

Toontrack PC MAC EZplayer Pro £25



Constructing drum parts from MIDI grooves isn't always as simple as it should be. Can Toontrack remedy the situation?

> A big problem with using prefabricated MIDI grooves is that almost all the various drum samplers (such as EZdrummer, DFH Superior, BFD2 and Addictive Drums) use their own note mappings rather than a standard such as General MIDI (GM). Hence, it's impossible to use a beat programmed for BFD2 in DFH Superior because the wrong sounds will be triggered. Toontrack's EZplayer Pro offers a solution to this, along with many more handy tricks.

EZplayer Pro runs as a standalone application or a VST, AU or RTAS plug-in, and is used in conjunction with your existing drum/percussion virtual instruments (or hardware, if that's your thing). It makes no sounds of its own, though it does come with a load of MIDI grooves.

The GUI is split into Browser and Arranger sections. You audition MIDI files in the Browser, and then drag them into the Arranger. If your drum sampler doesn't follow the GM standard, EZplayer Pro uses its 'map-wrappers' to convert files to play back correctly - these also ensure that the MIDI output will trigger the intended sounds in your drum samplers.

Keep the beat

The Arranger is a multitrack affair that will be familiar to anyone who has used a MIDI sequencer before, enabling you to order grooves, play them simultaneously, stretch them and more. See the *Right on track* boxout below for more on what each track can do.

You can set a different map-wrapper and MIDI channel for each track, enabling control of multiple drum samplers at once. When combined with EZplayer Pro's ability to split grooves into component parts, this enables you to have the kick drum playing via BFD2, with the other drums coming from DFH Superior, and so on. This isolation option also means it's possible to extract the hi-hat pattern from one groove and place it with, say, the snare drum part of another.

One thing to note, though, is that EZplayer Pro can't be used to remap incoming MIDI (from an



electronic drum kit, for example) on-the-fly, and spit it out to your chosen drum samplers.

You can't edit grooves on a note-by-note basis, either, which is a bit of a shame, but there's still a cool way of embellishing them: the Accents tool. This lets you add (but not remove) single hits, and is great for adding cymbals to the first beat of a bar, or plonking an extra bass drum in.

A velocity dial enables you to adjust the dynamics of grooves, and you can also transpose the MIDI, so a kick part plays on the snare, for example. Once you have your part down, you can throw it back into the Browser for later use, or drag grooves - or selections from the Arranger - into your DAW. You can also use the Record functions to 'fuse' tracks into one part.

If, like us, you have several billion MIDI files from different drum samplers spread across your hard drive, then EZplayer Pro can act as a central point from which to browse and combine them. Additionally, it offers plenty of groovy creative possibilities - and it's cheap, too! **cm**

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Info EZplayer Free, £Free



System requirements

PC PIII/Athlon 1.8GHz, 512MB RAM, Windows XP/Vista, software or hardware MIDI drum module

Mac G4 1GHz, 512MB RAM, OS X 10.4, software or hardware MIDI drum module

Test system

PC HP Pavilion 2.8GHz, 1GB RAM, Windows XP

Alternatively

FXpansion BFD2
cm124 >> 9/10 >> £234
First-class drum ROMpler, with a groove editor and sequencer

Toontrack Superior Drummer 2.0
N/A >> N/A >> £189
This brand-new drum sampler incorporates EZplayer Pro

Verdict

For Useful and easy to operate
Isolates individual drums
Aids creativity
Nifty independent track settings

Against MIDI can't be manually edited
Can't remap MIDI on-the-fly

A must if you use MIDI grooves and multiple drum samplers, but those seeking inspiration will also appreciate this cool tool

8/10

Right on track

Each track in EZplayer Pro can have several layers, enabling you to stack up multiple grooves. The Play All mode plays them all at once, while Step Through goes the layers one after another. The Random mode, though, is sure to give unexpected results!

Unusually, each track has its own loop region and time signature, which makes crafting polyrhythmic material a doddle. You may also have spotted that every track has a

Play button - this and the velocity setting can be controlled via MIDI for live performance (it's easily configured using MIDI learn). The Sync At option means that triggering happens on the subdivision of your choice - it's a bit like Ableton Live's clip launching.

At present, EZplayer Pro doesn't actually sync to your host, but Toontrack say that this functionality will be added to the app in an imminent update.