

cm mini reviews

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

Blue Microphones

Mikey £60

Format iPhone (all), iPod Touch 2G, iPod Nano 2G/3G/3G, iPod Classic, iPod 5G

Contact info@tcelectronic.com

Web www.bluemic.com

Blue's Mikey aims to turn Apple's iPhone and iPods (see list above) into high-quality stereo field recorders, using their built-in apps or any of the many available on the App Store. While it's not the only such add-on microphone available, it's certainly one of the more expensive - and the only one coming from a reputable pro microphone manufacturer.

The front side of Mikey is a stereo condenser mic, while the back is a mono loudspeaker for playback - a welcome feature for iPod users, though the lack of a volume control is disappointing. The unit connects solidly to Apple's 30-pin dock connector and can be angled 90 degrees in either direction, thanks to the hinged base, so you can lie the host device down and still keep the mic upright. A three-position switch on the back enables Mikey's sensitivity to be adjusted.

Mikey looks a bit feature-poor compared to some other iPhone mics, lacking such niceties as line input, direct monitoring and USB pass-through for charging. However, dynamic sensitivity and frequency response are genuinely impressive, and the three sensitivity levels mean that anything from ambient 'outdoor' sounds to



spur-of-the-moment vocal ideas to live gigs can be recorded with equal sonic efficiency.

There are considerably cheaper and more feature-packed iPhone/iPod mics on the market, for sure, but none of them do the job of capturing sound as well as Mikey, and for the computer musician, that has to be worth paying for.

9/10

Native Instruments

Audio 2 DJ £84

Format PC/Mac

Contact info@native-instruments.de

Web www.native-instruments.de

The latest addition to Native Instruments' DJ interface lineup is just 3.5" long, with two stereo ¼" jack outputs, each with a wheel to control their volume level, and simple output monitor LEDs. Aside from a USB port, that's it: no unnecessary bells and whistles here.

It's not as sturdy as the tank-like (and more expensive) Audio 8 DJ, but it's really light and sturdy enough that, providing at least a modicum of care is taken with it, we'd be perfectly happy to take it out and about. The hardware has WDM drivers, so Windows users can use it as a regular multimedia audio interface, and the package also includes a pair of stereo jack-to-phono cables, a USB lead, and a selection of NI software including Guitar Rig 3 Go and the Kore Selection soundpack for Kore Player. A demo of Traktor Pro is also included, and while it would be good if the package included some unexpiring DJing software, it still represents a solid deal for the mobile digital DJ.

9/10



Native Instruments

Discovery Series: North India €69

Format KoreSound Pack

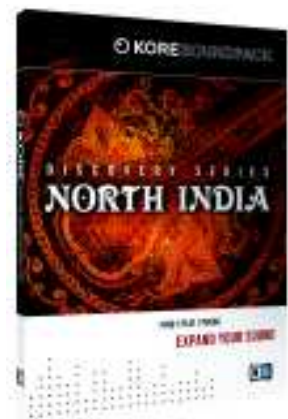
Contact info@native-instruments.de

Web www.native-instruments.de

This Kore soundpack takes inspiration from North Indian classical music and includes a variety of traditional instrument patches, including staples like the sitar and tabla, and some more obscure ones like the bansuri and shehnai. The patch programming is second to none, and Kore's macro knobs are used to deliver great flexibility for each patch - some instruments even offer a selection of authentic scales. The sound quality is brilliant, with crystal clear tones (although some of the tabla hits contain a lot of noise, strangely).

As well as the traditional instruments and drones, there are several pad sounds - they might not be authentically Indian, but they fit the vibe and will no doubt be appreciated by soundtrack composers. North India is an excellent ethnic library, and while it only consists of 30 patches, the high quality level makes it solid value for money.

9/10



PSP Audioware oldTimer \$99

Format PC/Mac, AU/VST/RTAS
Contact contact@PSPaudioware.com
Web www.pspaudioware.com

PSP bring us another stunning-sounding plug-in, this time in the form of a vintage-style compressor. It's not based on any specific piece of hardware, but rather is designed to capture the general sound and characteristics of certain types of old-style compressor. As a result, the controls are very basic indeed, making it much easier to make compress drums and other sounds without getting bogged down in endless tweaking.

So, about those controls, and first up is Ratio, which offers seven settings ranging from 1.2:1 to 10:1 and can take the effect from gentle levelling to full on pumping/squashing. At the higher settings, some sound-colouration takes place, but it is often quite pleasing to the ear. On a similar note, there's a simple three-way switch offering Valve (so nicely rounded) sound, Clear (more transparent) and Off (bypass) modes.

The self-explanatory Time gives one-knob

control over attack and release times, with the values slowing as the dial is cranked, going from fast percussive settings right up to slow levelling settings.

Next is Compression, which lowers the threshold level as it's increased, resulting in more compression being applied. Finally, there's a master Output knob that offers up to 30dB of makeup gain, which should be plenty!

All of this is great on paper, but how does it sound in use? Well, we tried oldTimer on a variety of sound sources, and while it's by no means a universal tool, it can generate excellent and even unique results on the right material. Examples of this include hats that need thickening, any single hits, drums or sound effects, or slapped right across your lead synth riff. You can drive the plug-in hard, to get a warm rounded sound, or use it subtly, to smooth over

rough edges.

With a healthy selection of presets to get you started and the kind of stunning sound that we've come to expect from PSP Audioware, we can say with absolute conviction that this is an essential plug-in.

10/10



Universal Audio Neve 31102 \$249

Format UAD/UAD-2, VST/AU/RTAS
Contact Source Distribution, 020 8962 5080
Web www.uaudio.com

The latest EQ to hit the UAD platform is the Neve-endorsed model of the 31102 EQ module originally found in the Neve 8068 console. It's been used in the production of a lot of American rock bands – such as Guns N' Roses, Metallica and the Red Hot Chili Peppers – for its bite and edginess, and although it's not as well known as its stablemates the 1073 and 1081, it stands beside them sonically.

There are just three bands of active EQ plus low- and high-pass filters, and the plug-in window is oriented horizontally, as if racked up – if you're used to the vertical console style, it feels wrong initially, but you soon get used to it. A vertical option would've been neat, though!

The top and bottom bands are shelving filters with three and four selectable frequency points respectively. It's great to hear the smooth sound of the top end as you increase the boost at 10 or 12kHz – it's airy and glistening, with no hint of the harsh grittiness that's found on a lot of digital EQs. The warmth and weight of the bottom end is full, fat and creamy.



The mid-band bell curve is where the character of the unit lies. A quick boost on a drum kit at the 3.2 or 4.8kHz centre frequencies is enough to tell you why rock bands like it. It really bites in and cuts through without leaving the sound thin. A narrower Q setting on the mid-band allows for tighter, more precise control. And taking out mid-range woodiness at 700 or 350Hz opens the sound up majestically.

Interestingly, even with the EQ processing switched out, the sound is coloured slightly, just like the real thing – engineers have always

known that just running a signal through Neve gear makes it sound richer before you've even touched the controls. Finally, you also get an SE version that's less hungry on the DSP, at the expense of accuracy/authenticity.

Whether you really need this plug-in will depend on what you've already got in your EQ locker, and while it's not a must-have, it certainly lives up to UA's consistently high standards and will be of particular interest to those who covet the Neve sound.

8/10

Soundware round-up

Dark Side Of The Tune [DOWNLOAD](#)

Bent-O-Box \$9

Web www.darksideofthetune.com

Format WAV, MPC

Bent-O-Box is a very unusual collection of incidental glitch samples in MPC-ready WAV format - it's the second such MPC-oriented pack we've reviewed from Dark Side Of The Tune, in fact. The sounds on this one have a tone similar to that of sound effects from early Amiga games - on the whole, short and lo-fi. You'll find pops, crackles, buzzes and an assortment of odd clicks.

You might find that they're best used in conjunction with a full drum kit, as despite the MPC format, the library doesn't seem to cover all of the sound types you might need to create a full beat. However, that's not to say that this lot don't have percussive potential.

7/10



Nine Volt Audio

Big Bad Bass Guitar £70

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200

Web www.timespace.com

Format ReFill, Apple Loops, Stylus RMX, Acid WAV, REX2

Continuing the super-pliable BPM Flex series, Big Bad Bass Guitar is a collection comprising 598 unique loops, split into 30 song suites, eight toolbox suites (containing chromatic loops), muted strums and a slides section. This gives an especially flexible solution and you won't have any trouble at all producing a convincing bass part. All of the loops are high-quality, 24-bit recordings of live players, with a very solid and rocking tone. The tempo ranges from 80 to 160BPM (although tempo isn't much of an issue if you're using one of the stretch-happy formats, such as REX or Apple Loops).

10/10



Loopmasters [DOWNLOAD](#) £25

Celt Islam Sufi Dub Sound System

Contact info@loopmasters.com

Web www.loopmasters.com

Format WAV, ACID WAV, REX2, Reason Refill, Live Pack, Apple Loops

Celt Islam introduces the Sufi dub sound to sample library market. This collection of over 360 loops fuses authentic dub reggae with modern world music, with a distinct UK underground dance twist. The result is an exciting hybrid, ripe with creative possibility. Expect live ethnic flavours alongside the freshest of dirty sub bass synths and glitched up Jamaican vocal snatches. Despite borrowing so much from the past, it comes together as something very contemporary and inspiring. Producers of breaks, dubstep, drum 'n' bass, etc, should definitely check it out.

9/10



Loopmasters [DOWNLOAD](#)

Fistful Of Drummers Pack 1 £15

Contact info@loopmasters.com

Web www.loopmasters.com

Format AIFF

The first download pack from the Fistful Of Drummers collection gives you four full drum tracks at 82, 87, 89 and 91Bbpm, all with a classic 70s-style groove. Each drum track is then split into separate files (where available) for kick, hat, snare, shaker, tambourine, spring reverb, and several overhead channels. This makes for a very practical fix for producers on the search for that live drum sound. The drumming is pretty good, although it won't blow you away. The recording standard isn't the absolute best either, but it has some character and we're sure that, with a little elbow grease, there's everything you need here to shine up a decent drum mix.

7/10



Sample Magic

Sunrise Sessions £59

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200

Web www.timespace.com

Format WAV, REX2, Stylus RMX, Apple Loops, Reason, HALion, Kontakt, EXS24

Sample Magic return with another elite sample collection. Unlike most of their titles, Sunrise Sessions isn't centred on high-energy dance grooves, and instead you're treated to 980 sounds, comprising smooth, mellow one-shots and loops at tempo groups 80, 90 and 100bpm.

Continuing where predecessor Sunset Sessions left off, you'll find a diverse selection of live instrument performances, including brass, piano and bass. Every sound is exceptionally well performed and well recorded, and the drum beats have been stripped down into basic elements to allow you full control. A premium quality pack!

10/10



Big Fish Audio

Vintage R&B £72

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200

Web www.timespace.com

Format ACID, WAV, Apple Loops, REX, Stylus RMX

Vintage R&B takes you back to the golden era of rhythm & blues. You'll find 25 well-labelled construction kits with a good selection of loops, highlights being the classic sounds of live brass and tambourines, wah wah guitar and a whole load of funky bass. While these kits are pretty authentic, and the files are provided in 24-bit format, the recording quality isn't without its flaws. For instance, you might have to work slightly harder to compensate for less than ideal microphone placement. Another criticism is the length of each kit - they almost sound like intros rather than full songs.

7/10



Producer Loops

Electro Tip Trixxx £14.95

Contact Producer Loops, 0845 094 3077

Web www.producerloops.com

Format Acidized WAV, REX2, Apple Loops, EXS, MIDI



This 460MB library covers the harder side of electro house, and the main attraction is a ton of dirty, grinding synth loops. The flavour here is rough and ready, in a good way - even producers of dubstep and tougher breaks tracks could find much of the material useful.

Other highlights include the drum loops (though purists might be frustrated by spot effects and pitched sounds included in the loops), synth and percussion one-shots, and a selection of noisy synth FX. Overall, Electro Tip Trixxx is a good selection at a great price that will appeal to a broad spectrum of lovers of hard-edged dance music.

9/10

Loopmasters **DOWNLOAD**

Moguai Punx Electro, Tech & Progressive House £25

Contact info@loopmasters.com

Web www.loopmasters.com

Format Wav, Acid, Rex2, Reason Refill, Live Pack, Apple Loops, HALion, Kontakt, EXS, SFZ, Stylus RMX, Live Pack, NN-XT



Moguai has crafted a sound set with a broad range of influences, which is intriguing, but unfortunately, there's a general lack of sonic quality. All of the right sounds are here, but they just feel lifeless and static compared to other titles. However, there are over 980 unique samples and they hold potential if you're into extensive tweaking and processing. You'll find the usual categories of effects, drums, chords and instruments, and there are single hits as well as loops.

6/10

Loopmasters **DOWNLOAD**

Syncopix - Drum and Bass vol3 £25

Contact info@loopmasters.com

Web www.loopmasters.com

Format Wav, Acid, REX2, Reason Refill, Live Pack, Apple Loops, HALion, Kontakt, EXS, SFZ, Live Pack, NN-XT



DnB producer Syncopix provides a selection of loops, single hits and sampler patches. Generally, the standard isn't quite up to previous packs from the Loopmasters/Hospital Records collaboration: many of the musical loops are weak, and the reverb and delay on some of the bass sounds is undesirable in this context. However, there are some phat single-hit sounds on offer, and Syncopix's effort is still worthy of investigation by sample-hungry DnB producers.

6/10

Puremagnetik **DOWNLOAD**

Microtron: Tape 2 \$12

Contact info@puremagnetik.com

Web www.puremagnetik.com

Format Live Pack, Kontakt, Logic



The Mellotron is an all-time classic prog rock instrument, offering an early form of sampling, using strips of tape to replay prerecorded sounds. This release from Puremagnetik recreates the Mk II Flute (popularised by the Beatles), Octave Recorder and Cello patches, with some controls for tweaking the sound to your specifications. The packs also include 50 loops, though we imagine that most users will just go for the multisamples. The patches are of good sound quality and play well, making this a decent buy, especially for the extremely reasonable price. Those looking for budget Mellotron sounds won't be disappointed.

8/10

Prime Loops

Lee Coombs Tech Funk V2 £15

Contact via website

Web www.primeloops.com

Format Acidized WAV, Live Pack, Apple Loops, Akai MPC



We enjoyed Mr Coombs' first slice of Tech Funk, so it's good to see he's back to provide us with another helping of beats and bass lines. The highlights here are the ten 128bpm construction kits, which include individual tracks for each of the drum sounds.

Elsewhere, it's business as usual, with a selection of synthesiser FX, beats, and synth and bass loops. With up to 400MB of content per format, it's not an enormous pack, but the price is reasonable and the content is up to scratch, so kudos to Coombs once again for delivering the goods.

8/10

Sample Logic

WaterHarp £36

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200

Web www.timespace.com

Format Wave, Kontakt 2 / 3



This library of Kontakt patches is based around the spooky sounds of the waterphone - it's an extremely unusual instrument that's graced many a film soundtrack (including The Matrix) with its creepy tones. The patches cover soundscapes, effects and rhythmic tones, and the quality is absolutely superb.

Considering the low price, the quality and quantity (1.8GB) of the supplied sounds is quite astounding. The only problem might be that you need a registered version of Kontakt 2 or later to use the product as intended, although it is possible to access the raw WAV samples directly. If you're a soundtrack composer looking for weird noises or someone who simply wants to try something a little different, WaterHarp is a great buy.

10/10