

WHAT IS IT?

A major update to Spectrasonics' flagship synthesizer

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 'Orb' sound design is genuinely thrilling
- 2 iPad remote useful for studio and live users
- 3 So much easier to see your editing choices via 'zoom' re-vamp

PRICING

V1.5 update:
£Free
to registered users
Omni TR iPad app:
£Free



Spectrasonics Omnisphere v1.5 Update | £329

Spectrasonics' Omnisphere was a powerful synth already but **Jono Buchanan** discovers that the 1.5 update takes it into the stratosphere...

While there are plenty of third-party synth plug-ins available on the market-place today,

it's fair to say that few pack as much sonic punch and are capable of quite such an array of sounds as Spectrasonics' Omnisphere.

I was lucky enough to run the rule over this synth behemoth when it first landed and was staggered by its capabilities. You'll recall that the 'oscillator' content for sound development in Omnisphere contains the famous burning piano, sampled

lightbulb filaments and a wide range of other leftfield sound sources and, combined with a monstrous synth engine, this gives Omnisphere a unique, 'organic' sound.

A major Omnisphere update is now available for free to all registered users and it's significant enough that we decided it was worthy of a review in its own right... So what's new?

The Orb

The Omnisphere makeover is most dramatically represented by the 'Orb' which is a circular real-time sonic

manipulation window, representing a kind of 'radar' read-out, complete with a centralised target. The original patch lies at the centre of this target, so by moving the point which you'll find there away from the centre, around the circles, parameters relating to the loaded patch begin to change, producing a constantly evolving set of sonic variations.

What's great is that the Orb has been configured for every single patch in the library with optimum settings to produce radical or subtle sonic manipulation depending on what seems most relevant for the sound you've loaded. Better still, however, if you don't like the sonic variations offered by the default Orb parameters, you can click the Dice button, which 'rolls' in a set of replacements, providing a second collection of assigned parameters.

Indeed, you can keep doing this until you find a collection of parameters which allow you to create the variations you can hear in your head. Suffice to say that, while preserving the sonic start-point of any program, this feature alone provides hours of intuitive sound design capabilities.

iPad support

For iPad owners, the news gets even better. Orb is also available via the Omni TR (Touch Remote) iPad application, which can be downloaded for free. When installed, this seeks out

Omnisphere over Wi-Fi and then allows for all Orb action, alongside functions such as patch browsing and loading to be carried out remotely.

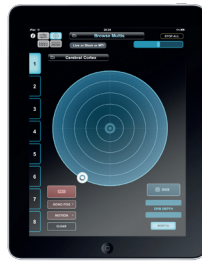
Manipulating Orb parameters with your finger rather than a mouse makes sound design much more fun for starters but the other appeal will be for live users – Orb is attractive and could easily be patched into a video display for real-time manipulation by DJs and performing producers.

Omni TR allows for greater control than just Orb manipulation – you can latch sounds so that, for instance, animated sequence sounds keep playing, so if you're using Omnisphere live in multi-mode, you can build up a sequence of sounds, all of which will sync, before moving on to control their tone qualities via the Orb.

Also new is a zoom feature for existing Omnisphere pages which require greater screen acreage, such as the Harmonia page. Harmonia allows you to create monstrous patches of up to 10 sound sources but until v1.5, editing of these has been a touch fiddly

Now With Added iPad App

Spectrasonics also deserve credit for taking seriously the feedback they've received from users – this might sound an obvious thing to do but it's extraordinary how many companies either don't request or completely ignore the desires of their faithful public. On the wishlist from Omnisphere users was a hefty raft of additional patches despite the colossal library which already ships with the program, so v1.5 contains



an additional 780 patches that help showcase the new synthesis engine, cranking the total patch list to over 8,000 sounds contained in 5,000

programs. Updating the browsing options to access this patch content was another popular wish and this too has been addressed with a new five-column browser that is easier to read and which contains enhanced search criteria. Interaction was another key demand and this has been addressed both with The Orb and with the free iPad app which brings performance to Omnisphere and dramatically increases its live usability.

reduction at the oscillator stage so the options for darker, harsher and grimmer sounds built from scratch is extended. This goes further, as you can modulate these effects, meaning that if you use the arpeggiator as your source – for instance, you can create buzzy, gritty

them in real-time via a series of user controls. Options here include Grain Depth, Intensity, 'Shooting', Spread, Pitch Grains and so on, all of which affect a different aspect of the rearranged sound. The results can be extraordinary and comprise a sound

designer's dream come true, as they can either radically warp or add subtle flavours to sounds such as unpredictable vibrato, wah or tremolo.

Omnisphere was already a killer plug-in but this update dramatically increases its appeal yet further and for registered owners, it's a no-brainer to immediately download and update. The more significant question is whether this update will attract new users. Bearing in mind the price remains the same yet the capabilities have increased dramatically, it certainly deserves to. If raw synth programming is your thing, there's enough here to last you a lifetime. **FM**

If raw synth programming is your thing, then there's enough in Omnisphere to last you a lifetime

– an independent, larger page is therefore very welcome.

Effects

New effects are included in Omnisphere via the Reducer and Crusher options via the new Waveshaper module too. These allow bit reduction and sample frequency

running sequences which are perfect for glitch music and darker TV-thriller type sounds in particular. If more extreme sound design is your thing, the Granular options are for you.

Again assigned to its own dedicated zoomed page, this employs granular synthesis techniques to break sounds up into tiny pieces and then rearrange



Create monstrous patches of up to 10 sounds at once, now with zoom functions

SPECS

Harmonia: New zoom page shows all Harmonia parameters per layer adding up to 10 oscillators per patch with new independent modulation options

Waveshaper: New zoom page with new processing modules including polyphonic 'Crusher' and 'Reducer' sections, with 'Force' and 'Animation' controls

Granular Synthesis: New 'Speed' and 'Position' modes. New zoom page with new 'Granular Visualizer'

Patch Library Update: Over 700 brand new patches gives Omnisphere over 5,000 patches and 8,000 sounds overall

Support for MIDI devices which send polyphonic aftertouch

'Clone Part' allows easier editing/setup with multi-channel MIDI controllers

New 'MIDI Learn' hardware control mode follows Live Mode selection

Modulation Envelope points can be key-command snapped to semitone when modulating pitch

User-assignable Legato Interval rule added

ALTERNATIVES



NI Reaktor 5

379 Euro

Reaktor can do it all – synth, samplers, effects and more. Its modular approach requires a steeper learning curve, though.

nativeinstruments.com



NI Massive

179 Euro

Massive is more immediate than Reaktor but still contains a raft of options.

nativeinstruments.com



Camel Audio Alchemy

£179

Multiple synthesis types and sample import, through which you can shape sounds in endless ways.

camelaudio.com

FutureMusic VERDICT

STABILITY



VALUE



EASE OF USE



VERSATILITY



RESULTS



An already powerful synth goes interstellar. Registered users – get it now!