

cm mini reviews

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

Blue Microphones

Yeti £130

Format PC/Mac, USB

Contact Apple UK, 0800 048 0408

Web www.bluemic.com

Designed for use solely via USB, the Yeti's chunky body incorporates mic gain, headphone level, pickup pattern selector, a mute button and, of course, built in converters. There's no mic clip, but there is a screw thread on the bottom for mounting the Yeti on a stand. The hefty integrated desktop stand means the Yeti is ready-made for voiceover work or casual recording of guitar, vocals, and suchlike. However, the most surprising feature has to be the 'tri-capsule array' design, which delivers four pickup options (omni, cardioid, bi-directional and stereo) from three closely mounted 14mm capsules.

Standard USB audio drivers make setup fast, and although we found the body-mounted controls a little wobbly, they're smooth enough to allow inaudible adjustments on the fly. Surprisingly, the mic/DAW headphone mix is fixed, although by changing your DAW output, you can easily get the desired blend. It's also worth noting that the mute switch takes half a second to de-activate (activation is instant). The Yeti's bulky design will no doubt deter some, but excellent sound quality and ease of use make it a very desirable package.

9/10



UVI

Acoustic Toy Museum £289

Format UVI Workstation Library

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200

Web www.ultimatesoundbank.com

Musical toys can be both idiosyncratic and inspirational, with uses way beyond their traditional roles of keeping young 'uns out of mischief. UVI's Acoustic Toy Museum brings together a vast array of sounds from sources that include private and museum collections.

The 250 or so toys (12.8 GB of samples) are arranged over 12 categories, and include the obvious (pianos, keys, drums, percussion, guitars and xylophones), and also more eccentric items such as gadgets, musicboxes and play-centres. Patches can include original pitch and pitch-corrected options, key click, alternate hammers and, where needed, keyswitching.

The depth and vintage of the source material is impressive, ranging from the early 1900s onwards. Highlights include the wobbly Flex A Tone, drum-like Boom Whackers and bell sounds of Roly Poly. On the downside, the percussion sounds are less distinguishable from 'adult' equivalents, and overall you do miss out on the original instrument 'interface', which is half the fun. Even so, this is an impressive UVI sample set, at their usual premium price.

8/10



ASK Video

Reason 5 Tutorial DVD £36

Format PC/Mac

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200

Web www.timespace.com

ASK's video guide to Reason 5 covers all of the included instruments and effects, keyboard shortcuts, exporting a mixdown, and various other subjects during the course of its 65 chapters. You get a bunch of example files too. Things starts off a little abruptly, guiding the viewer through the various preference screens without any kind of introduction or context, but at least it covers the topics in a fairly comprehensive manner.

The guide seems to be intended for the beginner, as it takes a slow and steady approach to each feature that will appeal to the novice rather than excite experienced users. With seven hours of content, you get a decent amount of bang for your buck, and the only downside is the proprietary ASK player that must be used to access the videos. This requires online registration and seems a little flaky - the player's play button stopped working at one point when we tried it on a Vista system, though we could still use the Spacebar to start/stop videos. Quirks aside, Reason 5 Tutorial DVD is a solid package and a good buy for the beginner who wants to get their money's worth out of Reason.

8/10



Akai SynthStation £5.99

Format iOS app
Contact Akai UK, 01252 896000
Web www.akaipro.com

SynthStation is essentially a sequencer containing three synth layers and a drum machine. Each synth can load a different patch, while the drum machine offers about 50 kits to choose from. Each synth and/or drum sound is triggered via the built-in sequencer and the output recorded to a WAV and transferred via WiFi. While the premise is based around three synths and a beat, though, there's a lot more to SynthStation than meets the eye.

When you launch the app, you're met with a 4x3 grid offering access to a dozen screens - our fave is definitely the X/Y pad. This enables you to 'bounce' a ball around the screen, which controls filter cutoff on the X axis and resonance on the Y axis, affecting the currently selected synth or drum kit. This is a great example of utilising touchscreen functionality in a way that caters well to a smaller display (we tested it on an iPhone 4).



The Drum Kit section offers nine drum pads, while the Tap Tempo function will take care of any syncing. The synth presets are all very modern and 'digital', but with the comprehensive synth editing functions, they can be shaped to your needs, albeit with a bit of faffing around. Each drum sound can be panned and pitched, with some serious digital artefacts at tuning extremes, but this is actually quite

endearing and could be used as a special effect.

All in all, the depth of SynthStation can't be overstated. It can be as involved or as shallow as you need it to be. While it's essentially a sequencer and sound palette, it has plenty of potential as a live performance tool. Add in the functionality of the Synthstation 25 (see p99) and you've got something quite special.

8/10

AppBC touchAble £10

Format iPad, iOS 3.2 or later
Contact info@touch-able.com
Web www.touch-able.com

As many iPad-owning musicians are discovering, Apple's tablet makes a phenomenal wireless remote controller for all manner of situations. There are controller apps for DAWs and virtual instruments, and even apps that enable you to roll your own control surfaces to suit your needs. As good as they are, though, touchAble sets the bar far, far higher, being a brilliant Ableton Live controller.

touchAble provides two-way communication with Ableton Live. Any actions performed on touchAble are immediately reflected in Live and vice-versa. A required (and free) additional server app is available from the developer's website. Some developers' wireless servers have had us wanting to smash our iPad in frustration, but we're pleased to report that, in this case, setup was a snap and took only minutes.

Latency is a non-issue here - tweak a fader on touchAble and Live reacts immediately. The iPad's multitouch capabilities enable you to grab a number of faders at once, or launch multiple clips simultaneously.

touchAble provides a staggering degree of control over Live. The interface is colourful, buttons and faders are sizable. The bulk of the screen is divided into top and bottom halves, either of which can display a different selection of controls at any given time. Transport and clip editing is provided along the right, along with other utilities. You can record and trigger clips, mix, pan, adjust send levels... Almost everything you can do on the desktop can be done via touchAble, with the exception of loading clips and plug-ins from Live's browser - you do need to have a Set loaded.

There are even drum pads and a dual keyboard controller, so that you can play instruments and samples from touchAble, and you can tweak instrument and effect parameters. As an added bonus, touchAble



offers at least one improvement over using the desktop in the form of immediate record and playback quantise controls - just tap one and select a value. It's much faster than digging through the desktop version's menu.

touchAble may be the most comprehensive remote control app yet. If you're a Live-lovin', iPad-totin' musician, it's a compulsory buy.

9/10

Soundware round-up

Puremagnetik **DOWNLOAD**

HarvestPak \$12

Web www.puremagnetik.com
Contact info@puremagnetik.com
Format Ableton Live Instrument, NI Kontakt, EXS24



HarvestPak is made up of over 500 samples spread out across 34 instruments, sampled from The Harvestman analogue synthesiser modules. Five categories denote the instruments, and each one has a wealth of editing options via Live's Macro controls. While it's hard to picture these in a conventional song context, anyone working with soundscapes, soundtracks or sound design will love their deep, rich, bubbling, David Lynch-style modular synth goodness. Modern electronic soundtrack heaven, at the usual Puremagnetik giveaway price.

9/10

Loopmasters **DOWNLOAD**

Monodeluxe Deep House £25

Web www.loopmasters.com
Contact info@loopmasters.com
Format WAV, Acidized WAV, REX 2, Reason ReFill, Ableton Live Pack, Apple Loops, HALion, Kontakt, EXS, SFZ, Stylus RMX, Ableton Live Presets, NN-XT, GarageBand



Packed with over 600 samples, Loopmasters' 43rd Artist Series release leans more towards the jazzy, lounge-flavoured, Rhodes-heavy house than the deeper, techy side of deep house. The demo song says it all, really: quite dated, background-based house that you might hear in the lobby of a hotel or during the pause menu in a PS2 racing game. The highlight is probably the kick-less loops and the one-shots, which are usable, but the rest is a tad flat.

6/10

Loopmasters **DOWNLOAD** DJ Mix Tools 08 – Swedish House Vol2 £15

Web www.loopmasters.com
Contact info@loopmasters.com
Format WAV, Ableton Live Presets



This DJ-friendly series provides tracks broken down into their individual stems, for creative mixing on the fly. It's for those who want to add extra loops, hits and effects via their standard digital DJing setup. Swedish House Vol2 takes its cues from the likes of Angello, Axwell and Ingresso. Four 'tracks' are broken down into their constituent parts to rebuild as you please and, being pre-warped for Ableton Live, they're ready to go off the bat. They sound big, epic, modern and would be completely at home in any commercial club. Plus, you can use these samples in your own tunes, of course.

8/10



Waveform Recordings

Victor Calderone & Mike Frade: Tech House £23

Web www.soundstosample.com
Contact contact via website
Format WAV

This pack comes to us via Sounds/To/Sample, who have built a reputation among producers as a superb sample source for house in all its forms. They tend to delve deeper into sub-genres and this catchily-titled pack is no different, providing a real insight into what's happening in clubs worldwide. It's packed with loops and shots that are ready for the floor, with a very high production quality. Legendary New York house producer Victor Calderone is behind this one, in league with his cohort Mike Frade.

The 234 loops are at 125 and 126bpm, and cover drums (just kick/snare/hats), percussion to layer on top, bass, glitchy vox, and a bunch of slightly more exotic 'jungle' loops (as in tribal-sounding, not breakbeats and ragga vocals). There are 148 spot-on drum one-shots, too. Tech house is one of the best bang-for-buck sample packs we've heard in a long time, and anyone working in this genre needs this on their hard drive.

10/10

FXpansion **DOWNLOAD**

Myagi:Ferocity £20

Web www.fxansion.com
Contact via website
Format DCAM: Synth Squad preset bank



Myagi, aka Andrew Mavor, is a self-confessed Canadian "dancefloor funkier" who has remixed The Crystal Method, Orbital and The Dub Pistols, amongst others. Offering his selection of 100 presets for FXpansion's popular DCAM: Synth Squad package, Myagi leverages Fusor, the 'hub' that can layer up to three DCAM synths. It's a varied affair, with everything from harsh digital leads and bubbling sequences to soft warm pads and complicated modulation effects. The £20 asking price might seem steep considering there are two Artist Series preset banks available from FXpansion for free, but fans of Myagi's sound shouldn't feel short-changed by this admittedly more focused collection.

7/10

Producer Loops **DOWNLOAD****Dark Tech Progressions** £25+Web www.producerloops.com

Contact via website

Format Acidized WAV, Apple Loops, MIDI, Reason ReFill, REX



These five very-thorough construction kits present single elements, loops and MIDI parts. Every sound you'd expect to hear is included, produced and mixed to an exceptionally high standard. The only thing that really lets it down is a lack of musical coherence. More than a few of the sounds in the construction kits aren't in key with each other and thus clash musically. Depending on your way of working, however, this might not be an issue. Sonically, however, this release stands out well.

7/10

Zero-G

Urban Legend £80Web www.timespace.com

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200

Format Acidized WAV, Akai MPC, EXS24, Kontakt, Reason NN-XT



Here we have an insane 100 hip-hop and RnB construction kits. The quality of sound ranges from extremely raw to beautifully pristine, but everything is as fat as can be and very much suited to the style of each kit. Authenticity levels are mostly sky-high. The musical parts are all well-written and there's a good variety of live instruments in there, as well some slightly less expected instruments that fit right in. Then there are hundreds of drum loops and multisampled synths, followed by over 1500 single hits and 150 orchestral samples. Very good indeed!

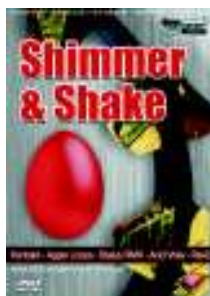
10/10

Nine Volt Audio

Shimmer & Shake £65Web www.timespace.com

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200

Format Kontakt, Apple Loops, Stylus RMX, Acidized WAV, REX 2



This title aims to address the lack of attention given to hand-shaken percussion in other percussive sample libraries. It's split into 25 categories, each one devoted to an instrument, including tambourines, cabasas, maracas and other such "shimmers and shakers", our favourite being Soft Sand. In each category are various loops and articulations. We feel it's heavily enhanced by the multisampled sections, which have all been beautifully programmed. Every sound has been captured in 24-bit stereo, which already sets this release apart from many other percussion titles. It sounds wide, with a smooth, 'expensive' top end.

9/10

Ueberschall

Pop Charts £89Web www.bestservic.de

Contact mail@bestservice.de

Format Elastik Instrument Soundbank



Most of the ten construction kits here could be described as house-based music, clearly inspired by the dance sound that's dominated the charts for the last two years. They range from 115 to 126bpm, bar the obligatory hip-hop kit at 89bpm. Aside from the construction kits, a whole section is dedicated to individual instrument parts, including live guitar and drums, which considerably broadens the stylistic scope. The sound overall is quite rich, if a little over-compressed, but not all of the samples loop seamlessly. A lot of it feels like cheap imitations of recognisable pop-dance hits, proving just how tricky it really is to nail that deceptively 'simple' pop sound.

6/10Detunized **DOWNLOAD****GraFX** €6.78Web www.detunized.com

Contact contact@detunized.com

Format Ableton Live Pack



We were initially confused here, as the names of the samples in this library mirror the titles of other packs by Detunized. This is no mistake, though, because the sounds here are generated from the *cover art* of the other releases and have therefore adopted their names.

As you might imagine, the resulting sounds are very abstract indeed. Over the 15 instruments, you can expect rich washes of atonal anomalies that are sometimes evolving, sometimes rhythmical but always unpredictable. This is a highly atmospheric soundscape that definitely won't be appropriate for all forms of music, but when you need unusual textures, they're here in abundance, and for a veritable pittance!

8/10Prime Loops **DOWNLOAD****Urban Takeova** £20Web www.primeloops.com

Contact info@primeloops.com

Format WAV, Apple Loops, Acid loops, Akai MPC, REX 2, FL Studio, Reason ReFill, RMX, Garageband, Fantom X, MC909, MV8000, MV8800



An exceptional collection of ten shockingly convincing hip-hop construction kits, plus ten categories of one-shots. The kits are varied, painting a broad picture of modern hip-hop and related styles. Everything has a great punch and sparkle to it. There's not a single sound here that's not well recorded/produced and the kit components blend together well. Tempos range from 80 to 100bpm. Any sound that's not bang up to date is a timeless classic, and if you're not in it for the ready-made loops, we'd contend that it's worth the asking price for the one-shots alone. **cm**

10/10