

# cm mini reviews

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

Spitfire Audio

## Hans Zimmer Strings £699

Web [www.spitfireaudio.com](http://www.spitfireaudio.com)  
Format PC/Mac, VST/AU/AAX

The specific role played by the great man himself is unclear, but Hans Zimmer Strings sees Spitfire capturing a 344-member string orchestra (violins, violas, cells and basses) at AIR Lyndhurst Hall, in a 184GB (compressed) multisample library (205,501 samples), comprising sections of 20-60 players each.

The proprietary plugin interface couldn't be easier to use. Sitting alongside the Expression and Dynamics sliders, the big circular slider is assignable to one of four Controller parameters: Reverb depth, Vibrato, Tightness or Release. The bottom section tabs between the articulations switcher and triggering options, the mixer, and the four aforementioned Controllers. The mixer features up to 26 mic channels, depending on the instrument, and the 147 keyswitched articulations include all the expected sustains, shorts, pizzicatos, tremolos, etc, as well as a ton of variations and effects - Flautando, Sul Pont, Sul Tasto et al.

HZ Strings suffers from a few functional glitches. The big 'knob' can't be assigned its own MIDI CC, switching to the CC mapped to whichever of the four Controllers it's pointed at. That being the case, and given how much dead space there is in the top section, surely there's no reason not to just put its four target Controllers up there instead. Similarly, the mixer channels and articulations could easily be squeezed into fewer pages if Spitfire softened their apparent penchant for the graphical void. Ironically, the preset browser, which uses its real estate more efficiently, is too small. Also, while we like the separate Left/Right/Centre patches for each section, encouraging construction of your own ensembles, the list of articulations differs for each one.

All of these criticisms certainly fade into the background once you start playing the thing, though: it's beautiful. The sound is, indeed, enormous, but in a graceful, controlled way; and the 'quieter' articulations are actually the most interesting aspect of it. From (Dunkirk-style) tension and atmosphere and (Interstellar-style)



anticipatory builds, to uniquely dense textural delicacies, evocative effects and beyond, there's nothing else like it on the market.

The price is clearly going to be restrictive to most people, and this certainly doesn't serve as a 'general purpose' strings ROMpler, but for those who are after the current last word in thick, epic, cinematic strings, Zimmer and Spitfire's offering is certainly it - all UI and consistency issues aside.

8/10

Polyverse Music

## Gatekeeper \$49

Web [www.polyversemusic.com](http://www.polyversemusic.com)  
Format PC/Mac, VST/AU/AAX

The latest collab between Polyverse and psytrance duo Infected Mushroom, this is a volume modulation effect plugin, designed to operate like a step sequencer, envelope or elaborate LFO. Up to eight tab-housed volume envelopes are played back in any



combo, switched manually in Auto Play mode, or triggered by MIDI note input - a single note can trigger any combination of envelopes. Envelopes are drawn by manipulating nodes in the main display, manually, and using a large set of preset curve 'brushes'. Each envelope has its own global controls, comprising smoothing, volume, panning and playback speed, the last three of which can be modulated by MIDI velocity and note, randomised, and alternated between two values. A powerful, intuitive 'polyphonic' tool capable of insanely complex stereo, pseudo-sidechaining and gating effects, Gatekeeper is an absolute must-have.

10/10

Audiority

## Tube Modulator €35

Web [www.audiority.com](http://www.audiority.com)  
Format PC/Mac, VST/AU/AAX

A collection of 50s/60s modulation effects emulations worked into a single plugin, Tube Modulator combines wobbling of amplitude, pitch and spatial positioning with analogue circuit modelling. Modulation of volume and/or pitch is done in the left half, while stereo animation is handled on the right, with



the green dot in the central display moving to reflect both on the Y and X axes. The modelled circuits include various flavours of tremolo, vibrato and chorus on the left, and auto-Panner, Leslie and Wow/Flutter on the right. The speed (sync'd or free from 0.1-10Hz), LFO waveform and amounts of the two modulators are adjusted independently or linked.

Guitarists will love this, but it also works wonders on keyboards, synths and percussion. The modulation itself is only half the story, with the variable modelled circuitry bringing an ear-pleasing spectrum of analogue-style warmth to the table, even with both mod amounts at zero.

8/10

# Soundware round-up



## Toontrack EZKeys Dream Machine £114

The latest in EZKeys' line of preset-driven sample-based (1GB) virtual keyboards (with compositional tools) combines a Rhodes Mk 7 and a celeste, with special appearances by marimba and xylophone. The 47 presets use each instrument alone and in various combinations, and each features bespoke adjustable parameters including modulation, reverb, filtering, tremolo and tone. The sounds range from mellow and haunting to percussive and funky, with the Soundscapes folder entering filmic territory. We're big Rhodes fans, and Dream Machine's effortless sound shaping, great playability and silky sonics has us beaming.

[www.timespace.com](http://www.timespace.com)

9/10

Ghost Syndicate

## Horizon £25

Joining the throng of ambience/drone/texture sample libraries already around, Horizon sets itself apart with its 'rhythmic and glitch' loops: 76 spiky percussive lines constructed mostly from heavily processed found sounds. There are some deeply intriguing bits and pieces in that particular folder - we'd love to see a whole release dedicated to that. Other than that, it's the usual story: 240 loops divided into 'atmospheres', 'drone loops' and 'field recordings', all very well produced and ready to drop into your downtempo and cinematic projects.

[www.loopmasters.com](http://www.loopmasters.com)

8/10



Che Ramirez

## Blue Note Sessions

Subscription

Misleading name aside (there's no connection whatsoever to the record label), Che Ramirez' new library is one for hip-hop producers to get their teeth into. Two hundred odd live loops of jazz combo elements - drums, bass, electric guitar, percussion, piano, Rhodes and vibraphone - alongside 151 one-shots. The leftward panning on the upright bass is annoying, the drum kit used for the loops is a little harsh and the piano sounds very crusty, but we really like the styling and earthiness of Blue Note Sessions.

[www.noiz.com](http://www.noiz.com)

8/10



Sample Tools by Cr2

## This is Techno 2 £16

The follow-up to This is Techno continues down the same path, but this time, strangely, at 127 rather than 128bpm. Twenty gutsy stemmed drum loops (100 files) set the pack's stall out somewhere between tech house and the brighter, 'happier' forms of techno, while the basses are almost entirely sub-focused, and the synth loops cover as much rhythmic and tonal ground as their number (20 again) permits. Six superb "songstarter" construction kits yield plenty more usable material, and a healthy sack of one-shots and Spire synth presets adds to the value.

[sounds.beatport.com](http://sounds.beatport.com)

9/10



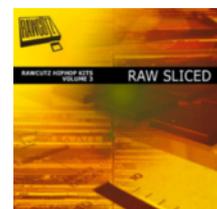
Raw Cutz

## Raw Sliced £45-50

The third and last of Raw Cutz' hip-hop production kits for Live and Maschine, Raw Sliced is more of the same, comprising 25 one-shot-triggering Drum Racks and Maschine Groups (134MB), plus projects for both DAWs showing them in action, and the bounced loops and stems therefrom. The organisation is quite confusing, but the main thing is the kits, which are packed with Dilla-style phat drums, vibey basses and crusty, crate-dug licks. Again, though, it's odd that the Maschine projects include MIDI patterns but the Live ones don't.

[www.loopmasters.com](http://www.loopmasters.com)

8/10



UNDRGND Sounds

**Junglist Rave Techno £30**

A bonkers, 90s-inspired stylistic pile-up, Junglist Rave Techno really does what it says on the tin, taking in everything from old-skool rave and breaks to various colours of drum 'n' bass and proto-UK garage. Tempos range from 127-150bpm, and the heart of it are 25 mini construction kits (oddly called 'drum loops'), riotously varied in their genre coverage but visually cohesive. The accompanying basses, pads, turntable FX, synths (including TB-303 riffs) and percussion loops are equally compelling, and their one-shots and sampler patches seal the deal.

[www.undrgrndsounds.com](http://www.undrgrndsounds.com)**9/10**

Loopmasters

**Psytrance Pulse £35**

The vast majority of the self-explanatory Psytrance Pulse's 60 drum loops are snare and top lines, but if you don't fancy any of the six kick and two hi-hat loops that go with them, programming your own using the supplied one-shots is easy enough. The 61 dune-quaking basslines are entirely self-sufficient, however, and the 152 screaming, bendy, psychedelic synth and 'sequence' loops won't fail to get those hands in the air. The cheeky 'zap loops' are wicked, too, with potential for use as both lead elements and spot FX. All in all, this is an easy 140bpm win for epic dance producers.

[www.loopmasters.com](http://www.loopmasters.com)**9/10**

Native Instruments

**Timeless Glow £44**

No longer just for Maschine, of course, NI's new Expansion provides all the tools required to put together authentic, retro-styled house in any DAW... but still with plenty of stuff exclusive to Maschine (23 Bass Synth and Drumsynth presets, 45 kit Groups and seven full Projects) and various of their other products. The essence of the thing, though, is a wealth of sampled drums and other one-shots (630 samples) and the 40 mini construction kit loops that have been made with them, all evoking the early, soulful Chicago sound beautifully.

[www.native-instruments.com](http://www.native-instruments.com)**8/10**

Touch Loops

**Cosmic Hip-Hop £24**

Claiming inspiration by the likes of Sun Ra, Flying Lotus and Glenn Astro, Touch Loops' new baby is an electronica/hip-hop crossover sample pack, with a strong textural angle and a deft rhythmic touch. Almost all of the 25 drum loops are hi-hat-free, enabling mixing and matching with the 14 loops in the Loose Hats folder; while the predominantly synthesised basslines bring Mr Scruff to mind, if anyone. The melodic side of things is covered by a diversity of synths, pads, Rhodes, and it all adds up to a sublime and characterful library at a great price.

[www.touchloops.com](http://www.touchloops.com)**9/10**

Sample Magic

**Soulful Beats £30**

Despite being quite plain in contemporary soundware terms, with its unremarkable blend of future R&B, trap and loping soul/hip-hop beats, this 1.7GB library pulls off its genre-straddling mission with great competence. With 350-odd loops divided by tempo - 90 and 115bpm - and a similar volume of one-shots onboard, it crams in a good amount of material for the money; and the production is of the highest standard. We particularly dig the drum loops and mini construction kits, but we can't help but lament the omission of a discrete set of bass loops.

[www.samplemagic.com](http://www.samplemagic.com)**8/10**

Loopmasters

**Organic Trip Hop & Scratch****£35**

An ingenious concept, brilliantly executed. Canadian producer Dubmatix has created a huge, impressive collection of trip-hop loops - stemmed drums, basses, guitars, vocals, FX, etc, all seemingly pulled from full tracks - then handed it to turntablist Illorn, who's glitched them up to make a further 200 loops (for 2.4GB in total). Auditioning through regular and scratched samples is inspiring, and Loopmasters' library encapsulates the spirit of classic trip-hop by Portishead, Massive Attack and the like.

[www.loopmasters.com](http://www.loopmasters.com)**10/10**

Zero-G

**Ethera EVI £80**

Built on 18.5GB of samples, the latest in producer Stefano Maccarelli's Ethera series of powerful scripted Kontakt libraries holds four separate instruments, three of them once again featuring vocalist Clara Sorace. Between them, EVI Vocal Builder, Vocal Phrases and True Legato Instrument all give a variety of options for non-verbal vocal parts, while EVI Synth's immense repository of instrument patches - sampling analogue synths, guitars, horns, a 1928 felt piano and more - makes for a rich sound design playground. Good value, too.

[www.timespace.com](http://www.timespace.com)**10/10**

ModeAudio

**Strata £14**

Fifty presets for Xfer Records' Serum synth, powered by 48 new sampled wavetables and each one matched up with a MIDI file to show it off. Ambient is the target genre this time round, but there's certainly no reason to take that as a creative stricture of any sort, as Strata's well-balanced mix of understated bass (of the slow attack variety), pad, synth and FX patches - every one making good use of all four Serum macros - is highly adaptable, and the wavetables are well worth the price of admission even on their own.

[www.modeaudio.com](http://www.modeaudio.com)**9/10**