

cm mini reviews

Tiny guitar gadgets, sample libraries, ROMplers and more

Native Instruments Guitar Rig Mobile £88

Format USB 2.0, PC/Mac, AU/RTAS/VST/standalone, ASIO/DX/CoreAudio
Web www.native-instruments.com

The latest in the Guitar Rig line is a tiny package that packs a huge punch, containing the nifty Mobile I/O USB-powered interface and the Guitar Rig 3 LE software, which is the same as the edition on our disc this month (see p40). Suffice to say that it's a great suite that puts some of the most universally useful gear from the full Guitar Rig 3 at your disposal.

The hardware can run at up to 24-bit/192kHz, and using it with an Intel Core 2 Duo laptop, we found an overall latency of 9ms to be suitable for running GR3 LE standalone without glitching (at 44.1kHz), although we had to raise the latency a touch for the HQ mode. There's a 1/4" guitar input, and a 1/4" stereo out to drive headphones or a line out - the guitar preamp is clean, if a touch on the bright side, and the output kicks out some solid bass. There are dials for the levels, and the Input LED turns red if you clip the signal.

This is a great package for anyone after an affordable 'way in' to the world of software amp modelling. And even if you eventually outgrow it (perhaps you'll invest in the full Guitar Rig 3 setup), you'd be wise to hang on to the pocket-sized Mobile I/O, for those mobile moments.

9/10



Sonus G2M £80

Contact Et Cetera, 01706 285650
Web www.etcetera.co.uk

This tiny box is simplicity itself: plug a guitar into it and it will convert monophonic playing into MIDI, pumped out via a 5-pin DIN port - the Thru jack allows the guitar signal to pass through. There's a Boost switch for weak pickups, and the power lamp doubles as a tuner - the slower it flashes, the more in tune you are. The 9V battery is said to give over 70 hours of use.

The G2M works surprisingly well, and as long as you play cleanly, the accuracy isn't too far off pricey (and more complex) systems like the TerraTec Axon (although the Axon handles chords, natch). It's not as quick, however, with a quoted latency of 16-30ms, and in practice, we had to offset recorded MIDI by up to 40ms to make it sit well with the guitar audio. Using the G2M live could be expecting too much of it, but when mixed with a real guitar tone or used for recording, it's quite viable and a bargain to boot.

8/10



CEntrance £159 AxePort Pro

Format USB, PC/Mac, ASIO/GSIF
Contact SCV, 020 8207 7880
Web www.centrance.com

The AxePort Pro is a bus-powered USB audio interface with one mono jack input for your guitar and a stereo minijack for headphones. The blue part of the casing is aluminium, and it feels like it should stand up to life on the road. There are knobs on the unit for input gain (there's bags of it, but no clip lamp, though it's easy to get the level right) and the level of the headphones output, which goes very loud indeed.

The guitar preamp is a winner, resulting in very natural-sounding recordings, and the output is clean and clear, with a well-defined treble that conveys the crispness of your tone. The device can run at up to 24-bit/96kHz and the driver allows very low latencies, down to about 5ms total, with direct monitoring, too. We found that an overall latency of 9ms was enough for glitch-free playing through Guitar Rig 3 LE in standalone mode (at 44.1kHz), but most impressively, we could run GR3 LE in High Quality mode at the same latency. To top off the package, you get a velvet sleeve to keep the AxePort in, a USB cable, a USB stick containing the drivers, and a beltclip. It's not cheap, but the AxePort Pro is sonically impressive and seems built to last.

8/10



XT Software energyXT2.5 Plus £132

Format PC/Mac/Linux

Web www.energy-xt.com

Info Standard version, £90; download, €59

When we reviewed energyXT2 (**cm116**, 8/10), we were overall extremely pleased with the second version of the small but beautifully formed DAW. We did have some issues with it, but many of these, such as MP3, AIFF and ReWire support, have been addressed in the latest version, 2.5.

ReWire compatibility is achieved through a plug-in called ReWire VST that allows users to sequence and route audio from ReWire apps, with energyXT acting as the master. The catch is that only one instance of the plug-in can be used at a time, and it can only route one stereo and six mono channels. This is OK for light ReWiring, but it's hardly a comprehensive solution. The documentation could also be improved, as while there is an explanatory PDF, there's no mention of the plug-in in the manual itself.

Likewise, we had issues with MP3 support. No actual encoder is supplied, although there's a link given to sites with versions of the LAME

encoder that you can download and use with the software. These instructions are vague, and we couldn't get the Mac version of the software to export MP3s at all.

Other new features include audio editing functions such as trim, fade in and out, normalise, auto-slicing (based on transients, though the user has no control over sensitivity), tempo-based slicing and crossfade. Although these tools work well, they don't have editable parameters, and some, such as the fades, are destructive, while others aren't, eg crossfades. Still, they're welcome features, and the new mixer with its collapsible EQ and effects sections and "quick add" buttons is a sure improvement.

The drum sampler now has EQ, sends and inserts per pad, which makes it far more powerful, and there are some new effects, too: bitcrusher, filter, compressor and guitar amp. They're all simple but have a good basic sound. energyXT2.5 can run from removable media,



and the boxed versions both come with USB drives preloaded with the software - the idea is that you can carry around both software and project files on the device. The standard box has a 1GB stick, and the Plus edition (reviewed here) has a 2GB stick and includes the ReWire plug-in. If ReWire isn't a priority, it's worth noting that the download-only version is much cheaper at €59, and **cm** readers can upgrade to it from energyXT2.5 Core CM Edition for a mere €39.

8/10

audioMIDI.com/VirSyn iSyn £2.99

Format iPhone/iPod Touch

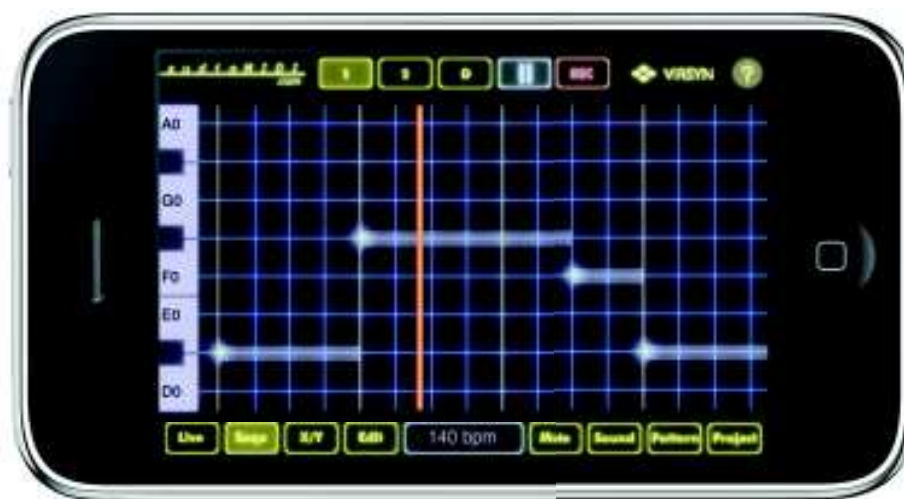
Contact via website

Web www.isynapp.com

Developed by VirSyn - the creative force behind the Tera 3 synth and numerous crafty plug-ins - iSyn is a two-synths-and-a-drum-machine-style groove box in the form of an iPhone app. There are plenty of apps like this in the App Store, including the excellent technoBox, but iSyn is in a league of its own, at least in terms of features.

The two monosynths alone are superb, with each having three oscillators (which can be set to sine, sawtooth, pulse, white noise or pink noise shapes and have their own tuning and pulse-width settings), and 24dB self-resonating low-pass filters with drive control, and a distortion section with independent drive, asymmetry and bit-crush settings. Each has separate amplitude and filter envelopes, and an LFO that can be applied to multiple parameters, such as pitch, filter cut-off and pulse width, and goes up to 100Hz for crazy sideband effects.

You get eight sampled drum kits featuring classic sounds from Roland, Linn and Simmons drum machines, plus a few original kits - each sound has its own pitch, level and pan controls.



The software includes a send effect that can be set to chorus, phaser, flanger or delay, with send levels for the synths and drum machine in the mixer. There's an easy-to-use grid-based step sequencer, and it's possible to play the drums and synths live using a virtual keyboard (with legato!) or drum pads. Stringing a complete song together from individual bars is easy thanks to the fuss-free arrangement editor. Patterns can be switched smoothly, too, making iSyn ideal for playing live. It's even got

arpeggiator and swing settings!

You can save up to 32 projects, and synth sounds can be stored separately, too, for use in other songs. To top it all off, you can export audio and MIDI data to your computer via Wi-Fi.

We were simply stunned by iSyn. It's incredible sound, depth and exporting capabilities make it an essential purchase for the iPhone-toting electronic musician, especially considering its reasonable price.

10/10

Soundware round-up

Producer Loops [DOWNLOAD](#)

Hard Dance Vocals £20

Contact Producer Loops, 0845 094 3077
Web www.producerloops.com
Format Acidized WAV, Apple Loops

A selection of high-energy female vocals running at 150BPM, the content of this pack is well recorded and is clearly appropriate for its intended purpose, ie, providing a sprinkling of vocals to cheesy uptempo dance tracks. Samples include short, medium and long scats; harmonies; vocal pads; and even a folder of pitched-up vocals that brings Euro legends Scooter to mind. Some longer, lyric-based vocals wouldn't have gone amiss, and you don't get the luxury of dry, unprocessed vocals, as delay and reverb effects are present on all the samples, but aside from that, this library is perfectly suited for hard dance producers after a few vocal snippets.

8/10



Producer Loops [DOWNLOAD](#)

Dubstep Construction £20

Contact Producer Loops, 0845 094 3077
Web www.producerloops.com
Format Acidized WAV, Apple Loops, REX2

Dubstep Constructions does exactly what is says on its grimy tin, with ten ready-made dubstep construction kits that cover all the clichés quite ably, including LFO-driven bass sounds, ambiences, reverb-fuelled beats and sinister atmospherics. The quality of the sounds is generally high, although some of the synth leads and chords come across as weak. Dubstep pros will want to look elsewhere for raw material, but for beginners looking to create their own tunes and those looking for some edgy urban flava for their latest soundtrack will love it.

7/10



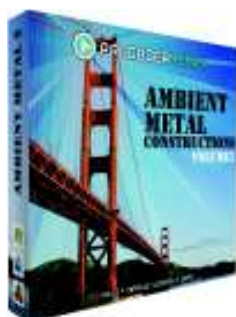
Producer Loops [DOWNLOAD](#)

Ambient Metal Constructions 2 £30

Contact Producer Loops, 0845 094 3077
Web www.producerloops.com
Format Acidized WAV, Apple Loops, MIDI

Boasting influences such as Dream Theater, Toto, Brian Eno and Vangelis, Ambient Metal Constructions 2 sounds like a disaster waiting to happen. Thankfully, it's actually pretty good, with floaty, atmospheric pads joining the crunchy, aggressive guitar parts and intense metal drum loops. It's not perfect - the drums are programmed rather than live; you get complete drum mixes rather than stems; and a few of the pads sound dated - but overall, this is a great collection that can serve a variety of genres, provided they're compatible with the pack's 90bpm tempo.

8/10



Impact Soundworks [DOWNLOAD](#)

Groove Bias \$99

Contact support@
impactsoundworks.com
Web www.impactsoundworks.com
Format Kontakt, HALion, EXS24, NN-XT

This set of three virtual drum kits and one percussion kit is designed to recreate the vintage sound heard on countless classic breakbeats, and is based around a 4GB of drum samples recorded with dozens of velocity and round-robin variations. The result is kits that are essentially simple - you don't get a huge variety of sounds, despite the size of the library - but sound authentic and phat when programmed via MIDI. You get access to patches for individual drum sounds as well as the complete kits, and you can also get at the individual samples, too. Overall, this is a good library that makes a decent alternative to virtual drummer software. Note that the NN-XT version is \$89.

8/10



Puremagnetik

Guitar Rack Volume 3

[DOWNLOAD](#) \$12

Contact info@puremagnetik.com
Web www.puremagnetik.com
Format Live Pack, Kontakt, Logic

This volume is based around recordings of a 1963 Guild Starfire hollow body axe, with five sampled patches that give you two types of chord menu, lead and octaved lead sounds, and the experimental JazzRobot patch. Ableton Live users also get five effects racks that emulate the sound of a guitar amp. However, the instrument racks themselves have amp simulation effects already in place - by working through the rack and switching these off, we found the sound to be more natural and agreeable. The recording quality is alright, though the way each chord/note is played is inconsistent. The loops are mediocre, too, making this one of Puremagnetik's less useful releases.

5/10



Acousticsamples [DOWNLOAD](#)

Bassysm-S €49

Contact via web
Web www.acousticsamples.net
Format Kontakt 2/3

Bassysm-S is a single heavy-duty slap bass patch for Kontakt 2 and 3, recorded from a 4-string Musicman Stingray bass via a tube preamp. Weighing in at 1.5GB, it's a pretty hefty proposition, with 11 velocity layers for both slaps and pops (triggered when you hold down B-1), arranged in two round-robin layers. It also uses keyswitching to enable legato, hammer-ons and slide, and this kicks in when you play two notes that are three semitones or less apart, thus you can still play chords, and it prevents you from playing unrealistically large leaps. The sound of the instrument is tight and consistent, so if you're prepared to pay €49 for one solid slap bass patch, Bassysm-S is worth a pop.

8/10

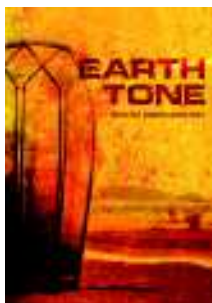


Big Fish
Earth Tone World Percussion £72

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
 Web www.timespace.com
 Format Acidized WAV, Apple Loops, REX, RMX

Earth Tone is a diverse collection of over 900 percussive loops, split into 12 large construction kits. Each kit consists of at least three different instruments, with multiple performances from the multitalented Jamey Haddad, who has been scouted to play for artists such as Herbie Hancock and Paul Simon. As you'd hope, the playing is exciting and the recording quality exceptional. You'll find the batagan, frame drum, hydraulic triangle, steel slip drum and more. The kits are labelled with the tempo, ranging from 72bpm to 200bpm and it's perfectly possible to mix and match performances.

9/10



Loopmasters £40
Alternative House - Tim Healey & Marc Adamo

Contact info@loopmasters.com
 Web www.loopmasters.com
 Format WAV, REX2, Acid, Reason, HALion, Kontakt, EXS24, Stylus RMX, SFZ, Apple Loops, Cakewalk, Emulator X2, Ableton Live

This forward-thinking duo have latched on to the latest house music trends and packaged over 1600 shining examples of such in the form of bass, drums, FX and synth sounds. Roughly a third of the samples are ready-to-go loops, while the rest are one-shots, all processed through a juicy chain of character-building rack gear, and as such, there's a smooth, rich quality that would be extremely difficult to reach using software alone. Note that download versions are £30 and £35.

10/10



Sample Magic £59
Progressive House

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
 Web www.timespace.com
 Format WAV, REX2, Stylus RMX, Apple Loops, Reason, HALion, Kontakt, EXS24

This title represents one of the most prolific flavours coming out of the dance scene right now, with a broad range of influences and a very high production standard that this library effortlessly exhibits. As we've come to expect from Sample Magic, the genre has been nailed and all of the samples have an almost surreal clarity about them. The whole disc is well presented and the samples are intuitively organised into the usual categories - bass, beats, FX and synths are all here. We're especially fond of the percussive loops, which are super-authentic, with plenty of fat bottom-end.

10/10



Loopmasters **DOWNLOAD**
Global Beatworks Vol 1 - Afro Cuban Percussion £15

Contact info@loopmasters.com
 Web www.loopmasters.com
 Format WAV, Acid, REX2, Apple Loops

This pack contains six tempo-labelled folders, containing individual percussive loops, plus a full mix of each performance. The total unique content is just 91 samples, and while they're well-recorded, they aren't as diverse as we'd hoped for. Drummer Simon Webster has performed them pretty well, although we weren't completely sold on his sense of groove. The percussion instruments are mostly typical of North African music, but the playing style borrows a distinct influence from Cuba. If you're looking for something very specific, this could suit your needs.

6/10



Loopmasters **DOWNLOAD**
Fidget House £20

Contact info@loopmasters.com
 Web www.loopmasters.com
 Format WAV, Acid, REX2, Apple Loops, Halion, Kontakt, EXS, SFZ, NNXT

As the genre demands, Fidget House focuses on the wilder side of electronic sound. It contains over 590 samples in total, including bass, drums, synths, FX and obscure vocal snippet samples, with just under half of those being loops. All of the sounds have that flamboyant, over-exaggerated quality that modern fidget thrives on - there's obviously been a lot of careful processing and editing involved in the production of this library, and it's paid off. The quality is fairly high throughout, with only the occasional minor flaw here and there that might require a little extra work on your behalf to overcome, but considering the reasonable price, that's no real reason to hold back.

8/10



Loopmasters **DOWNLOAD**
Dom Kane - Tech House Producer £25

Contact info@loopmasters.com
 Web www.loopmasters.com
 Format WAV, Apple Loops, Halion, Kontakt, EXS, SFZ, NNXT, Acid, REX2, Reason ReFill, Live Pack, Live Presets

Dom Kane is a relatively new face on the house scene, but he's already made his mark and this sample library gives clear indication as to why. His style is filthy, in the best possible way. There are 497 unique samples here, most of which are inspiring loops, split into bass, drums, FX and synths folders, so it's easy to locate what you need in the heat of the moment. You can expect the most jacking grooves, twisted synths and vast bass sounds. Almost everything jumps out at you from the speakers - the standard is that high. You're unlikely to find a comparable library in this price range.

10/10

