

cm mini reviews

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

Source Audio

Hot Hand USB £100

Web www.sourceaudio.net
Format PC/Mac

A 'wearable' motion controller 'ring' for use with a Mac or PC running any MIDI-receiving software, the Hot Hand USB responds to movement on the X and Y axes (ie, towards/away and left/right), as well as Z (up/down).

The package comprises a USB receiver dongle, the ring itself and a power supply for charging it up. The ring's not the sexiest bit of hardware we've ever seen, looking like nothing more than a utilitarian block of black plastic with a rubber wrap-around strap and a blue LED in the middle of its top surface. The strap feels pretty tough, despite its thinness, though we can't comment on its perishability or general longevity. Thanks to the strap being fully openable and adjustable, the ring is attachable to any of your fingers or (average-sized) thumbs – or indeed, anything else of similar diameter.

Getting up and running with the Hot Hand USB couldn't be easier. The USB receiver is class-compliant, so there's no need to install any

drivers, and after charging up the ring (which takes an hour and a half and gives six hours of life) you can simply hit the connect button, MIDI learn the three axes' default MIDI CCs in your target application and get to it, moving the ring around in the air to control up to three parameters at once.

There's much more to it than just that, though. Using the downloadable software, you can build complex control schemes by setting up six "processes" (ring output data streams, customisable by axis, value range and centre, smoothing, depth and inversion) and assigning them to up to ten MIDI output modules. Each module can transmit MIDI CC, pitchbend or aftertouch data, continuously or triggered (for bypassing effects, etc), and assignments can be muted (and soloed), so 'crosstalk' between axes when mapping them is easily avoided. Setups can be 'burnt' to the USB



receivers' 128 memory slots, recallable by Program Change messages.

Mild strap durability concerns aside, live electronic musicians and performance artists will love the Hot Hand USB. The software is perfectly intuitive, setup is effortless, and it all works beautifully, translating your movements exactly as you'd expect. If wireless, 'bodily' MIDI control is on your agenda, you need to check it out.

9/10

Propellerhead

A-List Electric Guitarist Power Chords £79

Web www.propellerheads.se
Format PC/Mac, Reason Rack Extension

Propellerhead's ongoing recruitment drive for 'live' (as opposed to electronic) musicians continues with the second instrument in their A-List series of Rack Extensions. Electric Guitarist Power Chords is an 'auto-playing' electric guitar ROMpler (715MB) designed to make adding rhythm guitar parts to your Reason projects effortless.

The guitar sound is defined in the Source panel, which offers four pickup-based variations (Twang, Bite, Soft and Fat), four optional amp types (Crunch, Cream, Brit and Metal), a Drive control and a switch for Drop D tuning. Although EQ controls wouldn't go amiss, there's enough here to enable a decent range of core tones.

Onto the rhythms, then, which are arranged in banks and selected by MIDI note input. Notes C4 to C9 trigger their corresponding power chords, while key combinations can be used to play six variations – sus4, augmented, +5, etc. 46 genre-specific Styles (largely rock-orientated but straying into funk, reggae and pop territory, too) are each subdivided into 11 Phrases of increasing complexity, selected using notes C3

to B^b4, while C1 to B^b3 switch between 23 standard Phrases common to all Styles. You can control the strength of palm muting using the mod wheel, dial in humanisation and swing, and activate a double-tracking mode. By combining chords and Phrases, either live or through MIDI sequencing, impressive-sounding (albeit only power chord-based) rhythm guitar tracks come together as fluidly and easily as advertised. Four effects (Slapback and Echo delays, Chorus and Reverb) are then on-hand in the Mix section.

In order to keep things simple, EGPC gives you no front panel control at all over the notes



within the Phrases, although you can feed into the CV Note input (from the Matrix Pattern Sequencer, say) to trigger their component slices individually. This opens the instrument up to more adventurous producers, breaking it out of its otherwise realistic, rather conservative niche and into the wider world of rhythm design.

As an authentic, stylistically expansive library of ready-to-rock rhythm guitar loops in a fun and intuitive performance interface, EGPC is a welcome addition to the A-List roster. Just be aware that it's very 'preset' by nature.

9/10

Sample Logic Cinematic Keys \$350

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

Sample Logic's latest sees the intrepid developers multisampling all manner of keyboard instruments to come up with over 850 single and multi-layered patches. They're divided up into various categories and sub-categories, covering everything from layered performance instruments, soundbeds and percussion kits to ambiences, loops, sequences, arps and more. Many of the samples were "derived from the destruction of upright and toy pianos all recorded in a huge multi-car garage", but don't take that to mean this is an outrageously noisy library by any means – there's actually more subtlety and finesse to the sounds than there is cacophony.

The interface is split between two main views: Step Animator and Effects. The Step Animator is a powerful combination step sequencer/arpeggiator, first seen in Arpology (**cm207**, 8/10) and unchanged here. It's used to generate elaborate note sequences up to 128

steps in length, incorporating various controllable parameters, headlined by the Step Type and Stutter Rate lanes, and the randomisation system, with which brilliantly glitchy sequences can be cooked up in seconds.

The Effects page houses eight effects modules (including Filter, Delay, EQ, convolution Reverb and a very simple synth for layering under the sampled sounds), eight FX Trigger pads (for switching 48 preset effects chains in and out), six pre-assigned LFOs, and a control arpeggiator for gate-sequencing the Trigger pads and LFOs. The effects have nifty per-parameter "FX Animator" step sequencers.

Cinematic Keys is indeed, well... cinematic, and we much prefer its unreal, processed sounds to the straight-up, not particularly 'big screen' – and thus arguably kinda pointless – pianos, harpsichords and organs (of which there

aren't many, admittedly). We'd also suggest that Sample Logic's Kontakt Scripting is now up there with the mighty Heavyocity when it comes to interface depth and flexibility. Nice work!

9/10



Toontrack EZkeys Mellotron £105

Web www.timespace.com
Format PC/Mac

The latest extension to Toontrack's EZkeys line of songwriting and virtual keyboard software (plugin and standalone; £55 as an expansion for existing owners) is a multisampled Mellotron M400 – the legendary tape-based instrument made famous by the likes of Genesis and The Beatles, and often cited as the forerunner to the sampler. 15 of its tapes have been captured, including Flute, Cello, String Section and Boys Choir, each one opening with its own set of adjustable parameters (reverb, Brilliance and Presence for Cello, for example), and all sounding fabulously crusty and evocative. Alongside the main presets are five "mixed instruments" and four pads (layered and processed combinations), but even with those, it's a very restrictive soundset, thanks to the inherent limitations of the source instrument.

Mellotron sure sounds pretty – and EZkeys itself is ace – but with its limited tonal palette, it could hardly be described as a must-have.

7/10



Liquid Sonics Mobile Convolution £6.99

Web www.liquidsonics.com
Format iOS

A new convolution reverb for iPhone, iPad and iPod touch from the creators of the Reverberate plugin (and our own **cm** edition, of course), Mobile Convolution makes applying impulse responses (true stereo ones at that) to your Audiobus and Inter-App Audio DAWs and instruments a very straightforward affair.

50 excellent IRs are included, and more can be easily added by various means. Editing is basic, limited to cropping the start and end of the IR, adjusting an ADR envelope, and stretching the IR from 7-500%.

The sound is awesome, IRs up to 60 seconds long are supported, and the negligible latency is impressive – it's absolutely worth seven quid for all that alone. However, it falls rather short of its only current competitor, Altispace (**cm209**, 9/10), in terms of interface, features and price (although the £2 difference isn't exactly a big deal). Ultimately, we'd recommend getting both!

v1.1 of Mobile Convolution should be available by the time you read this, incidentally, adding pre-delay and three-band EQ, and another 30 seconds of maximum IR length.

8/10



Soundware round-up



FXpansion BFD Virtually Erskine £55

Living drumming legend Peter Erskine (Weather Report, Joni Mitchell, Steely Dan et al) and producer John Emrich have multisampled two DW drum kits (a four-piece “jazz” one and a five-piece “rock” one, the latter captured played with sticks and brushes), complete with hi-hats, cymbals and cowbell, in this 7GB expansion for BFDs 2, 3 and Eco. Exuding warmth and organic loveliness throughout, this is a sublime set of skins and metals that takes FXpansion’s amazing drum system into new sonic territory.

www.fxpansion.com

9/10

Sample Magic Maschine Magic: Drum Synths £15

Ten complete Maschine 2 Groups (160 Sounds) made using nothing but Drum Synths, complete with effects chains, Macros and MIDI grooves. The sound design throughout is exemplary, from the breaky Broken and super-tight Cloud Kits, all the way through to the minimal Disclosed Kit and self-explanatory Trapped Kit. The only dampener is that there's no way to get the pack to show up as a filter in Maschine's browser. First world problems, eh?

www.samplemagic.com

9/10



Cr2 Records Deep House £16

Cr2's Sample Tools series rolls on with 675MB of samples, MIDI files, construction kits and Massive presets, plus Logic and Live project templates and 45 minutes of tutorial videos. Of course, the samples themselves are the main thing, and quite excellent they are too. You get 20 drum loops in various states of undress (ie, stems), then a diverse array of bass, piano, vocal and synth loops, and a good amount of one-shot drums, basses, fills and FX. Plenty to get your teeth into, then, at a price that can't be argued with.

sounds.beatport.com

9/10

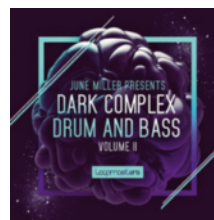


Loopmasters June Miller Presents Dark Complex Drum and Bass Vol2 £30

The DnB production duo return with another 1.4GB of 172bpm loops and hits. The 25 stemmed drum loops are tight and well-produced, but not particularly ambitious, sonically. The high-octane basses would tear through any mix, though, and the atmosphere loops and kits are truly stunning. On the one-shot front, the Risers and FX folder is particularly plunderable. Solid sounds, good value.

www.loopmasters.com

8/10



Native Instruments Magnate Hustle £44

NI describe their new Maschine Expansion as “perfectly tuned for modern urban pop”, and we’d certainly concur - Magnate Hustle is achingly hip. The 21 multisampled instruments (mostly keyboards and tuned kick drums) are pretty good, but the 53 phat, punchy drum and percussion kit Groups (incorporating 24 high-gloss Drum Synth chains alongside the sampled sounds) are the main draw. The kits also take in guitar licks, vocal hooks, FX and other one-shots, as well as 41 Massive presets, with which to spice up your grooves.

www.native-instruments.com

8/10



Niche Audio

Deep and Jackin Garage £25

Available as a set of 13 Ableton Live or Maschine projects, or a regular one-shot sample pack (£18), this superb library of contemporary and retro-style garage drums, basses and other groove elements, produced by Scott Diaz, hits all the right buttons. It might only comprise 244 samples in total, but the real value here (apart from the high quality of those samples) is in the effects-processed Groups and Drum Racks they've been rolled into, and the MIDI grooves that come with them. This one's only available to users of Live or Maschine, though.

www.loopmasters.com**9/10**

Sample Magic

Ableton Magic Racks: Creative FX £13

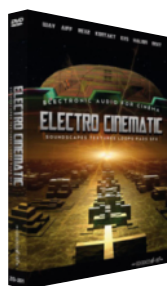
Five complex Audio Effect Racks for Ableton Live, built by Hedflux and drawing on everything Live's powerful array of devices has to offer. Our favourites are Multi-Band Mangler (distortion) and Psychedelizer (delay, filtering, resonance and more), but all of them have plenty of electronic production potential. It might feel a bit odd shelling out for something you could make yourself in Live, but at this price, Magic Racks feels like a very good deal.

www.samplemagic.com**9/10**

Zero-G

Electro Cinematic £56

An electro-inspired library designed for use in sci-fi movie projects, but actually wholly applicable for music production, too. Over 1300 samples are provided, both au naturel and key-mapped for various samplers. Beefy synth basslines and hard-hitting robo-industrial beats kick off the very well stocked Loops folder, which also hosts chords, keys, arps and more. 100 melodic pads aside, the rest of the library is more about sound design – textures, SFX and suchlike – and in that regard, it's a veritable playground of possibilities.

www.timespace.com**9/10**

Sonokinetic

Güzin €61

A female Turkish vocal library for Kontakt 4/5, Güzin gives you keyboard control of tempo-synced phrases in six "themes" (Peaceful, Joyful, Lament, etc). Keyswitches change the root key, each one hosting its own set of phrases, while phrase 'ends' and breaths are mapped to other keys. Sonokinetic's Intelligent Tempo Mapping sample switching/halving/doubling keeps singer Güzin Degimez sounding natural, and the vocals are fluid, evocative and lyrically 'neutral', making Güzin more versatile than you might assume.

www.sonokinetic.com**8/10**

Puremagnetik

Mark Two Berlin \$15

A multisampled restored Fender Rhodes MkII electric piano in Kontakt 5, EXS24 and Ableton Live 9 (Sampler) formats (you get all three), plus 60 MIDI clips and audio loops. The Live and Kontakt versions take advantage of their host systems to present a concise but useful set of controls and effects (tremolo, chorus, phaser and drive, most notably), but the core sample set is the same across the board. It sounds great and, despite having only three velocity layers, manages to be surprisingly expressive.

www.puremagnetik.com**8/10**

Big Fish Audio

Country Folk £59

The Fish's latest construction kit extravaganza is a 12-strong celebration of all things beardy – bluegrass, folk, country and general aural Americana, all beautifully recorded and produced. The melodic instrumentation includes guitars (acoustic/electric), mandolin, banjo, violin, cello, acoustic bass and dulcimer, while percussion is represented by djembe, shaker and tambourine. Essentially the multitracks to 12 complete songs, they're probably of most use to media producers, but the quality is impressive.

www.timespace.com**8/10**

Sonic Cat

Calliope \$99

A "universal sound module" for Kontakt 5 and Kontakt Player in the spirit of hardware ROMplers by Roland, Korg and others. With over 1000 basses, keyboards, guitars, winds, brasses, strings, pads, synths, drums and percussion squeezed into its 820MB soundbank, Calliope doesn't fall short on preset count, and you can stack up to four sounds in a patch. Sonically, it's not too shabby for a small-footprint workstation, but the 'real' instruments suffer from that artificial 'GM' sound and feel, and the synthesised material isn't hugely compelling. A lot of ready-to-go instruments for the price, though!

www.sonic-cat.com**7/10**

Mode Audio

Power Tools £14

A multi-format collection of 330 drum sounds that have been used to build 10 drum kits and 20 tuned kick patches for a range of DAWs/samplers. The component elements of each kit are well thought-out, including closed, half-open and open hi-hats, and long and short kicks, and the layouts are consistent, but we weren't particularly taken back by the sounds themselves. They're powerful enough, nicely recorded and suitably cohesive, but there's nothing here that we haven't heard before. It's a solid, highly usable library, though, at a fair asking price.

www.modeaudio.com**7/10**