

Creative samplers

No Kontakt or EXS-24 here – these are the lighter-weight workstations for old-school or thoroughly creative sampling



Togu Audio Line TAL-Sampler £47

Vintage sampling is the order of the day here. Sure, you've got four layers of sample-loading, three envelopes, three LFOs, and EQ, delay and reverb units on output, but the point behind TAL-Sampler is to emulate the sound of early sampling tech – E-mu, Akai and so on – with fine-tuning of properties like jitter, sample rate, converter quality and more. Classic digital machines are emulated, right down to the DACs with their idiosyncracies in tow. What you also get are some classic '80s/'90s sampled presets, with a Factory collection and an additional collection from Hollow Sun, giving you not just an incredibly competent tool at recreating classic sampling sounds, but also a bunch of fodder for the sounds themselves. With most presets using just one of TAL-Sampler's four layers, there's plenty of room to make them your own.

tal-software.com

VERDICT 9.2



Serato Sample \$79

A sideways look at slicing, Sample has algorithms that identify appropriate parts of a long audio file for you when you hit the Find Samples button, leaving you free to play them using a keyboard (QWERTY or MIDI). Results are hit and miss, but with Sample you can lock certain slices and re-randomise the rest of the selection, helping with the wheat-and-chaff separation. You can also reverse playback, take hold of basic sampling controls (enveloping and filtering, plus pitching and stretching), and play polyphonically. To be honest, after trying a lot of material in Sample, the results weren't as creatively liberating as hoped. The results here are, of course, context-dependent, but even after putting Sample through those contexts, it still doesn't quite feel like the inspiration driver it should be. Try it with slower, melodic material for best results.

www.serato.com

VERDICT 7.6



Accusonus Regroover Pro £170

Regroover is all about taking ready-made loops and messing with them on a per-element level, thanks to its source separation algorithms. The idea is that you grab a drum loop, and Regroover will do its best to turn it into separate tracks for its constituent elements (kick, snare, hats, etc), which you can then slice up and rearrange, creating variations on your loop. This loop separation works well in terms of isolation – you won't get a perfect kick/snare/percussion divide most of the time, but there are helpful fine-tuning parameters to tweak the analysis and combine tracks together, and the quality is on par with the best source

separation software out there, just for drums specifically.

But even without the perfect drum separation, it doesn't matter – the point of Regroover is to retime those elements, giving you off-kilter beats, polyrhythms and variations on the same loop, so there'll always be something going on in your full beat to absorb any separation artefacts. There are also Gate, EQ, Compression and Saturation on-hand for each channel to heat up the individual parts, and a 4x4 drum pad with full-on sampling controls to help you chop out certain hits from the groove and play them with MIDI. accusonus.com

VERDICT 9.1



DiscoDSP Bliss £79

There's sampling, there's resampling, and then there's Bliss. You've heard of sampling hardware, but this plugin lets you sample something else: your existing VSTi plugins. Technically tucked away under an 'Edit' button for the second sample layer, this functionality is deep, letting you load your VST2.4 plugin, tweak the preset, and hit the Sample Plugin button to do the dirty with your favourite commercial (or demo version) instruments.

Bliss as a normal sampler is relatively unremarkable, with dual envelopes, dual LFOs and dual filters, but what you're paying for here is access to the plugin-sampling functionality. You can choose the sampling interval, lowest and highest notes, velocity range, duration and so on, all while balancing the size of the exported material. After it's done (and it's done quickly), Bliss behaves just like a standard multisampler, with playback styles, effects and basic controls to apply to each region/sample.

A great idea well executed, although the interface design could be friendlier and easier on the eye. On the ears, though, and on your sound library, Bliss is a must-have creative sampler for those who want to go meta.

discodsp.com

VERDICT 8.8



iZotope Iris 2 \$149

The special thing about Iris is its ability to take your sample and apply filtering graphically, literally drawing rectangles or free selections across the frequency spectrum (Y axis) over time (X axis). Add in comprehensive sampling options like tuning, start time, loop positions and playback types, and you've got a truly creative tool. Multiply it by four (the number of layers you get to play at once), and the choice of using designed content or importing your own samples, and you've got an instant winner.

v2 of Iris has honed the modulation options, offering you five LFOs and five envelopes with drag-and-drop routing, plus controller signals and macro options too. There's also a very capable Send Effects section with distortion, chorus, delay and reverb. Iris is an inspirational workstation as long as you've got time to craft something uniquely new. It's starting to show its age in comparison to other iZotope products, though, begging the question of what could be coming in Iris 3, and when.

www.izotope.com

VERDICT 9.0