

cm mini reviews

A rapid-fire round-up of mobile gear and soundware

Sonokinetic Capriccio €363

Web www.sonokinetic.com
Format PC/Mac, Kontakt 5/Player

Sonokinetic's biggest release yet (35GB for the 24-bit version, 18GB for 16-bit – both are included) is the new head of the company's orchestral phrase ROMpler range, which also includes Grosso (cm208, 9/10) and Minimal (cm198, 9/10). Essentially, Capriccio is 'Grosso 2': an expansion on the same concept, employing a huge bank of phrases in 4/4 rather than 12/8.

The entire orchestra is represented, with separate full and "Lite" NKIs for the various orchestral sections – Strings, Brass, Woodwind and Percussion (tuned and untuned) – plus a Runs instrument and a non-phrased Multisampled Percussion ensemble split into Left and Right hand halves for playability. Improving on Grosso's mix of two- and three-layer sections, every section is three layers deep (with four keyswitchable presets), and each layer can be loaded with one of up to 18 phrases (many of them including variations) from the Low, Mid or High (or Piano, Wood or Iron for Pitched Percussion) categories. The

supplementary Runs instrument, meanwhile, has two layers each offering a choice of Woodwinds or Strings.

The engine itself has been improved in some areas since Grosso, too. You can now audition phrases in the Phrase Picker, MIDI phrases can be dragged out of the GUI, sample release volume can be adjusted independently, and the new Offset slider enables each layer to be displaced by up to one beat in either direction.

Like Grosso, playing Capriccio involves holding down triads at one end of the keyboard to trigger phrases, while switching presets and applying harmonic shifts at the other. The intelligent chord detection works brilliantly, and it all makes you feel like you're in control of a truly mighty (and perfectly captured) orchestra. The phrases themselves are generally very energetic, spirited and cinematic, and our only



real criticism is the same one that we levelled at Grosso: there's no mixer overview page – just separate editors for volume, pan, etc. Epic and enormous, though, Capriccio is a masterpiece.

10/10

ProjectSAM Orchestral Essentials 2 £278

Web www.timespace.com
Format PC/Mac, Kontakt 5/Player

ProjectSAM's second action-packed library of "cinematic" orchestral ensembles draws almost entirely on their Symphobia and True Strike series for its 9.5GB sample bank. Ranging from solo instruments and small groups to full orchestra and choir, the variety of instrument combinations, playing styles and flavours on offer is broad.

The 53 instruments are divided into nine categories – Mixed Orchestra, Strings, Brass, Woodwinds, Percussion, Keyboards & Harp, Choir, Sound Design and Bonus. The last two comprise swells, beds, whooshes and other effects, as well as orchestra tuning noises and "concert hall silence", so the meat of OE2 is undoubtedly to be found in the first seven.

The ten Mixed Orchestra instruments represent their diverse section combinations very well, and the inclusion of Cartoon and Texture ensembles is a nice touch. The Strings, Brass, Woodwind, Percussion and Keys categories capture the imagination and sound the

business, while the five "Legato" patches (solo trumpet, flute and oboe, cellos plus bassoon, and bass clarinet plus contra bassoon), which use sampled legato transitions for realistic and expressive play, are truly gorgeous.

There are a few questionable inclusions, however, taking up space that might have been better filled with more 'essential' sounds. Yes, we're looking at you, Bowed Cymbals and Box Organ. Also, the only all-new sample set in the package, Intimate Piano, isn't terribly exciting – a thoroughly standard piano in regular and "extra dreamy" versions.

Like its predecessor, Orchestral Essentials 2 is geared up to give sonically impressive results at maximum speed with minimum effort. The sample bank and scripted Kontakt interface don't give much in the way of options or



flexibility (one mic position per instrument, for example), and some of the quirkier patches aren't going to prove hugely useful, but for big, rich orchestals in a hurry, there's plenty to recommend here to those on a relaxed budget.

8/10

Native Instruments Session Guitarist – Strummed Acoustic £89

Web www.native-instruments.com
Format PC/Mac, Kontakt 5/Player

A 1973 Martin D-35 acoustic guitar was deeply multisampled to create this 8GB generator of strummed riffs and rhythms for Kontakt and Kontakt Player. 102 patterns are grouped across 31 'songs', but each of its eight keyswitched slots can be loaded with any one of them. The gamut of acoustic guitar styles is covered, and the library "does not employ traditional timestretching, but is based on a far more sophisticated technical backbone and recordings in multiple tempos". And it's paid off, as Strummed Acoustic sounds convincingly 'real' at anywhere from around 60-200bpm (depending on the Pattern).

Selecting patterns is done in the Pattern Browser, which has filters for playing/sound characteristics (Open, Muted, Mixed, Hard and Soft) and rhythmic base (3/4, 4/4, Triplets), plus Similar pattern and Rhythm Search functions to put specific pattern styles at the top of the list.

Strummed Acoustic divides the keyboard up into Pattern keyswitches, Endings, Pickups and the three-octave note/chord playing area. Pretty much any chord you can throw at it is recognised, and an easy-to-use Auto Chords mode is available for one-fingered play. Transitions between chords and patterns are always perfectly in sync with the playback position, while the Endings and Pickups offer various one-shot strums and palm hits for playing at the ends of patterns or in transition between them. There are also Swing and Humanise controls for dialing in feel, pitch wheel control of accent level, and a fret noise volume knob.

Impressively, high and low voicings have been captured for every pattern, with the mod wheel used to set the mix between them. Each voicing also includes a Doubling option alongside the regular Stereo mode, for a big double-tracked



sound. Basic sound-shaping is on hand, too, in the shape of EQ, compression and reverb.

Strummed Acoustic sounds superb, plays easily and boasts a high level of flexibility (and, consequently, longevity) thanks to its seamless pattern and chord changing. Recommended.

8/10

PreSonus AudioBox iTwo £149

Web www.presonus.com
Format PC/Mac/iOS

PreSonus' new 2-in/2-out 24-bit/96kHz mobile USB audio interface for Mac, PC and iOS isn't the smallest on-the-go solution we've come across, but it is lighter than it looks and is solidly built.

The two inputs are on XLR/balanced combs, the outputs are on balanced jacks, and a 1/4" headphone jack and 5-pin MIDI In/Out are onboard. Direct monitoring is supported, with an output Mix knob blending between direct input and DAW playback, while the main and headphone outs each get their own level knobs. A pair of buttons switch between line and instrument level signals on each input channel, and a third button switches phantom power on and off.

Mac and PC users can power the iTwo via USB, but using it with iOS means plugging it into the mains (using a USB power adapter/charger, such as the standard Apple one) as well as to the host device itself.

Ultimately, the iTwo is an unremarkable, workmanlike interface that sounds good and comes in at a reasonable price.

7/10



Future Moments MicSwap Pro £15

Web www.micswap.com
Format iOS

As far as we're aware, MicSwap Pro is the first microphone modeller for iOS. It runs the input (either an imported audio file, a feed from the built-in or external mic, or the output from another app) through 13 instantly switchable emulations of classics such as the SM58, U87, C12, etc, positioned in one of seven virtual recording rooms. There's a gain Slider and a Record button for capturing the signal.

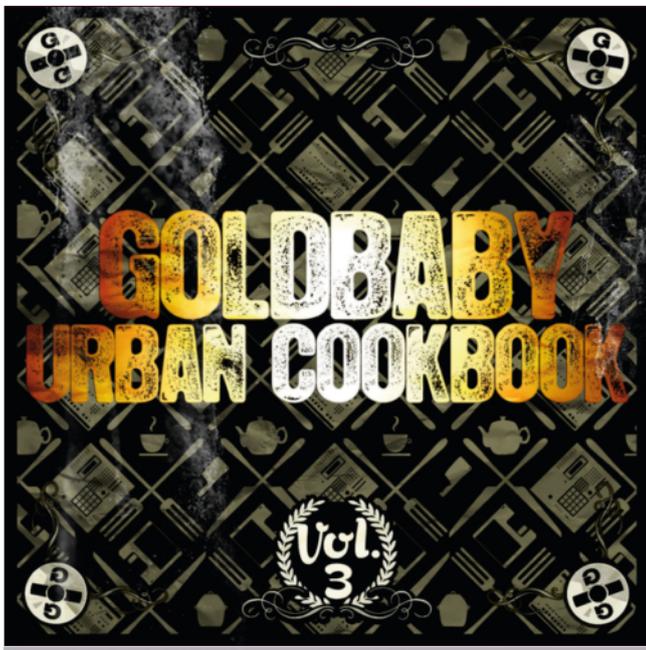
The mics do a pretty good job of capturing the general flavours of the originals, although serving more as a nicely varied collection of vocal (or other source) character enhancers than anything that would have purists swooning. Recordings can be trimmed and exported to other apps, and - as hinted at earlier - AudioBus and Inter-App Audio support are in place, via which Mic Swap can be used as an input or an effect.

A useful, well-produced app, MicSwap Pro impressed us more than we expected it to.

7/10



Soundware round-up



Goldbaby Urban Cookbook Vol 3 \$49

The 'Baby opens up another Goldmine of full-phat drum hits, chords, FX, Layers (transients, reverbs, vinyl noise, etc) and more, aimed at producers of hip-hop, bass and dance music of all kinds. Your meagre outlay gets you over 3000 samples, and even though that number includes a lot of multisample sets, it's still an enormous collection. The many accompanying sampler patches and Maschine 2 library are the icing on the cake, and this is yet another must-have from New Zealand's finest.

www.goldbaby.co.nz

10/10

Soul Rush Records

Found Sound Percussion Hits £15

230-odd sampled hits from a variety of objects (bottles, boxes, keys, etc) for the construction of drum and percussion kits, plus a handful of loops, ambiences and phrases. Tonally speaking, the sounds are generally OK, but many of the one-shots include a lot of (rapidly faded) background noise and rumble, which is frustrating. We get that this is meant to be 'earthy' stuff, but it actually comes across as a bit sloppy in places. Still, the price is good and there is some value here.

www.loopmasters.com

6/10



Mode Audio

Fracture £15

More found sound percussion: 210 samples rolled into ten drum kits and four channel strips for various DAWs (we received the Ableton Live version, so that's Drum and Effects Racks). The sonic diversity is impressive, given the subject matter, and clearly a lot of thought has gone into the processing involved. Fracture is much more interesting and cleanly produced than Found Sound Percussion Hits (above), and with both coming in at the same price, this has to be the one that gets our recommendation.

www.modeaudio.com

9/10



Sample Tools by Cr2

Dark Tech House £16

The moodier end of tech house gets the Cr2 treatment with this on-point library of sampled loops and hits (500-odd), synth presets (Massive and Sylenth) MIDI files, "song starter" construction kits and tutorial videos. The 25 (full and stemmed) big-'n'-bouncy drum loops are eminently mix-ready, while the raw, subby basses and cool, understated synth riffs really hit the spot. The song starters, meanwhile, are genuinely inspirational. On the one-shots front, the 109 drum hits should prove useful, and there are some tasty noises in the FX folder. Plenty to be getting on with, then.

sounds.beatport.com

9/10



Sample Magic

Ableton Instrument Racks £20

Five Simpler-based electronic Instrument Racks for Ableton Live: Bass, Lead, Kick, Snare and Hat. The eight macros at the front of each one start with the Selector, which scrolls through a bank of 64 samples in the relevant category. The other seven macros control a range of (fairly simple) effects setups tailored to each instrument type. It all comes together well, although the bass samples are very short, and some of them don't end totally cleanly. That said, this is a neat little dance music toolbox that deserves a place in any Live Library at this price.

www.samplemagic.com

8/10



Native Instruments

Prospect Haze £44

90s East Coast hip-hop and R&B are the topics for NI's latest Maschine Expansion, put together by Rawcutz. Prospect Haze's 843 samples come together in 53 Drum Kits (which actually include basses, SFX and other sounds) and 11 Melodic Kits. From beefy kicks and snares, through jazzy chords and dusty instrumental licks (the numerous flutes are a highlight), the whole thing exudes that authentic samplista vibe, with plenty of vinyl crackle and crate-dug ambience. Essential for hip-hop heads, and a must-hear for everyone else.

www.native-instruments.com

9/10



Big Fish Audio

Urban Guitar Suite Vol 1 £69

20 guitar-centred construction kits (2.7GB) in a range of, er, 'urban' genres: Funk, Retro, R&B and Rock. Weird genre classification aside, the tracks are compositionally top notch, excellently produced, and feature some breathtaking guitar work, with a broad array of playing techniques and tones. There are some great basslines too, but while the programmed drums work fine in the Funk and R&B tracks, the dreadful machine-gun snares suck the life out of some of the Rock and Retro ones. With regard to the guitars - the main attraction - though, it's an impressive resource.

www.timespace.com

8/10



Impact Soundworks

Reforged \$119

A 1.2GB pack of metallic hits and loops, comprising 1900+ WAVs and a series of scripted Kontakt instruments. The source material was recorded "in a shed in South Wales" and includes a colourful lineup of struck and resonated objects, from cooker, tin bath and gas canisters, to garden tools and household bits and pieces. The Kontakt interface includes effects and step sequencing, and although the Texture patches and Synths feel a bit superfluous, Reforged succeeds as a unique and characterful release.

www.impactsoundworks.com

8/10



Sample Magic

Organic Chillout £35

1.3GB of (acoustic, electric and electronic) drums, basses, percussion, FX, keyboards, strings and more at 95, 100 and 105bpm, with a laidback but focussed production style. The best bits are the stylistically adventurous drum loops (and accompanying one-shots), the very pretty Rhodes and piano riffs, and the dense stemmed music loops; but the whole collection oozes quality - there's enough here to sow the seeds for countless tracks. The only minor complaints are the atmospheres, which feel a bit short, and the cheesiness of some music loops.

www.samplemagic.com

9/10



Loopmasters

Hip Hop Instrumentals 3 £30

13 laidback hip-hop construction kits, each comprising between seven and 14 loops of up to 30 seconds in length, alongside a collection of their component hits and one-shots. The tracks are beautifully chilled and imaginatively produced - full of grit, dust and character - and a good range of instrumentation is represented. The single drum hits are also worthy of mention. The problem, though, is that at just 292 samples in total, there's not that much here to really get your teeth into - these days you'd expect rather more content for the money.

www.loopmasters.com

7/10



Samplephonics

Analogue Witchcraft Vol 2 £35

When we reviewed the original Analogue Witchcraft way back in **cm183**, we scored it a perfect 10, citing AncientPiano as perhaps the greatest loop we'd ever heard. With Vol 2, producer Paul Rez may not have surpassed his ear-reaving magnum opus (although 120_B_CaveScanner_01_SP.wav comes close!), but this is still one of the best libraries we've heard since that one. Comprising heavily processed and resampled bass, drum, synth and other instrument loops, it's a tour de force of musical sound design. Bold, imaginative, impossible to classify and utterly brilliant.

www.samplephonics.com

9/10



Samplephonics

Etch: Rave Warfare £35

This 1GB sample pack might only consist of 257 loops and 148 one-shots, but it feels like a whole lot more due to the sheer amount of stylistic ground covered. Essentially a new-school/old-school bass music hybrid, Rave Warfare takes on jungle, dubstep, DnB, garage, techno and more with equal aplomb. The focus is on tight, floor-shaking beats, breaks and basses, but the Chords & Pads folder is packed with gorgeous, floaty sounds, and the 30 melodics don't disappoint, either. A lot of it is quite derivative and referential, but that actually seems to help rather than hinder.

www.samplephonics.com

8/10



Sample Tools by Cr2

Sound Of Techno 2 £16

202 127bpm bass, drum and synth loops, 119 drum and FX one-shots, and six mini construction kits make up the core of Cr2's second techno soundware venture (we gave its predecessor 10/10 in **cm205**), bolstered by Cr2's usual MIDI files, synth presets and videos. Being basically more of the same, the musical feel is brooding and bangin', with the production style dark and relentless. Perhaps because of its similarity, this one hasn't got us as excited as the original Sounds of Techno (**cm205**, 10/10), but it's a quality set of samples, nonetheless, and great value for money.

sounds.beatport.com

8/10

