

Sony Acid Pro 7 £245 PC



It now has more bundled plug-ins and an improved mixer, but is Acid still playing catch-up with its rivals?

System requirements

PC 1.8GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, Windows XP (SP2 or later) or Vista

Test system

PC Intel Core 2 Duo 6400, 2GB RAM, Windows Vista

> Originally designed for simply arranging sampled loops, Acid has evolved over the years into a full-on DAW with MIDI tracks, VST hosting and multitrack audio recording. Despite this, the ability to quickly create arrangements by importing loops (which are automatically synced to the project tempo) and drawing them onto the sequencer track remains Acid's staple mode of operation. Furthermore, and its ease of use has arguably yet to be surpassed by any other sequencer.

In recent years, however, Acid has been eclipsed by the all-singing, all-dancing Ableton Live, which offers a more sophisticated approach to loop sequencing, can beatmatch seamlessly in real time, features an array of dedicated effects and instruments, and is cross-platform (Acid is PC-only).

Acid Pro 7 ups the ante with numerous additions both big and small. The most important of these is the new mixer. In previous versions of Acid, the extremely basic mixing section displayed just the master and bus channels, with the volume levels and other parameters of audio tracks only available via the

tracklist on the left hand side of the sequencer window. Quite how Sony managed to get away without having a proper mixer in their software for so long is anyone's guess, but we're sure that Acid Pro users will be overjoyed to finally have such an elementary feature added to their DAW.

Overall, the new mixer makes balancing, routing and other fundamental tasks that much easier, so we'd say that it's a success. Most notably, the zoom function that enables you to change the size of all tracks simultaneously with a single slider works a treat and is something that we can imagine cropping up in other DAWs.

Extra stretchy

While we've first dealt with the most obvious improvements, there are others that further help Acid hold its own as a serious piece of music production software. These include the addition of multiprocessor support, MIDI track freeze, a new plug-in bundle (see *Bundle of joy* boxout) and the introduction of zplane's élastique Pro timestretching algorithm, which complements Acid's original timestretching mode. Ableton Live uses élastique efficient, a

“The new mixer makes balancing, routing and other fundamental tasks that much easier”

less sophisticated (though more CPU-friendly) version, so this is one area where some may feel that Acid Pro has one over its rival.

For those intending to use Acid's multitrack recording abilities, the addition of input busses and real-time rendering will surely appeal. These enable the user to record external devices with effects, mix a variety of audio sources within the project and perform real-time input monitoring - all of which helps Acid feel more like a thoroughbred DAW.

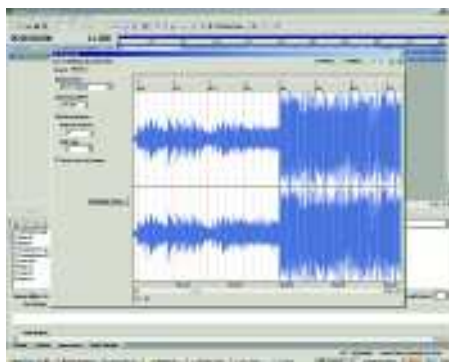
Tempo changes within a project are now possible, and the software has also gained support for the FLAC, AAC, AC-3 Studio, and MPEG-2 formats, thus making it a more credible multimedia production platform. Also, Acid's beatmapping now allows for tempo variation in audio, which isn't before time when you consider the flexible warping abilities that Live has had for years now. However, it has to be said that Ableton's software is still a much more efficient solution when you're working with non-sequenced material.

Look and learn

An addition aimed more at Acid newbies, rather than experienced users, is the suite of interactive tutorials. These are a great touch for anyone who isn't au fait with the software, and use overlaid graphics to make their points as plainly as possible.

They're not perfect, though. New users might wonder why there's no Paint Clip Selector displayed on their selected track, and there are no visual clues to suggest that zooming in or increasing the size of the track will make it appear. Despite these small niggles, though, the tutorials work well and do a great job of making the software inviting for new users.

These enhancements are all very useful, but whereas Acid was once a genuinely innovative product, it seems that Sony are now playing catch-up with other developers, rather than breaking new ground. The software is great for



Aside from the addition of Tempo Curves, Acid's Beatmapping Wizard is the same as previous versions



There are plug-ins aplenty with Sony's Acid Pro 7, as well as some treats for guitarists

Bundle of joy

Acid Pro 7 comes with a bundle of third-party effects and instruments that complement the Sony plug-ins included with previous versions. The iZotope-powered Acid Pro Effects Rack gives you basic chorus, flanger, phaser, delay and dynamics effects that sound great, while the inclusion of Native Instruments' Guitar Rig Combos is a fantastic touch for six-stringers. This last item includes more than 100 preset effects that, while not directly editable, have a few customisable settings, and are useful for non-guitarists, too.

Submersible Music's KitCore is a drum sampler that features eight kits and hundreds of MIDI loops that can be

dragged from the interface onto Acid's main sequencer tracks. It isn't as sophisticated as fully-fledged virtual drummers, but it provides a convenient way to program rhythmical parts.

There's also a basic ROMpler based on Garrigan's Aria engine, featuring a selection of patches taken from the popular Garrigan range. This makes a great alternative to the rather limited DLS Soft Synth and its generic General MIDI sounds, and is ideal for those after realistic acoustic instruments.

While some kind of synth would have appeased electronic and dance music producers, the bundle definitely adds value to the Acid Pro 7 package.

beginners, although they'd be advised to plump for the much cheaper Acid Music Studio 7 (£38), which has the basic functionality of Pro but misses out on the majority of the new version 7 features. However, it does contain the interactive tutorials, and if you go for the boxed version, you get the same library of over 3000 high-quality samples that Pro users get.

If you're already an Acid-addicted producer, this one is definitely worth the upgrade fee, but if you're looking for a loop-savvy DAW, then Ableton Live 7, which is arguably a more accomplished piece of software, can be picked up for around the same price. Still, Acid's straightforward presentation and clear, easy interface are sure to be highly attractive to those who are put off by Live's plethora of advanced features. What's more, Acid is a convenient tool for multimedia audio production, and users of Sony's Vegas video editing software will feel at home right away.

Taken as an update, Acid Pro 7 is very good, but Sony still have work to do if Acid is to catch up with the current crop of do-it-all DAWs. **cm**

Contact SCV, 0208 418 0778
Web www.sonycreativesoftware.com
Info Acid Music Studio 7, £38

Alternatively

Ableton Live Suite
cm121 >> 9/10 >> £550

This bundle contains Live 7 and a load of extras, but you can get Live on its own for around half the price

Steinberg Cubase 4
cm107 >> 9/10 >> £504

Not specifically for loops, but has tons of features and plug-ins

Verdict

For A proper mixer, at last!

New plug-ins are a boon

Good multimedia capabilities

Multicore support

Interactive tutorials

Against Beatmapping inferior to Live's
Still no built-in audio editor

Balancing ease of use and power, this is a great update to a solid app, though it's not likely to convert users of other DAWs

7/10