

TOONTRACK SUPERIOR DRUMMER 3

From £149* The daddy of drum sample plugins just got a facelift. Can the best be even better?

WORDS: **STUART WILLIAMS**

Earlier this year, *Rhythm* was invited by our pals at Toontrack to attend a top secret product launch at Belgium's Galaxy Studios. With our bags packed, *In Bruges* on our iPad and gobs firmly shut under the most terrifying NDA we've ever encountered, we were met by what we'd all hoped for: Superior Drummer 3.

It's a vast monster of an update to Toontrack's industry standard drum sample package; engineered and captured at Galaxy by golden-eared producer and gear tinkerer George Massenburg in glorious 11 channel surround. We have a lot to talk about, so let's get started.

Build

As detailed in these pages previously, we've come to expect brilliance every time Toontrack releases a new product (see the criminally accessible Steve Albini-produced Alt Rock pack for the proof), and there are a vast number of additions here that make SD3 exciting, ranging from the small (scalable windows and an improved usability) to simply huge upgrades like the new Stack (for creating layered sounds) and Tracker (for complete drum sound replacement) tools.

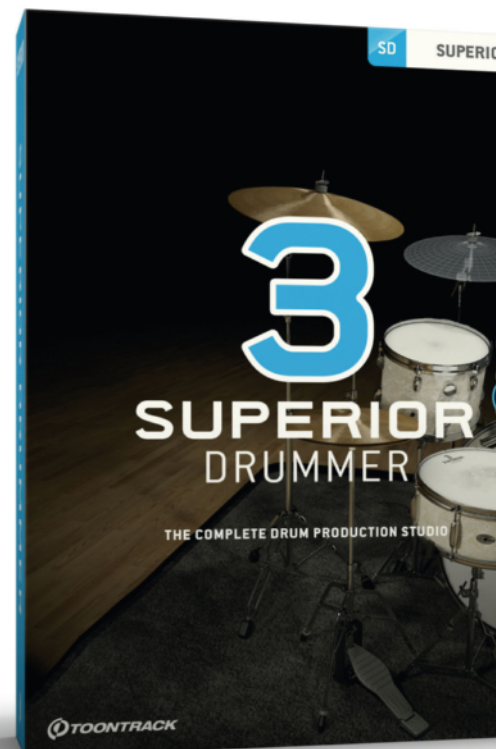
We'll start with the sounds - you get six kits, all recorded by George and configured into 14 different options. There are vintage options ('60s Gretsch Round Badge, '70s Ludwig Classic) and modern classics from Aoyote, Premier, Pearl and Yamaha. Then consider the snares: want a Tama Bell Brass? It's in there. How about a 1920s Black Beauty? Yep! In fact, Toontrack has covered off everything from aluminium to pear staves, with sizes ranging from a 10"x2½" Sonor Jungle snare to a 14"x10" Rogers 'York Town'. There are 26 snares in total, including some effects (splash on the

batter head, additional muting, etc). Finally, there's the cymbals - 27 different crashes, rides, chinas, splashes and effects including some stack sounds, plus four pairs of hi-hats. That's before we mention the 350 brand new electronic sounds or percussion. Like we said, it's vast!

Hands On

Superior Drummer 3 has added a lot of new features, some of which will be a godsend to previous users, such as the newly-designed interface, introduction of macro controls for assigning multiple parameters to one easy control; but for the more casually interested, we're going to focus on the bigger elements of the package.

It should go without saying that all of the sounds included are top-notch. They've been captured by more than an industry legend - a pioneer in fact - in a state-of-the-art recording facility. We were treated to a dose of acoustic drums played in the actual room, and it really has been captured in detail for SD3. Our pre-release version of the software didn't include many presets (the full list will be ready by launch), which gave us more of an incentive to get our hands dirty by ourselves. The kits range from big and open with the Gretsch, to modern and punchy with the Pearl Masterworks. Scrolling through the list of snares is like having access to a dream snare



1
BFD3
We say: "Packed with over 150GB (compressed for installation) of acoustic drum samples, BFD3 has always been the main contender alongside Superior."



2
XLN AUDIO ADDICTIVE DRUMS 2
We say: "As with Superior 3, Addictive Drums comes with a huge library of samples, and the mixer features an impressive effects suite."

UPDATED USER INTERFACE

It's the most intuitive the software has ever been with the addition of macro controls, a new window layout and easily-searchable library

drum locker, and there's a raft of options for different stick/mallet/rod or snares on/off configurations.

It's saying something when having such a huge, pro-quality sound library at your disposal is only one of the main talking points though. Toontrack has introduced a new feature for SD3 called Stacks. In a nutshell, it

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SOUNDS

All bases are covered and every kit piece sounds fantastic

TRACKER

The new Tracker sound replacement tool quickly and intelligently converts your drum parts to MIDI, then plays them back through your sound library

Essential spec



PRICE

£295 (download); Upgrade from Superior Drummer 2 (£149); Crossgrade from EZ Drummer (£219) *pricing subject to change

KITS

6 (14 configurations): Gretsch, Yamaha, Ludwig (x2), Pearl, Ayotte

SNARES

26

CYMBALS

27 (crashes/rides/chinas/splashes/FX), 4 x hi-hats

LIBRARY SIZE

235GB

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Mac OS X 10.6 or higher; 64-bit Intel-based Mac with 4GB RAM (8GB RAM or more recommended), 64-bit host (with support for VST, AU or AAX); 64-bit Windows 7 or newer; 4GB RAM (8GB RAM or more recommended); Standalone is included.

CONTACT

www.timespace.com



ALL-NEW SOUNDS

Toontrack set industry legend George Massenburg loose in Galaxy Studios to engineer and create the impressive SD3 library

STACKS

The addition of the new Stacks feature allows you to mix any of your Toontrack sounds, or even use your own samples in a kit

allows you to build layered sounds from one triggered drum or cymbal slot. It will also let you mix and match from any of your kits and previously purchased Toontrack packs too. So, you could layer up multiple snares, a handclap and a cowbell, for example. In addition to this, Toontrack has bundled 350 electronic drum and percussion sounds from classic drum machines for you to use in your stacks. But wait! It doesn't stop there, because you can also import an audio file to a stack too. This means that you can incorporate your own custom samples into your kit in a way that has never been so easy, with each layer fully routable through SD3's mixer and effects.

Drum sound replacement is a touchy subject, but for those recording drums on a budget it can also be extremely useful and

necessary. Toontrack has based its Tracker algorithm on machine learning - basically feeding it millions of drum samples until it knows the difference between a snare drum and a hi-hat, for example. In use, you simply drop your individual audio stems into Tracker's arrange page, tell it what kit part it needs to focus on, and it works out what it thinks is a hit and what is bleed from your other mics. From here, it creates MIDI data for each part of the kit which is then played back through the sound of your choice. You can replace the original sounds entirely, or simply blend them in. And it really works! We took some decade-old stems from a budget recording session, fed them into Tracker and were able to start building a more professional-sounding drum track extremely quickly. **R**

VERDICT: There is a lot to take in with SD3. It's taken multiple areas of drum production and successfully combined them into one all-encompassing powerhouse. The library is huge (over 235GB), and for many drummers, EZ Drummer will still be a more cost-effective way to expand their sonic palette. However, the inclusion of Stacks, Tracker and the fact that it is backwards compatible with previous Superior and EZX packs makes it an extremely powerful tool, both in the studio and for hybrid sounds in a live setting.

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★
PLAYABILITY ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★
RHYTHM RATING ★★★★★