WHAT IS IT?

A drumkit sample library presented as a plug-in and standalone application

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HIGHLIGHTS

1 The new interface. It's a huge improvement

2 The mixer and integrated effects

3 Supplied library is much improved over version 1

UPGRADE

Upgrade for registered BFD 1.5 users

£99

FXpansion BFD 2 | £199

It's been a long time in development, but version 2 of FXpansion's popular workstation is finally here. *Steve Hillier* bangs the drums

Version 2 of a plug-in tends to bring a quantum leap in functionality. Manufacturers spend a long time coding an application, debugging and beta testing before rolling out version 1 to the public. They only get a real taste of how users want to use their product once it's been out in the shops for a few months, and this can come as a shock. Functions that were previously thought to be pivotal to its success become ignored – users start crying out for more of this, more of that, a bit less of that and for pity's sake make it larger and, of course, ten times faster!

So here we find FXpansion, the world leader in drumkit samples,

upgrading their flagship product to version 2. There's no doubt that BFD 1.5 has taken the music world by storm – many drum programmers have achieved stunning results with this product and it has featured in countless hit records. But was BFD 1.5 elegant and easy to use? Many thought not, and quite a few said so too. FXpansion have clearly been listening to their customer base and have produced an elegant upgrade for their flagship software bundle.

Easy on the eye

The BFD 2 upgrade is supplied in a reassuringly small cardboard box, not much larger than a pack of recordable DVDs. It may seem like a trivial point,

but I thoroughly approve of the minimalist approach to packaging that many software companies are taking these days. The days of wastefully selling us a licence code in a huge, nearly empty box are almost over (are you listening, Microsoft?).

Installation takes a fair while with every incarnation of BFD. The full sample library is over 55GB in size and took me nearly an hour to install, but FXpansion have streamlined their product authorisation by integrating the online authorisation tool into the process. This worked seamlessly, and installation was completed without fuss. I can happily report that BFD 2 will load all of the expansion packs that have been available for BFD 1.5 users too – so no major upgrade issues.

First impressions are quite a shock. The interface for BFD 2 is very different to the original BFD. On a cosmetic level, FXpansion have chosen a much darker background than previously used, reminding me of Logic 7's grey and high-contrast finish. Some may not like this change but there's little doubt that it has improved clarity. The interface is also much bigger – you can easily see details for each piece of the kit and you've got access to some of the most important parameters at the same time too.

There's now a mixer page, which makes balancing your drums far easier. In BFD 1.5, I'd always relied on Logic

to adjust individual drum sounds – now it seems just as easy to do it within BFD 2. We also have insert effects within the mixer, including a filter, a distortion unit, bitcrusher, a 4-band EQ, a compressor, delay, flanger, chorus, ring modulator, frequency shifter plus a reverb unit. These sound pretty good, and with a little experimentation I discovered some quite extraordinary applications for the filter and distortion plug-ins (see DVD). Editing the supplied grooves and even making your own within the dedicated MIDI page is now possible too.

Big friendly update

I've had trouble using BFD 1.5 ever since I upgraded my system to Logic 8 and Leopard – sometimes the software won't load, often Logic will crash. FXpansion have suggested a few workarounds on their online forums, but realistically, if I were to stay using BFD with my huge library of kits, this upgrade had to address these compatibility issues. I'm pleased to report that BFD 2 had no problem
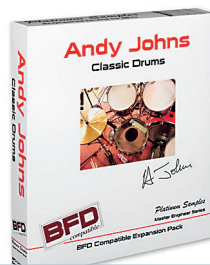
The Engineer Within

The most striking aspect of using BFD is that you mustn't approach it like you would a typical drum library. With so many velocity layers and so much control over the sound of the room, the mix of the drums and so forth, you really have to think like a studio engineer rather than a programmer. The level of the room sound, drum mic 'bleed', the balance between the top and bottom of the snare and many other factors all make a huge impact on your drum sound. With

this much detail in the sample library, it takes some patience to make a BFD drumkit come alive.

This might seem daunting, especially to a novice, but it's the key to BFD's versatility and its appeal. It's entirely possible to achieve two

widely different sonic characters from the same drumkit samples, just like using a real kit. My favourite BFD expansion pack is Andy Johns' Classic Drums, but it sounded very bright on first listening. With a little patience, judicious use of EQ and a smattering of compression, I now have the drumkit sound I've had to approximate for years. It's my own signature drum sound, supplied via Andy Johns and FXpansion; no other sample library has yet to even come close.

running on my upgraded system, we got along just fine. Of note is the fact that BFD 2 doesn't replace BFD 1.5 – projects that use version 1.5 will still load that version. BFD 2 *can* load mixer and drumkit settings from the earlier version, but it won't do it automatically. You have to load in BFD 2 and import your settings. I think that FXpansion could have provided a

more elegant solution to this issue. It's a minor niggle, but as I'm currently moving a couple of dozen projects to run on BFD 2, it's a task I'd rather do without. On the plus side, BFD didn't

tax my Mac too hard – at no point did I feel a performance hit comparing version 1.5 to version 2.

If we're looking for reasons to upgrade, the biggest improvement in BFD 2 has to be the user interface. The BFD 1.5 interface has felt cramped for years, and with the growth of expansion packs for BFD, navigating through your drum library was a slow

and annoying task. This is not the case in BFD 2. Navigation is relatively simple, intuitive and quick. The mixer is as straightforward as you can make it too, and editing MIDI is easy. The included sample library is a huge improvement compared to BFD 1. If you're new to the BFD market then you could easily survive with just these kits and not have to worry about the expansion packs – something you really couldn't say about version 1.

So, BFD is maturing nicely. It sounds superb, it's now far simpler to use, and with a proper internal mixer and real support for electronic drumkits, BFD 2 is still the complete solution for sampled drumkit sounds. If you're an avid user of previous versions, an upgrade is highly recommended to make the most of this mammoth software sampler. **FM**

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ALTERNATIVES

Spectrasonics Stylus RMX
£128
Much more than a drum library, Stylus RMX is an essential purchase for drum programmers.
spectrasonics.net

Toontrack EZ drummer
£100
Still BFD's only real competitor, EZ drummer is another huge (35GB) drum library with full control over room mics, overheads and even spill.
toontrack.com

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD

VALUE

EASE OF USE

VERSATILITY

RESULTS

An incredibly in-depth software package gets an incredibly practical update. Ideal!