

NEW GEAR

EXCLUSIVE

CHOOSE FROM
a range of sounds
for each pad



SEE THOSE TINY
numbers? They indicate
which mixer channel a
pad is routed to

TOONTRACK ELECTRONIC EZX

ESSENTIAL SPEC



PRICE
£49

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
EZdrummer or
Superior Drummer
2.0, 512MB RAM, 1.2GB
drive space, DVD drive
PC: PIII/Athlon 1.8GHz
CPU, Windows XP/
Vista/7
Mac: G4 1GHz, OS
X 10.4

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£49 Tired of the traditional drum kit? Then this far-out collection of synthetic sounds could pique your percussive interest. Lee du-Caine puts it through its paces

The Toontrack name is synonymous with high-quality sampled acoustic drums, but Electronic EZX sees the company leaving its comfort zone to deliver 33 kits' worth of electronic percussion.

Build

The sounds have been sampled from an extensive selection of gear, including '80s drum machines such as the Alesis HR-16 and Roland TR series, renowned synthesisers like the ARP 2600 and Access Virus, and even 8-bit home computers/consoles like the Atari 2600 and Commodore 64. Much of the gear has been modified to give sounds outside its usual range, and numerous effects processors employed. To ensure that all this equipment was put to good use, Toontrack drafted in electronica maestro Richard Devine as lead sound designer.

Hands On

The first thing that hits you about this EZX is its 'alien' interface - we'd have preferred something less cryptic and more indicative of what sounds each pad offers. You can build kits by selecting kicks, snares, etc from the dropdown menus, though it's not a totally open-ended system. For

instance, there's only one kick pad per kit.

The 41 pads are grouped to a more sensible 13 channels in the mixer, where you'll also find six additional effects channels. The kits load very quickly because they don't use multisampling - velocity simply controls sample volume. Standard drum kit mapping is not strictly adhered to, so tom pads won't necessarily trigger deep booming sounds, for instance. While this can be fun to play with, at times you may want more than simple sound selection and a fixed MIDI mapping.

EZdrummer might not be the most appropriate 'shell' for Electronic EZX, then, but the sounds are really excellent. Classic drum machine punch, snap and sizzle is covered, but such samples are easily found elsewhere, in greater abundance. What makes this pack shine is the plethora of esoteric sounds, ranging from fuzzy videogame-style bleeps; speaker-shaking booms and bangs; grungey clonks and clatters; synthetic creaks, gurgles and groans; vocoded robot-talk; spacey blips and pings; and the indescribable. These sounds are fiercely electronic but not cold or characterless, and many are semi-rhythmical, making them inspiring to play.

As for effects, the Tape channel adds warmth; Attack lends transient bite; Bias gives

further grinding grit; SubTube offers harsher distortion; Echo is a stereo reverb; and Chorus widens the sound. These can beef things up or radically reshape the overall sound.

Load Electronic EZX into Superior Drummer 2.0 and you'll gain per-pad control over pitch, level, effects amounts and amplitude envelope (great for shortening overly long sounds). You can also freely combine sounds using X-Drums, and create acoustic/electronic hybrid kits.

Verdict

Sonically, Electronic EZX brims with character, charm and creativity. On the flip side, the lack of flexibility (at least with EZdrummer) and heavy slant towards unusual, experimental sounds means it's not a one-stop shop, so consider pairing it with a more meat-and-potatoes sample library. Indeed, control freaks may be better off with open-ended software like FXpansion Guru, NI Battery or Ableton Live and some quality samples from the likes of Goldbaby and Wave Alchemy. However, for a plug-and-play solution featuring some of the freshest, most inspiring electronic percussion around, Electronic EZX hits the mark. **A**

Rating ★★★★★