

cm mini reviews

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

Korg microKey £82

Web www.korg.co.uk
Contact 01908 857101
Format PC/Mac, USB

The microKey is aimed squarely at musicians seeking a light, portable keyboard that just plugs straight in and works with no fuss. On that front, it doesn't disappoint, working right off the bat with a variety of systems in our tests.

The keys feel nicely solid, particularly for such a dinky device, though those with larger hands might find them a bit cramped. We're particularly taken with the colourful octave up/down buttons, which change progressively from green to flashing red to indicate how far away from the starting point you are - very useful. The pitch and mod wheels fulfil their roles well enough, and the range of the latter can be modified using the Korg Kontrol Editor software, which is also where you can adjust the keys' velocity curve.

Unusually, there are two USB ports on the side of the keyboard, enabling the microKey to act as a hub, and these worked perfectly for us with a variety of hardware. One tiny



niggle: the included USB lead is extremely short, and as the port is on the left-hand side, we had trouble plugging it into our iMac. Budget for a longer replacement.

Overall, though, this is a mini-keyboard that does exactly what it promises, feels good to play, and even delivers a little extra in the form of those handy USB ports.

8/10

Waves Tony Maserati Artist Signature Collection £646

Web www.waves.com
Contact Sonic Distribution, 01462 424900
Format PC/Mac, AU/VST/RTAS

The Tony Maserati Artist Signature Collection has grown with the addition of the GRP Group Processor, included in the free v71 update. It's designed for grouped signals, and has seven modes: drums (live/programmed), guitars, strings, keys, background vocals and master bus. Its EQ is for general shaping (hence the simple low/mid/high bands), and the compressor is more 'mastering' than 'mash-up'. Each mode alters the underlying behaviour, with compression ranging from fast and snappy (drums/guitars) via flattening (keys) to mix-style presence-boosting (master). There's more flavour here than we were expecting and although modes match their intended material, you can always use them as you like. All in all, GRP is a great bonus for existing users and another reason for newcomers to check out the pack.

8/10



Vir2 DOWNLOAD Violence £67

Web www.timespace.com
Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Format PC/Mac, Kontakt Player 4

From the makers of the outstanding Electric6ity (cm157, 9/10) electric guitar instrument comes Violence. Although this Kontakt instrument library is inspired by the violin, the complex patches use deliberate, accidental and outright sadistic violin abuse as the source of a large palette of sounds incorporating 'bass', 'drum' and percussion sounds, as well as a wealth of other instrument types.

Four categories, Melodic, Pads and SFX, Drum Kits and Tempo Synced, offer some beautifully textured and atmospheric tones, as well as some surprisingly synth-esque patches. This is one of those libraries you go to when needing some inspiration, and the basic editor controls for each patch give you a handle on the envelope, filter and FX situation. Note that Kontakt Player 4 ships with the library.

This isn't one for purists looking for an accurate virtual violin, but is a quirky and inspiring secret box of trinkets for sound designers and composers who are always looking for fresh sounds to fire up their inspiration.

8/10



Arturia Analog Experience – The Player £129

Web www.arturia.com
 Contact 2Twenty2, 0845 299 4222
 Format PC/Mac, USB

Whisper it quietly, but all some people really want from a synth is high-quality presets and the ability to tweak their most important parameters. What's more, a good number of said people would also take a dedicated, auto-setup MIDI controller keyboard for that synth.

This is precisely what Arturia are offering with Analog Experience - The Player. It's a scaled-back version of the Analog Factory Experience (cm124, 8/10), which has now been rebranded as Analog Experience - The Player.

We say scaled-back because, while the Factory model ships with a 32-note keyboard and a version of the Analog Factory 2.5 software that contains 3,500 sounds, The Player comprises a 25-note keyboard and just 1,000 sounds. These are still powered by Arturia's well-regarded synth engines, though - minimoog V, Moog Modular V, CS-80V, ARP 2600 V, Prophet V, Prophet VS and Jupiter-8V -

so are bursting with analogue juiciness.

You can browse the presets by instrument, type or both, with search results thrown up as you go. Browsing can be done from the keyboard (via a button and knob), which is a retro-looking device made from wood and metal. It has a pleasing action and feels impressively robust; in fact, the only downside is that it might be a little too heavy to be considered truly portable.

Editing of the sounds is restricted to the filter cutoff/resonance, chorus and delay effects, and ADSR envelope. This is handled by four knobs on the keyboard, the functions of which can be switched with the Shift button. You can also

store five snapshots.

The Player is fine as far as it goes: you can't argue with the sound quality, and it comes with a terrific little keyboard. Yes, it's limited, but it's great fun and delivers good results fast.

8/10



Moog Music Inc. Filtatron £2.99

Web www.moogmusic.com
 Contact via website
 Format iPhone app

You know iPhone music apps are getting serious when even hardware synth legends Moog are after a piece of the pie. Their app, Filtatron, isn't a straight-up synth, however. Instead, you use it to process audio from three sources: the mic input, a sample player or an analogue-style oscillator with blendable saw/square shapes - you get level knobs for each of these inputs, so you can use all three at once, if you like.

These signals are then pumped through a stereo Moog ladder filter with low-/high-pass mode, cutoff, resonance, separation (stereo offset of cutoff frequency), and dry/wet mix controls. You can twiddle the cutoff manually or use an envelope follower and LFO to modulate it. The latter has tempo sync (set it with the Tap button) and five shapes via a continuous knob, so you can smoothly move between them.

That's the main page, in a nutshell, but there's more... On the FX page, there's filter overdrive and feedback, alongside a tempo-syncable tape-style delay with a simple time-modulating LFO. The Pads page, meanwhile offers dual X/Y pads

for controlling parameters in real time.

Filtatron's sound quality is superb, and it's easy to forget that you're using an iPhone app and not a desktop plug-in (actually, we'd love to see a plug-in version!). The filter can go from a bassy thud to all-out resonant whistle, and the drive/feedback options offer plenty of textural variation and wild behaviour. The oscillators sound warm and 'analogue', while the delay is itself a prime source of sonic madness. Just crank up the feedback and start manhandling the delay time - it sounds very smooth and can even churn out pseudo vocoder and old-school timestretching effects.

Using the mic input to manipulate real-world sounds is fantastic fun (especially in a public place using headphones!), and all of your mayhem can be recorded to WAV. There's Audio Copy/Paste for bouncing sounds back and forth with apps like NanoStudio, which facilitates the use of Filtatron to jazz up staid sounds.

Further niceties include a built-in manual and synthesis glossary, a Moog product catalogue and FTP file transfer. While not being essential, Filtatron sounds superb and is a ton of fun. We can't imagine anyone being disappointed with it.

9/10



Soundware round-up

Puremagnetik **DOWNLOAD**

Ultrakord \$12

Web www.puremagnetik.com
Contact info@puremagnetik.com
Format Live 8.1, Logic 8, Kontakt 3.5



This pack brings us the vintage tones of the Suzuki Omnichord, a sort of electronic autoharp that appeared in the early 80s. As well as multisampling of three main voices along with bass and drums, there are sampled chords and strums. Making use of these are a set of patches offering arpeggiation and one-shot strums, as well as layered and effected variations. Crucial to the experience are the one-chord-per-key mappings, which are terrific fun to jam with, whether you use them for simple riffs or ear-catching progressive chord changes. The overall sound has a classic 80s electronics vibe, offering simplistic yet characterful bleeps and warbles that would brighten up any track.

8/10

Crate Diggers **DOWNLOAD**

Cylinder Vocals £15

Web www.soundstosample.com
Contact via website
Format WAV



Presumably having exhausted the world's supply of unsampled vinyl, Crate Diggers turn to the first ever commercial recording medium, the wax cylinder. The pack contains 465 spoken vocal phrases plucked from turn-of-the-20th-century cylinders, all broken down into categories like 'city life', 'drugs' and 'love and women', all coming from a great variety of voices. Although the audio has been tidied up using restoration tools, it's still authentically noisy, with enormous variance in clarity between samples. And therein lies the rub: while these are fascinating soundbites, we're not sure how effectively you'd be able to use them in your tracks, as so many would be difficult to discern in a mix.

6/10

Sonokinetic **DOWNLOAD**

Carousel £20

Web www.sonokinetic.net
Contact via web
Format Kontakt 4.1



A 400MB sampled fairground barrel organ with over 400 samples under the hood. The organ features ten registers (voices), which can be played together (tutti) or toggled individually with the interface or keyswitches. There's a simple convolution reverb and percussion comprising kick/cymbal bashes and some snare hits. To expose Carousel's character, you should explore the registers individually. There's subtly detuned reediness, raspy honkings, hollow 'blowing across a bottle' tones, brash strings and more. We'd have liked more control, such as knobs to pan the registers and set the level of the release noises. The recording quality is nothing special but Carousel is usable enough and represents fair value.

7/10



Producer Loops £35 **DOWNLOAD**

SupaLife Dubstep Hard Edition

Web www.producerloops.com
Contact via website
Format Acidized WAV, MIDI, REX2, ReFill, Apple Loops

SupaLife's Dubstep Smooth Edition (**cm157**, 8/10), impressed us with its slick spin on the gritty sound of dubstep. Now we have Hard Edition to contend with, though it's far from mindless wobbling, with plenty of musicality at play. The production quality of the five construction kits is high, featuring slamming beats, ripping bass noises, slick synths and nifty percussion.

There are loops for each mix element (even down to separate drums), some individual note samples (synths, etc) and MIDI files, and although you don't get single drum hits, you can easily chop them out of their loops. Not only is this pack credible within the genre, but SupaLife have put their own twist on the dubstep vibe. Whether you're seeking inspiration or looking for insight into how to build solid productions, this is one to check out. Note that kits can be bought individually and price varies with format.

9/10

Loopmasters **DOWNLOAD** £40

Designer Dance FX

Web www.loopmasters.com
Contact info@loopmasters.com
Format WAV, HALion, Kontakt, EXS24, SFZ, NNXT



A straight-up collection of sound effects intended for dance music production, Designer Dance FX delivers 1.2GB of the typical booms, crashes, risers, stabs and other bread 'n' butter noises. Oh, and don't forget the sirens!

While there are some really good sounds here - the crash cymbals and sub noises in particular stand out as highly usable - much of the content is a little lacklustre and dated-sounding when compared to the current cream of the crop. Designer Dance FX is by no means a bad library, but there are better sample packs to put your £40 towards.

6/10

K-Size

NoKick Edition €87

Web www.bestservic.de

Contact mail@bestservice.de

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

We've been thoroughly impressed by K-Size sample libraries in the past and this title is no exception. Here you get 1500 percussive and FX loops with no kick drum present – a practical format that's excellently executed. All the loops are at 128bpm and clearly designed for upfront house genres. However, despite being so specialised, there's plenty of scope for these very trendy loops to be coerced into other styles. Sonically, the set is up there with the best and there are even 100 bonus kick samples.

9/10



Big Fish Audio

G-Strings £65

Web www.timespace.com

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200

Format Acidized WAV, Apple Loops, REX, Stylus RMX

This release comprises 40 R&B construction kits, boasting the talents of guitarist Tommy O, who's cited as having worked with TLC, Janet Jackson and Toni Braxton. The music is very nice, if a little dated, and the performances are top notch. Each kit includes individual drum tracks and hits as well as the other instrument loops, although the percussive hits are nothing special. The recording quality is good on the whole, but we spotted a few nasty bits of digital clipping that really let it down. With better production and closer attention to detail, this title could have been a winner.

6/10



Nine Volt Audio

Organ Explosion: 9V-B3 Edition £62

Web www.timespace.com

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200

Format Kontakt, Apple Loops, Stylus RMX, Acidized WAV, REX2

This latest edition to the BPM Flex Series consists entirely of performances on the classic Hammond B3 organ. The 706 unique loops are presented in 20 categories, all labelled by tempo and name. The recordings have a lovely warm quality and – possibly a first – the performances are split into left hand (bass) and right hand loops, so that you're free to manipulate the upper and lower parts of each performance without any hassle. Stylistically, it's very diverse, even though all of the sounds originate from the B3, so fear not, there's plenty to play with.

9/10



Big Fish Audio

Metric Odd Meter Drumloops £65

Web www.timespace.com

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200

Format Acidized WAV, Apple Loops, REX, RMX

If you're into music that strays outside the standard 4/4 time signature, you'll probably be aware that sample loop libraries tend to be presented entirely in 4/4 by standard. Editing regular 4/4 loops to force them into other time signatures can be tedious and doesn't always produce satisfying results. Enter the Big Fish solution, Odd Meter Drumloops, in which you'll find 1030 live drum loops in 3/4, 5/4, 6/8, 7/8 and 9/4. It's a nice idea on paper, but the recordings seem to be very meek, lacking punch, depth, volume and brightness.

6/10



Zero-G

Animato String and Flute FX for Cinema £90

Web www.timespace.com

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200

Format Kontakt, Acidized WAV

A library of string, flute and piccolo performances with a twist. It happily provides the dark and moody textures that typically underlie the most chilling of film scenes. You can expect lots of high-pitched whining and squealing, next to rich-but-soft ambiances that bubble and swell.

Some of the effects are so dramatic they enter the realm of the theatrical. The library presents each instrument in live and mutated versions, the latter delving even further into eerie and unnatural territory. While there are WAVs here, you'll definitely want to use the Kontakt instrument to get the most out of this lot.

9/10



Dubdrops DOWNLOAD £35

Bubbles and Chops

Web www.loopmasters.com

Contact info@loopmasters.com

Format Acidized WAV, REX2, Apple Loops, WAV

Bubbles and chops are those funky off-beat chugs that accompany every reggae classic as a matter of course, usually performed by a guitarist and/or pianist. The most immediately striking quality of this 200-sample set is its authenticity – perhaps both its weakest and strongest point in one. If you're strictly after vintage reggae skank, then you're going to be pleased with this title. It does exactly what it says on the tin and is very well organised. We only wonder whether it's a little too faithful to yesteryear's recording techniques and could have benefited from slightly cleaner production for the sake of flexibility. **cm**

7/10

