

cm mini reviews

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

FXpansion Etch Red €39

Web www.fxpansion.com
Contact Via website
Format PC/Mac Reason Rack Extension

One of the most exciting launch-day Rack Extensions, Etch Red is a slightly cut-down version of FXpansion's amazing dual-filter plug-in Etch (9/10, **cm179**) for Propellerhead's newly unshackled Reason DAW.

Built on FXpansion's DCAM circuit modelling technology, Etch Red centres on a pair of filters, switchable between serial and parallel routing. There are four filter types (Japan, SVF, Fatty and Comb) and a total of 38 modes, starting with the usual high-, low- and band-pass before moving onto more esoteric variations and combinations. The Transmod modulation system facilitates modulation of any parameter with a red depth knob underneath it via ten sources, including two separate CV inputs, an envelope, two LFOs, an envelope follower and Sample+Hold.

If you've used Etch before, this will all sound very familiar, as so far Etch Red is exactly the same. A few sacrifices have been made to

re-imagine Etch within the Reason Rack, though, such as the loss of the X/Y controller (replaced by the CV inputs), fewer modulation targets (faders can't be assigned, basically) and no white noise source. However, all of this is more than made up for by the rear panel sockets, which accept audio input from other devices within Reason for modulation of FM amount (at audio rate), envelope follower, S+H and pitch, and are completely independent of each other (as opposed to Etch's single sidechain input). The cherry on top is the fact that they also enable Etch Red's TransMod sources to be aimed at anything else in the Rack. The envelope, meanwhile, can be triggered via CV gate input as well as MIDI.



Etch Red is simply a must-have for any Reason user, combining stellar sonics with slick, flexible modulation – the possibilities it opens up beyond its own slot in the Rack are immense. We have a feeling there are going to be quite a few essential Rack Extensions appearing in the Propellerhead shop over the coming months, but we don't think we'll see a better filter than this one any time soon.

9/10

Focusrite Scarlett 2i2 £144

Web www.focusrite.com
Contact Focusrite, 01494 462246
Format PC/Mac, USB 2

Sitting at the very bottom of their audio interface line-up, Focusrite's Scarlett 2i2 is a 2-in/2-out USB 2 box featuring the same preamps found in the high-end Saffire series – and if there's one thing Focusrite know better than most, it's preamps.

Built like a brick khazi with a unibody aluminium outer housing, the 2i2 interface makes all of the essentials accessible from the fascia rather than a software control panel. Direct monitoring, phantom power, input level, gain knobs, master out level and headphone level controls sit comfortably around two Neutrik combi inputs and a 1/4-inch headphone output, while round the back are a pair of 1/4-inch balanced line outs. A particularly useful feature is the pair of level monitoring LED rings situated around the Gain knobs – these light up green for a safe signal, turn amber when it approaches clipping and go red when clipping occurs. It's an impressive, well thought-out feature on an interface at this price point.



Bundled with the 2i2 is the Scarlett Plug-in Suite, which comprises Compression, EQ, Reverb and Gate effects in VST format for Windows and VST/AU/RTAS for Mac OS X. These are pretty impressive, particularly the Compressor and Gate, which we would happily use in any serious project.

Unsurprisingly given its top-notch innards, the 2i2 sounds fabulous: the preamps are warm and noise-free, and the unit is capable of operating up to 24-bit/96kHz. The recording quality really can't be faulted. We find it truly

incredible that preamps of this calibre are now available at this sort of price. As seems to be becoming the norm with smaller audio interfaces, there aren't any MIDI or digital audio I/O onboard, but that's the only thing you could grumble about on the 2i2.

Whether used in a small project studio or for a spot of serious mobile I/O, the Scarlett 2i2 is without doubt one of the best sub-£150 interfaces on the market that we've had the pleasure to try. Bravo, Focusrite!

9/10

Cinematic Samples Cinematic Strings 2 £375

Web www.cinematicstrings.com
Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Format Kontakt/Kontakt Player 5

Professional string libraries can be intimidating beasts, but Cinematic Strings 2 aims to make programming realistic orchestral strings as easy as it ought to be in this day and age.

A fully scripted library for Kontakt/Kontakt Player 5, CS2 divides an orchestra's worth of strings into five sections: Violins 1 (x12) and 2 (x8), Violas (x7), Cellos (x7) and Basses (x6). The articulations (each containing four dynamic layers) are easily loaded using the switches in the middle of the GUI, and they can be key-assigned via MIDI Learn. A built-in mixer is used to load and set the levels of the four captured mic channels: Close, Stage, Room and Mixed. Throw in two different staccato lengths (Staccato and Staccatissimo) and you have the essence of CS2.

Sampled transitions with scripted envelope control keep legato performances smooth and convincing, while short notes can have their envelopes shaped in the Advanced page. All five

sections also feature both High and Low position samples for two distinct 'global' tones, and the Live mode throws slightly 'wobbly' samples into fast passages in order to introduce human timing and tuning variations. The Arco articulation features a punchy staccato layer at velocities of 60+, and vibrato intensity throughout can be modulated via MIDI CC.

CS2's 22GB library sounds stunning. The three discrete mic channels blend beautifully, and the sound is big, rich and a little edgier than some such libraries. Achieving the articulations and nuances you want is a snap, with no significant compromise in terms of functionality and depth.

On the downside, there are no solo instruments, and some samples exhibit a bit of (easily concealed) background noise. A few more



ensemble patches wouldn't go amiss either. Those quibbles aside, though, this is a phenomenal package for the money.

9/10

Logic Cafe ControlSkin £30

Web www.logic-cafe.com
Contact contact@logic-cafe.com
Format For Mac with Logic

The ControlSkin combines a soft silicone Mac keyboard overlay (MacBooks of all kinds and Apple's Bluetooth 'boards

only) with a Logic key commands file that matches the text and icons printed on the overlay. The overlay fits snugly and looks great (although typing on it is no fun at all), and the key commands have clearly been put together by someone who knows their way around the software.

However, despite being described as "more than a shortcut skin", the ControlSkin is... just a shortcut skin. Those shortcuts might be cleverly designed and well-laid out, but it's nothing you couldn't easily set up yourself - assuming you don't already have your own effective set of key commands. So, the overlay itself is what you're paying for, and despite its high physical quality, £30 is way too much. The website also contains some rather misleading marketing implying that the ControlSkin gives Logic the ability to do certain things that wouldn't be possible without it. We're not big fans of that sort of thing.

6/10



Tangible FX iMoov £2.49

Web www.tangiblefx.com
Contact lee@tangiblefx.com
Format iOS 4.3; iPhone, iPad, iPod touch

A motion MIDI controller for iOS devices (Wi-Fi, Bluetooth or cabled), iMoov transmits MIDI CCs for remote control of plug-in parameters or anything else that receives MIDI, via waving your iDevice around in the air. The interface is well-designed, making setup straightforward, though the Learn button doesn't seem to serve any purpose; in our testing, just having the Controller active constantly sent the selected CC out for assignment. Each of the three axes works over 180°, movement can be limited to a certain range, and the MIDI Stop sends a specified value when the controller is turned off.

A couple of in-app purchases (£0.69 each) grate. Custom MIDI enables switching between pitchbend and MIDI CCs, and specifying of CC numbers and MIDI channels; and Scale MIDI lets you set maximum and minimum MIDI CC values for each movement. We think they should be rolled into the main app, even if it means putting the price up. Overall, though, this is a nicely designed, impressively responsive app that any computer musician would enjoy and possibly find useful.

8/10



Soundware round-up

Loopmasters

Krafty Kuts – Bass, Beats & Kuts £25

Limiting itself to the more electro/breaks side of Krafty Kuts' repertoire, this 1.2GB library features 20 drum loop construction kits plus a wealth of bass, synth/stab, vocal and FX loops, one-shots and multis. The genre focus is tight – the drums are particularly unwavering – and the production is bright and energetic. Highlights are the FX, versatile construction kits and synth multis.

www.loopmasters.com

8/10



Loopmasters

Deep Dub Tek £25

From the studio of Brighton's Statek comes a supremely inventive blend of dub, minimal and electronica. The sounds are dark and awesome, and we were particularly impressed with the synth multis. It's just a shame that the construction kits are the headline act – we would have preferred more in the way of disparate loops and hits, rather than 12 necessarily self-limiting sets of sounds.

www.loopmasters.com

8/10



Zero-G

Club Classics £70

38 70s- and 80s-inspired construction kits (broken all the way down to separate kick, snare, hi-hat tracks, etc) and a ton of loops and hits to go with them. The emphasis is more 80s than 70s, with a range of dance, disco, funk, soul, R&B and pop styles represented. Everything's on point with regard to production quality, authenticity (the synth sounds are very well done) and musicianship. The only disappointment is a paucity of brass.

www.timespace.com

9/10



Pressure Samples

New School of Electro House £16

More bleedin' construction kits! Once again, they sound good and are great fun to mess around with, but they're just not that easy to repurpose. Still, if you have the patience to chop out the bits you want, this bargain-priced library of funky, bouncy, jittery 126-128bpm electro house loops boasts tons of fidgety bass action, phat drums and quality stabs/FX.

www.soundstosample.com

7/10



Prime Loops

Dubstep Gladiators £18

380MB of raw, hard-hitting, slightly predictable dubstep loops, hits and FX at 140bpm. The bass and drum loops seem to be the stars, by sheer weight of numbers, but we particularly dug the leads and FX. More adventurousness wouldn't have gone amiss, particularly in the drums department, but Dubstep Gladiators is a solid if safe collection, at just the right price.

www.primeloops.com

8/10



Sample Magic

SM101 Sylenth1 Nu House Patches £17

102 patches for LennarDigital's mighty synth, and 32 MIDI files with which to get started triggering them. The bass patches are chunky and suitably 'housey'; the chord patches have some interesting sustain sections; and the leads, pads, plucks and arps are superb – expressive and cleverly constructed. The MIDI files are useful for auditioning patches but not a reason to buy in themselves.

www.samplemagic.com

9/10



Rhythmic Robot

LEL £6

A Kontakt patch recreation of the 80s Soviet-built 'Lel' PSR drum machine, drawing on 56 samples: each of the original 12 8-bit sounds accented and unaccented, plus all 32 preset rhythm patterns. The sound is filthy and patterns can be activated simultaneously for combination rhythms. You'll have to restart Kontakt for certain changes, but this crazy curio is still worth the tiny asking price.

www.rhythmicrobot.com

8/10



Seán Cronin

Trance Producer: Massive Soundset €15

Cronin's second synth preset library comprises 180 Massive patches programmed with flair and attention to detail. The basses, plucks, leads, FX, gated patterns and more all demonstrate Seán's keen ear for modern synth sounds. The one glaring issue is that there are hardly any macro assignments, which renders these patches less hands-on than they deserve to be.

www.djseancronin.com

7/10



Producer Loops

Supalife Dynamite: Dirty South Vol 2 £25

Ten 80bpm construction kits from DJ Khalid and Supalife Records, comprising dry, wet and 'unlooped' riffs with tails, accompanied by numerous single hits and melodic MIDI files. Stylistically, it's laid-back instrumental hip-hop with all of the larger-than-life, glossy phatness that we've come to associate with the Supalife label. If you liked Vol 1, you'll no doubt like Vol 2; and if you're new to the series, you'll find a lot of usable urban material here.

www.producerloops.com

8/10



Big Fish Audio

Acoustic Indie Pop £82

An incredibly well-played/-produced set of 20 construction kits in Big Fish's KLI Kontakt scripted format, covering acoustic pop, country and 'indie', complete with vocals. For game, video and 'media' producers needing to throw pro-quality tracks together in hours, this could be a godsend. If you're just after a library of acoustic loops to use in your own productions, though, it's a fairly pricey but very powerful option.

www.timespace.com

8/10

