cm mini reviews

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

Toontrack
Custom & Vintage SDX £119

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com
Format SDX for Superior Drummer 2

Originally for the old DFH engine, C&V is now reborn in the superior SDX format. The drums used are not your typical big-name brands – instead, you get old-schoolers like Slingerland and Ludwig alongside modern-day desirables from Noble & Cooley and Craviotto, all recorded at London's 2kHz studio using a Beatles-tastic EMI TG console.

There are a whopping 20 snares, including a few damped versions and high/low tunings, and bona fide legends like a Ludwig Supraphonic and pre-war Black Beauty. There are four tom positions, with five sets, with the small, single-ply Noble & Cooley Star Series and rubbery, tubby Slingerland Studio King set being particularly characterful. The six kicks are similarly beefy and rotund. There are 35 cymbals and seven sets of hats, from Zildjian, Paiste and Istanbul Agop.

The overall sound is big, round and appropriately 'loose', with that subtle, smoky darkness that we associate with a vintage tone. C&V SDX hits the mark, then, especially for styles like ballsy rock, soul, jazz/big band, country, etc.

8/10

DanceMIDISamples
DMS Dimension £50

Contact via website
Web www.dancemidisamples.com
Format PC VST, SF2

This trance-specific VST ROMpler for PC sports 1.2GB of euphoric content (all supplied in SF2 format too). You get amp and filter envelopes, reverb and delay. Most sounds are dual-layered, with controls to set the balance.

There are 49 pads, 41 leads, 10 hoovers, 22 basses, four pianos, and two FX banks (bangs, whooshes, etc). There's a lot of detuned sawtooth action going on with the pads – more variety and evolving sounds would've been good here. The leads are more interesting, but be aware that there's no monophonic mode (and no glide). The tight and punchy basses and cutting pianos, meanwhile, are highlights. The overall tonality is a touch brash and bright, and the internal reverb is best disabled and an external one used. We'd have liked more sounds that leverage the sample-based format, but overall this is a decent buy for aspiring trance producers.

7/10

Fixed Noise
Rhythm Objekt £128

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com
Format PC/Mac, VST/AU/RTAS

Producer Jimmy Edgar has crafted an intriguing genre-hopping collection of "erotic electro" sounds, powered by the ubiquitous Kontakt Player. It's packed with heavily tweaked granular-sounding FX, synth chords, electronica-style clicky drums and snarling analogue basses.

The "erotic" tag might be a tad silly, but some of the "sexed-up" effects are really quite striking: synth moans and groans, coupled with nasty-sounding vocals! In fact, it's made up of an odd mix of brilliantly versatile sounds – such as the fantastic drum loops, one-shots and innovative FX – and uninspired, repetitive stuff. There are far too many minor chord stabs and samey bass loops, for example, and these particularly grate in the absence of a good selection of pad sounds or multisampled bass patches.

Having said that, the overall production quality is high, and if you're writing electronica-infused pop, then this could be a godsend. It's slightly pricey for what you get, but the greatness of the drums helps to tip the balance.

7/10

Soundware round-up

Dark Side of the Tune DOWNLOAD
Queen's English $30

Contact info@darksideofthetune.com
Web www.darksideofthetune.com
Format WAV

Pay attention, you miserable worm: Queen's English consists of 176 spoken-word stereo WAVs performed by plummy-voiced dominatrix Miss T, ranging from kinky commands to, er, food-oriented innuendos. You like that, don't you? Well, you shouldn't, because once you get past the barking, the boring and the badly delivered, there's not a lot left. The recording quality is sub-optimal, all needlessly in stereo, with the mic position audibly changing from sample to sample. There's some over-zealous trimming, too, resulting in certain orations finishing a little, um, prematurely. Overall, we think DSOTT need a good spanking for this.

4/10

Loopmasters DOWNLOAD
Marshall Jefferson House Generation Vol 2 £25

Contact info@loopmasters.com
Web www.loopmasters.com
Format WAV, REX2

Loopmasters return with a second instalment of this collection from house legend Jefferson. There's a good selection of basic elements like bass and drum loops, but also some more unusual material, such as the horn and synth loops by nu-jazz musician Onyx Ashanti. This is very much a classic house pack: modern, chunky percussion and particularly powerful sounds are generally absent. As long as you're prepared to do your own layering and processing, though, there are some decent sources to work with here.

7/10

Producer Loops DOWNLOAD
Classic Bollywood £70

Contact info@loopmasters.com
Web www.loopmasters.com
Format WAV, AIFF, Acid WAV, Apple Loops, ReFill, REX, Stylus RMX

This sample pack is an attempt at capturing the "true sound of Bollywood movies" and was recorded by composer Gaurav Dayal. Right from the get-go, you're confronted with very chunky percussive dholak loops, flute stabs and pleasingly aggressive, sweeping string sections. There's also a host of unusual instrumental and vocal lines that could fit into pretty much any genre of music: don't underestimate the adaptability of these samples, despite the overt Bollywood branding. The pack is construction kit-oriented, though we think it could've been stronger with a focus on simply providing a standalone loop library. Nevertheless, this is a very interesting collection.

8/10
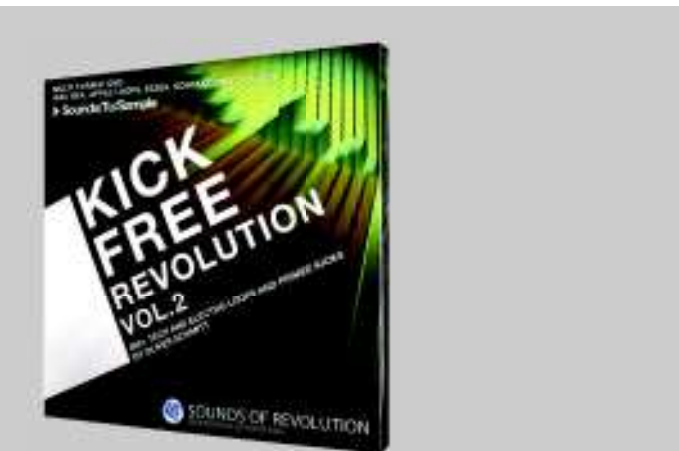
Sounds of Revolution DOWNLOAD
Kick Free Revolution Vol 2 €47

Contact via website
Web www.sounds-of-revolution.com
Format WAV

Now we're talking! SOR's Oliver Schmitt returns with yet another impeccable pack for dance musicians. This library provides over 500 percussive loops for all four-to-the-floor dance genres: minimal, electro, trance and house of any flavour will benefit from this collection of glitchy, clicky, processed joy, categorised according to their general style. The clever bit is that all loops are programmed from scratch, but come sans kick drum. Thus it's easy to use them in your productions and drop your own kicks in there (70 bonus kick drums are thrown in too). We could even imagine some of these loops working their way into DnB and breaks tunes: the superior production quality means that you'll be satisfied even if you just grab a short section of each loop. This one is just shy of classic status – it's not quite unique enough for that – but that's certainly not to disrecommend it in any way.

9/10

MyLoops DOWNLOAD
Ultimate FX Vol 1 €30

Contact via website
Web www.myloops.net
Format WAV

This 460-sound FX library is aimed squarely at the dance market. You've got your decidedly 1996-era-Time+Space big major pads; 'risers' and 'descenders'; and stabs, booms and crashes. There are also some tonal noises, and a folder full of melodic loops that you may or may not have any use for. As alluded to, the stylistic angle of the pack isn't especially contemporary; however, the production quality is good, everything is competently put together, and there are no clangers. Our only grumble on the technical front is that it would've been good to have dry versions of some of the delayed/reverbed noises. Ultimate FX Vol 1 is somewhat reminiscent of a cheese sandwich: it's adequate enough, but you really end up wishing you'd got some meat in there as well.

7/10

Loopmasters DOWNLOAD
Dom Kane Tech House Producer Vol 2 £25
Contact info@loopmasters.com
Web www.loopmasters.com
Format WAV, REX2

Another very-much-OK pack from Loopmasters, lacking a little in the sparkle and excitement departments. We're reviewing the download version, which contains WAV and REX2 files only, but many other formats are available in the physical version. It's a straight-up tech house pack at bottom, and the expected percussion loops, glitchy FX and thumpy bass patches are all there. A greater focus on usability – for instance, fewer bass multis and pointless "groove loops", plus more percussion and innovative noises – could've made this pack more vital. The quality level is high, but there's too much showing-off and not enough punch.

7/10

Big Fish
Funk Soul Horns £67
Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com
Format WAV, Acid WAV, Apple Loops, REX, Stylus RMX

This DVD features a six-piece horn section (two trumpets, trombone, alto, tenor and baritone saxes) within ten loop-based construction kits. These contain anywhere between 13 and 24 individual loops, ranging from one to eight bars long, and each comes as a mixed blend and individual instruments. You'll also find a useful folder of individual per-kit licks, bringing the loop total to over 2100. Sonically, this set is both consistent and well played, and stylistically the title tells you everything you need to know. In short, anyone making soul- and disco-influenced club music will find good use for this excellent library.

9/10

Prime Loops DOWNLOAD
Guitar Anthology (Combo Pack) £33
Contact info@primeloops.com
Web www.primeloops.com
Format WAV, Apple Loops, Live, Akai MPC

This contains five Prime Loops guitar packs rolled into one multi-genre bundle. Each pack – Acoustic, Funk, Indie, Jazz and Rock – features 50 loops played on a variety of instruments, including Les Pauls, Stratocasters and various acoustics. The loops vary in length from one to eight bars, and include short licks, as well as more complex patterns. To round things off, they've also included a set of clean and distorted single chords. This library covers a lot of ground, then, making it a great resource for quick results. But although it's sonically on the money, the lack of detail may frustrate some.

8/10

Best Service
Black Pearl £89
Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com
Format WAV, Acid WAV, REX2, HALion, Battery 3, Soundfont, NN-XT

If the sounds of producers such as Timbaland, Swiss Beatz and Darkchild float your boat, then Black Pearl is aimed squarely at you. Featuring 35 construction kits of loops and single hits (over 1GB in total), this set goes beyond the typical crisp beats and tough bass sounds to include various kit-specific elements, such as guitars, synths, keyboards and sound effects. Both the loop programming and processed sounds are excellent, with styles ranging from smooth ballads to up-tempo lurchers. If your urban sounds need an update, check this set out.

10/10

Best Service
Accordions £153
Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com
Format Kontakt 3/4
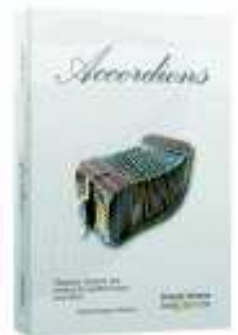
Produced by Eduardo Tarilonte, this 2.7GB library comprises five 41-key accordions (two musettes, one bassoon, a piccolo and one for bass chords only), a concertina, a bandoneon, and a bonus Steirische Harmonika. The interface has been tailored to the job at hand, including CC-mapped convolution reverb and volume (swell) settings. You'll also find various instrument-specific 'noise' parameters (key, release, bellows and so on). In practice, these elements, plus the three velocity layers and three round-robin alternatives, deliver very playable, lifelike results.

9/10

Puremagnetik DOWNLOAD
PM Grand $12
Contact info@puremagnetik.com
Web www.puremagnetik.com
Format Live, Kontakt 3/4, Logic

Want a multisampled Yamaha Conservatory Grand that won't eat up your RAM? Well, here you go. This one was recorded using a combination of X/Y close mics and a spaced pair of omnis. The sample set has been reduced to a reasonable 567MB footprint, and also includes 50 further looped clips (116MB). In typical Puremagnetik style, they've made good use of the raw material to provide nine sampler patches, including a backwards piano and infinite looped option, and authenticity is improved by additional key release and pedal resonance samples. With only three velocity layers, it's no surprise that PM Grand doesn't break any realism records, but we're very impressed by the overall sound and usability of this super-affordable pack. **cm**

8/10