Mac PC | **What is it?** Electric guitar emulation | **PRICE: £133**

CONTACT: Time+Space, 01837 55200   **WWW.**musiclab.com   **INFO:** RealGuitar Crossgrade, £105

MUSICLAB
computer **music** PERFORMANCE   computer **music** INNOVATION

RealStrat

RealGuitar enabled authentic acoustic guitar parts to be created by non-guitarists. Can RealStrat do the same for the electric axe?

▲The ability to choose chord position and register helps to keep your parts sounding authentic

▶ SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

PC: Pentium 4 2GHz, 1GB RAM, 2GB hard drive space, Windows XP SP2, VST/DX host

Mac: G4/G5 1GHz, 1GB RAM, 2GB hard drive space, OS X 10.4, VST/AU host

▶ TEST SYSTEM

Mac: PowerMac G5 dual 2.3GHz, 2.5GB RAM, OS X 10.4.10, Logic Pro 8

▶ ALTERNATIVELY

MusicLab RealGuitar 2L
cm100 ≫ **8/10** ≫ £133
If it's acoustic guitar you need, look no further than RealGuitar. For those needing electric, too, there's a bundle containing both RealStrat and RealGuitar

Steinberg Virtual Guitarist
cm99 ≫ **8/10** ≫ £170
Steinberg's Virtual Guitarist was the first plug-in of its type to hit the market. Available as a VSTi, this does a decent job of emulating electric guitars

On the DVD

AUDIO DEMOS
There are three audio demos on the disc, along with a text file explaining how they were created

RealGuitar is one of our favourite virtual instruments. It's a clever piece of software that enables any user – whether they possess guitar-playing skills or not – to bring authentic acoustic guitar parts to fruition within a host DAW. At the time of its release, MusicLab promised that there would eventually be an electric guitar version… and here it is, in the shape of RealStrat, an instrument sampled from a Fender Stratocaster.

If it ain't broke...

RealStrat adopts a similar performance ethos to that of its acoustic sibling, in that five performance modes are available: Solo, Harmony, Chords, Bass & Chord and Bass & Pick.

Solo mode is polyphonic but otherwise speaks for itself, while Harmony is monophonic but doubles your chosen note at the octave. Chord and Bass & Chord modes let you 'strum' any chord of your choice, with the latter providing a bass root. Bass & Pick enables you to play picked or plucked parts with a supporting bass.

The other major performance element maintained from RealGuitar is that your controller keyboard is automatically divided into two discrete

zones: Main and Repeat. If you're in Chord mode, the Main area is where you hold down chords, while the Repeat zones, at the extremities of the keyboard range, provide retriggers, so you can tap out rhythms on them. The really nifty thing is that within the Repeat zones, white notes retrigger the full sound, while black keys trigger a muted variation.

RealStrat also comes packed with keyswitch options to keep parts sounding as realistic as possible. In Solo Mode, for example, a huge range of tricks can be assigned. Harmonics, slides, hammer-ons and many more are available, and you can keep tabs on which one is selected within the main GUI. See the *Get real!* boxout for more realism-enhancing goodies.

In Chord Mode, you can be musically specific in other ways, such as paring down chords to fewer than six strings. You can choose from a variety of ascending fretboard positions in order to emulate a guitarist's approach to chord changes, rather than that of a keyboard player.

Playing RealStrat is a real joy, particularly in Solo and Chord modes. The former offers a range of styles, with the fantastic-sounding plug-in responding to your every move. Velocity, mod wheel and pitchbend become expressive controllers and, after a little practice, you can produce authentic solos and strummed parts.

For non-guitar-playing producers, RealStrat could be the answer to their prayers. As ever, understanding how to play guitar will help in achieving the best results, though it does a good job of making up for performance discrepancies by itself. And even if you do play, the lure of firing up RealStrat may ultimately prove all too strong! Either way, this is magnificent stuff. **cm**

Get real!

Because RealStrat is an emulation of the direct output from a guitar – it's not recorded via an amp – an amp simulator is needed to produce an authentic sound. You can use any one you like, but IK Multimedia's AmpliTube Duo is included in the box to get you started.

This is a dramatically cut down version of AmpliTube but it's very welcome nevertheless, with a selection of 'British' and 'American' tones on offer. The sound quality is great, and though the full version offers much more, Duo can still supply plenty of highly usable tones.

RealStrat itself also offers three 'effects' mixers, though these cover various performance aspects rather than outboard processing. The first mixer harbours parameters such as Fret Noise, Mutes and Switch FX, whilst the second balances Slap, Scrape, Harmonics and more. Lastly,

▲This version of IK's AmpliTube comes packaged with RealStrat

there's a dedicated Wah-Wah mixer. The further you delve, the more you realise that virtually all the performance articulations available on a real guitar have been modelled.

⏻ VERDICT

FOR
+ A dream to play
+ Multiple flexible performance modes
+ Keyswitches galore
+ Effects mixer for fine-tuning
+ AmpliTube Duo bundled
+ Throw away that 'how to play guitar' manual

AGAINST
− Bad news indeed for session guitarists!

RealStrat can sound scarily similar to the real thing, representing the pinnacle of today's emulative technology. For a virtual electric guitar, this is the best option yet

RATING
10