

Mac PC What is it? A top-quality sampled drum kit with integrated MIDI loop player **PRICE: £99**

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TOONTRACK EZdrummer

On the DVD

AUDIO DEMOS
Hear what EZdrummer is capable of in the Audio Demos folder.



The name is a giveaway – the little brother to dfh Superior is designed for those who want to create convincing acoustic drum parts, fast...

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

PC: PIII/Athlon 1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM, Windows XP, 1.5GB free hard disk space, VST host application
Mac: G4 1GHz, 512MB RAM, Mac OS X 10.2.8, Audio Units host application

TEST MACHINE

PC: Carillon AC-1 2.4GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM, Windows XP SP2, Steinberg Cubase SX 3.1

You're going to like this one. Seriously. You're really going to like it. Irrespective of whether you're a computer music-making novice or a world-class record producer who flits between exotic studio locations on a water scooter, the only reason to dislike EZdrummer is that you hate live drum kits. In which case you should stop reading now. EZdrummer is a drum sampler (and integrated MIDI player) that offers three or four types each of snare, kick and cymbals. If that doesn't sound like £99 worth of software, you're probably not

familiar with Toontrack's technology, which does for drum sampling what Stradivarius did for bowed instruments.

Beats out of Hell

Toontrack made their name with their Drumkit From Hell range of ultra-high-quality drum samples. Then, in search of perfection, they upped the stakes and launched dfh Superior, a set of drums that was recorded with so many permutations that it required a sophisticated yet intuitive software plug-in to tame it. Both dfh Superior and its sister product, dfh Custom &

Vintage, enable you to create drum parts so good that it's impossible to tell that they're not live recordings. However, they both take up many gigabytes of disk space and, more importantly, need to be allied to some skilful programming if you're going to get the best out of them. EZdrummer represents Toontrack's attempt to make the dfh Superior technology somewhat more practical (and easier) to use. The user interface is customised according to the drum kits you purchase, and two are provided out of the box. Specifically,

there's a basic, three-cymbal/three-tom kit and a Yamaha cocktail kit.

It might sound a bit childish, but it really is great fun to click on the little pictures of drums and hear them being bashed. In practical terms, the pictures give you no more functionality than the square boxes in Battery (or any other decent drum sampler, for that matter), but they're more fun to play with and we like them. OK?

EZ does it

There are only two other parts to the user interface. The first is a pop-up mixer that features level and pan controls, and also a stereo-reverse macro button. If you want more functionality, just select Multichannel from a pop-up menu and the channels are mapped across all of EZdrummer's individual VST outputs, rather than just the first stereo pair.

Finally, there's the MIDI library browser, which is very attractively laid out, expandable and, once you've figured out the slightly odd way in which filenames and folders are used,

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user-customisable. This oddness is acceptable, though, since it enables you to label MIDI files in a way that file systems don't otherwise permit.

There's nothing difficult about the operation of EZdrummer (hence its name). You put MIDI in and drum sounds come out. That's pretty much

Hell or high water?

If the terms 'leakage' and 'spillage' evoke only watery images in your mind, you've probably managed to avoid wrangling with the difficulties of recording a real drum kit. These terms (along with 'bleed') describe the way in which the sound of every drum inevitably gets picked up by every microphone on the kit. While excessive leakage can cause problems, a small amount – coupled with natural drum kit resonance – actually helps bind the drum sounds together into a pleasing musical package.

Toontrack's dff Superior uses leakage to great effect, but at the expense of taking up masses of disk space. In the case of EZdrummer, however, the cross-microphone leakage has been cut down to a bare minimum, with only the overhead microphones and the lower snare microphone sporting leakage controls (and even in these cases, we're just talking about an on/off switch). However, Toontrack have still managed to give EZdrummer a real-life, holistic sound by retaining the all-important Room microphone channel which, by its very nature, adds kit resonance and

it, apart from the self-explanatory MIDI loop browser and onscreen mini-mixer. If you're wondering what that Christmas-like snow is (the stuff that hangs from the top edge of the cymbals and drums), this just activates the drop-down menu of alternative

plug-in and into the host environment. Here, it's the MIDI drum loops, and the procedure is quite simple. You just flick through the different loops (while they're playing), and when you find one that you like, you drag it onto a track in your sequencer, and drop it wherever you want it to be. It's an easy, quick and effective system that enables you to build up a complete arrangement in seconds.

Hidden depths

So, is there anything wrong with EZdrummer? Perhaps some slightly more twiddly hi-hat patterns wouldn't go amiss (it's not much of a criticism, but it's the best we can do). Some people might consider it to be a little expensive, but remember that this is no toy. EZdrummer features a set of custom samples of a high-quality kit, and this was played in one of the world's finest studios and recorded in a degree of detail that you won't find in many other libraries. Also, this sample set is controlled by a specialised plug-in, which hides all of the complexities of velocity layers and alternative hits and enables you to produce a drum sound that's both natural and organic.

Finally, we should point out what an amazingly effective productivity tool EZdrummer is. Within literally seconds of starting a new project, you can be assembling a kick-ass drum track with perfect sound. Combine that with the option to expand the library with your own MIDI loops and Toontrack's forthcoming add-on drum packs, and you've got a winning solution which enables you to produce world-class results straight away. **cm**



▲ Leakage is switchable for snare and overheads

natural ambience. To round things off, the addition of an optional humaniser feature ensures that repeated hits don't suffer from the infamous machine-gun effect that's commonly associated with sampled drums.

▶ ALTERNATIVELY

Native Instruments Battery 2

cm81 » 9/10 » £150

The latest version of this drum sampler comes with its own multi-mic samples and a powerful new processing engine

FXpansion BFD

cm68 » 9/10 » £180

Awesome acoustic drum module that can be expanded with a range of excellent add-on packs. More advanced than EZdrummer, but also more complex

VERDICT

FOR

- + A world-class drum sound
- + Create drum backing tracks in seconds
- + Easy to use
- + Thousands of basic MIDI drum loops
- + Expansion packs are already planned

AGAINST

- Not designed to cater for user samples
- Slightly unadventurous MIDI hi-hat parts

EZdrummer is probably the fastest route from inspiration to pro-quality drum tracks that you can take. Highly recommended

RATING



▲ Fancy a cocktail? It's the retro alternative to a full kit