

cm mini reviews

A rapid-fire round-up of sample libraries, ROMplers and music gear

Steinberg UR12 £88

Web www.steinberg.net
Format PC/Mac/iPad

The latest in Steinberg's UR range of USB 2.0 audio interfaces marks the bottom of the pile in terms of price and I/O, but matches the rest of them for build quality and compatibility (Mac, PC and iPad, via 30-pin- or Thunderbolt-to-USB adapter).

An austere-looking metal-framed slab measuring 159x144x46mm and weighing 850g, it's not the smallest or lightest mobile interface we've ever come across, but it's certainly one of the sturdiest. Power is supplied via USB from a host Mac or PC, with a separate Micro-USB input onboard for providing juice from the mains or a USB battery when used with an iPad.

Aimed at singer/songwriters and other musicians on the move, the UR12 features a single XLR mic input with optional phantom power, alongside an unbalanced 1/4" jack for hooking up a guitar or other mono source. Each input has its own gain knob, the XLR

feeds into a Yamaha D-PRE preamp, and the A/D converters do their thing at up to 24-bit/192kHz quality.

At the other end of the line, the main outputs comprise a pair of phonos, sharing a single volume knob with the 1/4" headphone out. We're not fans of that particular approach to monitoring, although it probably won't bother the target market too much. Finally, as you'd expect from any interface these days, a Direct Monitoring switch is on hand to feed the inputs directly to the outputs.

Apart from the combined output volume control and, perhaps, its weight, we really can't find anything to complain about with the UR12. It sounds great, runs smoothly and could survive a nuclear blast. Oh, and you also get a download code for Cubase AI 7 in the box.



With support for up to 32 audio tracks, 48 MIDI tracks 28 effects and 180 sample-based sounds in the shape of HALion Sonic SE, this heavily cut down but perfectly usable DAW for Mac and PC could make a great introduction to the world of production for the fledgling musician in your life.

At this price, it's impossible not to recommend the UR12 to anyone seeking a high-quality, tough, affordable on-the-go solution for recording.

9/10

Native Instruments Emotive Strings £249

Web www.native-instruments.com
Format Mac/PC, Kontakt 5/Player

A direct counterpart to Action Strings (cm186, 8/10), Emotive Strings runs in the same interface but uses sampled legato phrases and arpeggios to deliver instantly usable dramatic and/or emotional string section parts, rather than the high-octane sounds of its predecessor.

Up to ten keyswitchable phrases from the 175-strong library (28GB) can be brought together in a Theme, and 75 preset Themes (of five phrases each) are included. By keyswitching between the component phrases of the loaded Theme with the left hand, and playing notes and chords with the right, even the least melodically-minded of producers will astound themselves with the authentic, deep and undeniably emotive string parts they're suddenly making.

Emotive Strings adds to the straightforward Single Pitch and Melodic phrase types of Action Strings with the rather more elaborate Emotives and Arpeggios. Emotives are a collection of legato phrases and ending notes for playing in real-time or programming to create custom lines and melodies. Input a chord with your left hand (the green keys) and the notes of that scale

alone are made available for triggering and playback (the blue keys), each pitching the phrase but keeping it in the same mode (minor or major) as the chord. Low-velocity notes trigger descending phrases, while high-velocity ones play ascending phrases (dynamics and intensity for all Phrase types are controlled using the mod wheel or Expression slider in the GUI, rather than velocity).

The Arpeggios, meanwhile, are played using minor and major chords, naturally and in their first and second inversions.

Opened at the bottom of the GUI, the Sound tab is home to a couple of preset EQ settings, Close or Stage mic options, and the Normal or Wide Stereo Image switch, plus a choice of ten uneditable convolution reverb presets. The Playback tab enables tempo doubling/halving, adjustment of the release time when playback stops, and volume levelling of the phrase-to-phrase transition samples.

As with Action Strings, Emotive Strings' lack



of mixing functionality is notable by its absence, particularly given the price - we should at least have independent level control over the two mic channels, rather than having to choose one or the other. But this is an instrument built to give the media composer immediate results and sound superb doing it - on both those counts, it's every bit as effective as its stablemate.

8/10

Sonic Faction Archetype Ableton Bundle \$200

Web www.sonicfaction.com
Format Mac/PC, Max For Live

What we have here is a collection of all eight sample-based Max For Live instruments (and nested Live Racks) based on Sonic Faction's previously released Live Racks, plus a pair of step sequencers for use with the Akai APC40, Novation Launchpad and Ableton Push. Each instrument is also available individually, making for a total of \$491, although we'd question the value for money of some of them.

Beatdown is a 16-slot drum machine powered by a high-impact, EDM-centric soundbank of over 40 kits, the Live Rack version of which we've covered previously (**cmi**184, 9/10). The synth-emulating (in the loosest sense) trio of Clone (Roland SH-101), Pulsator (Waldorf Pulse) and Rogue-One (Sequential Circuits Pro-One) have also had the **cmi** reviews treatment in the shape of the Mutant Synth Pack (**cmi**199, 9/10). The remaining four are Sickness (Access Virus), EvilFish 303 (Roland TB-303), Hatchet (Arp Axse) and Whoosh Machine (an original design, for

generating riser FX).

Sonic Faction have multisampled every oscillator and waveform of the referenced machines, then bundled the results into a functionally consistent interface with certain sections customised to suit each instrument – EvilFish's filter morph, say, replacing the waveform mixing of Hatchet or Pulsator's X-Mod oscillator. Controls and parameters common to all of them (except Beatdown, with its percussion-orientated alternatives) include a multimode filter; amp, filter and pitch envelopes; two LFOs; various effects; an arpeggiator; and preset morphing – indeed, they're far more intuitive and approachable than the vast

majority of Max devices. Nonetheless, the end result is a bonkers parade of flamboyant classic synth reimaginings – and an awesome drum machine – that dance producers in particular will get endless mileage from.

So, what you probably need to do is find 200 bucks and take the plunge, because Archetype is a monster. Being Max For Live devices, the interfaces aren't always as smooth as we'd like (instrument loading/unloading and preset morphing are dismally slow/laggy, most pertinently), but the sounds that come out of these things are good enough to outweigh such negatives. A truly mighty bundle.

9/10



HoRNet FilterSolo €18

Web www.hornetplugins.com
Format PC/Mac, VST/AU/RTAS

HoRNet's newest plugin is a multimode resonant filter with envelope and LFO.

Low-pass, High-pass, Band-pass and Band-stop filters are available, with slopes of 12dB or 24dB per octave. The cutoff frequency and resonance can each be modulated by its own LFO and envelope follower, with the depths of all four assignments set by the sliders. The LFOs offer four waveshapes and can be synced to host tempo (1/16 to 1 bar) or run free, while the envelope Attack and Release times range from 10-1000ms. The sloping Attack/Release graphic in the main display is quite cool, but we'd prefer to see actual time values as well.

There's also a moderately effective Analog saturation mode, and imperceptible hiss (-120dB) can be added.

The filter itself sounds good – sharp and responsive if not particularly characterful – and our only real issues are the puzzlingly subtle Hiss feature, the wilfully uninformative display and the absence of any presets. Other than that, a sound investment at this price.

8/10



DopeVST Crate Digger £60

Web www.dopevst.com
Format PC/Mac, VST/AU

Ultimately a novel way of turning a one-shot sample library into a 'performance' plugin, Crate Digger wraps 800 crusty, dusty (but, crucially, original and royalty-free) hip-hop sounds, organised into 50 preset banks, in a simple MPC-inspired interface.

Each bank is mapped to the 16 pads, the first 12 holding melodic clips, stabs, short loops, etc; the last four firing off FX. The instrumentation is classic 90s hip-hop: keyboards, funky brass, guitar, vocal cuts, strings – you name it – and playback can be mono, poly or legato.

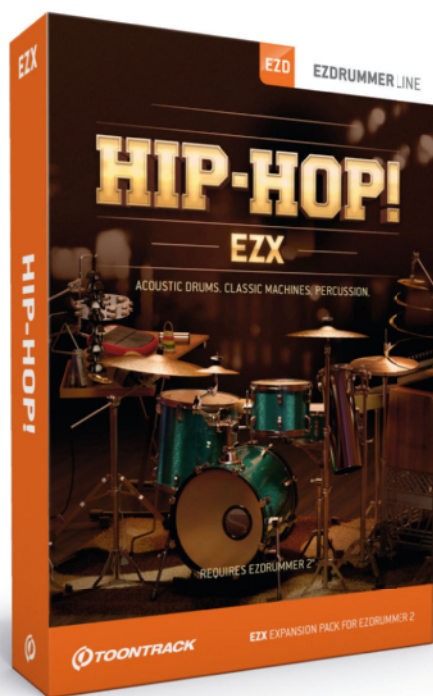
Volume and pan are adjustable globally and per-pad, while Pitch is used to apply varispeed-style timestretch/pitchshift (80-100bpm) to the whole instrument. There's also a suitably subtle one-knob (depth) reverb for instant ambience.

Crate Digger's GUI is functional rather than innovative, but the concept works well enough and the samples are absolutely gorgeous. Approaching it from a 'beat making' perspective, rather than as a weighty compositional tool, is obviously key, but if old-skool hip-hop is in any way your flava, this is essential.

8/10



Soundware round-up



Toontrack Hip-Hop! EZX £43

Toontrack's most extensive EZX yet wants to be your go-to percussion resource for hip-hop and related genres – and man, does it hit the mark. A huge number of larger-than-life acoustic and electronic kicks, snares, toms, hats, cymbals, percussion and FX sounds enable endless kit construction possibilities, although the 22 excellent preset kits – each with its own mixer and effects setup and library of grooves – could be all you'll ever actually need. An essential add-on for all EZdrummers of a non-rock bent.

www.timespace.com

10/10

Sample Tools by Cr2

Drum Hits £16

Eschewing their usual loops-and-construction-kits approach, Cr2's latest comprises 615 one-shot drum samples (and a 21-minute tutorial video on designing the perfect "Big Room Kick") aimed primarily at house and EDM producers. It's a superb collection at an equally superb price, including the expected kicks, snares, claps, hats and cymbals, plus snaps, percussion (the only weak spot, really – they could be more interesting and varied) and subby kick tails. A comprehensive library of bread-and-butter electronic drum sounds.

sounds.beatport.com

9/10



Realdrumsamples.com

Line of Legends \$67

More one-shot drums and cymbals – 389 of them, to be specific – at an 'old-school' price, Line of Legends is more versatile than Cr2's Drum Hits, mixing acoustic and electronic sounds, the latter centring on a dedicated folder of 808 kicks, snares, hats and toms. The recordings are well processed and punchy, and despite a few very minor glitches and curtailed sustains, all is well sonically – but we're just not down with that price. There's nothing remarkable or 'different' enough here to justify such a premium tag.

realdrumsamples.com

7/10



Raw Cutz

Turf Smoke £25

A "golden era" hip-hop library for NI Maschine and Ableton Live (also available in a WAV/AIF pack for £20), featuring 30 Maschine Groups and 26 Live Drum Racks, plus ten (very small) projects for both. The sounds and grooves are laid-back, with a vinylistic, jazzy vibe (Cypress Hill and Blue Note are cited as influences), the instrumentation is diverse (drums, basses and a wide range of melodies) and the consistent production style gives the whole thing a real air of authenticity. Funky, classy stuff.

www.loopmasters.com

9/10



Sample Magic

Disco & Funk Guitars 2 £15

The follow-up to Disco & Funk Guitars (cm193, 9/10) serves up a further 195 two-bar riffs and licks, played on Fender Stratocaster and Epiphone ES-175 guitars, through a range of amps, pedals and mics. Samples are divided into three tempo-categorised folders – 115, 120 and 125bpm – and each includes its key in the file name. As with its predecessor, an impressive range of sounds and rhythms is coaxed from the instruments and gear involved. Whether owners of the original need this one, too, though, is debatable.

www.samplemagic.com

8/10



Samplephonics

AMIT: Dub Evolution £35

Bass music don AMIT knocks it out of the park with his first sample library – what Dub Evolution's 236 loops and 152 one-shots lack in sheer numbers, they more than make up for in quality and originality. The dark and dirty drum and percussion loops, and spooky atmosphere FX are the main attractions, but the evil basslines and compelling music loops certainly don't disappoint, either. AMIT's fusion of dubstep with Asian and Middle Eastern influences works brilliantly, making Dub Evolution a must-plunder.

www.samplephonics.com

9/10



Sample Tools by Cr2

Deep House 2 £16

It really is amazing just how much quality soundware you get in the average 16-gig library from Cr2, and Deep House 2 is one of their most satisfying, action-packed yet. From brooding, kick-heavy drum loops and wall-wobbling basslines, through evocative synth lines and twisted vocal cut-ups, to sampler-ready one-shots, melodic MIDI sequences, well-programmed Sylenth1 patches and handy song starter kits, it's a perfectly pitched package that nails its genre perfectly.

sounds.beatport.com

9/10



Dream Audio Tools

LFO Piano £25

A Fender Rhodes MkII has been multisampled at three velocity layers, with and without analogue tremolo pedal, for this 1.3GB Kontakt 4+ library. The Rhodes sounds lush, but you can't adjust the modulation speed or depth in the tremolo version, so if you don't like the exact timing (about 1.3Hz) and level of the baked-in effect, you're out of luck. The scripted effects are also too limited for serious use – you can't even change the delay time. For the raw quality of the Basic unmodulated patch, though, this is worth a look.

www.dreamaudiotools.com

6/10



Niche Audio

Planet 808 £25

13 sampled TR-808 kits for Maschine and Live, four of them in their natural state, the other nine heavily processed, and each coming with four increasingly dense MIDI patterns, plus two extra ancillary kits (subs and percussion). There's hardly anything going on in the way of host effects processing, so what you hear is what you get, but fortunately, the samples themselves are punchy, frequency-rich and generally gorgeous. Even if you have a ton of 808 samples already, you should still check out this genuinely unique collection.

www.loopmasters.com

8/10



Earmark Audio

DNB £25

One of three debut releases from soundware newcomers Earmark Audio, DNB is a characterful, confident and well-presented library of 172bpm drum 'n' bass loops and shots. Highlights include the 20 drum loop construction kits, the bass and music loops and one-shots, and the quirky FX. Stylistically, it's on the cleaner, more spacious side of the DnB fence, but that's not to say that filth is off the agenda. On the down side, the Pads folder is decidedly anaemic, but otherwise, this is a compelling first outing for Earmark.

www.earmark.audio

8/10



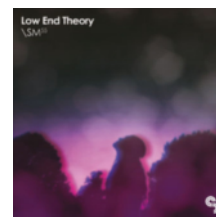
Sample Magic

Low End Theory £35

Comprising just shy of 800 sampled 140bpm loops and hits, plus MIDI files and sampler patches, in the 'LA beat' multi-genre, Low End Theory lays down a wealth of wonky, trap-tinged (stemmed) beats, articulated, subby basses, warped synth lines, dosed-up melodic construction kits, glitchy FX and much more, with something new to surprise you at every turn. It's a production and compositional tour de force that we can't recommend highly enough to anyone working in electronica.

www.samplemagic.com

10/10



Mode Audio

Beat Voltage £15

Capturing an unspecified but familiar-sounding range of "analogue drum machines and hardware", Mode's latest turns 247 synthesised drum, cymbal and percussion samples into 12 kits for Live, Logic, Reason and FL Studio, and throws in five powerful effects chains for all but FL. The sounds are warm and retro rather than in-your-face and bleeding edge – more techno than EDM, you could say – but these days that's actually quite refreshing. A quality source of old-school electronic riddims, Beat Voltage feels like good value.

www.modeaudio.com

8/10



Zero-G

Sensual Grooves £65

35 extensive construction kits taking the media producer on a trip through the history of contemporary soul and RnB, from the 80s to the early 00s, plus a side collection of drum, electric piano and guitar loops. There's certainly enough material here to enable anyone to put together convincing tracks in no time at all, but whether you perceive these generic but exceptionally well-produced numbers as smooth and sumptuous or cheesy and toothless will depend on your point of view... and possibly your age.

www.timespace.com

7/10

