



Steinberg Absolute 5

£429



The latest edition of Steinberg's über-collection adds new plugins, instruments and expansions, but is it absolute hero, or absolute zero?

> Although best known for the venerable Cubase – now well into its fourth decade – Steinberg are, these days, much more than just DAW developers. Of particular note amongst the company's current crop of products is their collection of virtual instruments, as well as the vast library of content – expansions, sample packs, patches, and what-not – that Steinberg have curated to complement these instruments. Versions of these instruments, and elements of the libraries, come with Steinberg's DAWs, but all are available as individual products too, and will run on any VST-, AU- or AAX-compatible host (some instruments can run standalone too). Kitting yourself out with all of the fully-featured versions of these instruments, and stocking up on content for them, would be quite painful on the wallet if it weren't for the Absolute collection, the latest update of which is now available.

Super samplers

A big chunk of Absolute 5 is given over to

HALion, Steinberg's advanced sampling and sound design platform. The collection includes both the fully featured HALion 6, which we looked at back in **cm243**, and HALion Sonic 3. While both are built on the same core technologies, HALion Sonic acts only as a host for HALion-compatible instruments, allowing you to play them and work with their control panels, whereas HALion itself allows you to design and build those instruments and control panels too. Including both in the Absolute collection makes a lot of sense, giving a phenomenally powerful instrument creation workshop to create sounds, and a more lightweight player with which to create music.

The library of HALion instruments included in Absolute 5 includes everything from the previous version of the collection, which includes all of the HALion and HALion Sonic factory libraries, a number of different analogue-style and pure digital synths, the excellent Eagle and Raven grand pianos, and

much more besides (the full list is available on Steinberg's website). New to Absolute are Amped Elektrik, sampled from a rare and fully restored Hohner Electra electric piano, and Electric Bass which combines samples and physical modelling techniques to deliver convincing emulations of classic Jazz, Precision and MusicMan bass guitars.

If beats are more your thing then Steinberg's excellent drum and rhythm workshop, Groove Agent 5, is for you. We looked at this in **cm266** so won't retrace too much ground, but the headlines are that Groove Agent is a massively flexible, multi-engined drum sample and pattern player that's as happy working with contemporary sounds and beats as it is creating realistic articulation-based acoustic drum sounds and grooves.

All of the Groove Agent libraries and kits that were included in Absolute 4 are here, such as Rock Essentials, Raw Power and Prime Cuts. A new addition to the collection is Future Past

“The plugins included in Absolute 5 are an ideal blend no matter where your particular focus lies”

Perfect, a collection of house and techno sounds and styles by producer/DJ Dean Coleman.

Best of analogue and digital

On the synthesiser front, Absolute 5 includes both Retrologue 2 and Padshop 2, which we last looked at in **cm183** and **cm184** respectively. Whilst not based on any specific synthesiser, Retrologue is a distinctly vintage three-oscillator analogue synth that combines the best elements of classic synthesisers with a number of modern features, such as advanced modulation routing, a step-sequencer/arpeggiator, and a flexible FX section. New here is the Sounds of Soul expansion containing more than 400 soul-inspired presets.

The versatile Padshop specialises in complex, evolving sounds, which it creates via a pair of sample-based engines that can run in either a granular or a spectral mode. Three expansions are included with the regular Padshop factory libraries: Granular Guitars and Zero Gravity are carried over from Absolute 4, whilst new to the collection is Polarities. This moody expansion from sound designer Simon Stockhausen features over 250 patches that explore contrasts, both sonic and conceptual, for an eclectic mix of tonal, atonal and mysterious.

Last but not least we come to The Grand 3, Steinberg's ultra-detailed piano instrument. This includes over 30GB of exquisitely detailed multisamples taken from a variety of pianos: Yamaha C7, Steinway D and Bösendorfer 290 grands, a Nordiska Pianofabriken upright, and a Yamaha CP80 electric. Various aspects of a loaded piano's sound can be modified, such as



You get a toolkit for New York House, Future House, Progressive House and Techno



Plus a collection of more than 400 Retrologue patches based on classic soul sounds



New to Absolute 5 is Backbone, Steinberg's fascinating drum sample designer

Get some backbone

Absolute 5 includes Steinberg's fascinating drum sampler, Backbone. This hard-to-define tool allows up to eight samples to be layered together, with per-layer filters, envelopes and modulation available, much like a conventional sampler. The clever bit is that Backbone can decompose these samples, a process that separates them into noise and tonal elements, which for most drum sounds equates to the transient and sustain portions, respectively. You can then work to rebalance these components within the sound, use one component without the other, or blend together decomposed components of different samples. This all adds up to a

tremendously effective way to create utterly original drum sounds; it's very effective at creating special effects too.

Although intended primarily for creating drum sounds, Backbone is excellent for creating special effects too. What Backbone isn't though, is a drum machine. So while you could run multiple instances of it, each hosting a different drum sound in order to build up a full Backbone kit, the idea is that you would export your Backbone creations to audio files that could be then used as drum samples. You can also drag a Backbone sound directly to the timeline, or into a plugin that supports it, as Groove Agent and HALion do.

the sustain resonance or damper release sound, although the options available depend upon the loaded piano. In addition there's a four-band EQ to help further hone the piano's tone, and an ambience section that lets you choose between using algorithmic or convolution reverb.

Absolutely fabulous

The plugins included in Absolute 5 are an ideal blend no matter where your particular focus lies: if sound design is your thing then HALion and Backbone will not disappoint; if you're into building beats and grooves then Backbone will please you too, as will Groove Agent's take on the classic drum sample workstation; and if all you want to do is create music then everything in the collection will serve you well.

The asking price would be attractive if Absolute 5 only included the plugins, but of course there's the huge library of content thrown in on top too - you can check out the full list on Steinberg's website. The quality of these expansions is consistently high, and they are packed full of exciting and inspirational sounds, beats and textures that cover a huge range of genres and styles. Taken together, Absolute 5 is a mightily impressive and deep collection that will often surprise but never disappoint. **cm**

Web steinberg.net

Alternatively

Native Instruments Komplete 13
£539

Sounds to suit any style of production or performance

Arturia V Collection 8
€599

Explore the history of synthesis with this mouth-watering collection of modelled vintage synths

Verdict

For Comprehensive collection
Over 130GB of high-quality expansions
Sensible HALion/HALion Sonic combo
Ace Groove Agent/Backbone pairing

Against No edition that includes every Steinberg expansion
You may need a bigger hard drive

A near-perfect combination of Steinberg's finest instrument plugins coupled with a vast library of expansions and content

9/10