

Mini Reviews

Grab your mini-wallet and get out your mini-cash – or mini-card – as we deliver this month's pint-sized reviews. But remember: not all products shown are actual size...

BEHRINGER UCG102

CONTACT: Behringer, +49 2154 92060
FORMAT: PC/Mac USB interface

WWW.behringer.com
PRICE: £39

This tiny USB audio interface enables you to plug your guitar straight into your computer and use the bundled Native Instruments Guitar Combos Behringer Edition software to create amp tones. The box also claims that you can use it for recording, but we'll get to that in a moment...

There's a single input for your guitar and an output for headphones (or speakers). The sound quality isn't brilliant, but it's acceptable. To get decent low-latency performance, you have to install the included ASIO driver. This works well enough, but it ties up the USB port so that the non-ASIO drivers then 'disappear',

thus you can't use the UCG102 with non-ASIO apps like media players.

The three NI Guitar Combos sound great, and are responsive and easy to use – there's a voucher included so that you can get a full version of one of them. The other included software is Kristal, a multitrack recording program. Here's the crunch: because the Guitar Combos are standalone only, you can't use them to make recordings in Kristal! This is a major drawback that's sure to disappoint anyone expecting to use this package to record their playing. It may be cheap, but there aren't many reasons to buy the UCG102.



TOONTRACK Claustrophobic EZX

CONTACT: Time+Space, 01837 55200
FORMAT: EZX

WWW.timespace.com
PRICE: £59

Toontrack have just released a trio of expansions for their EZdrummer VSTi, and this one has been designed with modern pop, hip-hop and R&B in mind.

There are 18 different kick drums and ten snares, and the toms and cymbals have multiple models too. There are brushed variations, as well as some where a cymbal has been laid on the drum for a nasty, trashy sound. Combine this with tons of percussive sounds, a multitude of playing articulations and four



mixer effects (chorus, distortion, reverb, 'attack') and you're really getting your money's worth.

The sound quality is up to Toontrack's usual high standards, so the main consideration is probably whether the to-the-point, up-front production style is to your taste or not.

As well as being suitable for the styles for which it was designed, we also had success using Claustrophobic for metal and rock beats. Anyone seeking tight, snappy and edgy drum sounds should check it out.



ACOUSTICA Beatcraft

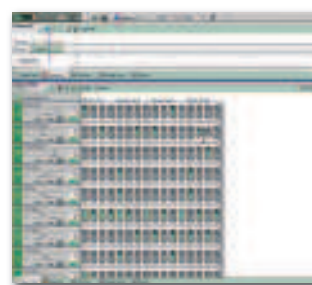
CONTACT: Et Cetera, 01706 285650
FORMAT: PC

WWW.etcetera.co.uk
PRICE: £30

You don't see too many standalone drum machine/loop construction applications these days, but Beatcraft harks back to the era of FruityLoops and the like.

Dedicated purely to beat programming, most of your time using Beatcraft will be spent on the Pattern Editor page, where a familiar step sequencer invites you to place sampled drum hits. It's as intuitive as you'd hope, and even novice computer musicians should find it relatively hassle-free to use.

Multiple patterns can be sequenced, and these can be



arranged into complete 'songs' and exported as audio in WAV, MP3, WMA or OGG format. A mere 5MB of drum samples are provided (in OGG format), but you can load your own, and although

there are no amplitude envelope or start/end point controls, you can at least use your VST plug-ins to process each channel or the mix as a whole. Beatcraft is nowhere near as sophisticated as more advanced plug-in drum samplers, such as Battery, but it is reasonably priced and a great option for beginners.



Samples round-up

Hard drive space is there to be filled, and nothing does the job quite like a sample disc...

Zero G Anthem House

CONTACT: Time+Space, 01837 55200
WWW: timespace.com
FORMAT: Acidized WAV, Apple Loops, EXS24, HALion, Kontakt, Refill, REX
PRICE: £60



Sample CD veterans Zero G return with yet another selection of sounds and loops, but unfortunately Anthem House isn't up to the high standards of their other products. While there's nothing particularly wrong with the loops on offer, there's nothing particularly right with them either. While house producers

— especially novices — will no doubt derive a lot of use from the gig-and-a-half of unique sounds on offer, they're really not that inspiring and are unlikely to bring on any great rushes of creativity. There are plenty of superb house libraries out there, but Anthem House isn't one of them.

RATING
6

Sample Magic Sunset Sessions

CONTACT: Time+Space, 01837 55200
WWW: timespace.com
FORMAT: Acidized WAV, Audio, EXS24, HALion, Refill, REX
PRICE: £60



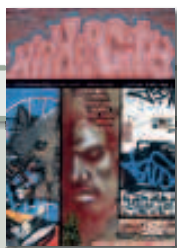
Sunset Sessions is a slightly twisted take on the ubiquitous chill-out and lounge libraries that we're used to seeing — and a refreshing one, too. Most of the samples are in loop format and cover a wealth of real instruments, including electric piano, guitar, flute, bass and even trombone. Though the loops are

short, they're well recorded and played and have a very authentic modern, sleazy chill-out vibe to them. You also get plenty of synths and pads (with their chords and keys in the filenames — brownie points aplenty!), and a small selection of single hit drums. This comes highly recommended.

RATING
9

Big Fish Audio Hip Hop City

CONTACT: Time+Space, 01837 55200
WWW: timespace.com
FORMAT: WAV, Apple Loops, REX
PRICE: £40



Hip Hop City is a collection of 50 hip-hop construction kits. The quality varies quite a bit — some of them are uninspired, weak and dated-sounding, whereas others have quite a lot of potential. All the usual elements are present and correct: beats, bass, synths, scratching and percussion sounds — you know the deal.

The single-hit sounds aren't great and many of the construction kits don't really cut the mustard, so it's hard to recommend Hip Hop City to those looking for a one-stop shop. However, if you can't get enough hip-hop sample libraries, you may well find some grooves that get your head nodding.

RATING
6

Big Fish Audio Punk and Indie Rock

CONTACT: Time+Space, 01837 55200
WWW: timespace.com
FORMAT: WAV, Apple Loops, REX
PRICE: £55



As you'd expect from a punk sample library, this collection is chock full of flutes, sax, and sweet, sweet accordion licks. Just kidding, punkers — it's guitars, bass and drums all the way. Nothing more and nothing less. Everything sounds as you'd hope, and while the production is competent, it's never overbearing,

so you're free to add your own sonic colour. The disc includes 43 construction kits, each split into individual drum tracks, so you can easily concoct your own rockin' drum mix — a great touch. If you're after punk or hard-edged indie loops, then this a library that's definitely worth investigating.

RATING
8

reFX Nexus Expansion: Store 'n' Forward

CONTACT: reFX via website
WWW: refx.net
FORMAT: Nexus expansion
PRICE: \$70



German trancers Store 'n' Forward have taken some time out from creating their banging club tracks to bring us this expansion for reFX's excellent Nexus ROMpler. As you might expect from this duo, the trance influence is strong, with lush pads, chunky synths and even the odd plucked guitar here

and there for good measure. There are also plenty of arpeggiator patches, some superb atmospherics and a few warm, dark bass noises chucked in as well. Overall, Store 'n' Forward is a great selection of sounds that, at just under \$70 for 128 patches, gives quite reasonable VFM too.

RATING
8

Best Service Dancehall Vibes

CONTACT: Time+Space, 01837 55200
WWW: timespace.com
FORMAT: Acid WAV, HALion, Refill, REX
PRICE: £60



Dancehall Vibes takes a contemporary look at dancehall, and features 30 construction kits ranging in tempo from 95-119bpm. The quality of these kits is generally excellent, and as well as the loops, you also get single drum hits and samples for each kit. All the instrumentation is synthetic, so if

you're into your roots, there's not a lot for you here, but fans of upfront club hip-hop will love it — in fact, we'd go so far as to say that this disc puts the vast majority of recent hip-hop libraries in the shade. Whether you're into dancehall, hip-hop or even grime, Dancehall Vibes is a great buy.

RATING
9