



Synapse Audio Dune 3

£139

PC MAC

This fully paid-up member of the exclusive supersynth club looks and sounds better than ever with its latest full version update

> Scoring 10/10 in **cm207** (2014), the second version of Synapse Audio's Dune synth was a landmark virtual instrument, turning what had previously been a decent virtual analogue/wavetable synth into a mainroom-filling powerhouse. While it's apparent at first glance that Dune 3 (VST/AU/AAX) doesn't mark quite as sweeping and profound a revision as its predecessor did, there's still plenty of good, meaningful new stuff here for experienced users and newcomers alike to sink their teeth into. Before we get to all that, though, a quick recap is in order.

A three-oscillator synth with superb built-in effects, arpeggiation and sequencing, Dune's two headline features are the ability to independently set Oscillators 1 and 2 to Virtual Analogue, Wavetable or (rather basic) FM mode, and the incredible number of unison voices it's capable of generating: up to 8320 when running 32 stacked oscillators each in the Oscillator 1 and

2 blocks, and eight global unison voices, at 16-voice polyphony. The oscillators feed into a zero-delay feedback filter with various onboard distortion and second-stage filtering FX, and the overall sound of the thing is big, beefy, glamorous and supremely versatile. In one sense, it's a workhorse, delivering the full spectrum of 'static' and sequenced sounds, and

"In one sense, it's a workhorse, and in another, it's a character instrument with its own sound"

in another, it's a character instrument with a sound very much its own.

Fundamentals summarised, then, let's move on to what's new in Dune 3...

Under the 'table

Dune 2 included a solid array of prefab wavetables, and not only does v3 almost double their number to 47, but it also introduces a full-on Wavetable Editor. Here, the currently selected waveform in the wavetable can be shaped freehand or using Line and Segment drawing tools, and manipulated in terms of harmonic (partial) volume and phase in the Additive Editor mode. Samples can be converted to wavetables, either split into a specified number of waveforms, or spread across as many as their length dictates, up to the maximum of 256. Selecting the Morph function creates a smooth transition through the wavetable from first wave to last, and other

“Dune 3 could never have been as radical an overhaul as Dune 2 was of Dune, but this is still a worthy update”

waveform operations include DC offset removal, normalising, inversion and reversal. There's also a Formula field for generating waveforms via mathematical function input, and wavetables can be exported in WAV or Dune 3's WT format.

Also new for the oscillators is the Swarm stack type. This is a supersaw with random pitch modulation of each oscillator in the stack, yielding a dense, wildly animated signal that sounds wicked on its own and makes for a viable alternative to high counts in other stack types when system resources are running low.

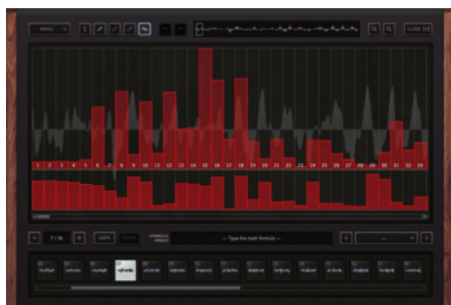
Fresh filter

Another major architectural upgrade has been implemented in the filter section, which now houses two filters and an insert effect. The filters are blended with the Balance knob, and can be routed in parallel or series, with the effect inserted before, in between or after them in serial mode.

There are also a ton of extra filter modes – including low-pass emulations of the Roland JP-08 and Alpha Juno, and CEM 3372, as well as a 36/60dB Brickwall, the 12/24dB Moog ladder from Dune's sister synth The Legend, and a Deep Notch – plus new Formant, filter, Vowel filter, Phaser and Hard Foldback filter effects.

While we're on a frequency-shaping tip, Dune 3's EQ effect expands on the simple three-band (low/high shelves, parametric mid) design of old with the addition of a second parametric band, 12/24/36/48dB low- and high-cut filters, and a graphical editor for node-dragging adjustment of the shelving and parametric bands. Other changes in the effects department are summarised in *Epic effects*.

That's the standout improvements in Dune 3 covered, but a few of the less attention-grabbing tweaks are worth mentioning, too. For starters, you can now switch between two independent arpeggiators, and toggle playback with a foot pedal or other controller via the new Arp Hold modulation target. Then there's the Alternate mod source, for jumping target



Adjust the volume and phase of partials in your waveforms with the Wavetable Editor's Additive mode



The new Shimmer Hall and Shimmer Room reverbs use pitchshifting

Epic effects

The EQ may have seen the most obvious improvement among Dune's effects for v3, but every one of the synth's seven signal processing modules has been blessed with new algorithms and modes.

The Delay gets six further types, taking the total to 11. Among them, L-C-R alternates echoes between left, right and centre, Filtered incorporates a filter, and Swing lets you dial in offset for every other echo.

The Reverb module's new Shimmer Hall and Shimmer Room algorithms are able to employ pitchshifting for strange harmonic ambiances, while Cathedral and Studio Room provide users with

extreme spatial options at both ends of the size scale.

The Chorus and Phaser effects are bolstered by a range of new Roland-inspired models – specifically, the Dimension-D and JP-8000 (Chorus and Flanger, with Rate and filter parameters), and the Boss PH-2 Super Phaser pedal.

Unusual in a synth, the Opto Compressor mode is ripe for experimentation with its languid attack. And the already well-stocked Distortion module can now serve up Fuzz Face and 'Dirt' stompbox flavours, and a tasty alternative to bitcrushing with the Dynacrush algorithm.

parameters between positive and negative values; a pink noise option for the noise generator; presets for the MSEGs; four GUI resolutions, from tiny to enormous; unlimited undo/redo, even across patch changes; and a brickwall limiter on the output.

Sand storm

While, as suggested earlier, Dune 3 could never have been as radical an overhaul of Dune 2 as Dune 2 was of Dune, this is still a thoroughly worthy update to one of the finest softsynths around. The Swarm oscillator, new filter features and enhanced effects make front-panel programming more flexible than ever, and the Wavetable Editor gives Dune parity with the likes of Serum and Thorn when it comes to wave design. The Wavetable Editor is quite laggy and slow to respond to mouse input (on our test 2018 MacBook Pro, at any rate), however. Hopefully this will be improved in a patch.

If we had to choose a single instrument to cover all our synthesis needs without making compromises in any of them, Dune 3 would be towards the top of the shortlist. It's easy and enjoyable to use, up there with the very best sonically, and – if you're buying it for the first time, at least – great value for money. **cm**

Web synapse-audio.com

Alternatively

Xfer Records Serum
cm213 » 10/10 » \$189

Mindblowing wavetable synth with incredible effects, deep modulation and so much more

u-he Diva
cm178 » 10/10 » £138

Semi-modular synth with gorgeous modelled oscillators and zero-delay feedback filters

Verdict

For Wavetable editing!

Dual filter with new models and FX
Sweeping effects improvements
Swarm stacking mode

Against \$79 upgrade is a little pricey

FM is still very rudimentary
Wavetable Editor is laggy

There's always room for improvement, it would seem, as one of the biggest, baddest synths around hits a new high. Essential

10/10