



WHAT IS IT?

A virtual studio with built-in instruments, effects, MIDI, audio recording and sample manipulation tools.

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Value for money
- 2 Plug-in bridging options
- 3 New patcher

PRICING

- FL Studio Express Edition (download) - \$49
- FL Studio Fruity Edition (boxed) - £99
- FL Studio Producer Edition (boxed) - £199
- FL Studio Signature Bundle (boxed) - £299



Image Line FL Studio 10 | £299

FL Studio has just seen an update to double-digits. **Bruce Aisher** takes a look at the latest incarnation of this ever-evolving system and wonders what it has up its sleeve this time around

To many seasoned producers, Image Line's name is still associated with the 'Fruity Loops' moniker – a well-regarded beat creation and programming tool from roughly 12 years ago. However, along the way and as new features were added, the program developed into a fully-fledged DAW. In other words, its functionality has extended into the realms of integrated multi-track audio, MIDI and plug-in technology. However, despite this there

are signs of the original 'Fruity' past in the DNA of FL Studio, but this shouldn't be seen as a bad thing. Essentially, FL Studio offers pattern or track-based sequencing via a step sequencer or piano roll editor using built-in and third-party hosted plug-ins. Check out the box on page 98 for more information on the various FL flavours that are available, and what is included with each version. The last time I looked at FL Studio was last summer, with the arrival of the

FL9.5 public beta. This brought with it a host of new features, ultimately paving the way for the move to version 10.0.0 that sits before me right now.

Give me some juice...

So that brings us to the features that will be new to those moving from FL9 to 10, and who hadn't dared delve into the world of public beta-testing. In general terms, we get 64-bit plug-in support, as the plug-in Wrapper now detects the presence of 64-bit versions and automatically opens them in 'bridged' mode. Interestingly, FL Studio also support 32-bit bridging.

In the 32-bit Operating Systems, such as Windows XP, the total memory each application (and by implication all the plug-ins that sit inside it) can use is limited and inflexible. Bridging solves some of these issues, by allowing plug-ins to use their own memory space, which is then 'bridged' back to the main application.

The significance of this for most users is in when using sample-based plug-ins that eat-up large chunks of available RAM – now you should be able to run more of them with less problems. This improved use of memory allows plug-ins to use 2GB (in a 32-bit OS) and up to 192GB in a 64-bit environment. FL Studio now also uses a

'Keep on Disk' option for Audio Clips & Sampler Channels that allows mapping of these to separate memory space.

Sticking to performance issues, the Audio preferences have been updated and offer two further options that might improve CPU load with some ASIO drivers ('Mix in bufferswitch' and 'Triple buffer'). These appear to offer an extra layer of protection between the program and soundcard drivers, reducing glitching and possible drop-outs.

It should also be noted that plug-in delay compensation for a new project is now fully automatic by default.

Play it again Sam...

There have been some modest, but useful, changes to the mixer section. A 'Wide Tracks' option makes for much easier navigation and editing of the mixer surface, while a 'Waveform' meter option provides a useful alternative way of viewing each track's audio via downwardly-scrolling waveform displays.

The Playlist area of FL Studio has been revised, allowing the resizing of track heights (this addition certainly helps when more detailed editing is required, particularly with automation

Newtone and Pitcher Plug-ins

The update introduces two new optional pitch manipulation plug-ins for use within FL.

Pitcher is a real-time pitch-correction plug-in in the manner of Antares Autotune, but with a few additional features. For simple pitch correction, automatic mode can be used, with the option of setting the scale, key or notes to avoid. MIDI mode allows for external control of pitch transposition, with a 'harmonize' mode capable of producing four-part harmonies. The correction speed setting allows for the plug-in's use a 'special' effect, while various formant options determine how



much the timbre changes with extreme values.

Newtone takes its cue from software such as Celemony's Melodyne or zplane's vielklang. This allows audio clips to be dragged from the playlist and manipulated on a note-by-note basis. The plug-in allows the user to adjust volume, pitch,

pitch variation (vibrato) and formant elements individually against a standard piano-roll style grid. In fact pitch and volume adjustments can be made for the whole note as well as the user-definable ramp-in and ramp-out sections. The results can even be output to a MIDI file.

and the number of mouse and modifier options have been increased for improved copying, moving and duplication of elements.

has seen some significant changes, although many of these might not be immediately obvious and relate to the cycling, selection, zooming and

rescaling of notes and clips.

Usefully, Piano Roll and Playlist sync has now been added – meaning that editing in the Piano Roll while in Song mode will

Markers have been expanded to include Live Playlist types that allow for looping, pausing and skipping

work), the locking of track heights and locking of tracks to clips. A new playback tool allows the preview / auditioning of Audio and Pattern Clips,

Markers have been expanded to include Live Playlist marker types that allow for real-time looping, pausing and skipping. Similarly the Piano Roll editor

also move the Playlist transport. Additionally, Piano Rolls may now be exported to a standard notated musical score in PDF format.



There have been some modest changes to the FL Studio mixer section

SPECS

System Requirements

PC: Windows: 2GHz AMD or Intel Pentium 3 compatible CPU (with full SSE1 support), Windows 7, Vista, XP/2000 (32- & 64-bit), 1GB RAM, 1GB free hard disk space + Windows-compatible soundcard with DirectSound drivers. ASIO drivers are required for audio recording. FL installer comes with generic Asio4All for soundcards that do not provide ASIO drivers.

Mac: Intel Mac with Boot Camp (running XP or Vista) - or another virtualisation environment.

ALTERNATIVES



Ableton Live 8

£299

A well-rounded package that is similar to FL Studio in many respects. Definitely the choice for those also involved in live performance or processing.

ableton.com



Propellerhead Record Reason Duo

£369

The pairing of Reason and Record makes for a formidable production system that is also easy to use. Not cheap in comparison to FL10, but a strong contender and solid performer.

propellerheads.se



LMMS

Free (Open Source)

An interesting, and free, production environment available for Linux and Windows systems that sits in a similar territory to FL Studio, but with perhaps less depth or finesse.

lms.sourceforge.net

Freshly picked...

One of the most interesting new features in FL Studio 10 is Patcher. Patcher is a great idea, in that it allows you to create your own instrument and/or effect plug-in chains in flexible ways (serial, parallel etc) with the ability to add your own control parameters – a bit like a modular plug-in editor. Once you've constructed your original chains, they can be loaded into different tracks or projects in one go. This is certainly the future of DAWs, and it is interesting and encouraging for FL users to see Image Line getting there early on.

Less exciting, though definitely a useful bonus, is the new Visualizer, which is based on the Open Source ZGameEditor, an integrated development environment for creating games, demos and screensavers. Of genuine interest were the two new pitch manipulation plug-ins Newton and Pitcher, which although not free are, at the time of writing, available via a 'pay

Juice In Many Flavours...

Image Line allow potential users to download a fully featured demo version that allows you to create, save and export tracks. However, projects saved in demo mode will only

open fully once all the elements used have been registered. For those of you who are unsure of which version to go for, there is a FL Studio Edition Choice Wizard on

the website that will guide you to the version best suited to your music-making needs (<http://bit.ly/gmUC3S>). FL Studio comes in four different flavours so try it out.

to the software, but this doesn't appear to be a cheap ploy to lure in unsuspecting customers, as they release major new version once every year or so, and provide a stream of updates in between. This does make the cost of ownership lower than many DAWs over time, and is also helped by the highly competitive pricing.

One interesting aspect to all this is that IL have a full software update history on their website extending back to the original (and unreleased) Fruity Loops 1.0. This is unusual, but to be admired in a world where many

Studio to compete with other DAWs head-to-head, and the new playlist and mixer features do help in this regard, as does the support of VST3 plug-ins and plug-in bridging.

The Patcher, takes things in an interesting direction in processing terms, and is something that I imagine other DAW users would like to see added to their software of choice. The ZGameEditor Visualizer is fun, adds some interesting possibilities for those keen on uploading tracks to YouTube or similar sites. The Newton and Pitcher plug-ins, although not free, do mean

FL Studio is a great software, that in some areas is way ahead of the more mainstream competition

that FL Studio now potentially offers a strong and up-to-date range of plug-in options. My main area of reservation is still in the mixer section, but it

what you think they're worth' offer. Check the box on the previous page for more information.

Concentrated or freshly-squeezed?

Image Line make a big play of the fact that once you buy FL Studio you are entitled to unlimited life-time updates

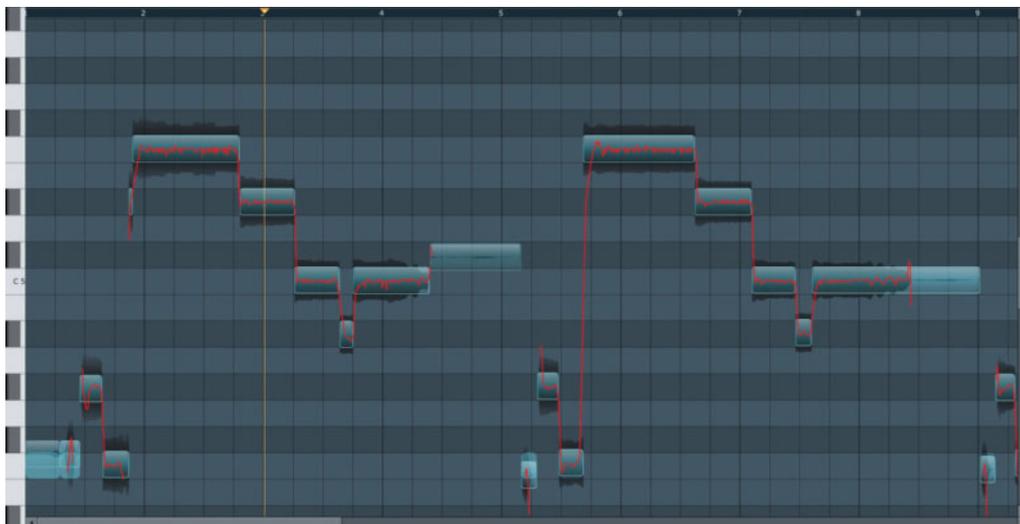
manufacturers could do better in the support and communication stakes.

So, where does that leave us in the big scheme of things. FL Studio offers increasingly more bang for the buck, and Image Line have seem to make the effort to respond to user requests. Many of the recent changes, quite rightly, have focussed on attempting to allow FL

operates work well, once you have adjusted to its workflow.

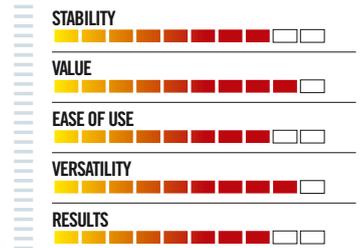
As always the great appeal of FL Studio is the price. With the lowliest version costing only \$49, it is possible to scale the software to your requirements. On the downside, FL Studio is PC-only, which restricts its use in some ways, although Apple Mac users tend to be less price-sensitive, so this could be overstated.

Ultimately, FL Studio is a great piece of software, that in some areas is way ahead of the more mainstream and 'industry-standard' competition. **FM**



FL Studio 10's new Newton allows you to manipulate audio on a note-by-note basis

FutureMusic VERDICT



A solid contender for any budding producer's affections, that offers plenty of bang for the buck.