎ 0181 598 9506	118-119, 120-121, 122-123, 124-125
Musical Exchanges	☎ 0121 248 5868	75
Musictrak	☎ 01462 812010	iFC
P & R Audio Technology	☎ 01323 849522	189
Peavey Electronics Corp UK	☎ 01536 461234	147
Phil Rees Modern Music Technology	☎ 01608 811215	249
Project Music	☎ 0181 570 4444	209
Red Sound Systems	☎ 01494 429321	95
Red Submarine	☎ 01904 624266	227
Roland UK	☎ 01792 515020	105, 218-219, 250-251
Samplezone	☎ 0800 731 2939	200-201
Sennheiser UK	☎ 01494 551551	111
SDV London	☎ 0171 923 1892	iBC, 35, 103, 123, 153, 223
Smart Sound Direct	☎ 01883 346647	191
Sound Business Studio Sales	☎ 0181 559 0373	205
Sound Control	☎ 0800 525260	232-233
Sound Division	☎ 0171 609 3939	302-303
Sound Solutions	☎ 01403 732606	169
Sound Technology plc	☎ 01462 480000	5, 171
Sound Valley Distribution	☎ 01494 434738	213
Sounds Live	☎ 0191 230 3422	215
Spirit by Soundcraft	☎ 01707 696000	8-9
SRTL	☎ 01243 379834	242-243
Stirling Audio Systems	☎ 0171 624 6000	69
Studiomaster	☎ 01582 570370	135
Studiospares	☎ 0171 482 1692	107
Sutekina Music (World of Music)	☎ 0800 371129	148, 246-247
TEAC UK	☎ 01923 819630	172-173
Techmate UK	☎ 01206 793355	93
The Academy of Contemporary Music	☎ 01483 456788	199
The American Intercontinental University	☎ 0171 486 1772	127
The UK Office	☎ 01442 870103	77
Thomann Musikhaus	☎ 00 49 956 92230	259
Time & Space Distribution	☎ 01837 841100	255, 256-257
Tony Larking Audio	☎ 01462 499600	197
Turnkey	☎ 0171 379 5148	20-21, 22-23, 24-25, 26-27, 28-29, 30-31, 141, 229, 236-237, 277, Loose Insertion
Unity Audio	☎ 01440 785843	193
Way Out West Music Company	☎ 0181 744 1040	47, 225
Yamaha - Kembie Music	☎ 01908 366700	17, 75



Reading 'Sounding Off' recently, you tend to get the impression that music and computers just don't mix. A typical article will read either "I'd rather use a good old warm/analogue/2-inch 24-track any day than one of these new-fangled disk things, err, but I grit my teeth, struggle with the unfamiliar, and use one anyway," or "I was distressed to find my Yashimoti Wanblaster soundcard only played back two and a half tracks of audio with *Logic*, even after de-installing all my games except *Resident Auto Theft III*..."

In the first case, a seasoned 'pro' is attempting to apply the same working methods to hard disk recording that he/she would use with tape. However, this doesn't quite get explained to the supplier, and they end up

installing an under-specified system. The user is left feeling that computers and music just don't mix very well, and that they simply aren't worth all the hassle.

"If Sergeant Pepper didn't need one..." they can be heard to mutter into their pints.

In the second case, the complaints stem once again from woefully under-specified systems. The

company selling the computer or soundcard most probably doesn't know its word clock from its *Wordperfect*, and is still living in the dark old days of 1995, when getting more than four tracks out of a computer was considered an exotic luxury, rather like having your car talk to you. Funnily enough, it's the same computer salesmen who also have David Hasselhoff haircuts, but that's another story...

Anyway, let's put all of this behind us. 1998 is Year Zero as far as computers and hard disk recording are concerned, now that Apple have finally got their butt into gear and released the brilliant G3. It's now perfectly possible to set up a computer-based hard disk recording system that behaves much like a 24-track tape machine when you want it to, and much like a sequencer when that appeals. It's just a matter of planning, setting up, and spending some cash.

Here's the secret. Buy a G3, stick in more RAM than is usual (128Mb), attach a pair of big AV drives (never put all your, er, data in one basket), add 16 channels of ADAT I/O via cards, and here's the good bit — it actually works! Use a pair of ADATs or a desk with ADAT format I/O for your ins and outs, and Bob's your uncle. Add multiple outboard valve preamps for that groovy sound we all love, and

no-one can complain — compared to the cost of a well maintained 2-inch 24-track, you'll save at least five grand, enough money for the tape- and tree-huggers to pay for a lifetime's subscription to *What Classic Car* magazine, with something left over for new polo-neck sweaters. Of course, you'll still need some great mics, and don't expect to do all your effects and processing with plug-ins for at least another year, so don't sell the PCM 90 just yet.

There's just one main rule — back up your data regularly. I don't wish to get too boring, but here's my method. I just drop the folder containing all the sound and sequencer info on to my second hard drive from time to time, backing up the project as I go. When the tunes are finished, I'll make CD-ROMs. I'm finding that each song tends to take up about 500Mb, which means that I can back up the all the multitrack information for around 90 pence. For safety's sake, let's call it two pounds fifty and make a couple of copies and print labels. Now, I for one don't remotely believe the figures banded around for the life of CD-R media — one earnest salesman informed me that the blank CD-Rs he was selling would definitely hold their data for a hundred years, whereupon I expressed surprise and told him that I was unaware, up until now, that they'd made 4-speed CD recorders in 1898. Perhaps the manufacturers were just taking a good guess at archive life. I do believe, however, that they'll last long enough for me to back up all the CD-ROMs that I've made on to whatever format supersedes them in about five years and makes their capacity look miniscule. As a matter of interest, I've just backed up all my old high density floppies on to one CD-R.

Done properly, therefore, you can have all the advantages of a tape-based system (separate ins and outs, simultaneous multiple track recording, cheap media, er, that's it) with the zillion and one brilliant things that have made sequencers the tools of the modern music scene that they are. All this for a system that also plays the stress relieving *Duke Nukem* without messing up any of your settings, for when the might of your modern music software is rendered useless by the oldest force known to society, the crap drummer. Oh yes, and I'm writing this initially on paper whilst sitting in the garden. It's a gorgeous day and a laptop would melt. I'll leave my computers doing what they do best, recording expressive music and getting it onto CD with the minimum of fuss, so that others can hear it.

Rupert Cook wears eyeliner, drives an old Capri, and loves the '90s. Contact www.lostboysstudio.com for more information.

SOS

sounding Off

RUPERT COOK tells the Luddites among us to stop complaining and defragment our hard drives.

If you'd like to air your views in this column, please send your ideas to: *Sounding Off*, Sound On Sound, Media House, Trafalgar Way, Bar Hill, Cambs CB3 8SQ. Any comments on the contents of previous columns are also welcome, and should be sent to the Editor at the same address. Email: sos.feedback@sospubs.co.uk

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