



# Propellerhead Reason 6.5 £349

PC MAC

The famously unflappable DAW finally opens its stable to third-party developers, but should we be more careful what we wish for?

> In December 2000, a piece of software arrived that changed the face of desktop music production. Reason was keenly priced, CPU-efficient and projects could be shared with ease. It was a hit. Reason has evolved to include comprehensive mixing and audio playback, but while other DAWs support open plug-in formats like VST, RTAS and AU, it has always been a closed shop. Enter Reason 6.5 and the game-changing step that is Rack Extensions.

The idea is simple: open Reason's Rack to third-party developers. And that's exactly what Propellerhead have achieved - Rack Extensions have all the base functionality of existing Reason devices. There are over 20 launch REs, including three from Propellerhead, reviewed opposite. Our first third-party RE review - FXpansion's Etch Red - can be found on p90.

## Playing nice

There were advantages to being self-contained. Firstly, Reason was the most CPU-efficient and stable DAW by a country mile. At least one user here at **cm** hasn't had a single crash since v1! Happily, we still haven't had a crash, despite trying everything we could think of to trip it up.

It's not all gravy, though. When using lots of REs, we had occasional unnerving screen freezing, causing the kind of gut-twisting feeling of which Reason users have thus far been blissfully free. Then there's the fact that some REs introduce latency; for those who have only ever used Reason, this sluggishness will be a new experience. We've also never before had a system overload when using Reason on our studio machine, but we reached this point after adding as few as 15 REs to large projects. This

means that Reason urgently needs track freezing. You can't expect people to repeatedly bounce and bypass large numbers of Devices in order to finish a project.

Another factor in peril is Reason's previously universal project portability. We believe that any REs you don't have in a shared project should be downloadable as playback-only versions. As it stands, you get bypassed placeholders - but what if it's a critical Device, like a synth? Considering the number of users out there who collaborate with Reason, we rather think Propellerhead have ridden roughshod over one of its central tenets. The free 30-day trial versions won't help either, as the first thing most 6.5 users will do is try out the lot, and trials can only be activated once.

## The end of the beginning?

Despite our criticisms, we're hugely impressed by the way Propellerhead have implemented Rack Extensions. With the exception of the collaboration issue and immature RE pricing, any issues are the price of progress (we should remember that Propellerhead have always cited these as their main reasons for not opening the software up previously). Only time will tell whether Rack Extensions represent a step too far, damaging Reason's unique appeal and offending the software's loyal fans. For now, though, it looks like Propellerhead are getting the balance just about right.

**Web** [www.propellerheads.se](http://www.propellerheads.se)  
**Contact** Sound Technology, 01462 480000  
**Info** Upgrade from v6, Free; upgrade from v1-5 or Balance, £139; upgrade from Adapted/Essentials/Limited, £229

## Alternatively

**Ableton Live 8**  
**cm139 » 9/10 » £349**  
Quick arrangement and plenty of bundled plug-ins

**Native Instruments Maschine**  
**cm138 » 9/10 » £499**  
If you use Reason as a scratchpad, NI's MPC-style approach may appeal

## Verdict

**For** No crashes  
REs function just like regular Devices  
Nice starting collection of REs  
Proper mixing now a possibility

**Against** No freeze function  
Project sharing no longer universal  
RE pricing confused

Conceptually controversial, Reason 6.5 is nevertheless a technical masterpiece and a pivotal update

9/10



## Pulsar €39

Web [www.propellerheads.se](http://www.propellerheads.se)

Contact Via website

Pulsar is a dual-LFO modulation generator designed to control just about anything that accepts CV in Reason. You might think that there are already plenty of modulation options in the Rack, but the Reason paradigm is designed to encourage patching things together, so we don't think you can have enough mod-generators.

Apart from all the obvious controls like waveform type, speed, sync and phase offset, Pulsar also boasts some really cool unusual features, such as shuffle. This parameter adds a shuffle-like variation to adjacent LFO cycles, meaning that even your modulation can have

swing. It's something you don't see so often, and it's a very good idea.

Lag is another cool feature: it acts to smooth out the edges of sharp LFO waveform types. When automated, this can add or remove edge from modulation in quite interesting ways. As you'd expect, it sounds a lot different acting on, say, a filter cutoff rather than pitch. Pulsar also features the ability to control the LFO rate with a MIDI keyboard, which can be great for studio and even live work.

The effect's input and output section is pretty formidable. There are inputs for dynamically controlling the aforementioned shuffle control, not to mention the Phase and Rate. Then come the outputs, featuring multiple instances of each

to avoid too much Spider splitting, and even audio outputs as the LFOs go right up to audible frequencies. This, of course, makes Pulsar a two-oscillator monosynth as well!

And that's the theme with Pulsar - you have to muck about with it to see what it can do. There are plenty of preset ideas and combinator to get started, but the best thing to do is chuck it at as many things as you can think of. For the best and most dramatic results, patch it in to multiple mod destinations (different parameters and different devices alike) simultaneously.

For experimental minds, Pulsar is currently the only essential Propellerhead Rack Extension. Even better, it's free until 1 October 2012!

9/10



## Radical Piano €79

Web [www.propellerheads.se](http://www.propellerheads.se)

Contact Via website

As the only new Propellerhead instrument on offer, expectations are high for Radical Piano. If you aren't really a piano kind of producer, then you might be about to stop reading - but don't be too hasty. Radical Piano takes a number of piano models, allowing you to blend them to create completely original sounds. Opening up the bottom section also lets you tweak a large number of parameters, such as envelope, resonance, EQ and even mechanical noise.

Little details such as any undamped strings resonating, multiple basic piano types and room ambience all conspire to allow you to make everything from realistic-sounding pianos to otherworldly ones.

In the end, though, this instrument is just a piano - and not a world-class one. If you're a Reason user and want some tasty piano sounds, then this is currently your best option, but the rest of us can stick with ID8's default Piano preset.

7/10



## Polar €55

Web [www.propellerheads.se](http://www.propellerheads.se)

Contact Via website

The 80s popularised a slew of then-futuristic digital effects that defined much of the music of the day, and one such processor was the stereo pitchshifter. Enter the ice-cool Polar.

One of the pitchshifter effect's most common uses is micro-shifting for widening and thickening, and this is the sound we know and love from countless 80s vocals, synths and guitars. But there's much more to it than that. Users of Audio Damage's Discord 3 will know what to expect, with pitchshifted delays, crazy modulated pitchshifting and generally out-there and spooky effects being the order of the day.

Anybody working with acoustic sounds, vocals or synths should try this out. Polar offers a professional sheen and stereo widening that just wasn't possible in Reason before, so it is a great way to sex up your mixdowns in just about any genre, from the most banging house choonz up to and including acoustic folk! **cm**

8/10