

cm mini reviews

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

Propellerhead ReBirth £3.99

Format iPhone, iPod Touch
Contact via website
Web www.propellerheads.se

There are two ways to view Propellerhead's port of the seminal ReBirth to iPhone and iPod touch. The first is as a new music production benchmark for the App Store, being in every way the same application that exploded onto Mac and PC in 1997. The second is as a lazily built, rather ill-fitting fingermare that experienced hands will frequently find frustrating and casual users won't have the patience for.

Both are right, if we're honest. The interface scales smoothly but not exactly pleasantly - it's bitmapped rather than vector-based, resulting in blurry text and ugly, fuzzy knobs at high zoom settings. And no concessions have been made in terms of making it 'fit' the iPhone - it's literally the Mac/PC version shrunk to fit a smaller screen.

But ultimately, and considering the price, none of that really spoils the party. This is ReBirth - two 303s, an 808, a 909, the Pattern Controlled Filter, the compressor, the delay, the step sequencing, the song mode... There are even five user mods included with the software (the mighty PBE

among them), while you also have the ability to share your projects online.

Equally importantly, ReBirth is simply an awesome nostalgia trip that revives the undefinable magic of the early days of serious computer music. Essential.

9/10



Takashi Mizuhiki DXi FM synthesizer £1.19

Format iPhone/iPod Touch/iPad app (requires OS 3)
Contact dxisupport@me.com
Web web.me.com/tmizuhiki/DXi

Yamaha's interpretation of Frequency Modulation synthesis needs no introduction. It's a sound splattered across many 80s synth classics, and recreated by various soft synths. DXi brings FM to your phone, but it's closer to the DX27 than the

legendary DX7. There are four operators rather than six and polyphony is reduced from 16 to three, from what we can tell. DXi also offers a neat 16-step sequencer and an effective XY performance pad, to mix operators and patterns in real time.

Sound editing is primitive. You can flick between eight algorithms and edit a four-stage amplitude envelope for each operator, but you can't listen to frequency and feedback changes as you make them - you need to press Audition again for these to be heard. While DXi does sound good, and you can recreate many classic sounds, it lacks versatility for the experimentalists, and completeness for the purists, sort of defeating the point of it being a synth and not a ROMpler.

5/10



SoniVox Eighty Eight £129

Format PC/Mac, VST/AU/RTAS/standalone
Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com

Eighty Eight is a ROMpler built around a Steinway Concert Grand. Rather than sticking purely to acoustic piano, about a third of the 12GB sample set is taken up by additional sounds, including acoustic bass, various pads and a number of solo instruments, such as acoustic guitars, woodwind and horns. This comes as 52 piano presets, 35 piano/pad textures and 15 three-part performance combis with split key ranges. Onboard features include four-band EQ, reverb and output limiter, as well as overall pan, level, transposition and tuning. You also get pedal and release level for the piano, and global velocity response.

The 'detail' of the sound is handled solely via patch selection, and patches range from high-end (16 velocity layers and release samples) to RAM-efficient (four layers, no release). In use, this gives Eighty Eight a workhorse feel, and we were somewhat reminded of Clavinova keyboards. Even so, the piano sounds fine, and those RAM-efficient patches could come in handy. It's not at all bad, but we weren't blown away.

7/10



Line 6 FBV Express Mk.II £99

Format PC/Mac, USB 1.1
Contact Line 6 UK, 01327 302700
Web www.line6.com

The original FBV Express was a floor unit for controlling Line 6 hardware such as PODs and modelling amps. The Mk.II also performs these duties (with all but the earliest Line 6 units) but is of greater interest to **cm** readers due to its USB port and ability to control not only Line 6 software products such as Pod Farm, but also third-party DAWs and plug-ins via standard MIDI control. This is facilitated with the freely downloadable FBV control software, making it pretty versatile, at least on paper.

The unit is a compact 25.4 x 33 x 11.4cm. It has a metal chassis, four chunky footswitches and a wah-style rocker pedal. All are assignable. No external power supply is required as the FBV gets power from the USB bus when connected to a computer, or a standard RJ-45 cable for Line 6 hardware.

Once installed, we had no problems setting up the FBV control software with Ableton Live

to control Pod Farm 2 as a plug-in, as per the manual. It proved easy to do basic stuff like change patches and volume levels. The pedal can control wah or volume (or indeed, the CCs of your choice), and you step on the pedal to switch between the two.

The simple GUI of the software makes it easy to assign pedals to DAW functions. With Reason/Record, it was straightforward to get the pedals controlling transport, mixer faders and effect levels – potentially useful for hands-free recording. Using the FBV with Logic Pro 8 proved less straightforward, although this was simply down to the way Logic works.

Some users reported glitches after a few months with the original FBV Express Mk.I,

even though many others found it rugged enough for prolonged stage use. Line 6 seem to have ironed out these bugs with the Mk.II, though, and if it proves to be as durable as it is versatile, it should see you right for many a gig.

8/10



Korg iElectrube £5.99

Format iPad app
Contact via website
Web www.korg.co.uk

When Korg announced iElectrube on April Fools' Day, it was easy to mistake it for a cruel joke. Surely a £5.99 app couldn't transform the iPad into a fully featured groovebox? However, true to Korg's promises, iElectrube takes the original hardware Electrube ER-1's classic step sequencer format as its inspiration, allowing patterns to be constructed from four real-time synthesis parts and separate sample-based open and closed hi-hats, cymbals and clap/snare parts. Together, they provide plenty of options for creating loops and song arrangements.

Although iElectrube has 64 presets and 32 templates to get you started, it's easy to begin creating a new track from scratch, either by entering hits in step time or by recording parts in real time and allowing the app to quantise them for you. Most of the parameters can be automated using the Motion Sequencing feature, from pitch, pan and level all the way through to modulation, decay and low-end boost. It's a very intuitive system that makes it easy to get great results.

The central section of the neat interface allows a master effect to be chosen from eight options, including two delays, a reverb, a chorus/flanger, a low-pass filter, a grain shifter, a "talking modulator" and a bit-crusher with sample rate reduction. The effects all sound good enough to be useful, though only one can be applied at a time. Next to the master volume control, you'll also find a knob for a (slightly digital-sounding) tube gain effect, which is always available.

Unlike the master effect parameters, this distortion can't be automated.

In its present form, iElectrube's main weakness is its inability to sync to an external clock signal. A hardware Electrube would quite happily do this, but the iPad platform means that iElectrube can't really play with other equipment.

Forthcoming iPad accessories will hopefully offer a solution to this problem, but for now, you'll have to bounce your patterns to WAV files if you want to be able to use them in your DAW.

Despite this minor inconvenience, iElectrube is an intuitive, great-sounding groovebox app that ably demonstrates the iPad's latent music-making potential. Most of all, it's simply gratifying and fun.

9/10



Soundware round-up

Loopmasters **DOWNLOAD**

Bop – Minimal Drum & Bass £25

Contact info@loopmasters.com

Web www.loopmasters.com

Format Acidized WAV, REX2, Reason ReFill, Live, Apple Loops, Halion, Kontakt, EXS, SFZ, Stylus RMX, Live Presets, NN-XT



Hailing from Russia, Bop is an ice-cool producer focused on minimal and all its branches. Turning his attention to DnB, the result is a sparse but tight collection of samples. There are 216 loops and 480 WAV samples and 'cool' is definitely the word that comes to mind – atmospheric pads, glitch loops and 'tech chords' accompany the usual one-shots and loops. Bop has done a great job of combining textbook DnB samples with creative 'sound-designed' hits that still feel at home in the genre.

9/10

Sounds/To/Sample **DOWNLOAD**

Glitch and Twist Vocals £15

Contact via website

Web www.soundstosample.com

Format WAV



Using standard vocal samples can sometimes sound cheesy, plunging your track into by-the-book banality. Sounds/To/Sample are clearly aware of this and so have created some very unique content here, covering vocoded phrases, all glitched up and processed to bits. Think Boys Noize-style Speak & Spell outpourings crossed with Claude VonStroke pops and splurts and you're almost there. There are over 150 samples, at 125 or 128bpm, and all are perfect for the club. We wish the sounds were labelled by key, too, but nevertheless, this is a cool, creative pack at a decent price.

8/10

Prime Loops **DOWNLOAD**

Dubstep Nation £30

Contact via website

Web www.primeloops.com

Format WAV, Apple Loops, Acid Loops, FL Studio, Reason ReFill, Ableton Live Pack, Garageband, Roland Fantom-X, MC-909, MV-8000, MV-8800, Stylus RMX



Dubstep Nation should be a one-stop shop for fans of the genre, with over 200 loops, in excess of 200 one-shots and more than 130 sampler patches. And it kind of is, with the Dubstep Breaks folder being particularly fine. It's full of weighty, hard-hitting, sub-heavy loops that will give you more than a head start, though with only 55, we would have liked a few more to choose from. The one-shots and wobbly bass loops are tamer, though still good and authentic. Overall, it's all usable enough and, for the price, it just about hits the mark.

7/10



Vengeance **DOWNLOAD**

Essential House vol.3 £65

Contact via website

Web www.vengeance-sound.com

Format WAV

Reviewing a Vengeance sample pack is like a blurry trip down memory lane. Whether it's because their sounds are used so much in commercial tracks or simply because they're so 'production ready', each sample and loop sounds like part of a tune you know and love. Essential House vol.3 packs in over 2400 samples, loops (at 128bpm) and multisampled kits. Kicks, snares, percussion, claps, FX, basses, synths and more are all catered for – just about everything you need for a full track.

The Special Sounds folder is full of what sound like chops and samples from famous tracks, warped and effected almost beyond recognition – something you'll either love or raise an eyebrow at! Either way, if you can't find anything useable in this bundle to fill out your club tracks, you might want to stick to your day job.

To paraphrase a famous producer, "Everyone uses Vengeance samples – why do you think every house track is 128bpm?"

9/10

Producer Loops **DOWNLOAD**

Drum & Bass Tip Trixxx Vol 2 £13

Contact Producer Loops, 0845 0943077

Web www.producerloops.com

Format ACID Loops, WAV, Apple Loops, MIDI, Reason ReFill, REX2



This pack offers up drum and synth samples, with over 550 loops and about 300 one-shots. The Break Loops and Drum Loops samples are the main event here, sounding like the intro to a Pendulum track. Some are more retro, with a warped, cut-up feel. Usefully, there are also kick-and-snare-only loops. The one-shots are a little disappointing, with many of the kicks and snares being quite similar, while the synths section relies heavily on hard-edged sounds and grinding distortion. It's not a must-have, but you get plenty of solid bang for your buck.

8/10

Big Fish Audio Urban Nation £65

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com
Format Acid, WAV, Apple Loops, REX, RMX

Here we have 25 construction kits aimed at the pop/R&B producer. The tempo range is broad (75 to 118bpm) and the content totals 1532 loops and hits – about 3GB in Apple Loops format. All kits include not only full instrument loops, but also individual drum stems and hits, and typically have three musical sections. These are clearly labelled by chord type, which certainly helps if working in a particular key.

Sonically, Urban Nation inhabits the more tonal end of the spectrum, so at times feels more soulful than some urban kits. The sounds are strong and perfectly suited to commercial production.

9/10



Bela D Diva Revamp £149

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com
Format Kontakt 2 & 3, WAV

Diva Revamp marks a shift to Kontakt format and an amalgamation of three previous Bela D 'Diva' products. The result is 2.3GB spread over a multitude of instruments, often with keyswitched articulations. Sounds include syllables and sustained, marcato and staccato vowels. Typically, these are unlooped, and some phrases include transitions or sung intervals. The use of two separate vocalists allows instrument combining for richer sounds, while their Kontakt script means you can introduce note-by-note envelope variations. Our only gripe is that it should all really be in Kontakt 4 format too.

9/10



Big Fish Audio Elemental Studio Percussion £65

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com
Format Acid, WAV, Apple Loops, REX, RMX

18 commonplace percussion instruments are featured here, including congas, bongos, agogo, shekere and cabassa. Across eight tempo-specific loop folders, the set includes 4/4, 3/4 and 5/4 time signatures, and ranges from 80 to 240bpm. You also get a folder of one-shots. It sounds like it's all sourced from the same instrument set, and sometimes the playing is a little too loose for our liking. Plus there are some glaring omissions, such as no tambourine loops at 120bpm. By contrast, congas are well covered and well played (56 loops at 140bpm). Overall, not quite what it could have been.

6/10



Drumdrops **DOWNLOAD** Drumdrops in Ska £35

Contact info@loopmasters.com
Web www.loopmasters.com
Format WAV, REX2, Acid, Apple Loops

This well-known drum loops series moves into rudeboy territory. It includes 86 variations across 11 tempos (from 117 to 132bpm) in both dry and effected form (so 172 loops in total). Use of analogue recording tape, ska-savvy drummers and vintage kits means that, stylistically and sonically, it's right on the money and you'll find some tidy skankin' fills. Even so, beat variation is limited, and you won't find any intros or single hits. For this reason, it's fine for adding a ska flavour to existing tracks, but not much good for making actual ska music, and there's no multitrack version, as there is for some other Drumdrops titles.

7/10



Puremagnetik **DOWNLOAD** TrapKit \$12

Contact info@puremagnetik.com
Web www.puremagnetik.com
Format Live 8.1.1, Kontakt 3.5, Logic 8

TrapKit features most of a 60s Ludwig kit (kick, tom and floor tom), combined with a DDrum snare, Zildjian hats and ride, and Sabian crash. Recorded in a reflective live room with typical kit mics (KM84, C451, SM57, Coles 4038, and so on), the sound captures the nature of the original kit well, and with multiple round robin hits, it's suitably varied. It's definitely a big step up from Purple Kit, Puremagnetik's previous sampled acoustic pack. However, we do feel the sound lacks punch, particularly the snare. In addition to custom interfaces for Kontakt and Live users, there are also four presets, including a rather cool processed kit called 'zapped'. All in all, this is not bad at all given the low, low price.

8/10



Hollow Sun **DOWNLOAD** Novachord \$80

Contact steve@hollowsun.com
Web www.hollowsun.com
Format Kontakt 3, EXS24, Reason ReFill

This pack samples a fully refurbished Novachord instrument from around 1940. Famous for its creepy pads, the original was designed by organ supreme Laurens Hammond. It's basically a 72-note polyphonic subtractive synthesiser, but of course, it's rammed full of valves rather than transistors. Through painstaking sampling and editing, Hollow Sun have produced over 130 patches that capture the essence of the original. The sounds are at times reminiscent of string machines and sometimes of 60s organs like Farfisas, and they're at their most distinctive when using the Novachord's own electromagnetic vibrato. Terrific stuff! Note that the Kontakt version is \$120.

9/10

