

cm mini reviews

A rapid-fire round-up of sample libraries, ROMplers and more

Native Instruments Alicia's Keys £85

Format DVD, Kontakt 4 library
Contact 2twenty2, 0845 299 4222
Web www.native-instruments.com

NI's latest keyboard instrument is their most high-profile endorsement to date. Developed in collaboration with Alicia and her engineer Ann Mincieli (and with Thomas Skarbye programming) the result is an instrument based on her own Yamaha C3 Neo, and one she's using in the studio and live.

So, what's the score? You've got just one main piano instrument here, but it's accompanied by six tabbed pages with features ranging from algorithmic and convolution reverbs to attack/release behaviour and sympathetic resonance settings. Both sustain and sostenuto pedals are catered for, and if you have a continuous sustain pedal, there's a simulated half-pedalling option. One of the nicest features is simple fader control for mechanical noise, including pedal, key and even microphone hiss.

The pink interface may not appeal to everyone, and the sound lacks some of the natural room character associated with classical piano instruments; however, that clearly wasn't the remit. Alicia's Keys delivers an excellently 'produced' piano sound, with plenty of tone and behaviour-shaping flexibility, all from a fairly compact 7GB drive footprint.

8/10



ProjectSAM True Strike £320

Format Kontakt 3/4 Library
Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com

True Strike and its sequel are well-established 'turn to' orchestral percussion libraries for soundtrack and TV work, and they've recently been repackaged in Kontakt Library format.

True Strike now features a custom interface with two-band EQ, delay, ADSR and active articulation readout. The 16GB library has seven categories - timpani, kits, drums and toms, cymbals and gongs, melodic, miscellaneous and small percussion - and each is available from close (2-3 metres), stage (7m) and far (15m) mic positions. It's obvious why True Strike has proved so popular, as the consistency is excellent. Its reputation is further cemented by an excellent array of playing articulations (mapped across the keyboard, accessed via the sustain pedal or, in more complex patches, keyswitching). One example is the timpani roll with optional 'release hit' keyswitch. Further highlights include timpani and suspended cymbal rolls of various lengths, multiple bass drum hits and some excellent body percussion.

True Strike is not groundbreaking, and it's worth saying that even the close mic sample set is quite 'roomy'. However, if you crave that classy Hollywood percussion sound, it delivers it - big time.

9/10



Line 6 MIDI Mobilizer £59

Format iPhone/iPod touch
Contact via website
Web www.line6.com

Line 6 join the iPhone party not with an app but a piece of hardware: the MIDI Mobilizer is a MIDI interface for iPhone and iPod Touch. It's got an iPhone connector on one end, and 5-pin DIN MIDI in/out coming out of the other. Let's cut to the chase - it's not possible to plug this in and play existing apps from a MIDI keyboard. Developers will have to rewrite their apps to take advantage of the device, and there are a few caveats involved in this due to Apple's developer restrictions.

For now, there's only one compatible app: Line 6's free MIDI Memo. It has a huge Play button and a slider to enable record. There's a menu to access previous recordings and an Info page to edit their names and send them via email. MIDI Memo does what it claims, recording and playing back MIDI with aplomb, but nothing more. Why not include a metronome, looping, MIDI file import and layering of recordings? OK, the hardware itself is what you pay for here, and it's high-quality, but it's disappointing that Line 6 haven't given more of an incentive to actually buy it by making a decent app available upon its launch.

7/10



Gleetchplug Berna €11

Format Mac
Contact sales@gleetchplug.com
Web www.gleetchplug.com

Before Moog and Buchla created the first synths, electronic musicians crafted sounds using tape machines and laboratory test equipment, most of which was never intended for music-making. It was a difficult but often enlightening path. Signal generators generated simple waveforms, while ring modulators, filters, tape echoes and spring reverb tanks were called into action. 'Sequencing' was done by means of splicing bits of tape together – truly time-consuming stuff!

Gleetchplug offer us a taste of these archaic practices with Berna, a standalone vintage electronic music studio for Mac – think of it as Reason for fans of the Radiophonic Workshop. It consists of nine virtual test oscillators; a number of filters; ring, dynamic and amplitude modulators; tone burst generator; noise generator and a beat oscillator. Tape echo and plate reverb are in tow, as is a wicked frequency shifter. Four reel-to-reel decks are used to play

samples/loops and record Berna's output. An eight-channel mixer offers level, pan and sends for echo and reverb, with signals routed via an EMS-style matrix. Any setup can be saved and recalled, but Berna won't recall the files that were loaded into the tape players.

So why would you want to go to the same

efforts as our electronic ancestors to produce a few burbling beeps and buzzes? Because it's a blast – that's why! Berna is pure joy for anyone who revels in the sci-fi sounds of the 50s and 60s. It sounds fantastic, too, and will almost certainly lead you to strange new territories.

8/10



MusicLab RealLPC €198

Format VST/AU/DXi instrument
Contact via website
Web www.bestservicede

MusicLab's latest sampled guitar instrument comes from a Gibson Les Paul Custom. Like RealStrat, it's a single-guitar instrument, with the focus on flexibility. You get 15 plectrum positions, simulating movement of the hand between the front and rear pickups. Further sound adjustments include basic EQ and levels (pick, fret and release) and control of alternative sounds including mute, strumming and harmonics. You'll also find five round robin options, with a maximum of ten alternates.

In use, RealLPC operates in two ways. Firstly, using one of five modes – solo, harmony, chords, bass & chord, and bass & pick – you can play it from a MIDI keyboard or sequencer to create lead lines, power chords, standard chords and bass-note-plus-chord combinations. Each mode has its own set of articulations and features, and by far the most flexible is solo mode. This includes 30 articulations and playing styles such as bend, trill and slide up, and less common ones like scrapes and volume pot swells.

RealLPC has a library of 1250 rhythm patterns

that you can audition from the floating 'pattern manager' window and then drop into your host sequencer. The patterns can then be used to play parts via any of RealLPC's five modes – you simply supply the notes.

Because it's sampled from a DI'd electric guitar, RealLPC only comes alive when coupled with an amplifier plug in (IK's basic but decent AmpliTube 2 Duo is bundled with it). Beyond this,

we also found using the many articulations difficult at first. However, with features like hammer on, legato and velocity-dependent articulations, not to mention the full array of keyswitching techniques, there's plenty of incentive to put the time in and get to grips with it. Overall, RealLPC is an excellent product and a logical progression from the MusicLab team.

9/10



Soundware round-up

Prime Loops **DOWNLOAD**
Wonky Beats £18

Contact via website
Web www.primeloops.com
Format WAV, Apple Loops, Live, FL Studio, REX2, ReFill, Stylus RMX, GarageBand



Wonky is definitely the name of the game here, with Wonky Beats offering 120 lo-fi, crushed, compressed-to-blazes beats, cruising at hip-hop and dub-friendly tempos. Lovingly crafted using custom hits made with classic synths such as the Roland Juno-106 and Korg Mono/Poly, each loop offers some of the most unusual, loping grooves you'll hear anywhere. You could even buy this just to extract the weird and undeniably off-centre grooves! Add to that the unique but somewhat niche sounds and fans of Prefuse 73 and Flying Lotus will find endless use for these rhythms.

8/10

Producer Loops **DOWNLOAD**
Dubstep Constructions Vol 2 £20

Contact Producer Loops, 0845 094 3077
Web www.producerloops.com
Format WAV, REX2, Acid, ReFill, Apple Loops



This pack features ten construction kits, all at the practically mandatory dubstep tempo of 140bpm. Each kit features a demo mix and all mix elements presented as stems. Aside from the basslines, a lot of the programming is fairly standard stuff, and wouldn't take more than a few seconds to recreate with your own samples. This wouldn't be a problem if the production values were sky high, but that's not the case either - it all sounds a bit 'Dubstep-R-Us' and rarely excites or inspires. This pack isn't unusable, but you'd expend quite some effort breathing life into it, and it's not as good as Vol 1 in the series either.

5/10

Sonokinetic **DOWNLOAD**
Turntablism €30

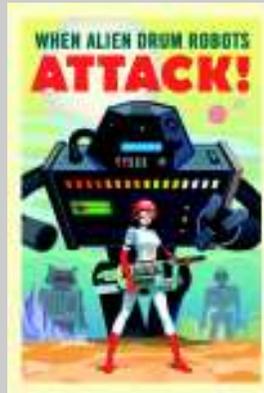
Contact via website
Web www.sonokinetic.com
Format WAV, REX, Apple Loops, EXS24, Kontakt



Here we have a 3GB+ collection of scratched samples at 80, 90, 100, 110 and 120bpm. There are over 500 of these, covering scratched beats, vocal samples and instrumentals. Turntablism is surprisingly comprehensive. It also provides unscratched samples of 80 famous speeches, 50 George Bush quotes and 17 high-quality vinyl crackle sound effects, so you can get practising on your own original turntable compositions.

We have to admit that we were initially sceptical about this pack, expecting cheesy 'DJ'-style effects, but Turntablism proved us wrong. It's full of high-quality loops and FX from talented turntablists, and it's keenly priced too.

8/10



Goldbaby
When Alien Drum Robots Attack! \$39

Contact info@goldbaby.co.nz
Web www.goldbaby.co.nz
Format Battery, Guru, EXS24, REX, WAV

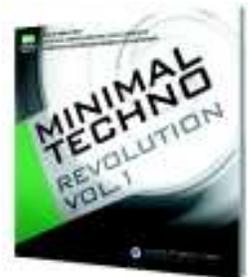
Firm favourites of **cm**, Goldbaby strike again with another prolific collection of samples. Described by the brazen babes as a 'drum and FX tool box', this pack is jammed full of high-quality one-shots, kits and loops. There's also a collection of 'Rise and Fall' FX and layering tools such as transient snaps to give your snares more bite, and vinyl crackle to make your kicks sizzle. All of the samples here sound warm and huge, a testament to both the sound sources (vintage drum machines, samplers and synths) and the high-quality processing they underwent.

Don't be put off by the retro sci-fi terminology and artwork - this package will stretch right across genres like hip-hop, dubstep and DnB, as well as being perfect for house and techno. To top it off, each pack comes with a PDF of pictures of the equipment used to make the samples. This is a hugely versatile, premium quality pack at a great price.

9/10

Sounds of Revolution
Minimal Techno Revolution Vol 1 €80

Contact info@mutekki-media.de
Web www.sounds-of-revolution.com
Format WAV, REX, Apple Loops, EXS24, Kontakt



Minimal Techno Revolution comprises a huge library of one-shots and loops, totalling over 2000 samples. Each folder is meticulously filed, with subfolders making it easy to find the sound you need. Every sound is upfront, tight and powerful, and what's more, it's easy to get inspired and start working on ideas right away. One of the best things about the included loops is how they don't try and take over a project - they're EQ'ed to sit tightly without intruding. The kicks are fantastic, offering weight and power. If you can't find something you like in this package, you're in the wrong business.

9/10

Sony Sound Series **DOWNLOAD**
What It Is!
'70s Analog Funk £44

Contact via website
 Web www.soundstosample.com
 Format Acidized WAV

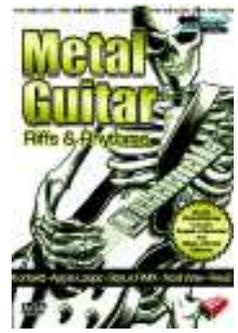


This pack is a true band-style sample set in construction kit format, featuring 15 kits built around a core band of drums, bass, guitar, keys and percussion, the sessions were tracked to 2-inch tape. Parts are presented as loops (two beats to eight bars in length) and sonically, the set is spot on, and the playing fluid and funky. Particularly nice are the real clavinet and lovely, solid electric basses, and some tracks also include horns and scat vocals. The authentic playing, vibe and sound really make this pack stand out.

9/10

Nine Volt Audio
Metal Guitar:
Riffs & Rhythms £95

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
 Web www.timespace.com
 Format Acid WAV, Stylus RMX, Apple Loops, REX2, Kontakt



Here we have 293 unique double-tracked parts at 15 chromatic intervals (4395 loops) both DI'ed and distorted, totalling over 7GB. The audio files are in time-malleable formats, so you can adjust the tempos - to the trained ear, the results of this aren't totally realistic, but it's acceptable. Musically, the set is very genre-specific, as you'd hope. Track construction is quick and the clean DI versions mean you can ditch their (slightly polite) amp sound in favour of your own.

7/10

PowerFX **DOWNLOAD**
Fairlight CMI Legacy \$69

Contact support@powerfx.com
 Web www.powerfx.com
 Format Reason ReFill



Fairlight CMI Legacy features the sounds of all 33 original 8-inch discs for the now-antiquated CMI II computer-powered music system. These vary from the obvious (drums, basses, pianos and keyboards) to the less obvious (effects, animals and weather), plus a couple of famous orchestra hits too. PowerFX have even added some extra sounds, taking the total to over 2000.

Samples from the original instrument are mono (44.1kHz, 16-bit) and sound very much of their time. However, from these, PowerFX have created a bunch of patches (Redrum, NN-XT, and Combinator) as well as some 80s-influenced sounds (SubTractor and Thor), so it all adds up to a surprisingly desirable, flavour-filled package.

8/10

Electronisounds \$35 **DOWNLOAD**
Downtempo Spirals

Contact junebug@electronisounds.com
 Web www.electronisounds.com
 Format WAV



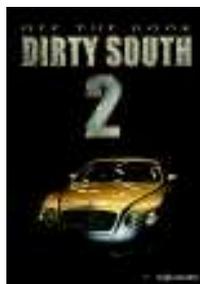
The remit for Downtempo Spirals is basically anything under 100bpm. You get over 3000 samples (around 2.5GB), comprising single hits, loops and multisamples, arranged across 190 folders.

DS is the work of five producers, with the majority coming from Junebug, JTEKK and Rhythm Lab. Sounds are mainly grouped by producer, but that doesn't stop the set from feeling very disorganised. Overall, there are indeed some good sounds included, but you'll have to wade through the rest to find them, which will require some patience.

6/10

Big Fish Audio
Off The Hook –
Dirty South 2 £65

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
 Web www.timespace.com
 Format Acidized WAV, Apple Loops, REX, Stylus RMX



Dirty South 2 revisits the Southern-influenced crunk style, this time featuring 41 construction kits plus bonus loops and hits (50 and 185 respectively). Tempos are mostly in the 70-to-90bpm range, with loops typically two or four bars long. DS2 is at its best in the beats department, serving up plenty of crisp, pre-processed sounds. Kits include all individual drum hits and often two separate beats loops. Also great are the bonus loops. Beyond this, sounds vary from the excellent to less inspired and the pack could really do with more sonic variety. It's not bad but this is by no means an essential release.

7/10

Toontrack **DOWNLOAD**
Songwriter's
Drumpack £15

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
 Web www.timespace.com
 Format MIDI for EZ/Supier Drummer



This is a pack of MIDI grooves recorded by a real drummer. It offers 11 songs' worth of grooves (450 in total) across five categories: ballad, half-time, mid-tempo, up-tempo and shuffle. Tempos range from 42 to 190bpm, though grooves should work well beyond their original tempos. Songs are broken down into sections with a number of variations for each. We found this made song construction very easy, and coupled with drummer Ricard Netermalm's tight but expressive playing, your tracks will no doubt sound excellent with him backing you up. More songs would be nice, but for the asking price, we really shouldn't complain!

9/10