

cm mini reviews

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

ESI UGM96 £69

Format PC/Mac, USB, ASIO/MME/WDM/DX/CoreAudio
Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com

ESI's tiny UGM96 is a 2-in/2-out USB-powered audio interface aimed at guitarists, featuring two high-Z guitar inputs, one of which is switchable to a mic input with +20dB preamp. It has two stereo headphone outs (the same signal at both jacks), and one also works as a line out. It might not be the prettiest bit of kit around, but the sound quality is up to ESI's usual standards, going all the way up to 96kHz/24-bit operation, and the all-metal construction should ensure its longevity. All connections are on 1/4" jack.

The software control panel gives control over levels (there's no physical volume control, annoyingly), muting (handy to suppress monitoring of the direct signal), latency, and number of buffers. The Windows drivers suffer from a frustrating problem we've run into with some other interfaces, whereby the device needs to be plugged into the same USB port it was attached to when installing.



Adding much value is the inclusion of Cubase 4 LE and the excellent Studio Devil Virtual Guitar Amp, which scored 10/10 in **cm122** and on its own is worth \$79. Overall, this is a good package for guitarists looking to save space and/or money, but it could face stiff competition from NI's Guitar Rig Mobile.

7/10

112dB Redline Monitor \$99

Format OS X 10.4/10.5, Windows 2000/XP/Vista, RTAS/VST/AU
Web www.112dB.com

This plug-in from 112dB tackles the age-old problem of mixing on headphones. It combines filtering, frequency-dependent delaying, mid/side processing and room simulation to imitate nearfield monitors on your headphones so, in theory you won't be in for any nasty surprises when you do get around to hearing your mixes on speakers.

Soundstage sets the angle of the speakers, from 30 to 90 degrees; Distance controls the speaker proximity, up to two metres; and Center trims the phantom centre level, from 0 to -3dB. There are also solo, phase reverse and mono options. We eventually settled for a 60-degree soundstage at 1m with -2dB centre level. However, we were very impressed by how natural the sound was with any combination of settings.

Success depends on the quality of your headphones, and you'll still need to be able to evaluate your results on proper monitors at some stage, but for anyone who regularly works on headphones, or wants a portable, reliable reference, this is a highly effective and potentially time-saving plug-in.

9/10



Native Instruments Urban Arsenal 2 €99

Format PC/Mac, AU/VST/RTAS/standalone
Contact via website
Web www.native-instruments.com

The latest Kore Player soundpack from Native Instruments is another collection of sounds intended for the production of so-called urban music, including real instruments, synth sounds, drum kits, complete beats and sound effects. 236 patches are included in total, and the content is much more contemporary-sounding and usable than similar ROMplers of this type. Highlights include subby 808-style kick sounds with optional distortion, stylistically appropriate drum and stab kits, and useful horn, string, guitar, bass and piano patches. The selection of brass stabs in particular is impressive indeed.

Rather than just focusing on the hip-hop and RnB sounds that you might expect from the collection's title, you'll also find gems like a lush house organ chord, some tearing synth leads, and arpeggiated variations of some of the synth patches. This is a fantastic library that exceeded our expectations and represents superb value for money, especially considering that it outperforms more expensive titles. Urban Arsenal 2 gets the **cm** seal of approval!

10/10



Toontrack New York Studios Vol.2 SDX £125

Format SDX for Superior Drummer 2.0
Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com

Users of Toontrack's flagship Superior Drummer 2.0 drum ROMpler have always been able to buy further virtual percussion via EZX expansions, which are primarily intended for the simpler EZdrummer. At last, though, Toontrack have released the first expansion specifically for SD2.0, providing more drums, mixer channels, articulations and dynamics layers than any EZX, at least as far as conventional drum kits go.

The stock SD2.0 kit was recorded at Avatar Studios in New York, and New York Studios Vol.2 gives you two further bites of the Big Apple with kits recorded at Allaire Studios and The Hit Factory (both of which are now closed).

The Hit Factory kit gives you 22" and 24" GMS kicks; 10", 12", 14" and 16" GMS toms (clear and coated heads); and seven snare drums, including four GMS ones, two Ludwigs (including a Black Beauty) and a Trick. All are 6.5x14", barring a 5.5x14" GMS. All cymbals are

Sabian, and you get two hi-hats, two rides, and ten different crash/effects cymbals.

The Allaire kit has fewer cymbals (all Sabian again) and sonically is warmer, with more of an old-school tone. The hi-hat is a 16" beast made up of a pair of crash cymbals - it actually sounds very sweet and clear. You get six wildly different kick drums, including a thunderous 26" Slingerland, a resonant 20" Gretsch, and some more modern-sounding affairs. The toms and snares are Ludwig, except for a 14" Rogers Dynasonic. Four of the snares have a cutting, clangorous timbre, while the other two deliver in-your-face punch. There are plenty of possible articulations and the choice of felt or plastic kick drum beaters.

The Hit Factory kit has all the usual close-miked channels, as well as far and mid-distance ambient channels, compressed snare and ambience, and a couple of room tracks, seemingly recorded with Sony and Shure mics. The Allaire kit offers 'bonus' channels in



the form of near/mid/far/mono ambience, mono overheads, snare rim, and those running through both a SansAmp preamp and a Shure 'Green Bullet' harmonica mic. The room sound of The Hit Factory is tighter and more controlled than that of the livelier Allaire, but obviously, with all those mixer channels and the SD2.0 effects to play around with, either kit can be mixed to work with any genre of music. There are also MIDI files and mixer presets.

If you've already got SD2.0, then you'll be well aware of the outstanding sound quality of its Avatar kit, and the contents of this SDX are in the same league, making this a mandatory purchase for all addicts of superior virtual drums.

10/10

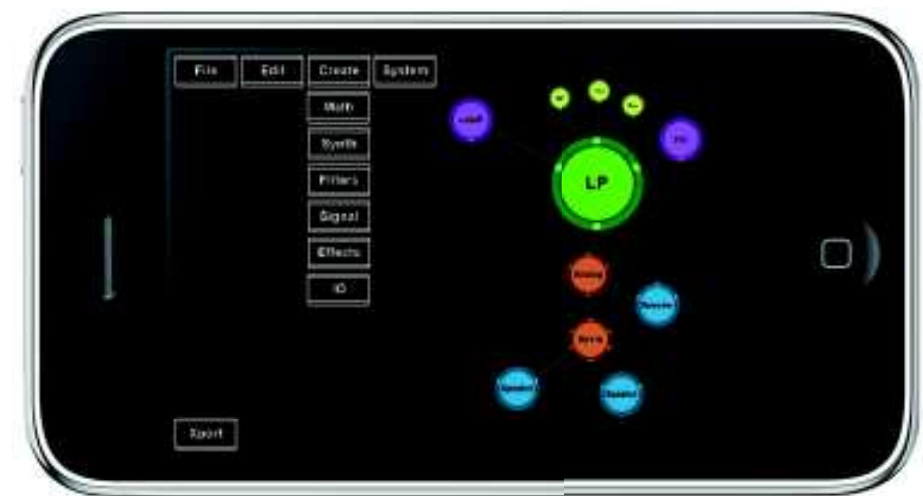
Chris Wolfe Jasuto £0.59

Format iPhone/iPod Touch app
Contact chris@jasuto.com
Web www.jasuto.com

Jasuto, its developer claims, is the first modular synth for the iPhone/iPod Touch. Think 'Reaktor Mobile' and you're getting there, though of course, this is far simpler. Being on the iPhone/iPod Touch, you get to use your fingers rather than a mouse and pointer, although there is a free VST plug-in version for your desktop too - see p18 the lowdown on that.

So what you have here is a lovely-looking but slightly alien setup. View some of the excellent videos on the website, though, and you'll soon get your head around it, as well as discover how filthy Jasuto can sound! You can create your own synth within a Scene (of which eight examples are provided) using various components, called Nodes. Starting from scratch, you'll need a speaker Node in order to hear the results and a source Node, which can be one of six oscillator types: Sin, Tri, Saw, LFO, Square and Noise.

The Nodes connect (and the signal flows) from top to bottom and they link to one another via user definable inputs and outputs so you can



have, say, three oscillators connected to one speaker for really fat, layered sounds.

Things get really interesting when you insert effects or a filter into the signal path - place a filter betwixt synth and speaker, for example, and control the sound with your fingers by connecting and moving filter and resonance Nodes.

All movements can be easily recorded and looped, and a keyboard screen lets you play

while a sequencer enables the recording of 16 steps of note information, so you can create simple riffs with relative ease.

Once you get your head around the concept, you'll grow to love Jasuto. Yes, it is a mite fiddly and, if you work with complex patches, you do get the occasional audio dropout but, hey, as an introductory offer, it's just 59p, which is a phenomenal deal! Get it now.

9/10

Soundware round-up

Big Fish Audio Chill 2 £58

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

This title offers 30 chilled-out urban construction kits that are frankly weak and lacking authenticity. The loop tempos range from 67bpm to 140bpm. Unfortunately, they seem to have been constructed using cheap, badly recorded sounds, with horrible EQ to boot; and some of the kits are even badly timed. You have to wonder what kind of monitors were used during the production of this library, and the whole thing sounds like it was rushed together. The drum tracks haven't been broken down for all of the kits, and of those that have, not all of the drum hits are included in the relevant folder.

4/10



Tekniks Ghetto Grooves 3 £43.99

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com
Format WAV, REX, Apple Loops, EXS24, NN-XT, Kontakt

Get past this title's distracting packaging and you'll find 30 RnB construction kits, ranging in tempo from 75bpm to 140bpm - or so they're labelled. On closer inspection, the tempo markings aren't all correct, which is extra annoying because the individual loop samples have the wrong tempos marked on them, not just the full mixes. Although there are some nice musical ideas scattered about, the emphasis seems to be more towards hip-hop, not a diverse representation of RnB, and it's certainly not authentic. You'll find lots of cheap-sounding synth patches in the kits, including badly emulated acoustic instruments that sound amateur.

5/10



Loopmasters DOWNLOAD Jody Wisternoff Future House £25

Contact info@loopmasters.com
Web www.loopmasters.com
Format WAV, ACID WAV, REX2, Reason Refill, Live Pack, Apple Loops, HALion, Kontakt, EXS, SFZ, Stylus RMX, NN-XT

House producer Jody Wisternoff shows off his skills in this solid collection of filthy house samples. There are some really nice dirty bass hits, including some classic old school house sounds. There's a very varied collection of drum hits, too, mostly very useable; instrument chords, which are very retro for a title such as this, but welcome nonetheless; an SFX folder full of useful little fillers; and stab hits and drum loops that also have something of a retro feel. All loops run at a house-friendly 126bpm.

7/10



Zero-G Progressive House £40

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com
Format WAV, Apple Loops, AIFF, ACID WAV, REX2, RMX, EXS24, Kontakt, NN-XT

This one is for the producer serious about their house music, offering 560 unique 24-bit samples. The loops are split into three tempos - 122, 125 and 127bpm - and cover basslines, beats, and synth lines. There are also FX samples in the same three tempos as well as a separate category for FX with no particular rhythm - they're all extremely atmospheric and capture that essential progressive vibe that will spark your inspiration. There are individual hits, too - we found the crashes to be particularly special, although the solid kick drums and tight hi-hats are sure to be popular.

9/10

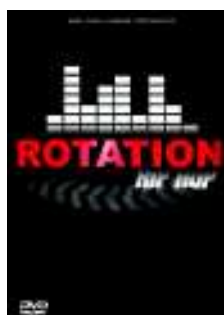


Big Fish Audio Rotation Hip Hop £58

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

Another construction kit title from Big Fish Audio, this one has 39 of 'em, labelled by key and tempo, ranging from 71bpm to 120bpm, with drum hit samples in a separate folder for your convenience. The modern hip-hop style is well represented, with lots of different flavours and influences. The construction kits are made up of electronic drums, lots of synths and a few keyboard instruments, including clichés such as stabby, marcato strings. While all the samples are clean enough, they can be on the dull side, so you might want to mix them up with sounds from other sources. The quality isn't amazing and the sounds are uninventive, but there are some inspiring grooves here.

6/10



Sounds Of Revolution Kick Free Revolution €85

Contact via website
Web www.mutekki-media.de
Format Apple Loops, AIFF, EXS24, Kontakt, REX, RMX, WAV

Sound design whiz Oliver Schmitt returns to Mutekki Media, responding to user requests for more of the kick-free drum patterns that cropped up on his previous titles. The idea is that with very little low-end, these 680 dance-based loops are easy to integrate into your own drum mixes. All loops are at 127bpm, so it would seem the emphasis is on house music, and there are three categories: Experimental has strange loops with lots of quirky hits and FX; Main contains more typical loops, very up to date and easy to adapt to many styles; Perc covers more realistic percussion, such as congas and bongos. This title isn't as exceptional as Schmitt's previous output, but it is highly usable.

8/10



Loopmasters **DOWNLOAD**
Trance Fragments £25

Contact info@loopmasters.com
 Web www.loopmasters.com
 Format Acid Wav, Rex2, Apple Loops, HALion, Kontakt, EXS, SFZ and NN-XT



Aimed at the psychedelic end of trance, this library features beats, percussion loops, basslines, lead loops, sound effects and multisamples. No individual drum sounds are provided, so this isn't exactly a one-stop shop for trance productions, but the loops are serviceable and the trance melody MIDI files are a nice touch.

There are more complete trance libraries out there, and Trance Fragments would hold up better if it included more one-shot sounds. Still, if you're in need of loops, then you'll find it does a good job of providing them.

7/10

Loopmasters **DOWNLOAD**
2020 Vision Deep Tech House & Techno £35

Contact info@loopmasters.com
 Web www.loopmasters.com
 Format Acid Wav, Rex2, Apple Loops, HALion, Kontakt, EXS, SFZ and NN-XT



From the UK house label comes this collection of hits, loops and sampler patches. The flavour is electro-tinged and pretty banging for the most part, so if you're expecting chilled out techno sounds, you might be in for a shock. As well as the usual hits, beats and basslines, there are also groove loops that combine beats with musical elements, and can provide a handy starting point for beginners. There are also a few surprises like vocal snippets and piano chords, making 2020 Vision Deep Tech House & Techno suitable for those after a slightly heavier take on the house sound.

8/10

Organic Loops **DOWNLOAD**
Acoustic Matter £25

Contact info@loopmasters.com
 Web www.loopmasters.com
 Format Acid Wav, Apple Loops, RX2



A collection of instrument loops from session musicians, Acoustic Matter covers bass, congas, drums, strings and guitars both electric and acoustic. bpm-wise, they lie in the 70-120 range, and stylistically, everything is very smooth and inoffensive. Some of the content is so sickly sweet that it wouldn't sound out of place in a TV commercial, but there's more tasteful stuff on offer too, and the recording and playing are top notch. If you want versatile, easy-on-the-ears instrument loops, then Acoustic Matter is worthy of your time and money.

8/10

Bela D Media
Retro Flute £110

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
 Web www.timespace.com
 Format Kontakt 2 / 3



This instrument for Kontakt 2 and 3 is designed to bring the sound of the flute to your DAW. The package includes but a single patch, which uses rather a lot of keyswitches to give the user enormous control over the sound of the flute.

Flutters, trills, runs, staccato and even sung articulations are available, and there's an alternate version of the patch included that uses Kontakt's Time Machine mode to alter the speed of playback.

Retro Flute is complex, isn't cheap, and you'll need to have a copy of Kontakt 2 or 3 to use it, but it's the most sophisticated virtual flute we've seen thus far, and the sound quality is tops.

8/10

Puremagnetik **DOWNLOAD**
Vintage Organs Vol. 1 \$12

Contact info@puremagnetik.com
 Web www.puremagnetik.com
 Format Live Pack, Kontakt, EXS24



Multisampled from two 60s Ace Tone electric organs - the GT7 and Phenix Top-4 - Vintage Organs Volume 1 supplies six retro instrument patches. The Kontakt and Live versions emulate the originals' ability to layer up harmonics with drawbars and combine flute, organ, reed and string tones. The package seems authentic enough and the GT7's virtual drawbar controls are great. However, the lack of a velocity-sensitive option is a downer, especially when the lower notes of the GT7 patches produce such a horribly overbearing sine tone, the level of which can't be adjusted. One for unfussy organ lovers only.

5/10

Dusted William Sounds
Dirty Dose \$30 **DOWNLOAD**

Contact derikw@gmail.com
 Web www.dustedwilliamsounds.com
 Format WAV/MIDI/SFZ/Guru/Battery 3/Live



Dusted William's lo-fi odyssey features sound from the Atari 2600 console, Commodore 64 microcomputer and Tama Techstar electronic drum kit, all recorded onto 2" tape. While many of the Atari and Commodore samples don't sound much like their designated category (eg, some of the 'snare' are really just FX hits), they're pleasing enough, and some are actually pretty damned good. The Techstar delivers punchy kick and percussion sounds too, and overall, Dirty Dose is a fresh take on the well-worn lo-fi theme. The inclusion of MIDI files and presets for Guru, Battery and Live makes this a good value pack.

8/10