

MAIN

The Main page offers easy Custom control - you can define your own setups, too

LAYER

Just like Trilogy, each Trilian patch can include two separate layers

FX

Each layer has four insert effects, and a further four inserts are common to both layers

SOUNDSOURCE

The building blocks of each layer, these sometimes include two channels - eg, amp and DI for electric bass

ARP

Access the 32-step pattern programmer and Groove Lock it to MIDI files or Stylus RMX Grooves

ZOOM ICON

These appear in various places - click for more detailed editing of that particular section

LINK

Linking layers saves you time by matching any edited parameters across layers



Spectrasonics Trilian £209

PC MAC



At last, the long-awaited successor to the Trilogy "total bass module" is here. Read on for the lowdown on this bottom-heavy instrument

System requirements

PC 2GHz CPU, 2GB RAM, Windows XP SP2/Vista/7 (32-bit or 64-bit), VST/RTAS host

Mac 2GHz CPU (Intel or PPC), 2GB RAM, OS X 10.4.9, 35GB drive space, AU/RTAS/VST host

> Released in 2003, Trilogy was a respected bass instrument offering a good selection of synth, electric and acoustic basses, with its sibling Atmosphere being similarly famed for lush synth pads and the like. Things move on, however, as demonstrated by Atmosphere's 2008 sequel Omnisphere - as well as a huge library of brand new sound content, this debuted the company's own sample/synthesis backbone, dubbed the Steam Engine. Now we have the second Steam-powered instrument, Trilian, arriving to supersede Trilogy.

The library is 34GB in size, the meat of which comprises the new instruments: acoustic bass with four separate mic/pickup channels, six electric basses (including Music Man five-string, Fender Precision, Fender Jazz and Chapman Stick) and numerous synth sources, including the Yamaha CS-80, Moog Taurus, Dave Smith Tetra and ARP 2600. You also get everything from Trilogy (remastered) and, as a bonus, an enhanced version of the Bass Legends library.

Trilian's new library is not only very detailed but sports features such as automatic legato, round robin variations, multisampled dynamic

slides, phase-locked amp/DI mixing and two modes, Live and Stack, for coping with multiple articulations (see boxout). Clearly, realistic bass is fundamental to Trilian's remit.

Rockin' round robin

The Steam Engine offers a multitimbral structure with eight dual-layer parts, 33 effects and the ability to integrate streaming sample playback with synthesis techniques - Trilian sports FM capabilities, but it lacks the full-on DSP synth oscillators, waveshaping and granular synthesis of Omnisphere. However, the 19 stereo filter types with twin filters per layer, multipoint looping envelopes and six LFOs (with nine waveform options) mean that Trilian is still very much a synthesis heavyweight. And totally new for Trilian are the 4-pole Juicy and Power filters with oscillating resonance. Add in the synth modulation options (26 mod sources and 47 targets), the Flex-Mod system for on-the-fly setup and the option to modulate over 200 effect parameters, and you begin to appreciate just how mighty the Steam Engine is.

All this power may sound daunting, but

“The Studio (Music Man) Bass, with its clean, punchy sound, is our favourite”

Trilian is actually very simple to use. Patches are built from one or two layers, each consisting of a 'soundsource' (essentially a multisampled polyphonic oscillator). Layers include the typical synth-esque trimmings (modulation, LFOs, envelopes and filters), as well as insert effects and arpeggiator options. Up to eight patches can be layered in a multi, with individual level, panning, MIDI channel and auxiliary effects.

For navigation, each layer has four tabbed screens (Main, Edit, FX and Arp), plus some deeper, complex pages accessed with the Zoom icon, such as the modulation matrix. The multi view also has four screens (Mixer, FX, Live and Stack) but is a simpler affair. However, there's nothing to stop you sticking to the Main screen with its patch-specific 'custom controls'.

Maximum velocity

Trilian's acoustic and electric basses are extremely detailed. For example, Trilogy's Double Bass instrument has four velocity layers and is 288MB, but in contrast, Trilian's Full Range Acoustic 1 has 12 velocity layers, 16 round robin alternatives per note and is 2.3GB. As expected, there are plenty more articulations - we counted 11 basic ones for the Clean Bass (Fender Jazz) - and you also get release noises and automatic legato. Of the stringed patches, the five-string Studio (Music Man) Bass, with its clean, punchy sound, is our favourite.

Multi patches and the Live mode bring the above elements together, with the Switch option in Live mode enabling temporary keyswitching. The other keyswitching modes didn't work properly for us, though, sometimes resulting in unwanted articulations playing. Also annoying is that patches start loading as soon as you select them in the browser - not great if you're surfing and just want to read the descriptions. Both Lite mode and Preview load can help here, luckily.

Synthetic material

As for the synthetic sounds, it's important that new users download the latest patch library, which includes over 500 new synth patches. Enhanced versions of the original Trilogy patches should also be out by the time you read



The Main panel offers custom macro controls for each preset - note this patch's wah and echo sections



Using the Stack page, you can layer up parts and map them according to note and velocity

Blow your Stack

Trilian's Live and Stack modes enable you to use the instrument in a more specific multitimbral way. Stack can quickly map all of your eight parts either by velocity or key range, or switch between parts using MIDI CC (only one option can be used at a time). It overrides any MIDI allocations in the Mixer, so that all layers respond to one selected channel. In use, it's great for spreading multiple articulations across the keyboard, building velocity-sensitive combination patches or morphing between parts.

Live is more akin to typical keyswitching territory. Again, up to eight patches can be used, and with full

control over key, MIDI CC and even mouse-click assignments, it's very flexible. There are three switching methods - Switch, Latch and Touch, which you'll find more on in the main text - that influence the nature of the switching, and with an easy MIDI learn option, as well as various ways to view assignments, it's difficult to go too far wrong. One of the best features is that existing articulations don't cut off when you switch to another. If you use basslines with multiple articulations such as slides, mutes and so on, Live mode makes it very simple, and there are plenty of library patches that are already set up to work this way.

this, although your old Trilogy presets are not compatible with Trilian. On a related note, you can also use Trilian's sounds within Omnisphere (but not the other way around).

The synth sounds are arranged in three categories: Mono, Bass and Arp + Rhythm. Sonically, there's much variety to be had, with plenty of noises and sweeps, as well as basses and rhythmic, arp-dependent patches that are often reminiscent of the original synths that were sampled. Most synth patches make great use of Trilian's effects, frequently with parameters linked to carefully configured custom controls. It's obvious that Trilian's ambitions go beyond simple bass sounds, and with over 350 synth sound sources, modifying or programming from scratch is always an option.

Trilian is an enormously powerful and deep instrument that can keep you busy for hours. Every patch, be it synth- or string-based, sounds brilliant in isolation, making it great for upfront 'lead' bass sounds; and the performance features and effects enable you to create unique and impressive tones with ease. **cm**

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.spectrasonics.net

Alternatively

Scarbee MM Bass
N/A >> N/A >> €79
Thomas Skarbye electric bass library in Kontakt format

Rob Papen SubBoomBass
cm140 >> 8/10 >> £89
If synth bass is your poison, check this out from patch king Rob Papen

Verdict

For Serious processing options
Extensive bass instrument library
Easy interface considering complexity
Great synth sound sources
Custom controls

Against Unintuitive browser
Trilogy patches not out at time of review

Trilian's not without a few quirks, but it's a fine successor to Trilogy and one of the best sources for bass sounds of all kinds

8/10