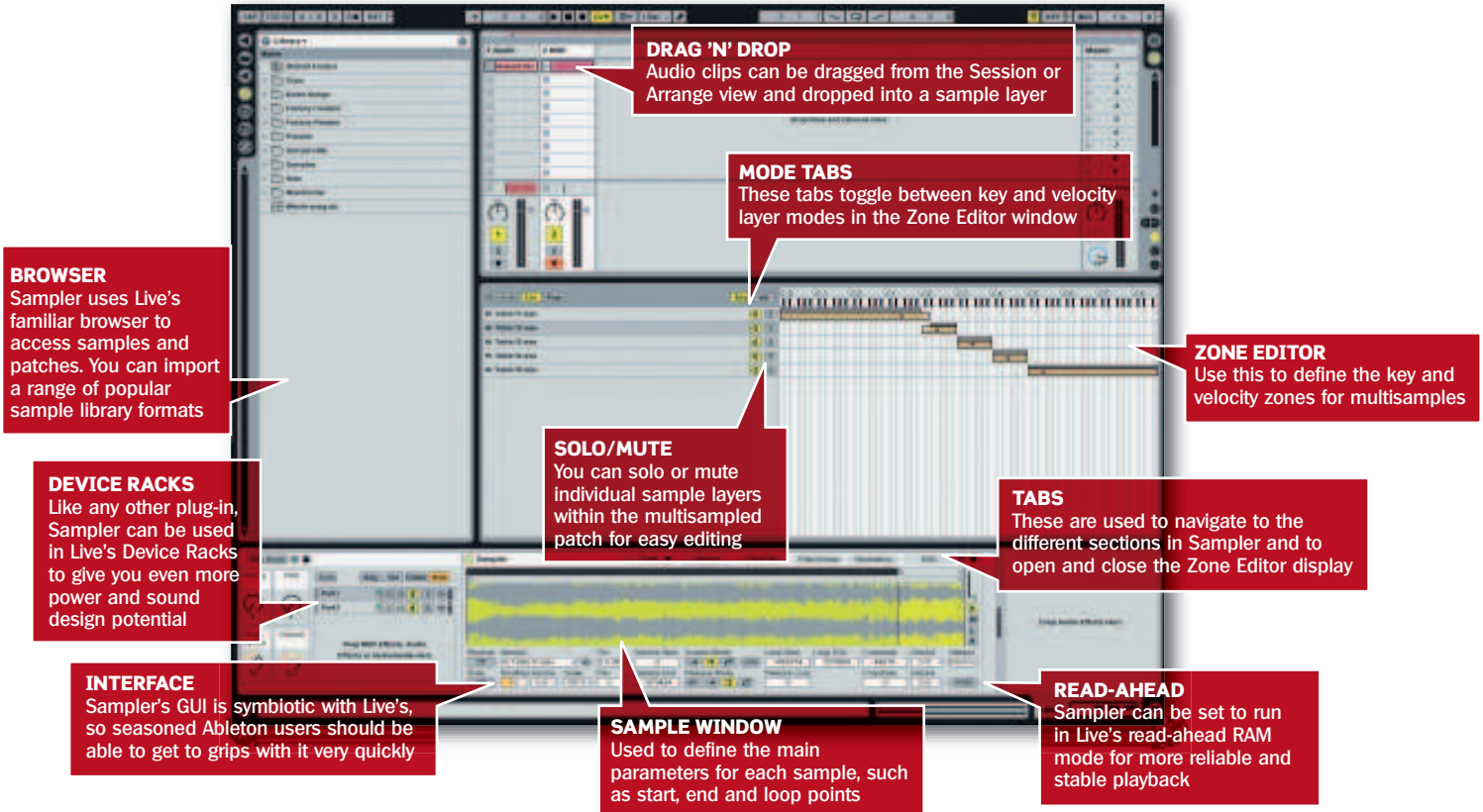


Mac PC What is it? Sampler plug-in for Live 6 **PRICE: €169**

CONTACT: M-Audio, 01923 204010 WWW.ableton.com



ABLETON Sampler

computer music PERFORMANCE

Ableton's customers have been asking for a fully-fledged sampler for quite some time. They've got one now, but does it offer anything new?

► **SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**

Mac: Any G3 (G5 or Intel Mac recommended), 512MB RAM (1GB recommended), Mac OS X 10.2.8 (OS X 10.4.x or later recommended)

PC: 1.5GHz CPU, 512MB RAM (1GB recommended), Windows 2000/XP, QuickTime 6.4 or later, Windows-compatible soundcard

► **TEST MACHINE**

Mac: Mac G5 dual 2GHz, 2.5GB RAM, OS X 10.4.7; iBook G4 1.33GHz, 1.25GB RAM, OS X 10.4.7; Intel Celeron 2.6GHz, 1GB RAM, Windows XP SP2

Live users are a fiercely loyal bunch. Tell them that a major chink in Ableton's armour has long been their lack of a serious sound designer's sampling platform – not to mention Live's inability to import sample formats such as Kontakt or GigaStudio – and they're likely to debate long and hard with you. Thankfully, any such dispute has been rendered pointless with the release of Sampler, an optional add-on for Live 6. Sampler is built around the same model as the other Live plug-ins, fitting neatly into the window at the bottom

of the software's interface (though the keyzone mapping window sits above). All of its different sections are accessed via front panel tabs.

Format flexibility

Getting started is a cinch – drop a sample onto the Sample page (you can even drag 'n' drop clips from the Session or Arrange view) and it's automatically mapped to the root key of C3. Alternatively, you can access sample libraries in EXS, Kontakt (non-encrypted only), SoundFont, GigaStudio, S1000 and S3000 formats.

Live also now has a Find Sample CD function in the browser, so you can even access many old sample library discs that your computer wouldn't otherwise recognise.

The Sample window is as simple as you'd expect, and is where you handle pitch, looping, crossfade and other standard functions. This being Live, though, they're uncommonly easy to set up and navigate, come with some cool tools (such as bidirectional looping) and, for the most part, are real-time controllable with modulators. The next tab brings up the Pitch/

Oscillator section. This features not just a pitch envelope but also an oscillator section (with envelope) that can be assigned to perform either frequency or amplitude modulation duties, and which can itself be modulated further by the pitch envelope. All of which enables Sampler to dish up some pretty unique timbres.

Next is the Filter/Global section, with a variety of filter types, including real-time morphable combinations of high-, low- and band-pass. On paper, there aren't as many as in, say, E-MU's Emulator X2, but many of those filters are preset combinations rather than distinctly different types. Rest assured that Sampler can certainly hold its own when it comes to depth and breadth.

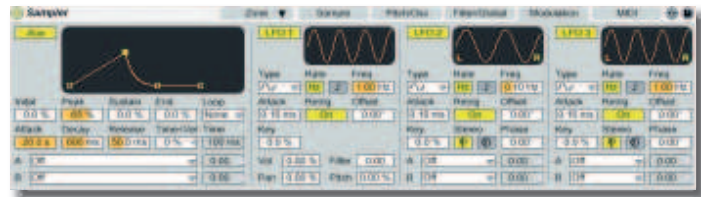
The penultimate section deals with modulation and includes a tasty aux envelope and three LFOs (see the *Modulation sensation* box for more). Finally, there's the MIDI section, where you can assign a range of MIDI CCs to one or two sample parameters simultaneously.

Sitting astride all of this is the zone mapping section, and this is where the real complexity and power of Sampler

Modulation sensation

Without a doubt, our favourite feature in Sampler is the Modulation window. It's fair to say that most casual users don't really get much use out of their sampler's modulation section, and this is partly down to sheer intimidation. The great thing about Sampler, though, is that it presents everything in a tried, tested and very familiar interface, so the whole concept of modulation is more appealing.

First, there's an auxiliary envelope that can be assigned to two parameters (chosen from a list of almost anything you'd want to modulate). Next up is LFO 1, which can be assigned to any or all of volume, filter, pan and pitch. These destinations are fixed – LFO 1 is designed to offer backwards compatibility with Simpler patches – but there are no such restrictions on LFOs 2 and 3. These can each have their two modulation destinations routed to all the same



▲ Modulate to dominate – Sampler makes it a doddle

parameters as the auxiliary envelope – they can even modulate themselves or the other LFOs, if you're feeling particularly courageous. When you start applying these modulations to Sampler's looping features, the sounds you can get are truly stunning, encroaching on the sonic realms of granular and wavetable synthesis – very impressive.

formats, for one. And although it's easy to set up the zone keymapping and multisampling section, actually creating a library of multisamples is still a highly laborious process if you're using nothing other than Live and Sampler, so something along the lines of the Emulator X2's automatic multisampling feature (SynthSwipe) would be very welcome. Without it, Sampler is far more useful for sound design and

Some users might well want to attach the same LFO to pitch, pan and filter frequency, for example.

Well worth sampling

But before we start to stray too far into nitpicking territory, we should say that Sampler is another exceptional piece of code from Ableton. What's more, when placed in the context of Live 6's other features – like Note Length and Device Racks – it becomes arguably the most straightforward and inspirational sampler there is. If you work with any third-party sample libraries, we'd urge you to try the demo – even Kontakt and GigaStudio owners might be seduced by its power, ease-of-use and tight integration with the main Live application.

Ultimately, though, we think it'll be sound designers (both budding and pro) who'll get the most out of Sampler, as the software makes it extraordinarily easy to get some truly unique and useful modulations on the go. Whatever your skill level, you'll find yourself doing things you wouldn't bother to try in any other plug-in. We've never used a more inspirational, fun and intuitive sampler than this, so stop reading and try it right now! **cm**

“IT'LL BE SOUND DESIGNERS WHO'LL GET THE MOST OUT OF SAMPLER”

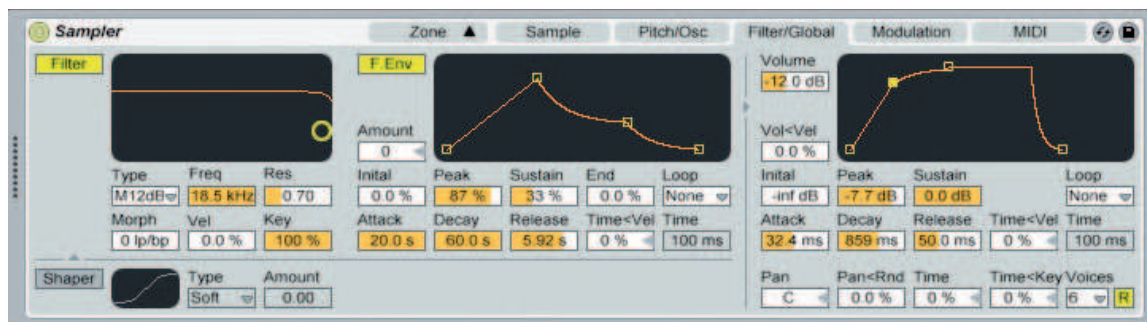
becomes evident. Each multisample within a zone can have any and all of the parameters we've mentioned set independently for it (with the exception of the Global controls), and no other sampler makes it as easy to set up key and velocity ranges to move between them all or to solo and mute individual sections for fine-tuning.

Multisimple?

As great as Sampler is, there are a few improvements we'd like to see – compatibility with even more library

library playback than it is for creating original multisampled instrument patches. Similarly, it isn't as well set up for creating highly realistic non-repetitious multisampled instrument patches as programs such as Tascam's GigaStudio and Yellow Tools' Independence are.

Another potential criticism relates to the modulation options. Great as they are, there's no clear reason (other than space restrictions) why the two additional LFOs can only be mapped to two simultaneous parameters each.



▲ Not only are there tons of options to tweak, but you can modulate and control most of them

▶ ALTERNATIVELY

Tascam GigaStudio 3 Orchestra
cm81 >> 8/10 >> £329

This PC-only behemoth is the daddy for real instrument recreation, but its power comes at a high price

Native Instruments Kontakt 2
cm97 >> 9/10 >> £300

A hugely popular choice and very potent, but nowhere near as approachable as Sampler

VERDICT

FOR

- + Great value
- + Seamless integration
- + Very powerful
- + Inspirationally easy and fun to use
- + Imports a wide variety of sample library formats

AGAINST

- Not ideally suited to realistic multisample instrument playback

Ideal for sound design and general use, Sampler is uniquely inspirational and fun. It should more than do for most Live users

RATING

