



FutureMusic



XILS-Lab StiX Virtual x0x Drum Machine €179

Having impressed us with their synths, XILS-Lab now enter the world of drum machines. Stuart Bruce steps in time

CONTACT WHO: XILS-Lab **WEB:** www.xils-lab.com **KEY FEATURES** **SYNTHESIS:** 10 fully featured synth engines **PRESETS:** 2,000 in total and more available soon **SEQUENCER:** x0x-style with multi- and single-line editing modes **COMPATIBILITY:** 32- and 64-bit (Mac & PC), VST, AAX, RTAS, AU

THE PROS & CONS



Excellent sounding synthesis with highly detailed sound editing capabilities

Fantastic groove control and incredible polyrhythmic possibilities

PolyStep modulation delivers subtle, humanised grooves, as well as insane soundscapes



No numbering in the PolyStep Editor

Step display doesn't flash on the relevant beats in SNGL edit mode when using multiple beats or rhythms

Drum machines haven't changed much in the way they look since the 808, and with little introduction you can get straight into programming. But StiX has plenty more under the hood...

There are plenty of presets to start with to get a feel for what you can do. The ten pads along the top access the controls for each sound and in the Easy section (as opposed to Advanced) you can manipulate

the sounds via the Cutoff, Pitch, Res, Stretch and various velocity sensitivity options, as well as via two quite sophisticated Macro controls that can be programmed with up to four sources each. Stretch and Pitch adjust all envelopes and oscillators respectively in a relative manner while cutoff and res work as offsets. To the right of the velocity controls you see a Drum Preset section where you can load and save individual sounds to and from the selected pad plus alter the volume. If you are unhappy with your edits you can

ADVANCED EDITING

You'll find all the sound shaping possibilities on the Advanced page. There are two oscillators and one noise/sample source. For samples you can use the library or import your own. There are seven filter types and individual envelopes for VCA, filter and pitch. Envelopes can either be a standard ADSR or XILS-Lab's R-CLAP envelope which makes multiple Attack-Decay stages (up to five) – great for claps and rolls. There are two polyphonic LFOs each with six waveforms to mix and match that you can free run or trigger and set to tempo. The Mod Matrix allows quick links from the LFOs and Osc 2 to the osc pitches, waveforms and filter cutoff, while the two Macro Mods give more flexibility in setting up complex modulations from a variety of sources.



The enormous polyrhythmic possibilities set StiX apart from many other step-based drum machines

reset to the basic sound and if you are happy but want to tweak on the Advanced page then you can Freeze the Easy edits so that the Advanced controls reflect them.

We are the mods

Next comes the step modulation section. Here you set the sources and mod amounts for the two Mod controls in the Step Time sequencer. Mod 1 can affect two parameters simultaneously and Mod 2 just one. You can then adjust mod amounts for every step of a sequence. Finally you get the PolyStep Modulator. This is an XY axis onto which you add up to eight red balls which you can place anywhere on the axes. These steps have up to four parameters, two vertical and two horizontal (each ball shares the same settings). These

balls cycle round the sequence steps in order and remain static in Lock mode and move randomly in Move mode. All these modulators are great for adding some natural sounding variation into parts and they can be as subtle or extreme as you like.

The step sequencer looks simple enough and in its basic form (the multi page) it is. Step entry, as you would expect, is done by clicking on the individual squares and all ten pads are laid out in front of you. If you right-click (on a Mac shift-click) any pad you can then change the number of triggers per pad from one to six – a quick way of entering triplets or any number of odd glitchy sounding FX. The number of bars displayed is set in the patterns window but it's the other pages in the step editor that unleash its

THE ALTERNATIVES



Arturia Spark 2 €169

An analogue modelling/sampling hybrid. The one to consider if samples are more your thing but you still want the feel of a drum machine.

www.arturia.com



NI Maschine £439

With its excellent hardware controller, this is an incredibly powerful beat production system with a huge sample library plus multiple drum synth options.

www.native-instruments.com



Logic Ultrabeat
Included in Logic X

A great hybrid with plenty of sound manipulation possibilities. It may not reach the levels of sophistication of StiX or others, but it is very powerful and comes with Logic X.

www.apple.com

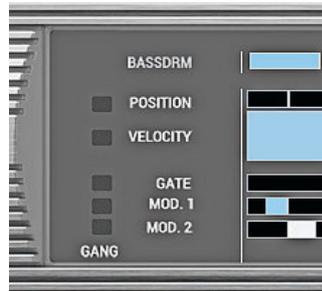
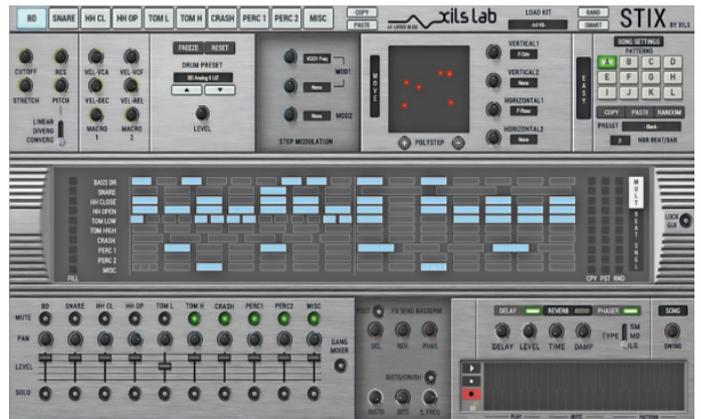
power. These are selected using the Mult/Beat/Single buttons to the right.

Polyrhythmic power

Switching to beat allows you to set the number of beats per bar of each individual pad. While you can do the obvious multiples (4, 8, 16) for straight programming, you can also set a different number of beats for each pad. The polyrhythmic possibilities are enormous and are one of the things that set StiX apart from many other step-based drum machines. Add that to the multiple triggers on individual pads and you can see that there are very few rhythmic variations that you can't do.

Then comes the Sngl page. Whichever sound is currently selected on the upper pads comes up here with all its programmable variations. You get velocity and gate time, plus the two mod options, and you also have position. This moves the trigger point backwards/forwards giving you an infinite set of variations from straight swing through to some extreme shape changed grooves to satisfy the most hardcore rapper.

Below the sequencer section and starting on the left you have a very straightforward mixer section covering level, pan, solo and mute, and next to that is the FX panel. FX are set for each individual sound and are divided into two sections. The first is a set of three sends which go to a global Delay, Reverb and a Phaser that are edited on the next panel along, and the Distortion/Bit Crusher that works directly on the individual sounds. This has controls for Distortion amount, Bit Depth and



SINGLE LANE EDITOR This is a great editor for fine-tuning every beat of a groove. Everything can be adjusted individually or you can gang parameters together for quick relative adjustments.

STEP EDITOR Putting together the polyrhythmic possibilities of the Step Editor with the multiple hit pad option and the R-CLAP envelope, you can build pretty much any beat you can think of.



POLYSTEP EDITOR The onboard modulation controls and MIDI CC options are vast, but it's the random nature of the PolyStep Editor that imparts the most human feel to the machine.

Sampling Frequency and does what you would expect, although I would like the distortion to be capable of far more extreme settings.

Finally, to the extreme right is the Effect and Transport area. Effects are delay, reverb and phaser and each has a set of control parameters which are easy to edit and sound good. Below them is a MIDI note

display which shows incoming MIDI and the transport controls.

From the first look I liked StiX. With a minimum of manual reading you can get up and running quickly and there are enough good preset sounds available to satisfy most of your basic creative requirements. As you feel your way into it there are plenty of sound and groove sculpting options which make it an instrument that you will return to over and over again. It's right up there with XILS-Lab's other excellent products and we heartily recommend it. **FM**

MIDI IMPLEMENTATION

It is possible to externally trigger sounds via MIDI (C1 to A1) but you can also swap patterns (C2 to B2) and mute and unmute individual pads (C3 to B3) opening up the possibility of using StiX as a live improvisational tool. You can also assign individual controls to CC numbers. As there are so many of them, each drum pad has its own MIDI channel (1-10) and it makes for incredible controllability. There is also an option to send MIDI out from StiX but I couldn't get this to work in my system and I would prefer to be able to drag and drop to a MIDI track to make defining individual patterns really simple.

FM VERDICT

9.1

If you love the sound of synthesized drums but like to humanise sound creation, this is one of the best drum machines out there.