

Mac PC What is it? Acoustic drum kit workstation **PRICE: £234**

CONTACT: Sonic8, +44 (0) 8701 657456 WWW.fxansion.com INFO: Upgrade from v1.5, £117

PAGE BUTTONS
You can access all aspects of BFD2 using the four main pages: Kit, Mixer, Grooves and Mapping. The fifth page is Preferences

CONTROL BAR
Hitting the Load button opens up the kit chooser and gives you direct access to groove, mapping and mixer presets

MAIN INTERFACE
On the kit page, the main interface is dominated by this graphic. You can audition sounds directly here or by using Audition in the Kit Piece Inspector

KIT PIECE INSPECTOR
With a kit piece slot selected, you can alter piece-specific parameters in the inspector, including ambience send levels

QUICK LOAD
Click on the piece name to view the Quick Load menu, which shows all similar pieces

AUDITION
With a kit piece selected, hear it by hitting the Audition tab

KIT SIZE
BFD2 includes three kit size options. Switching to the big 32-piece kit creates plenty of space to import elements of your choice

STATUS BAR
The Status Bar gives plenty of info, including the RAM usage, current tempo and CPU/HD performance meters

KIT PIECE SLOTS
Audition sounds by Alt-clicking on a kit piece slot. Alternatively, double-click on the graphic to bring up the menu and choose a different sound

MINI MIXER
This offers quick access to direct and ambient levels, and just above it are overall tuning, dynamics and humanise options for the kit

FXPANSION BFD2

It's fair to say that FXpansion's once-pioneering virtual drum kit, BFD, was beginning to show its age somewhat. Good job they've been busy putting together the sequel, then...

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

PC: P4 or better CPU, Windows XP SP1/Vista 32, 1GB RAM, 60GB 7200rpm hard drive, DVD drive, VST/RTAS host for plug-in use, ASIO/WDM/MME driver for standalone use

Mac: G5 or Intel CPU, OS X 10.4, 1GB of RAM, 60GB 7200rpm hard drive, DVD drive, AU/VST/RTAS host for plug-in use, CoreAudio/ASIO driver for standalone use

TEST SYSTEM

Mac: Apple Mac Pro Dual 3GHz, 3GB RAM, OS X 10.4.11, Logic Pro 8

On the DVD

AUDIO DEMOS
A WAV file showcasing BFD2 and an explanatory **Readme** are in the **Audio Demos** folder

For some time, FXpansion's BFD was the de facto standard in ultra-realistic drum ROMplers.

It wrote the rules and then followed up with some wonderful and absurdly large kit libraries. But in all fairness, things have moved on, and the plug-in itself was beginning to buckle under the weight of all that bling. Inevitably, users were being drawn towards new options such as XLN Audio's Addictive Drums and Digidesign's Strike. In typical fighting spirit, though, FXpansion are back with a sequel.

Just like its predecessor, BFD2's sounds were sampled from real kits using a variety of mics to capture

both the 'direct' sounds of the drums and room ambiances, with articulations varying from simple hits to flams, rimshots, sidesticks and edge hits. Couple that with detailed multisampling of many velocity layers, and the result is something that's far beyond a traditional drum machine.

Get some fresh AIR

Visually, BFD2 is totally different to BFD, however. With so many new features – including a new 'proper' audio mixer, analogue-modelled effects and a new groove page and palette system – there's clearly been more than a little tinkering. Add to that the brand new ten-kit, 55GB

library (all recorded at George Martin's famous AIR Lyndhurst studio), and backwards compatibility with the previous version (including the expansions), and things are looking very promising.

As you'd expect, BFD2 has much-improved workflow. With five main pages (Kit, Mixer, Grooves, Mapping and Preferences) accessible from the top bar, even the advanced features aren't buried. As you'd expect, whole kits and individual pieces can be loaded, edited and auditioned from the main Kit page – you can even load and map your own multisamples, should you wish. Kit size is now variable, with 10-, 18- or

even 32-piece options. Sound flexibility includes extensive bleed controls and piece-specific feed levels split into Overheads, Room and Ambience 3 sections.

New kits include two Ludwig classics (Ringo Starr's Blue Oyster and John Bonham's Vistalite) as well as contributions from Gretsch, DW, Pearl and Pork Pie. You'll also find bonus snares, like Ludwig's Black Beauty.

FXpansion's purist approach to recording, using unprocessed signals, has resulted in a flexible library that sounds both clean and consistent. You may have to process the sounds in the same way you would with a live kit, but the great thing is that you have the added benefit of the ambience from AIR Lyndhurst's recording room.



▲ New in version 2 is the grid editor, which forms part of the Groove Engine

Gridlocked

The mixer page includes up to four inserts and sends per channel, and a flexible bus routing system, so creating processed sub-mixes is easy. Factor in the option to render all audio channels to individual files and

point where you can even build new patterns by cherry-picking elements such as kick and snare parts from different grooves (full auditioning within the browser really helps with this). Full drum tracks can be built from grooves either using BFD2's

preferences that affect how many sample velocity layers get loaded, to variation preferences, such as the anti-'machine gun effect' mode. Plus, on the main kit page are Master Dynamics and Humanise parameters.

Hit or miss?

BFD2 is bigger, better and more professional than v1.5. Even so, there are a few things to consider. If you opt for the full 55GB install (you're given three size options), the number of available velocity layers means that kit patches can be very large, which means you need lots of RAM and a bit of patience when loading. If you don't like this, consider curtailing the velocity layers in the preferences. And although FXpansion have done some good work with the mixer and effects, we found the interface a little fiddly.

Over £200 for the full software certainly isn't cheap, but if you're upgrading from v1.5, just over £100 effectively gets you a completely new library as well as the updated plug-in, which is a very good deal indeed. **cm**

"BFD2 IS BIGGER, BETTER AND MORE PROFESSIONAL THAN V1.5"

you're much more in control. In essence, you can use BFD2 in whatever way suits you.

If you're not a drummer and don't fancy bluffing your way through, BFD2's new Groove Engine should be of major interest. Now sporting a drum grid editor with features including velocity, quantise, snap, swing and audition, operation will be instantly familiar to many users. You can load multiple key-mapped grooves in the form of 'Palettes', or load individual grooves direct from the library of over 5000. These can be edited, mixed and matched to the

dedicated drum track or by dragging parts into your host arrangement. You can also import and export as MIDI.

If you're after realism, BFD2's Groove FX feature can help. This includes a non-destructive set of tools, including Quantise, Q swing, Simplify, Compress, Weight, Humanise velocity and Humanise timing. Each lets you apply a percentage value to the existing groove parameters, affecting the tightness, complexity, variation and delivery of rhythms.

Still on a realism tip, there's also a similar set of features for kit sounds. These range from simple 'detail'

Smash and grab

When BFD1 appeared, the concept of 'playing' a software drum kit was in its infancy. But the rise of the electronic drum kit combined with the increasing power of computers has changed that situation considerably. So in use, mapping e-drums is surely no different to mapping a keyboard controller, right? Well, that's the case to a certain extent, but since digital drum kits use MIDI CCs to implement variable state hi-hat pedals, multi-zone pads and cymbal grabbing, a lot of extra CC data can end up being generated, particularly with more complex kit setups.

BFD2 deals with this in a variety of ways. Firstly, for the hardcore, it includes full variable hi-hat operation with adjustable pedal response, pedal tightness parameters and hi-hat fade times. If that all seems a bit too much trouble, though, FXpansion have also included an easy route to 'simple' hi-hat response, ignoring most CC data.

With snares, things are more straightforward, although MIDI CCs are still involved. BFD2 includes one 'half edge' snare articulation, which is the sound between the rim and the centre of the drum. You can set the MIDI CC range to



▲ Just some of the options available in BFD2 for mapping its sounds to your MIDI controller of choice

control the point this triggers at.

Finally, BFD2 supports cymbal choking, which utilises aftertouch data produced by the electronic cymbal. Alas, BFD2 doesn't yet support positional data for cymbals.

▶ ALTERNATIVELY

XLN Audio Addictive Drums
cm110 >> 9/10 >> £160

A more compact package with a smaller library, but we found AD reliable and easy to use, with a very impressive sound

Toontrack Superior Drummer 2.0
N/A >> N/A >> £166

It's been four years since dfh Superior hit the shops, but v2.0 is imminent, and we're expecting big things from it

VERDICT

- FOR**
- + Massive sound library
 - + Excellent groove editor
 - + Easier to use and more reliable than v1.5
 - + Self-contained solution
 - + Good on-board processing

- AGAINST**
- Potentially complex
 - Large disk footprint for library
 - Positional data not supported for cymbals

BFD2 is a big step up from v1.5, and should be strongly considered by anyone looking for a virtual acoustic drum kit. Current BFD users, meanwhile, should simply upgrade at the earliest opportunity

RATING

