

**WHAT IS IT?**

Enormous acoustic drum kit ROMpler with Groove Engine

**CONTACT**

Who: FXpansion  
Web: [www.fxpansion.com](http://www.fxpansion.com)

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- 1 Awesome new interface
- 2 BFD's best drum kits yet
- 3 Much improved Groove Engine and mixer

**PRICING**

Upgrade from BFD2  
£99



# FXpansion BFD3 | £229

FXpansion's virtual drum kit has had a major revamp. *Ronan Macdonald* finds out if it's a rival-beater...

**R**elased in 2003, FXpansion's BFD was the original acoustic drum kit ROMpler (albeit only beating Toontrack's Superior Drummer to market by a matter of weeks). With its whopping 30GB sample library (seven kits), it gave the desktop producer everything they needed to program and mix convincing drum tracks, from the massively multisampled tubs themselves to positionable virtual mics, a basic mixing environment and a library of live recorded MIDI grooves. BFD2 followed in 2008, redrawing the interface, improving the groove engine, adding a set of analogue-modelled effects and piling on another 25GB of weight (ten kits).

Five years on, BFD3 sees FXpansion putting their digital drummer right back on top of the pile and finally making it the comprehensive yet approachable system it's always wanted to be.

BFD3's new look is cleaner, smarter and far easier on the eye than either of

its predecessors. With the interface in Kit mode, the Browser and Drum Editor are permanently available on the left and right-hand sides (unless you don't want them to be), while the centre section contains the mixer and the Kit display, the latter sporting a handsome 'blueprint' design that looks really cool and gives a good sense of the physical layout of the kit. Switch to the Effects page and the Kit is replaced by an effects rack; hit the Groove Editor button and the whole centre section flips to that page (see *Groove Engine*); or click Key Map to put the whole interface into its completely redesigned and supremely flexible new MIDI mapping mode. The GUI can be stretched from roughly 16:10 ratio to seemingly limitlessly wide (we gave up clicking the 'extend' button after the central logo disappeared off the right-hand edge of our 2560x1440 display), while the Browser now lets you save and load individual edited Drums with all their mixer and effects settings.

**Here come the Drums**

Selecting a Drum (BFD3's new name for Kit Pieces) in the Kit display brings up its parameters in the two-page Drum Editor. The first page, Tech, is where you deal with the basics, such as trim, pan, tuning, kick/snare bleed and ambient sends, while Model hosts controls for Damping, Choke Response, Cymbal Swell and Tom Resonance, as well as adjustment of trim, velocity-to-pitch/damping levels and AMG Variance. To deal with the last of these first, BFD's old Humanization and Anti-MachineGun Mode functions have been brought together in two new settings: Loud and Tone, applying randomisation to volume and velocity (and, consequently, triggered sample selection) respectively. Both are activated via the AMG button in the Dashboard, and depth-scaled independently for each Drum using its Variance controls.

The Cymbal Swell feature comprises a new set of eight DSP modelling algorithms that make rapidly repeated cymbal and hi-hat hits build in energy/wash like the real thing – and very successful it is too. Similarly, the new Tom Resonance and Spill controls enable tuning of the amount by which each Drum spills into the tom mics and causes the toms themselves to resonate. Being modelled rather than sampled, again, the results are amazingly

realistic, and what might sound like a small thing proves to be profoundly affecting in terms of bringing life, 'glue' and vibe to the overall sound of the kit when used with care. All of BFD3's new modelling abilities will also work on your BFD2 kits and expansion packs.

### In the mix

Version 3 of BFD's mixer has been utterly transformed and now brings all of its many channels together in an intuitive virtual desk that would even give some DAW mixers a run for their money. Sets of channels can be hidden or revealed (Directs, Auxes, etc) and multiple channels for Drums that require them (ie, Kick In, Out and Sub) can be folded into single 'parent' channels. The fader area offers four view modes: Faders, Effects (six insert slots per channel), Sends (four buss assignments per channel) and Tweaks (replacing the faders with a rack of parameter controls appropriate to each type of channel – Tune, Trim and Damp for Drums, Trim and Sidechain Trim for

## Groove Engine

BFD3's built-in sequencer, the Groove Engine, lets MIDI patterns be programmed and stored directly within the software, although you can also trigger it within your DAW like any other virtual instrument. 1,000 all-new and editable Grooves are included, performed by the big-name likes of Peter Erskine, Steve Ferrone,

Stanton Moore and others, across a range of genres and styles, from Country, Jazz and Blues to Pop, Rock and Metal.

For experienced drum programmers (particularly those who play drums), the best thing about the Groove Engine will be the upgrading of BFD2's Roll tool to the Paint tool, which lets you paint in a wide array of preset drum

rudiments – paradiddles, ratamacues, rolls of all kinds, etc. While these could be programmed by hand, the Paint tool makes a fiddly process laughably easy. Coupled with the Anti-MachineGun function, it elevates BFD's already great pattern programming facilities to new, unrivalled heights.

That said, while the Groove Editor gives you all the tools you need to make authentic 'human' drum tracks, it probably still won't give your DAW's MIDI editor any cause for concern in terms of workflow, the arrangement of clips being particularly irritating at times. It's getting there, though, improving on BFD2 in all of these areas and more.



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Aux channels, for example), while the Mini mixer gives a handy secondary mixer view to which any channels you like can be added. Other improvements include an external sidechain input, and some new effects – an 8-band EQ, a new reverb algorithm, DCAM envelope shaper and distortion – all of which sound the business.

The all-new BFD3 sample library now totals a jaw-dropping 160GB, compressed down to a 55GB footprint by FXpansion's new proprietary lossless compression system. Seven detailed kits are presented, comprising a ton of fully mix-and-matchable (to a maximum of 64 pieces) drums and cymbals by

Drum Workshop, Pork Pie, Tama, Gretsch, Ludwig, Zildjian and Paiste, and three of them being the same kit played with sticks, brushes and mallets. The number of articulations and velocity layers on offer is staggering, now including the full range of brushwork (drags an' all), rim clicks, tom rimshots and more, at anywhere between 50 and 80 velocity layers per Drum.

### Beats working

BFD3 is, by some margin, the most powerful and readily usable drum kit ROMpler on the market today. The interface is a joy to use, the drums and cymbals sound totally 'real', and the

presets constitute a solid range of mix-ready set-ups that make BFD a genuinely 'zero set-up' solution at last. Although it actually includes less kits than BFD2, they've been captured in much finer detail with more articulations – and you can of course still use all your BFD2 content if you're upgrading. On the downside, the Groove Editor feels a bit clunky in places and it still can't do audio-triggering for drum replacement or load plug-in effects. Niggles aside though, BFD3 is a truly monumental achievement – the definitive software solution for acoustic drum kit emulation, whether programmed by hand or triggered by e-drums, pads or keyboard. **FM**



The mixer's Tweaks view lets you tweak various parameters for every element of your drum kit at once

**FutureMusic VERDICT**

**STABILITY** [Progress bar]

**VALUE** [Progress bar]

**EASE OF USE** [Progress bar]

**VERSATILITY** [Progress bar]

**RESULTS** [Progress bar]

The current state of the art acoustic drum kit emulation, editable down to the level of microscopy.

## SPECS

**System Requirements:**  
**Mac:** 2GHz Core 2 Duo CPU, 2GB DDR3 RAM, 7200rpm hard disk or fast SSD, OS X 10.6.8 or later, VST/AU/RTAS/AAx host (also runs standalone)  
**PC:** 2GHz Core 2 Duo CPU, 2GB DDR3 RAM, 7200rpm hard disk or fast SSD, Windows 7 or later, VST/RTAS/AAx host (also runs standalone)

## ALTERNATIVES



**Toontrack Superior 2**  
**£189**

The previous title holder still rocks, but BFD3 has the edge in terms of detail and UI. Superior 3, then? [www.toontrack.com](http://www.toontrack.com)



**Steven Slate Drums 4 Platinum**  
**\$199**

Over 100 preset drum kits, ready to drop into the mix with minimum user input. Stellar sounds, but without the depth of BFD3. [www.stevenslatedrums.com](http://www.stevenslatedrums.com)

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**XLN Audio Addictive Drums**  
**179.95 euros**

Slick and easy to use, but with only three kits onboard and nowhere near the realism of BFD3. [www.xlnaudio.com](http://www.xlnaudio.com)

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