

cm mini reviews

A rapid-fire round-up of sample libraries, ROMplers and more

Akai MPK mini £70

Web www.akaipro.com

Contact Akai/Numark/Alesis Europe, 01252 896000

Format PC/Mac, USB

At first glance, the USB-powered MPK mini looks like an amalgamation of Akai's LPK 25 mini-keyboard and their pint-sized LPD8 pad/knob controller. On second glance, it becomes apparent that that's essentially what it is!

The eight assignable velocity-sensitive pads feel as playable as you'd expect from the company behind the MPC range - two banks of assignments can be stored for additional flexibility. For a small device, the eight knobs are pretty well-spaced, too. Up to four banks of settings can be stored for quick recall, and control assignments can be made in a software editor.

All very nice, then, and the MPK mini is pretty good value for money, too. The question you have to ask yourself is whether you're happy to play its 25 mini-keys. They don't feel poor by any means (though there is a certain amount of sponginess), but some will still find them fiddly, particularly those with large fingers or who are used to a full-size 'board. That's the price you pay for having such a feature-packed and compact controller, though, and if you want a keyboard that does a lot and can be slung in a small rucksack, this is it.

8/10



Alesis Q25 £60

Web www.alesis.com

Contact Akai/Numark/Alesis Europe, 01252 896000

Format PC/Mac, USB

At a time when many MIDI keyboard manufacturers are keen to emphasise how many controls their hardware has and how easily they automatically map

to your software's parameters, the Q25 feels like a refreshing change. In some ways, it's a throwback to the old days: there are just two assignable controls (mod wheel and a data entry slider), a 5-pin MIDI output as well as a USB one (which can also provide power), and fairly conservative styling.

This isn't to say that the Q25 is an anachronism, though - far from it. The 25 full-size keys are lighter and more playable than those you'll find on some of this keyboard's rivals, and it's a pleasure to have proper pitch and mod wheels. It's a fairly svelte piece of hardware, too.

It might not do a great deal - and multiple key presses are required to change settings - but at this price and with this level of performance, the Q25 fills a niche for those seeking a compact keyboard that they just want to *play*.

7/10



Prodipe 25C £80

Web www.zenaudiolimited.co.uk

Contact Zen Audio, 01924 476533

Format PC/Mac, USB

Let's get the bad news out of the way first: the USB-powered Prodipe 25C looks dated (it appears to have been inspired by the very first generation of M-Audio's Oxygen 8), its case feels slightly brittle and the 25 keys don't play so well. They almost feel

'stepped', with a discernable change halfway down the action.

What this controller does have in its favour, though, is a wide-ranging feature set. The pitch/mod wheels, two data buttons, data entry slider and four notched knobs are all assignable; in fact, the knobs can be switched between two banks of assignments and transmit on different MIDI channels. There's also a Dual mode that lets you send MIDI data from the keyboard and some of the controllers on two channels simultaneously. Round the back, you've got a 5-pin MIDI Out, a pedal input and the option to power from the mains.

This is worth looking at if you're on a tight budget, but there are smarter, better feeling 25-note controllers out there.

6/10



Korg iMS-20 £9.49

Web www.korg.co.uk

Contact Korg UK, 01908 857100

Format iPad app (iOS 3.2 or later)

For their second App Store entry, Korg have not only virtualized their legendary MS-20 analogue synth, they've coupled it with a recreation of the accompanying SQ-10 16-step sequencer, and then taken things another step further with a six-part drum machine, seven-channel mixer and built-in effects processing.

The MS-20 monosynth is the star of the show. You get a pair of oscillators, three and five-stage envelope generators, LFO, VCA and, of course, those gloriously squelchy MS-20 filters. Noise and ring mod are included, and the LFO can be synchronised to the sequencer.

Speaking of modulation, iMS-20 includes a proper patchbay complete with virtual patch cables. Not that you need them, because just like a real MS-20, iMS-20 works as a fixed-signal path instrument when no cables are jacked in.

Further control is provided via a virtual keyboard and a pair of Kaoss pads, one of which

can be made to trigger notes in a selected scale, while the other is a fun way to tweak synth parameters.

The 16-step sequencer sits atop the synth and can be dragged down with your finger. There are three rows of 16 steps and a row of trigger outputs. The sequencer can control volume, pitch and pan, or pump out a generic control signal.

The drum machine section provides six-part rhythm sequencing with each sound created from a dedicated MS-20. You can control notes, volume and pan via the sequencer knobs. It's fast, friendly and flexible.

Sequencer patterns can be arranged into songs and dumped via iTunes, and there's even built-in SoundCloud support.

The iMS-20 is a superb-sounding app, and



one that invites hours of tweaking. The patchbay might be a bit intimidating to raw recruits, but the seasoned vet will appreciate the familiar playing field. Note that the price rockets up to £19.99 from February onwards, so grab it at the introductory price while you can!

9/10

Reactable Systems SL Reactable Mobile £5.99

Web www.reactable.com

Contact via website

Format iPhone/iPod Touch/iPad

Reactable is an attention-grabbing, interactive instrument that has wowed concert-goers during its appearances onstage with Björk. With its luminescent tabletop and building-block modules, it combines play and performance in a presumably inspiring fashion. We say "presumably" because the thing costs a pretty penny at just under €10,000. You can therefore imagine our glee at seeing this mobile version pop up in the App Store for a few quid.

Surprisingly, Reactable Mobile carries much of the functionality of the fully physical version, albeit with a few twists. The main limitation is that you can use only a limited number of each 'block' type in the mobile incarnation (eg, two oscillators, one filter, etc).

Reactable is inspired in part by modular synthesisers, with oscillators, filters, modulators, effects, sequencers and more represented as blocks that are placed (or dragged) onto the 'table'. Modules can then be patched together and tweaked by spinning them around, or dragging your finger(s) around the perimeter of

a given block. Each block provides a couple of parameters that may be manipulated in this way. For instance, an outer circle surrounding one half of the oscillator alters the played note, while an inner ring displays the octave. The other half of the block provides an amplitude control.

You can access further block parameters by double-tapping. For example, the filter block provides filter modes along with cutoff and resonance. The latter two are adjusted via a 2D graphical display. It's all very interactive and extremely intuitive.

Along with the usual oscillators, you get some sampler blocks. There's a dedicated loop block, along with an instrument/drum sample player. There are a number of samples included, and you can bring your own in through iTunes or via the built-in web server (which you can also use to retrieve recorded performances in WAV format).

Reactable is great fun. We wish we could access more blocks - we'd particularly like more sequencers and filters. Still, the price is right, and



there's no shortage of inspiration on tap. And let's be honest: for most of us, this is as close as we're likely to get to the real thing.

9/10

Soundware round-up

Industrial Strength **DOWNLOAD**

The Sound of London Acid Techno £23

Web www.loopmasters.com
Contact info@loopmasters.com
Format Wav, Acid, REX2, ReFill, Apple Loops, Kontakt, Battery, GarageBand



This pack was created by acid dons Chris Liberato and Sterling Moss, and if you're at all familiar with the sound of acid techno, you know exactly what to expect: thunderous drum machine beats, staccato synth bass rhythms and distorted Roland TB-303 leads. The library isn't enormous (1000 loops and hits), but the content is spot on and there's a great selection of single-hit drums, basses, synths, FX and vocals that should be enough to provide the basis for dozens of pumping techno tracks. If you're into the harder side of techno, this is a must.

9/10

D16 Group **DOWNLOAD**

Plasticlicks €69

Web www.d16.pl
Contact support@d16.pl
Format WAV, Akai AKP, SF2



Polish plug-in powerhouse D16 Group venture into the sample library market with this unusual collection of 1500 electronic drum sounds. Rather than concentrating on massive full-on hits à la Vengeance-Sound, D16's approach is more minimal, serving up edgy, unusual elements that are perfect for percussive duties or for layering up with meat-and-potatoes drum sounds. Each sound has samples for four velocity layers, covering all your favourite analogue-style drum types, from kicks to cowbells. Plasticlicks isn't a one-stop shop, and it won't be everyone's cup of tea, but if you're into anally sculpting drum sounds or programming weird beats, it's a terrific tool with a distinctive vibe.

9/10

Original Music **DOWNLOAD**

Dance Drum Samples £15

Web www.original-music.co.uk
Contact admin@original-music.co.uk
Format WAV, AIFF, REX2, MIDI



While this title from newcomers Original Music is relatively cheap, it's not going to give established sample publishers any sleepless nights. It consists of 342 one-shots and 104 loops. The hits are generally badly recorded, and many are of real drums, which don't sound very 'dancey' and are often plagued by background noise. There are often many indistinguishable variations on the same sound (some are seemingly identical). The loops are poorly produced, with numerous useless variations on a theme. More positively, there are some decent ride cymbals, but overall, this is best avoided.

3/10

Zero-G

Alien Skies: Cinematic Ambiences 2 £90

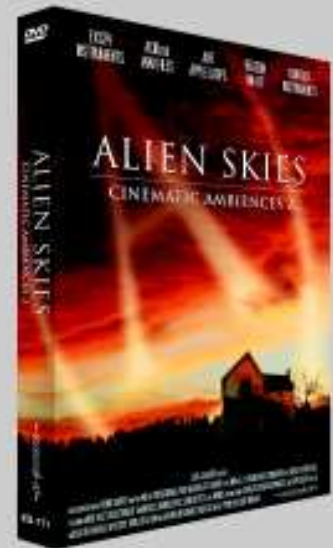
Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com
Format Acid WAV, Apple Loops, EXS24, Kontakt, Reason NN-XT

Alien Skies follows on from where its prequel, Dark Skies, left off. It's a two-DVD package including 36 huge-sounding construction kits full of hits, sweeps, ambiences and FX. Expect deep and atmospheric textures that will remind you of those unforgettable film moments. Each kit has a cue file so you can hear how all the parts work together in context.

You also get descriptively named folders containing ambiences, hits/stings, sweeps/swells - eg, the ambiences are filed under Grotesque, Intense, Sacred, etc.

The sounds demonstrate mind-blowing sound design skills, are insanely inspiring and are presented in 24-bit. While the content is perfect for game and film scores, don't discount its use in any musical project requiring added depth and dramatic tension. Highly recommended.

10/10



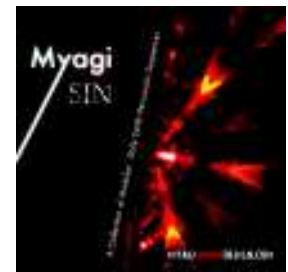
Myagi Sound Design **DOWNLOAD**

Sin \$35

Web www.myagisounddesign.com
Contact myagi@myagimusic.com
Format WAV

Sin consists of just 50 samples, which isn't a lot for the \$35 entry fee. If they were, say, the best 50 drum hits, loops or synth noises of all time, you might be satisfied, but what you get is a handful of very mediocre bloopy, bleepy analogue synth-style percussive loops. They're described as "heavy duty", but only a few of them live up to this. The loops do build up as they play through, which is a nice touch and means there's more variety than there first appears, but to be frank, it sounds as if it was knocked out in an evening. Considering you can get much larger and more comprehensive libraries for around the same price, we suggest you look elsewhere for your fix of wobbly, envelope-following noises.

4/10



Producer Loops **DOWNLOAD**
Supalife Progressive House £25+

Web www.producerloops.com
 Contact via website
 Format Acid, WAV, Apple Loops, MIDI, Reason ReFill, REX

There are five construction kits here that leave nothing to the imagination. You get dry loops, MIDI loops, single hits, and even "unlooped riffs" with their tails intact. The musical parts suit the genre, the grooves are rocking, and there are some exceptionally modern and exciting sounds. We're not convinced that all of the parts in each kit work together so well and there's a slight lack of bottom-end in some sounds, including some kicks. Overall, though, this is a good pack, and the FX are especially slick.

8/10



Goldbaby **DOWNLOAD**
iAm-MS20 \$49

Web www.goldbaby.co.nz
 Contact info@goldbaby.co.nz
 Format WAV, Kontakt, EXS24

The Korg MS-20 analogue synth has been reborn digitally as a plug-in, an iPad app and even a Nintendo DS title, but this selection of patches from vintage kit lover Goldbaby is all about the authentic tones of the real thing. Plenty of other classic kit was involved in the recording, and iAm-MS20 oozes old-fashioned synth vibes. There are 140 patches including monosynth, polysynth, single cycle waveforms, drum and FX sounds, as well as some lush raw waveforms. None of the sounds are startling or revolutionary, but for classy vintage synth sounds, iAm-MS20 is a great buy.

9/10



Puremagnetik **DOWNLOAD**
Lady Vox \$6

Web www.puremagnetik.com
 Contact info@puremagnetik.com
 Format Ableton Live Pack, Kontakt, Apple Loops

The latest silly-priced Puremagnetik pack is a set of ten instrument patches made up, as you might expect, from female voices. Six of them are simple (but handy) 'ooh'- and 'ahh'-type patches. They span one to two octaves each and are in stereo (although the loop points aren't perfect). Then there's a single patch that has roughly an octave each of 'shoo', 'be', 'doooh' and 'wah' sounds. The remaining three patches sound like convincing synth sounds, though they're also based on vocal samples at source and thus have qualities about them that conventional synths don't have. This pack is a lot of fun!

8/10



Ueberschall
Deep House €99

Web www.bestservice.de
 Contact mail@bestservice.de
 Format Elastik Instrument Soundbank

These 24 construction kits range from 119 to 127bpm, but they don't demonstrate a great deal of authenticity. For example, none of the kick drums hit the mark and some of the kits don't sound like the deep house genre at all. On the positive side, there are some very interesting sounds included and the musical content is reasonable. Unfortunately, this title uses the Elastik player, which is pretty inconvenient for the production of serious house music. This isn't awful, but with the standard of house music libraries being so high, you can do a lot better for the asking price.

6/10



Prime Loops **DOWNLOAD**
Aquasonica £20

Web www.primeloops.com
 Contact info@primeloops.com
 Format WAV, Apple Loops, Acid, Akai MPC, FL Studio, Garageband, MC-909, MV8000, MV8800

Aquasonica is a library of loops, patches and one-shots made with the dub techno producer in mind. It seems to draw upon a wide range of influences, even though all of the sounds are synthetic. Spread across 232 loops, 301 drum one-shots, 35 bass patches and 26 synth chord patches are some of the wildest, most eccentric samples we've heard. You'll draw plenty of inspiration from the stylish and unique sounds here. Everything is nice and bright, with good stereo width where relevant. The tempo ranges from 108bpm to 120bpm with plenty of energy packed into the grooves.

9/10



Loopmasters **DOWNLOAD**
Rennie Pilgrem Future Funk £25

Web www.loopmasters.com
 Contact info@loopmasters.com
 Format WAV, Acid, REX2, Reason ReFill, Ableton Live Pack, Apple Loops, HALion, Kontakt, EXS, SFZ, Stylux RMX, NN-XT, GarageBand, MIDI

One of the main ambassadors of the nu-skoool breaks genre, Rennie shows off his musical pedigree with this title. There are 238 samples, ranging from 110bpm to 132bpm. Be warned, though, that some are quite similar to each other. There's also an inconsistency with regards to quality. The best samples are outstanding, with beautiful textures and a rich sound, whereas the worst sound cheap and suffer from clipping and similar symptoms of poor recording/mixing.

7/10

