



# Steinberg Cubase 7 | £490

Just over six months after the last paid update Steinberg introduce Cubase 7. **Bruce Aisher** shines a light on the new mixer and the mysteries within

## INCLUDES AUDIO

### WHAT IS IT?

The latest iteration of Steinberg's 'Music Production System'

### CONTACT

Who: Steinberg GmbH  
Who: +49 (0)4042 236115  
Web: [www.steinberg.net](http://www.steinberg.net)

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Chord Track
- 2 Advance channel linking
- 3 ASIO-Guard

Steinberg have stuck to their recent two-yearly interval between major updates and Cubase 7 hit the streets on 5th December. As always, when a software update arrives for something that is central to the way you work, it's greeted with a mixture of excitement and trepidation.

Once you arrive at the program itself, you are presented with the Steinberg Hub, which adds news and tutorial information to the old Project

Assistant page. Here you will also find links to a wide range of instructional videos which should help both new and upgrading users – a nice touch.

Visually, there's been an ongoing trend of making Cubase darker, and C7 is no exception, however if this is too 'Emo' for your liking, there are even more colour customisation options available. The darker tones are particularly noticeable in MixConsole, the all-new mixer window, which is also quite a departure in functional terms.

As well as MixConsole and other mix and plug-in elements, we also get a new performance-management function in the shape of ASIO-Guard (a form of audio pre-processing), and a remote recording tool called Chord Track.

As with previous updates, Cubase 7 installs to a fresh location and allows you to keep using earlier versions. Running it for the first time requires a full rescan of any plug-in folders and this is where things get fiddly. C7 is a 'clean' install, so it doesn't pick up any existing information regarding locations, preferences or other configuration settings. I'd hoped for an improvement with this update but sadly that's not the case, which means lots of trawling through files and manual tweaking of colours, custom quantise, key commands, MediaBay folders, and many other settings. What a pain.

## Hitting the right chord

Cubase 7 comes with a whole new series of chord functions, the most prominent of which is Chord Track. This takes Cubase's musical capabilities in a new direction and allows you to enter chord information in symbol form (Bbmaj7, Cm etc) whereupon it's translated into MIDI information which

any track can take advantage of. Adding an event to the Chord Track is handled by a dedicated pop-up window and takes just a few clicks. Once a few chords are entered, the Chord Assistant can advise you what chords might fit a new location, and with user-selectable levels of harmonic complexity.

There are a whole raft of voicing options that determine how these raw chords are translated into notes, with dedicated selections for Piano and Guitar. The Guitar option works a treat when routed to a 'FlexPhrased' Guitar patch in HALion Sonic SE, providing you with realistically picked or strummed backing.

In certain ways this removes the need for an understanding of music theory – and makes a great compositional aid for any style – though to get the most out of this new area of Cubase, you'll definitely benefit from some formal music knowledge.

The Chord Track can be used on its own, or as a controller for other tracks leaving you to take care of note or chord timings (by 'bashing' the keyboard). It can also generate MIDI notes and add them directly to a track, or analyse an existing MIDI or Instrument track and create a chord map. A novel feature links the Chord Track to C7's updated

## Only Connect



Also included with Cubase 7 is a bundle of two plug-ins that, together with a separately installed application, form VST Connect SE – a remote production and recording system. The plug-ins are placed on input and monitoring busses and allow two-way communication (including video) with a remote performer via the internet. The performer doesn't need to run, or even own

Cubase, as they simply run the free VST Connect Performer SE app (available for Windows and OS X via the Steinberg website). The system handles synchronisation duties, and also allows the producer (at the Cubase end) to remotely set the monitor/mic balance and basic reverb settings.

Recordings are then made straight into a normal Cubase audio

track, though the bit-rate is unfortunately limited to 384kbps and there is no additional offline WAV support. It's great to see Steinberg exploring this way of working – and it's definitely something set to increase in popularity. However, from the Cubase end, it's not completely streamlined in its setup, feeling a little like a bolted-on extra. I certainly don't begrudge its inclusion, though.

## SPECS

### System requirements

**Mac:** Intel or AMD dual core CPU, OS X 10.7/8, 2GB RAM, 8GB free HD space, 1280 x 800 display

**PC:** Intel or AMD dual core CPU, Windows 7/8, 2GB RAM, 8GB free HD space, 1280 x 800 display

## PRICING

Full version

**£490**

Upgrade from Cubase 6.5

**£120**

Upgrade from Cubase 6

**£160**

Upgrade from Cubase 4 or 5

**£200**

## Link Chord Track to C7's VariAudio engine to generate harmonies for any monophonic audio element

VariAudio engine within the Sample Editor and allows it to generate harmonies of any monophonic audio element. This is marred, though, by the lack of formant analysis and processing in VariAudio 2.0 – definitely something

that needs addressing if this is to work as expected.

I was a little sniffy about Chord Track and its associated features when they were announced but it's definitely worth giving them a go – even if it's

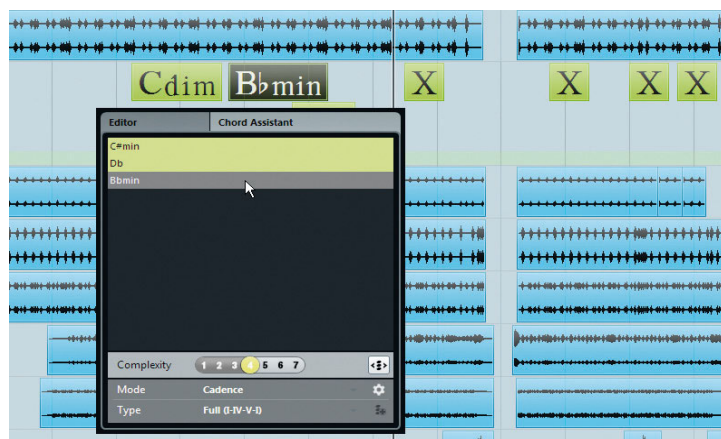
only to help generate ideas.

Those of you trying to squeeze the last ounce of performance out of your computer will appreciate the new

ASIO-Guard. Blink and you'll miss its mention in the manual, and it's only visible as a new tick-box column in the Plug-In Information window but, in effect, by ticking the relevant box next to a plug-in it enables a pre-processing buffer to smooth the CPU workload. It doesn't work with all plug-ins (such as those that use hard disk buffering), but it's good to see Steinberg trying something new, here. It certainly helped me export projects that would fail in the past due to momentary – and previously inaudible – glitches.

## Mix it up

The biggest functional change in Cubase, and one you can't avoid, is MixConsole, the new all-purpose scalable mix window. Although you can still view and access all the previous routing, insert, send and EQ functions, these are now presented in a quite



Cubase 7 comes with a range of new chord functions, including the useful Chord Track

## ALTERNATIVES



## Apple Logic 9

£140

Cubase's arch-rival is rumoured to be getting an imminent update to Logic Pro X. At £140, it's fantastic value – assuming, of course, that you've already bought a Mac!

[www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)


## Propellerhead Reason 6

£280

Having come of age with its full audio recording implementation and Rack Extension plug-in system, Reason is well worth exploring.

[www.propellerheads.se](http://www.propellerheads.se)


## Digidesign Pro Tools 10

£460

Priced on a par with Cubase 7 and now fully native, Pro Tools is an industry standard. Its MIDI aspects have steadily improved over the past five years.

[www.digidesign.com](http://www.digidesign.com)

different, and highly customisable way. The fact that everything is scalable, vertically and horizontally, means some of the rendered elements are a good deal less clear than before, which is a step back in my view. When it comes to functionality, though, there's a lot to get excited about.

The Rack area includes a new Channel Strip section designed to provide common mix elements (such as EQ, compression, gating, limiting, transient shaping and maximisation) in an easy-to-use way. Many of these are variations on pre-existing Cubase plug-ins though others, such as the tube/tape saturation module, are entirely new. The EQ now comes with a built-in spectrum analyser and additional low and high-pass filters.

If you're a user of predominantly third-party plug-ins, though, there are other more alluring features: A/B parameter comparison – please add this to the mixer as well Steinberg – and excellent track-linking capabilities; and plug-ins now feature in a searchable



The new Channel Strip area provides a simple way to access all of your mixing tools

menu list, which means quicker access but doesn't allow you to categorise features, as we'd hoped.

In addition, each track can have its own icon and notepad, and there are many more control and arrangement features accessed from the icons and drop-down menus. From here it's also possible to save four different window configurations but, on a global level,

there's a serious lack of any saving and recall of settings – a serious omission in my book.

## Magnificent seven?

This Cubase update is alluring in many ways, though it perhaps lacks those must-have features that will force people to put up with the current bugs and functional quirks. These should get

ironed out over the coming months (Steinberg have already provided the first maintenance update in the form of 7.0.1). I was also surprised not

to see any form of track bounce feature included (to name just one omission).

If you never made it as far as the 6.5 paid update, which introduced the excellent Retrologue and Padshop VSTi plug-ins and more advanced comping features, then the leap to C7 will be more attractive. If you already have 6.5, then I recommend taking a proper look at this version and being prepared for a period of adjustment. Despite my reservations, though, Cubase remains a truly excellent DAW – and version 7 does nothing to diminish this. **FM**

## The biggest functional change – and one you can't avoid – is MixConsole, an all-purpose scalable mix window

### And There's More...

Let's not forget the other new additions to Cubase 7. It comes bundled with Voxengo's CurveEQ, a useful addition to the included plug-ins with its spectral matching feature, although it might have been better if it adopted the Cubase visual style and we saw a little rationalisation of the quite busy interface. The Control Room features are

now accessible from within MixConsole, making them better integrated into the overall workflow. The MixConsole also hosts a neat range of output metering options, with some very useful loudness indicators. Downmixing of surround-based mixes has also been much improved.

Throughout, there have been updates to the drag-and-drop

implementation, copying and moving plug-ins in the mixer is now much clearer, and multiple Chord Track events can be dragged to HALion Sonic SE and the Chorder plug-in. Third-party drag-and-drop has also been improved, with some favourable reports in relation to NI's Battery and Kontakt.

Each MIDI and Instrument Track now has an ASIO Delay Compensation button that improves the placement of recorded notes at higher buffer settings – a small addition, but a very welcome one.

Dynamic Hermode intonation is now supported – although this is mainly for those interested in orchestral or ensemble composition.



FutureMusic VERDICT	
STABILITY	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
VALUE	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
EASE OF USE	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
VERSATILITY	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
RESULTS	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>

A competent update, with a lot of promise, but at this stage it's a little rough around the edges.