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**FOLDER TRACK**  
Click the '=' icon to enable Track Edit Groups and edit all contained tracks as one

**TEMPO TRACK**  
This tempo map was generated using the new Tempo Detection system - it follows the audio just below it

**MULTITRACKED AUDIO**  
Because these clips start and end in the same place, they can be selected with one click using Track Edit Groups

**INSPECTOR**  
Fast access to the selected channel's properties

**MIDI TRACK**  
We used the Convert Hitpoints to MIDI feature to create these notes from the kick drum track

**TEMPO DETECTION PANEL**  
Works on any audio longer than 7 seconds, with options for adjusting the results if they're not quite right

**VST AMP RACK**  
Here shown in the condensed view - the arrow button at the top expands it to full size

**LANE-BASED COMPING**  
Clicking a grayed-out clip makes it active at that point - we've comped three takes into one 'perfect' one



# Steinberg Cubase 6 £508

PC MAC

Practically every DAW owes a debt to Steinberg's innovations, and this update could see the competition sinking further into the red

## System requirements

**PC** Intel/AMD dual-core CPU, 2GB RAM, Windows 7, 8GB hard drive space, USB port for eLicenser

**Mac** Intel CPU, 2GB RAM, OS X 10.6, 8GB hard drive space, USB port for eLicenser dongle

> It's a household name in computer music circles, but for those who don't know what Cubase is all about, we don't mind telling you that this DAW is a real all-rounder, being a one-stop music production package for recording, editing, sequencing, mixing and mastering in any genre. It comes with virtual instruments (drum machines, synths, ROMplers, etc) and an extensive collection of effects.

Windows 7 is the only Microsoft OS supported this time around. However, the 32-bit version of Cubase 6 worked perfectly for us under XP32 and Vista 64. The 64-bit version didn't work, but that's fair enough considering they're unsupported OSes. On the Mac side, there's finally 64-bit support in OS X.

Steinberg have posited Cubase 6's drum editing features as its headline addition, so we'll start there. There's multitrack quantisation and drum hit replacement (aka triggering). Both rely on the hitpoint detection system, which is much more accurate in v6. It's still a doddle to operate: move a slider to adjust the sensitivity and Cubase puts a marker wherever it thinks there's a drum hit. It's not as accurate as, say, Slate

Digital's Trigger (a dedicated drum triggering plug-in), but it's arguably more convenient, and you can easily move, add and delete markers until you're happy. You can then generate MIDI containing notes for each hit, complete with velocity, then pump that into a drum instrument, for drum replacement/augmentation.

## Phase too

The multitrack audio quantisation slices audio at the same point on all tracks (to preserve phase coherency), quantises it, and applies crossfading to cover gaps. You can 'key' the quantisation to certain tracks (eg, kick and snare) and give each track a priority. The results are good, especially when using a minimal crossfade time to avoid artifacts on cymbals. It doesn't use real-time 'elastic' timestretching or anything you couldn't do by hand, but this does mean you can easily make extra edits, which can save your bacon with dodgy playing that won't quantise neatly.

Those who work with multitrack audio will appreciate the elegance of these new features. The simplicity of the drum replacement in particular is refreshing. Cubase does seem a

“The new tempo detection option works like a dream”

little disjointed, however, in the way it divides audio editing between the multifaceted Sample Editor and main Project window. For years, the Sample Editor has offered an awful lot of audio manipulation power, but it can be hard to figure out how to best tap into it.

### How fast?

The new tempo detection option works like a dream. It takes a rhythmic audio clip and creates a bar-by-bar tempo map. If the algorithm runs up against a part it can't suss out, the tempo map ends there, but you can chop the audio into sections and analyse them separately.

Cubase finally has a decent comping system for putting together the best bits of multiple takes. It uses Cubase's Lanes system - you simply click a clip in a Lane to make it the active one at that point. You can also use the Range Selection tool, and this works like the 'swipe' comping in some other DAWs. Clips in any Lane can be auditioned by Shift-clicking, but it seems you don't hear any insert effects applied, which makes it useless in some situations, such as when using amp simulation plug-ins.

Back to multitracked audio, and there's a new feature named Track Edit Groups, whereby clicking a clip in a Folder Track also selects all other clips that start/end at the same point, so you can edit all channels 'as one'. It's easier than multiselecting or using grouping, and more powerful than moving/resizing via the Folder Track because you can perform *any* operation. Note that the new comping system leverages Track Edit Groups to enable multitrack comping.

The built-in timestretching routines were seeming a little, well, stretched, but now you get



This is Steinberg's first serious stab at amp simulation since Warp VST - remember that?

### Sweet rack

It's de rigeur for DAWs to come with a pro-looking guitar amp simulation, and Cubase has caught up with the Joneses with the tediously titled VST Amp Rack. It offers seven amp heads and cabs (modelled on classics from Marshall, Fender, et al), two blendable virtual mics with seven positions, and 16 effects that can go pre- or post-amp.

We found parameter handling a little awry, and eventually realised that the plug-in's Master output control (which should affect only the level) and the amp's Master knob (influencing tone and volume) are 'cross-wired' internally, so each controls the other's parameter. This bizarre slip-up leads to patches restoring at the wrong volume.

Of the effects, you can't set the dry/wet mix for some (eg, chorus, phaser), so you can't use them subtly. We especially like the rip-roaring fuzz box and meaty octaver, though.

As for the sound quality, it's average by today's standards, which is to say that it sounds fine but doesn't have the realistic roar of the best amp sim plug-ins. The cabinet simulation is our favourite aspect, with plenty of variety and a lack of annoying resonances.

While VST Amp Rack needs more work, and the tone isn't awesome, it does slot into the mix neatly, giving solid - if unspectacular - results. It's CPU-friendly, too, which could be useful in a heavy mix.



On the left, this is about as deep as HALion Sonic SE's voice editing gets; up top, detecting and editing hitpoints in a drum performance; and down below, VST Expression 2 now incorporates dynamics

zplane's proven élastique algorithms. We've encountered these in numerous other apps, and they sound as good as ever in Cubase (the pre-existing Drums algorithm is still sometimes your best choice for percussion, though). One gripe: these algorithms seem to be unavailable to the Project Editor's 'resizing applies timestretch' option, which is something we use all the time.

If you're not into recording and audio editing, there's still plenty here for you. VST Expression 2 introduces useful dynamics markings, but far more exciting is the all-new Note Expression, covered in the boxout. New for automation and MIDI controller lanes are pop-up tools for scaling, moving and skewing the curves - how did we manage without them? You also get an Inspector in the Key Editor for quantisation, transposition, etc), simpler Quick Control assignment and more, all of which offer appreciable smoothing of workflow.

### Going instrumental

Cubase's instruments are slightly lacklustre compared to, say, Logic's or Sonar's. Aiming to remedy this is HALion Sonic SE, which supercedes the HALion One ROMpler, offering all of its sounds and more, with a sound engine that utilises both samples and synthesis. It has over 900 patches, and while it's a superb sound source, there's no in-depth patch-editing power. As it stands, then, Cubase still doesn't have a proper sampler, which is odd considering the drum replacement functions (you could use Groove Agent One, but it's rather rudimentary). And the only instrument with a competitive synthesis engine - HALion Sonic SE - is basically a preset machine with knobs on. Presumably the idea is that you'll fall in love with the sound and pay up for the full HALion Sonic (cm156, 8/10).

The LoopMash loop-wrangler reaches v2, with some new MIDI performance options. We still can't see any serious producer using it.

So, a lot's been added, but where is Cubase lacking? It still doesn't have undo for mixer operations, which we're pretty tired of. The window-based interface is also considered clunky by some. And while Cubase is great for mixing, there hasn't been much advancement in that area this time. The existing mixing plug-ins are pretty workmanlike, and there's nothing to compare to, say, Sonar X1's sonically excellent Pro Channel. We'd also like to see further mix-friendly functions, such as freezing at the group channel level and ganging effects parameters across multiple channels, which would be ideal for amp sims on multitracked guitars.

Obligatory wish-listing aside, we're really impressed with this update - Steinberg even had time to smarten up and clarify the interface. There's a well-rounded balance of workflow tweaks, interface polish, shiny new plug-ins and



**Note Expression in use - the colour of each curve signifies its parameter**

### Express yourself

**Despite all the innovation in music technology, the piano roll editor has barely progressed. But here come Steinberg to shake things up with Note Expression. Double-click a note and an overlay pops up, enabling you to draw in curves for any VST3.5 parameter or MIDI CC - each note can have its own such curves. Curve data can be snapped to horizontal or vertical (eg, semitone) positions, scaled, and extended beyond the end of the note (eg, to manipulate pitch during the release phase). And when you move a note, its curves move along with it - this aspect alone is invaluable. You can also record MIDI as Note Expression data.**

**Tracker users have had per-note programming since the beginning, and they'll tell you that while it's liberating and logical, it's unlikely to revolutionise your music. The real value is that, for many operations, Note Expression easily beats traditional automation/CC lanes on flexibility and convenience, and sidesteps their limitations too.**

**To do things outside of the MIDI spec - like bending notes in a chord - you need to use a VST3.5 instrument, and this is currently found only in Steinberg products such as HALion Sonic and the bundled SE version. Still, at least there's a real incentive for developers to support VST3.5 now.**

forward-thinking features, making for an update that'll appeal to beginners, pros, newcomers and existing users alike. You even get two hours of informative, easy-to-digest video tutorials. And crucially, it's a stable release - something that new Cubase versions haven't always been.

All in all, Cubase 6 reasserts Steinberg's reputation for innovation while still delivering plenty of no-nonsense improvements. **cm**

**Contact** info@steinberg.de  
**Web** www.steinberg.net  
**Info** Upgrade from Cubase 4/5, £126  
 Cubase Artist 6, £253

### Alternatively

**Cakewalk Sonar X1 cm160 >> 9/10 >> £379**  
 PC-only DAW with a fresh interface and superb channel strip

**Apple Logic Pro 9 cm143 >> 10/10 >> £417**  
 Mac-only DAW that's overflowing with features, plug-ins and content

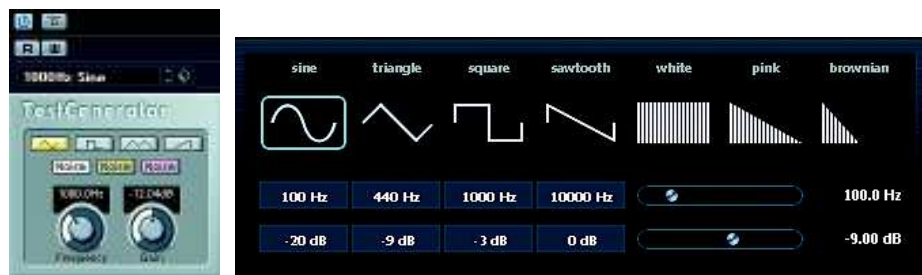
### Verdict

**For** Comprehensive, powerful package  
 Note Expression is awesome  
 Smart audio editing enhancements  
 élastique timestretching algorithms  
 Halion Sonic SE sounds great...

**Against** ...But is basically a preset bank  
 VST Amp Rack could do with more work  
 Still no mixer undo or sampler

An all-round update for an all-round great DAW, combining sensible additions and tweaks with splashes of real innovation

**9/10**



Several of the plug-ins that were stuck with the old-style graphical interface have been brought up to scratch. Above, you see the Test Tone Generator in its former (left) and current (right) guises. Functionally, it's identical