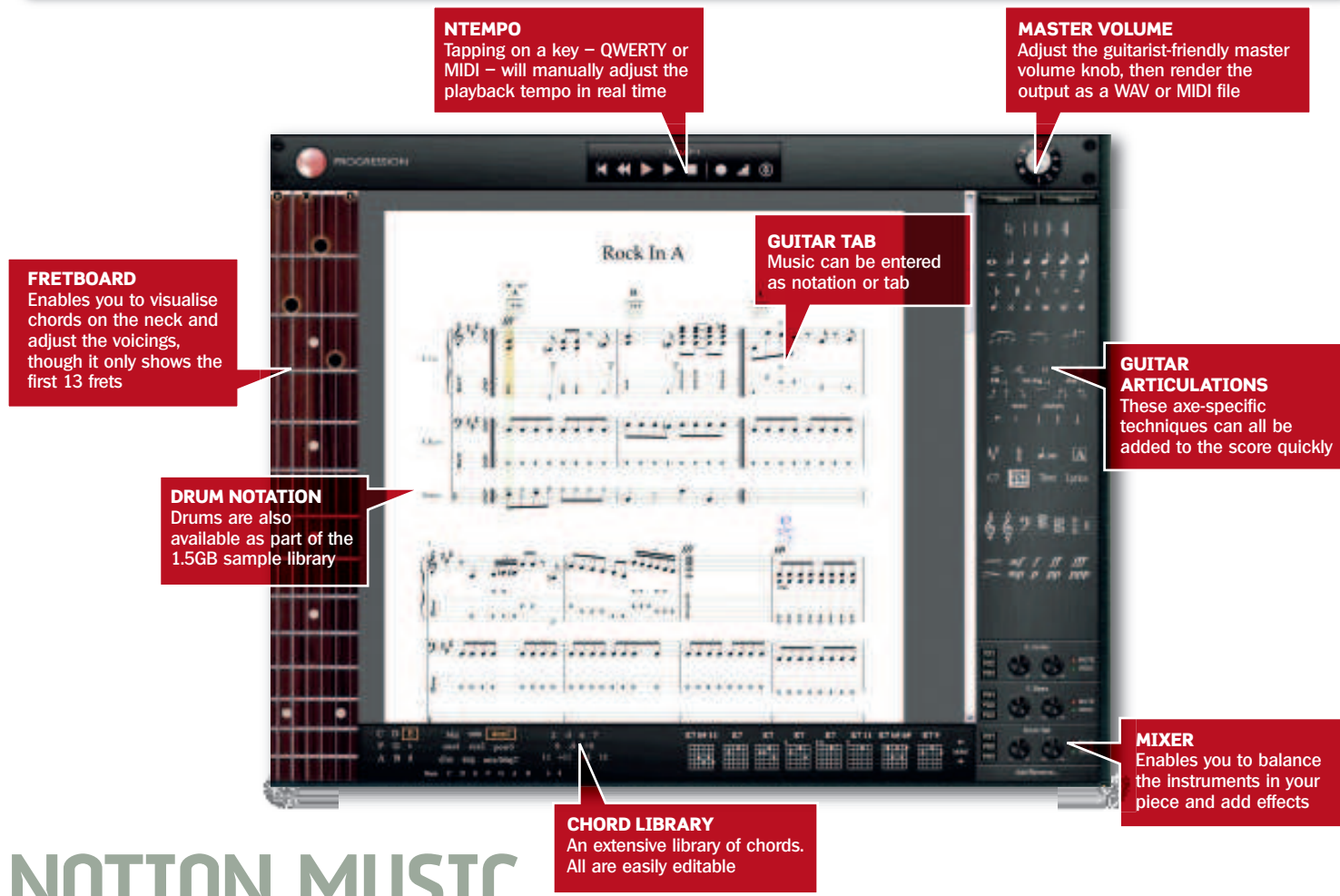


Mac PC What is it? Guitar tab editor with built-in instruments **PRICE: £79**

CONTACT: Notion Music UK, 020 8899 6090 WWW.notionmusic.com



# NOTION MUSIC Progression



It blurs the boundaries between guitar notation and music-making, but is this brand new title what it's name suggests or a step backwards in getting your ideas down?

**► SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**  
**PC:** 2GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, Vista/XP/2000 (SP4)  
**Mac:** 2Hz CPU, 1GB RAM, OS X 10.4

**► TEST SYSTEM**  
**PC:** HP Pavilion 2.8GHz PC, 1GB RAM

**On the DVD**

**AUDIO DEMOS**  
 You can evaluate Progression's sonic capabilities for yourself in the **Audio Demos** folder

**N**otating guitar music is a pain. Even without the instrument's unique articulations – slides, bends and whammy bar dives, etc – each note can be played in up to five different places on the fretboard. This makes the guitar a great deal more difficult to notate for and emulate in the digital domain than, say, the piano (which is essentially a tuned percussion instrument). With Progression, Notion have tried to make life easier for guitarists who want to notate and produce convincing audio of their song ideas. There are already a fair few guitar notation programs out there, but it's

fair to say that they tend to fall down where audio reproduction of your piece is concerned, so Notion have made sound quality one of Progression's strengths.

**Sample this**  
 The sample library is 1.5GB in size and Notion have rounded up a cadre of top-flight session players, including guitarist Neil Zaza and rhythm section gurus Victor and Roy Wooten (bass and drums, respectively), to painstakingly record the samples, covering every note of the guitar's fretboard. It all pays off because the samples are very good, providing some of the most realistic guitar

sounds of any such program on the market. It's by no means perfect, though: bends are still robotic and short notes suffer from the dreaded 'sampled note decay', but short of a 2000GB sample library, what can we reasonably expect? As well as guitar in both electric and acoustic varieties, there's electric and upright bass, a drum kit, and even piano, clavinet and Fender Rhodes keyboards. The guitarist-friendly setup is enhanced by the inclusion of a mixer section, which enables balancing of the instruments as well as the ability to add VST effects to the supplied unprocessed guitar sounds (see *Pro tones* boxout).

There's also the NTempo feature that enables the user to control the speed of playback in real time by tapping the computer keyboard or any MIDI key, which is useful for adding a human feel to your music, or when playing along (eg, by tapping out the beat on a MIDI foot pedal) to your backing track. It also enables the integration of Progression into a live performance scenario.

## Guitar heaven

Notion have tried to make the process of note entry as easy as possible for guitarists. You can directly enter notation or tab, either using the mouse and keys, or with a MIDI keyboard or MIDI guitar (though string bending isn't currently translated). The great thing about the note entry is that notation automatically generates tab and vice versa, which saves on having to drag the notes from one staff to another. This function also means that a note that needs to be edited later will be automatically changed (in some apps, the whole

notes) to the correct string. It's a simple solution that doesn't exist in many other programs.

Chord entry is as easy as clicking in the appropriate place on the score and selecting the shape you want from Progression's library. The guitar neck graphic that runs down the left-hand side of the screen comes into play when you edit the notes within the chord shape – you simply click on the fret you want a note to appear in and the alteration to the diagram is made automatically. You do have to rename the chord yourself, but that's easy enough.

On the surface, it looks as if Notion have got guitar notation nailed, but we do have a few gripes about the engraving side of Progression. Engraving is the process of laying out the score and its various elements in an aesthetically pleasing and musically comprehensible manner, but unlike programs such as Finale, there isn't the ability to get into every aspect of the layout of the piece, meaning big compromises have to be



▲ Progression's intuitive GUI enables you to assign custom sounds to the various parts of your score

the rest of the piece too spread out and difficult to read.

Progression is also missing quite a lot of key musical symbols. Things like being able to specify the number of repeats, first and second time endings and codas, to name but a few, should really be considered as essential inclusions in any notation program.

## Noteworthy

All that said, it is worth remembering that Progression costs a mere £80, and if you're a guitarist with only a basic knowledge of music theory who just wants to get some ideas down, this represents excellent value for money. Progression is also a great piece of software for the guitarist looking to map out their song arrangements for band members to listen to and follow, or someone who simply wants to create a few backing tracks to jam along with. **cm**

“THE SAMPLES PROVIDE SOME OF THE MOST REALISTIC SOUNDS OF ANY SUCH PROGRAM ON THE MARKET”

bar has to be re-entered).

We mentioned earlier that the same notes can be played in several places on the guitar fretboard, which presents a major hassle for note entry and can eat up time at an alarming rate. While there's not really a cure for this – it's almost impossible for the computer to determine the 'correct' fingering – in Progression you can simply drag the note (or group of

made. For example, note spacing is automatic, meaning that some bars can end up looking like a fight in a telephone directory, and if you try to place too many chords in a bar, the chord diagrams overlap and become unreadable.

These two problems can be sorted by specifying a maximum number of bars per system (musical line), but that's a global setting and can make

## Pro tones

Not content with giving Progression 1.5GB of excellent built-in sounds, Notion have included a number of plug-in amp simulators and effects too. On the face of it, this might not seem like much to get excited about, but remember that most notation programs simply feature a set of basic samples with amp tones already applied (acoustic, clean electric and some sort of 'rock' sound, if you're lucky), whereas Progression uses clean tones sampled direct from its various instruments, empowering you to make your own tonal choices rather than have to rely on someone else's.

Notion have teamed up with Alien Connections to give you three amp units, seven cabinet models and three effects units from ReValver Mk II. The amp emulations come in the shape of the ACM 900 and the Blues Maker, so both high-gain and overdriven tones are covered, while the bass amp is the Fender Bassman emulation known as the Bassguy 100. All come with ReValver's hugely editable tube settings, and the effects units are reverb, chorus and delay.

Being able to route your tab's audio signal through the rack enables you to get the tone you want, which means your parts will sound closer to what you intended than they would with preset tones.



▲ Progression comes bundled with a comprehensive selection of amp simulators and rack-style effects units, courtesy of Alien Connections

### ▶ ALTERNATIVELY

**Sibelius G7 Kontakt Edition**  
N/A » N/A » £149

A more rounded engraving program, with its own sounds powered by NI's Kontakt sampler

**MakeMusic Finale 2008**

N/A » N/A » £399  
Fiddly in places, but a very flexible notation program

## VERDICT

### FOR

- + Easy note entry
- + VST effect support
- + Very affordable
- + Great sounds

### AGAINST

- Lacks the flexibility of other notation packages
- Fretboard graphic only goes up to fret 13!

Notion Music have made a strong first attempt at producing a high quality, accessible tab-based music package. As long as you're not expecting advanced engraving functions, it's a solid buy

### RATING

