

WHAT IS IT?

An important update to this classic rack-based synth and sequencing system, one that finally delivers what was only previously possible using other software – full audio recording – alongside a fully integrated mixer and some other interesting processing additions

CONTACT

Who: Sound Technology Ltd
 Tel: + 44 (0)146 2480 000
 Web: propellerheads.se

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Audio recording – at last!
- 2 The new Mixer – it's huge
- 3 The Echo – sounds dirty.



Propellerhead Reason 6 | €405

Reason finally fully integrates multi-track audio. **Bruce Aisher** wonders whether it can now compete head-on with the big guns of the DAW world

Propellerhead Software possess a compelling heritage for a company based solely in the digital age. Having developed the sample loop editor and slicer, ReCycle (and its associated REX format), three years later they released the now classic ReBirth RB-338. This techno-oriented virtual synth and drum-machine software set the standard for much of what was to come in the later DAW and plug-in era. The ideas laid out in

ReBirth then developed into the first, and more rounded, Reason product. For nearly ten years Reason staked out its own territory in the production world without ever introducing the facility to add or record multi-track audio. It was only in 2009, with the introduction of its sister product Record, that the full Reason functionality was to become available in a true DAW format.

So, flash-forward two years and we have Reason 6. This essentially distills everything that, as a duo, Record and

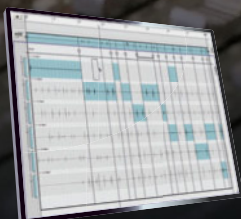
Reason provided together, boiling it down into a single product. In fact, Record has been dropped altogether, consequently making Reason 6 a fully featured DAW, with all that implies, for the very first time. Propellerhead haven't, as some might have expected, given up on the closed-system idea (there is still no third-party plug-in support), but it appears that Reason now possesses the capability to be your main (or even only) piece of music production software.

Gimme the Reason

Installation is as easy as ever, although unlike older incarnations it requires the use of a USB copy-protection key. Once again, Reason appears identical in its Windows and Mac guises, but this time it is fully 64-bit, while at the same time being compatible with your older Reason and Record song files. In previous versions of Reason there were essentially two main working areas – the Rack and the Sequencer. Although originally tied together in one window, in more recent years the Sequencer window could be detached, moved and resized separately. Reason 6 brings with it a third major component, the Main Mixer. This is a huge, analogue-style mixer, that is apparently modelled on the rather weighty SSL SuperAnalogue XL 9000 K series, although to what extent this is visual rather than sonic is not mentioned specifically.

Reason 6: the Top 5 New Features

The great leap forward that is full audio recording capability is understandably hogging column inches, but Propellerhead's newly integrated package comes bristling with a range of other fresh features. We break down the ones you really need to know about, because we're nice like that...



Audio recording

Yes, it has finally arrived. Despite having seen action in Record, this still represents one of the biggest changes to Reason in its long and illustrious history. Implementation is simple, effective and flexible and, with plenty of editing and take comping options, it certainly doesn't feel bolted-on.

Some might say that Reason has finally been allowed to play with the big boys. While it might not see other major DAW users leaving their current software home, it may sway potential new arrivals to the music tech world.



Neptune

With the arrival of full-blown audio recording comes the need to tease, tweak, correct and modify the pitch of any less than perfect performance – yes I know 'autotuning' is overused, but it's still a necessary tool in the armouries of many producers. Propellerhead satisfy this need with Neptune, their new 'pitch adjuster and voice synth'.

Transposition can be achieved quite naturally using an independent Formant control section, and automatic pitch correction offers the usual range of scale and key options. Things get more unusual with the MIDI-playable vocal synth for playing harmonies or creating special effects.



The Mixer

Wow – it's big! While in the past any mixing elements had to be inserted and managed via the Rack, the new Reason 6 mixer (also first seen in Record), is a separate beast. This SSL-style megalith is visually huge, and offers professional-style tone and dynamics shaping straight out of the box. This makes it a great tool for learning about 'real' hardware mixers, but more importantly provides a degree of mixing power previously only glimpsed at within Reason's closed framework. You even get a hardwired, and rather tasty, bus compressor to glue everything together.



Line 6 Amps

Not wishing to leave axe grinders out in the cold, Reason 6 offers very high quality amp modelling straight from the Line 6 Pod processing family. These have a proven track record, and the results are certainly realistic and convincing. Interestingly, if you own Line 6 USB audio interface you can unlock additional tones to use within Reason – and if you don't, additional model packs are available to purchase online.



The Echo

One of the limitations of Reason's closed system is the fact that you're stuck with its own flavour of effects processing. Up until now, DDL-1 has been its only independent delay effect – and a rather boring one at that. So three cheers then for The Echo, an interesting, and highly tweakable, beast with plenty of character. Taking its inspiration from a well-known Roland unit, The Echo sounds great, and is capable of some vintage dubby tones that pack plenty of grit, grime, wobble and degradation.

SPECS

System Requirements:

Mac: Intel Mac (multiple cores highly recommended), Mac OS X 10.5.8 or later, CoreAudio compliant audio interface or built-in audio hardware

PC: Intel Pentium 4/AMD Opteron or better (multiple cores highly recommended), Windows XP SP3, Vista or Windows 7 (Vista or Windows 7 required for 64-bit), A 16 bit Windows compatible audio card, preferably with an ASIO driver

Both: At least 1GB RAM, 3GB free hard disk space (program may use up to 20GB scratch disk space), Monitor with 1024x768 resolution or larger, a MIDI interface and a MIDI keyboard recommended, Internet connection for registration, free USB port for Ignition Key

PRICING

Reason Essentials
279 euros

Balance with Reason Essentials
499 euros

(Includes a free upgrade to Reason 6 for any registered Record or Reason owner).

Reason 6 Upgrade
149 euros

(from any Reason version, Reason Essentials and Balance).

Reason 6 Upgrade from Record-Reason Duo
Pay what you want, from 1 euro

(before 31st October 2011)

149 euros

(after 31st October 2011)

Regardless of its sound, this mixer is heavy on features, with hardwired and comprehensive EQ, compression, noise gate, insert and send FX sections on each channel. The master section also includes a bus compressor, which again nods (and winks provocatively) towards a visually-similar SSL hardware offering. This new Reason mixer really is very powerful, although even the largest of screens would have a problem accommodating its full height, and some of the legending can appear rather small. The dense layout also means that parameter adjustment can be fiddly at times, despite the generally clear layout.

Reasons to be cheerful

As you all know, the biggest functional change in Reason 6 is the ability to record audio direct to the Sequencer page, and this is facilitated by the use of the aptly-named Audio Track. Set-up, monitoring and recording are all about as easy as it gets. If you've made multiple passes at recording a particular section, it can all be comped very easily by clicking on the relevant audio event and, in the editor, selecting the portion from each take that you require. Crossfades can be easily applied, and the overdub button also works with audio tracks (by creating a new empty track with the same

Pulverised by an Alligator

While there are many aspects new to Reason 6, quite a number of these were Record features. Propellerhead have added genuinely new toys though, two of which are Pulveriser and Alligator.

Alligator is a pattern drive gate effect – a more advanced take on the so-called 'trance gate'. By splitting audio into high, mid and low bands, then treating these differently, it's possible to create movement in slower, sustained elements, or mayhem in vocals, guitars, bass, synths... anything really. Fun, and great for instant gratification, or even just some sonic inspiration.



Pulveriser does the same for compression and distortion, combining a number of effects. Taking a disrespectful approach, you'll find controls for 'Squash' and 'Dirt'. These lead you to a multimode filter section that can be modulated by amplitude controlled envelope and the so-called 'Tremor' section. A Blend

control enables you to experiment with parallel compression and distortion treatments. Although Reason traditionally excels at effect 'power-routing' using its extensive virtual-cable system, it's always great to have some devices that can be patched in and up and running immediately.

processing as applied to the original). It's worth pointing out that all audio automatically tracks any newly applied tempo changes by time-stretching on the fly, and each event can be transposed very easily. To facilitate this real-time audio manipulation one of three algorithms can be selected, with the results for the most part being

extremely good. Bouncing audio is far more flexible than before in Reason 6, with the ability to export multiple tracks simultaneously.

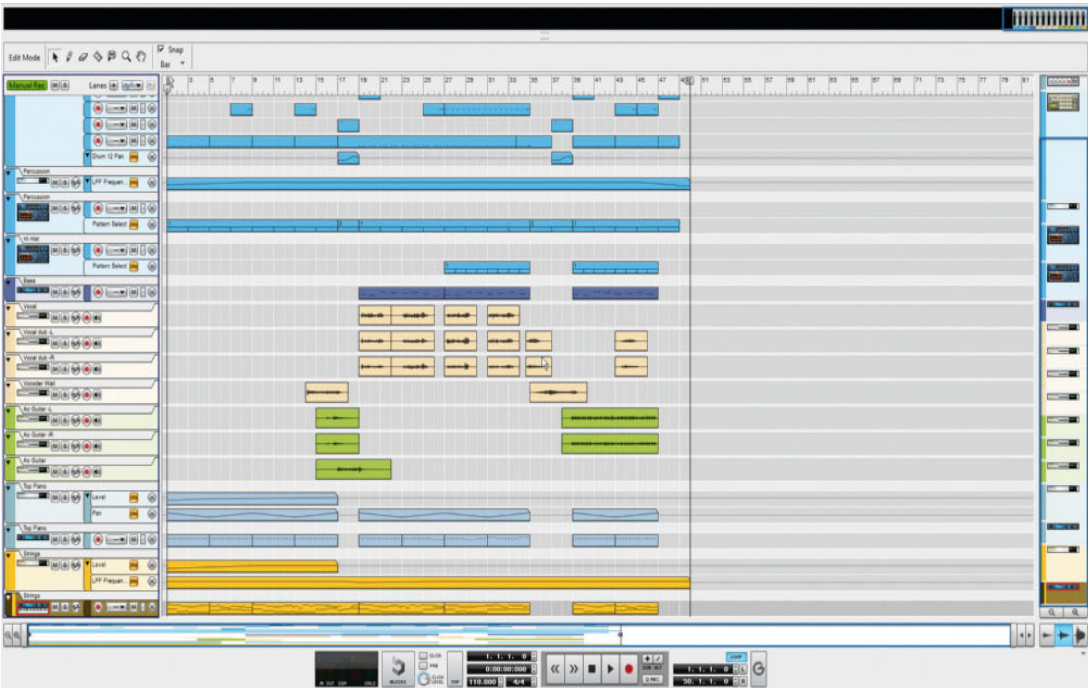
Now that we have full-blown audio we also get the rather nifty Neptune Pitch Adjuster, which has a palette that extends from manual transposition, through standard autotune-style correction and on to MIDI controllable vocal synthesis.

On the subject of effects, we also see the arrival of three new processors that even Record was not party to. Pulveriser combines distortion, compression and filtering with various modulation capabilities to do exactly as its name suggests – although it's capable of subtler treatments as well. The Echo is an effect that clearly owes a debt to the classic tape-based Roland Space Echo, and is capable of some fabulous dirty, and rather wobbly, delay effects – though it can be pressed into (a little) more clean and serene service if required. Ducking delay effects are also possible using the new Reason 6 side-chain routing methodology. Last of the newbie triumvirate is Alligator, a pattern controlled multiband gate/filter effect that also throws in some overdrive, phasing and delay for good measure.

A special mention should go to the guitar and bass processing effects that were introduced in Record. Rather than building their own, Propellerhead have gone straight to well-established pros in this area – Line 6. The amp modelling



Reason 6 keeps the famous 'rack' format that defines the software



A cleaner arrange window gives a more standard DAW-like way of looking at things

these units deliver is extremely good, as you'd expect, and you can purchase and unlock additional models online.

Finally, we get the simple but effective ID8. This is a sample playback instrument incorporating

editing to get things started, and at this ID8 excels.

Rhyme and Reason

Given that it only took a few years for Propellerhead to go from introducing

sense to combine the two forever. The reality is perhaps that Propellerhead were being left behind in a world tired of Rewire integration (now also 64-bit).

All things considered, I enjoyed using Reason 6 – it's a truly self-

contained system – but the closer it comes to other DAWs in terms of functionality, the more you notice the differences. There's no third-party plug-in

Reason now has the capability of being your main (or only) piece of music production software

a relatively sparse number of presets, including drums. The idea behind this is that sometimes you just need a few decent sounds in order to build a solid basis for a track, with limited parameter

Record to dropping it completely and integrating it fully into their flagship product, one might think that Record was a mistake – or that the fusion was so successful that it made commercial

support, which does mean missing out on some potentially interesting forms of processing available to other DAW users. The upside is that Reason is fast and stable, with a file format that is completely portable. For teaching sequencing, mixing and production, or just as a sturdy studio workhorse, Reason really is very good. **FM**

The New Reason Family

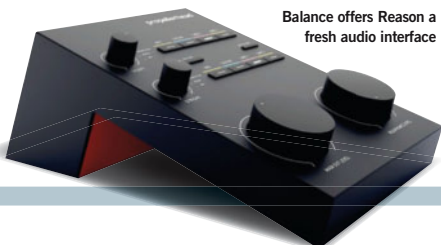
The last two years have seen a lot of changes in the Propellerhead software camp. Record introduced new audio recording and mixing functionality, but left out many Reason production favourites. Purchasing and installing

these together provided the best of both worlds. With Reason 6 the rules have been changed again. Record is no more, essentially becoming part of Reason proper and we also have Reason Essentials, a trimmed-

down version of Reason – though certainly not cripplingly so. It comes packaged with Balance, a new USB 2-in 2-out audio interface that looks and feels fantastic, being the perfect partner to the new software.

It is also worth pointing out the higher price of Reason 6 compared to Reason 5 (a hike of about 100 euros), though this does make the upgrade easier to swallow.

Balance offers Reason a fresh audio interface



ALTERNATIVES



Ableton Live Suite 8 from £299

Ableton Live has always dug its own furrow in the DAW stakes. With a solid base in the DJ fraternity, it has recently found favour at the more experimental end of the spectrum having integrated many aspects of Max/MSP (as a premium add-on).

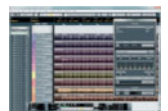
ableton.com



Apple Logic Studio 9 £417

One of the big guns in which Reason needs to compete. Logic comes with a huge array of effects, instruments and loop-based content, but it's Mac only, and is rather less CPU friendly than Reason's offering.

apple.com

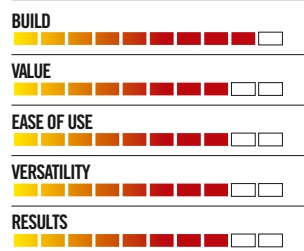


Cubase 6 £500

Although Steinberg and Propellerhead have a relationship that goes back a long way, Cubase and Reason are now squarely aimed against one another in head-to-head competition. Cubase, like Logic, offers third-party plug-in support and a far longer heritage of use in professional studio circles.

steinberg.net

FutureMusic VERDICT



Reason is now a well-rounded DAW capable of taking care of nearly all of your production needs.