



ON THE DVD

**WHAT IS IT?**

A collection of world instruments in plug-in form for adding a bit of global spice to your productions.

**CONTACT**

Who: MOTU  
Tel: 01767 313447  
Web: [motu.com](http://motu.com)

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- 1 High-quality sounds
- 2 Wide range of territories covered
- 3 Drag-and-drop loops for instant gratification



# MOTU Ethno Instrument | £209

Packing 8GB of global sounds into a plug-in, MOTU send **Jono Buchanan** around the world in 80 minutes

**T**ake a moment to look around and you'll notice that the world appears to be getting smaller. Whether it's low-cost air fares

enticing us to far-flung corners, competitive roaming rates on our mobile phones, or the vast range of global cuisine available in every town, I like to think that we're a little more cosmopolitan than we give ourselves credit for.

This is perhaps even more true of our tastes in music – whether it's a Bollywood string sample propping up a

Britney track, a Reggaeton-infused R&B number, or conga and tabla loops coursing through a House record, it's fair to say that us production types have never allowed international boundaries to stand in the way of creativity.

It should come as no surprise then that a major player has bundled this global musical experience into a plug-in. Welcome MOTU's Ethno instrument.

**Fiddling about**

Ethno is a Universal plug-in for Mac and PC. It features an 8GB library roughly

split half and half between 'playable' sampled instruments and a loop and phrase library. Once you're installed and you've connected the now obligatory USB protection key, you can either use Ethno as a standalone instrument, or within a host sequencer.

The main interface is very attractive and pleasantly 'busy' – there's lots to look at and discover, but it's all nicely laid out. The central area allows you to load one or more instruments and clicking on an available slot brings up Ethno's excellent sound-selection browser. Once you're in here, you can choose instruments, phrases and loops from the menus at the top, and these can in turn be organised either by musical group (strings, woodwinds and so on), or geographically.

Ethno is multi-timbral, so you can load up to 64 instruments (if your sequencer can handle that many) in one instance, although make sure you keep an eye on that CPU meter. You can assign each sound to its own MIDI channel or select the same channel for each sound, resulting in a potentially monstrous 'global' über-patch. Whenever an instrument is chosen, its

## Fruit Loops

For many people, the immediacy of Ethno's loop functionality will provide the biggest draw.

Far from providing the user with a bunch of 'untouchable' loops, however, MOTU have done well to make these as flexible as possible.

For starters, there are three playback modes for loops: Sample, Stretch

and Slice. Sample does what you'd expect, allowing you to trigger notes from your keyboard. Stretch does the same,



but allows you to control pitch independently from tempo. Slice mode not only follows the tempo, but also aligns each 'slice' of a loop to the beat, allowing for highly accurate rhythmical playback. A speed control lets you offset the tempo against the host one and a half/double speed control is present too.

region is displayed on a map on the right of the interface so you can easily keep tabs on what you're playing and where the instrument comes from.

## Bringing more to the tabla

Any collection of this type will be judged by the sounds on offer, and again, Ethno doesn't disappoint. A

information for each. Audio content falls into two categories – instruments and phrases (including loops). The former is self-explanatory, in that once you've loaded an instrument, you're free to play it as normal. The latter includes two types of phrase or utterance. 'Utterances' allow a MIDI trigger of a pre-recorded phrase, such as a vocal

This teaches you more about the geography of sounds in a week than my generation learnt in a year

collection totalling 8GB might seem quite modest, yet the range of sounds here is comprehensive.

The usual suspects are here: shakuhachis, tablas, djembe drums and Irish fiddles. And more obscure instruments are not only included but are positively celebrated too, including several pitched and percussive instruments I'd not come across before.

The manual offers some background to all of these and gives key and pitch

snippet. 'Loops' are similar but feature a loop point, which is how you'll find most of the drum and percussion phrases ship. Clear?!

Click the 'Sync To Host' button and any phrase plays back in time with the host sequencer. In addition to being trigger-able, many of the loops can be simultaneously dragged and dropped onto a free audio track as a WAV file.

Combining loops is so simple that arrangements come together in no time.

## Delving deza

Once your instruments are organised, you can elect to turn Ethno into quite a sophisticated synth/sampler, in that the core sound can be passed through filter, amplifier, LFO and envelope sections and, better still, through the onboard convolution reverb. The synth tools lie towards the interface's top section and are straightforward to use if you're familiar with synthesis.

The filter section is great; the resonance control for one seems quite beefy. Adding extra vibrato via the LFOs also adds an extra dimension to some woodwind sounds, but there's enough flexibility with the tools on offer to turn these programs into completely new hybrids. The convolution reverb offers many preset starting points, from cathedrals and meditation chambers, to forest settings. Beautiful!

## Gongclusion

It never ceases to amaze me what you can get for £200 these days. Here is a comprehensive set of multi-sampled instruments, phrases, utterances and loops, which are well-recorded, excellently organised and

immediately intuitive and fun to play. As an educational resource, this is a wonderful plug-in, which will teach students more about the geography behind these sounds in a week than my entire generation learnt in a year.

Fortunately it has other strengths. As a production and composition tool it also excels, allowing for the subtle addition of global instrumentation to existing tracks, or allowing a fully-fledged 'ethnic' ensemble to be created from scratch. The range and quality of sounds on offer should ensure MOTU have a real hit on their hands here. **FM**

## SPECS

8GB library of sounds  
Standalone or host sequencer operation  
Up to 64 instruments per instance  
Synthesis features  
Convolution reverb  
Loop and phrase sequencer  
17 output pairs supported

## ALTERNATIVES



As a plug-in, Ethno's range of sounds and loops is fairly unique. Its stiffest competition will come from existing sample packages, which tend to be broken down into styles or regions.

In terms of hardware, Ethno's would-be competitors have mostly been discontinued, but remain at large on the second-hand market.

Perhaps the most relevant of these is Emu's Planet Earth module, released in 2001.



You'll never lose your sounds again with Ethno's super-efficient sound-selection browser...

FutureMusic

VERDICT

STABILITY

VALUE

EASE OF USE

VERSATILITY

RESULTS

This is a real winner. It has a great range of highly-usable sounds for students and professionals alike.