ON THE DVD

Hear filthy patches from The Dark Side and read the manual

EastWest PC MAC
The Dark Side €352

A company renowned for pristine, realistic sample libraries gets nasty with a ROMpler full of ready-distorted patches

> EastWest are renowned for their lush, lifelike orchestral and acoustic samples, but they've ripped up the rulebook for The Dark Side, a VST/AU/RTAS instrument powered by the company's Play engine. There's little subtlety here, with 40GB of content that's been banged through distortion and effects processors to make it stand out in the mix. EastWest say that about 90% of the sounds are totally new, while some – notably choirs and orchestra – mash up samples from their previous titles.

The resulting pre-effected patches are categorised in folders that denote the instrument type – eg, keys, guitars, etc. Each folder also contains a 'master' patch that loads all the sounds from the folder at once, with keyswitching used to select the active sound. This is great for auditioning the main sounds on the fly, as long as you've got sufficient RAM.

The sinister interface imagery upholds the tone of the library but contains all the usual Play controls, without many fiddly sub-menus. There's a low-pass filter, delay and an amplitude envelope with ADHSR controls. Tuning and pitchbend parameters can also be adjusted.

It's crunch time

As we ran through the samples for the first time, we had reservations about the usefulness of the patches. If we just wanted distorted sounds, we could do it ourselves with a quality distortion plug-in, right? Well, you could, but EastWest have not only applied their sonic expertise and extensive gear collection, they've also put the work in to sort the wheat from the chaff, rather than just giving you pointlessly distorted noises.

As we delved deeper into the package and fiddled with the ADSR and filters, the distant musicality of the samples shone through, which is something you don't always get with such inherently industrial-sounding material.

The percussion, bass and guitar samples are the most obviously useable sounds. Samples are crisp, tightly compressed and would punch through any mix. In fact, they were a little too punchy for a few tracks we tried them in. We set up the modulation wheel to control the filter and used it to temper the treble. In addition, we increased the amplitude envelope's attack by a few milliseconds to deaden the sharp 'crack' at the beginning of many of the samples. Chunky rhythm guitars can be had by cutting release times right down and increasing the reverb.

Some of the rasping bass patches are so filthy that we wondered for a moment if our speakers had blown, but with names like Bass Hemorrhage, you'd expect nothing less. Unless you're going for all-out extremity, careful editing and EQing of the bottom end makes for the most usable results.

The package is available as a boxed DVD set. However, it can also be bought (via EastWest's US distribution arm) as a 1TB hard drive pre-installed with ten-day trial versions of EastWest's other libraries. The licences for these products can be bought as needed and they're normally discounted more heavily than the DVD libraries, which is certain to save you cash in the long run.

There are just over 200 patches, some of them very similar to each other, making The Dark Side's price tag a little hard to swallow. It's definitely not a one-stop solution, but choose your presets wisely and tweak them to taste and it's perfect for spicing up any track in need of edginess, be it dance, rock or a soundtrack. **cm**

Web www.soundsonline-europe.com
Contact via website

Alternatively

Heavyocity Evolve Mutations
cm146 >> 9/10 >> $119
Kontakt-powered soundtrack-style library with plenty of gritty dirt

Audio Damage Kombinat
cm129 >> 10/10 >> $49
Grunge up the sounds you've already got with this distortion unit

Verdict

For Easy interface
Patches categorised and named well
Samples are powerful yet still musical
Drum kits and guitars especially good

Against No 64-bit OS X support
Some patches too similar to each other
It's all distorted! (But that's the idea)

It's a one-trick pony, for sure, but The Dark Side fulfils its remit nicely, albeit at a price

7/10

Double the fun

East West have included an automatic double tracking option that mimics the technique of layering two similar recordings together. Slight variations in delay time and depth can result in anything from a subtle chorus effect to a full-on flange. We found it most useful on guitar patches to fatten out the bottom end. With some of the higher frequencies removed, a long reverb and a delay, we also created some solid-sounding pads.

By using a very long delay time (50ms) and high depth setting, slow detuning effects can be created utilising the 'FX madness' presets to create pitchshifting bleeps and static. This is great for otherworldly 'space' atmospheres.

Drums also benefit from the treatment. We used the Bone Crunch preset pitched down by 24 semitones with a 50ms delay to bring a sinister earth-shattering crunchy double-hit to some drum lines.