ON THE DVD

WHAT IS IT?

Sample-based acoustic drum software.

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

1 Fully featured acoustic drum sampler
2 Huge library of sounds
3 Built-in Sonalksis effects

FutureMusic

Platinum Award

Toontrack Superior Drummer 2.0 | £215

Superior returns with a friendlier user interface and even more features. *Greg Scarth* feels the Funk

SPECS

Supported technology: AU, RTAS and VST

System requirements
PC: Windows XP or Vista, Pentium IV/Athlon 1.8GHz with 1GB RAM, 25GB free hard disk space (for full install), DVD drive.
Mac: OS X (10.4 or higher), Dual G4 1.25GHz with 1GB of RAM, 25GB free hard disk space, DVD drive.

Where many drum samplers focus on electronic sounds and reproducing the synthesized sounds of classic drum machines, Superior Drummer 2.0 (aka S2.0) is entirely based on samples of acoustic drums and the emphasis is definitely on Funk, Jazz and Rock sounds. The lengthy installation process quickly makes it apparent that S2.0 draws from a staggeringly large library of superbly recorded samples in order to recreate the subtleties of a live studio drum recording.

Construct

The standard view of the intuitive S2.0 interface, based around an image of a drum kit, takes no time at all to get used to and allows you to construct your own kit, choosing a specific drum for each position. If the graphical style doesn't appeal to you there's also a grid-based 'classic' view, which may be more familiar for users of the original dfh Superior or the likes of NI Battery. The 24-bit samples are recorded using

well-known drums, so you'll be able to take your pick from various GMS toms and kicks, Sabian cymbals and a mixture of Ludwig, GMS, Rogers and Slingerland snares.

All classic stuff, plus you can choose whether they're hit with sticks, brushes, rods or felt beaters. A full install will give you seven snares, three kicks, three hi-hats and a whole heap of toms and cymbals to choose from but Toontracks also offer expansion packs if you feel the need to add to the selection. If the sound still isn't right, the ADSR curve of each drum can be manually adjusted.

Composing drum parts using S2.0 is nice and straightforward. Each drum hit can be assigned to a different MIDI note and of course everything's velocity sensitive so your patterns will have realistic variations in expression. There are also multiple articulations for each drum, each of which can also be assigned to a different note. For example, there are 16 different ways to 'hit' your hi-hat, from tightly closed to open and everything in between. It's reassuring to see that there's also a

degree of smartness to the sample playback here – hitting a closed hi-hat, for instance, will instantly mute the sound of an open hi-hat that had been decaying. Just triggering S2.0 with MIDI loops or via a keyboard or pad controller produces good results, but controlling it with an electronic drum kit would be the ideal way to create high quality drum 'recordings' with the nuanced timing of a live drummer.
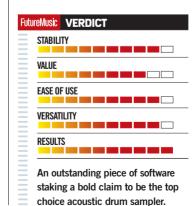
In the mix

Once you've composed your drum part, the mixer section is where things get even more interesting. With 18 virtual mic channels to play with (14 mono mics pointed at individual drums and four further stereo pairs for overheads and room/ambient mics), Superior Drummer is like being in charge of the console while you mix down a very well recorded drum track.

As well as all the usual level, pan and phase controls you can adjust the amount of bleed from each drum into a given mic for a more realistic mixing experience. There are 16 auxiliary buses to play with and S2.0 also includes a series of basic effects, which can be applied to any channel. The effects – an EQ, compressor, gate and a various filters – were developed by Sonalksis and give good results but if you'd prefer to use your own plug-ins or outboard you can also take advantage of the 16 stereo outputs for a bit more flexibility.

Conclusion

Superior Drummer 2.0 is an outstanding piece of software that achieves exactly what it sets out to do with ease. The sounds are excellent, the interface is clear, everything works as it's meant to and there's a clear upgrade path with the variety of expansion packs on offer. On the surface it might appear to be simple but it's a seriously complex tool that still manages to remain user-friendly. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT

STABILITY	
VALUE	
EASE OF USE	
VERSATILITY	
RESULTS	

An outstanding piece of software staking a bold claim to be the top choice acoustic drum sampler.