

cm mini reviews

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

Vibrant Digital Engineering Diode-108 £2.29

Web www.vibrantdigitalengineering.com
Format iPad

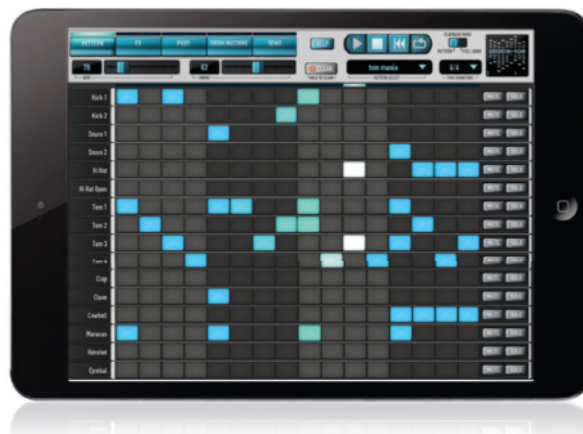
This 16-voice iPad drum machine is fuelled by an excellent and sizeable library of classic beatbox samples and original sounds by Dubsounds, Samples From Mars, 99Sounds and Orange Tree Samples, with all the essential compatibilities in place: Inter-App Audio, AudioBus, Dropbox, microphone and Core MIDI. Load a preset kit or combine sounds from the library and your own collection to make a new one, then program or tap in as many 16-step patterns as you like and string them together into a song. The 16-channel mixer-style Drum Machine editor lets you adjust the amount or mix of Distortion, Compression and Reverb effects, and tweak Volume, Pan, Gate time and Pitch.

Diode-108's big feature, though, is the implementation of per-step effects. Each channel includes its own series of step sequencers for modulating the above controls throughout the pattern, plus EQ (Tone) and the wet/dry Delay mix. Editing is done in basic Slider

Mode (set a discrete value per step) or the cleverly designed Advanced Mode, which interpolates between steps in various ways. Multitouch is supported for quickly creating ramps and curves, and switching the Pitch sequencer to Note Mode enables absolute chromatic pitching of the sound for melodic parts, with the note name listed at the top of each step.

The Special FX sequencer, meanwhile, presents a rack of 15 creative effect 'blocks' (Reverse, Bitcrush Sweep, Dive, Flanger, etc) that can be dragged onto the steps of the sequence and stretched across multiple steps.

It all hangs together very well, giving the user extensive control over both patterns and sounds. The problem is, while the effects sound OK, there's very little on offer in the way of editable parameters for each one. The delay, for



example, has just delay time, feedback and filter controls, and they're all quite restrictive in their ranges, while the compressor can't be adjusted at all. The Special FX blocks, too, have no controls - you have to take them as they come.

However, given the price tag, we really are nitpicking! As a highly creative, easy-to-use and great-sounding addition to your iPad music studio, Diode-108 is pretty much essential.

9/10

IK Multimedia iRig Mic Studio £160

Web www.ikmultimedia.com
Format PC/Mac/iOS/Android

The new flagship at the front of IK's fleet of microphones is a small but reassuringly weighty large diaphragm condenser (1" back electret), available in moody black and natty silver models. Connection to the host computer, phone or tablet is made via a Micro-USB port in the base of the mic, which handles power and audio signals, and three cables are supplied, giving you options to connect to your device of choice via USB, Lightning or Micro-USB. Also in the box is a handy desktop tripod stand and a bag, while an included code unlocks a couple of mic models for IK's new Mic Room modelling app, and draws your attention to the usual suite of free apps for iOS and Android, which can be downloaded from their respective online stores.

On the barrel of the iRig Mic Studio, a minijack headphone output enables monitoring through the built-in audio interface. A pair of knobs control the mic input gain and headphone output levels, and a multicoloured LED in between gives clear visual feedback on input signal level.

The AD converter in the iRig Mic Studio operates at 24-bit and 44.1 or 48kHz, while the quoted frequency response of 20Hz-20kHz and maximum SPL of 133dB imply a high degree of versatility. In our testing, we found the mic to be a very capable performer for the money, capturing the finer details of a variety of vocal deliveries and acoustic guitar playing styles well, with accurate dynamic representation. We were also quite impressed by the relatively low noise floor of the built-in preamp.

While the iRig Mic Studio isn't about to replace anyone's main 500-quid-plus studio microphone, we enthusiastically recommend it to singer/songwriters, mobile producers and field recordists as an excellent low/mid-range option, primarily for its peerless portability



and convenience, but also for its sensitivity and general performance. It sounds really good and 'just works' with any and all music-making platforms.

9/10

UVI Retro Organ Suite £115

Web www.timespace.com
Format PC/Mac

Loading into their well-established - and free - UVI Workstation engine (VST/AU/AAX/RTAS/MAS/Standalone), Retro Organ Suite is a 4GB (7GB uncompressed) multisample bank that encapsulates the sounds of a range of classic electronic organs in six separate instruments. Specifically, they comprise Hammer B (Hammond B3), Super VX (Vox Continental), Retrocorda (Philips Philicorda), EX III (Korg CX-3), GT2500 (Eminent Grand Theater 2500) and Combo K, (combining the Farfisa Compact Duo and Combo Compact, Elka Classic, Philips AG7500 and Hammond M100). The source organs were kept as authentic as possible throughout the recording process, with their original speakers, vibrato, percussion and other elements - over 20,000 samples in total.

As is always the case with UVI's multi-instrument libraries, the six Retro Organ interfaces aren't actually as different as they first appear. All of them share a common FX page,

housing a board of seven virtual guitar pedals (distortion, delay, reverb, etc), while the Edit pages of all but EX III give access to the same array of parameters - multimode filter, amp and filter envelopes, tremolo and vibrato control, and mod wheel filter modulation depth. The Edit page for EX III (which comes in monophonic and polyphonic versions) has a set of nine adjustable drawbars instead - it's the only one that actually lets you get hands-on with the harmonics.

The differences between the organs become apparent in their Main page controls and, of course, the sounds of the samples behind them. Hammer B, GT2500 and Combo K are dual-layer, for example, with their variably sourced and processed layers mixed and matched in the Main page; while Retrocorda instead offers seven preset voice combination buttons in 'Normal' and reverb/vibrato alternatives.

It's obviously important to understand that Retro Organ Suite isn't trying to be a purist recreation of the original instruments it represents, and isn't trying to be an algorithmic 'emulation' instrument exactly; rather, it's a sort



of 'reduction' of these, designed for quick and easy access to the legendary sounds for which they're known, with enough customisation to keep tinkerers happy. Approached with that in mind, UVI's nostalgic sextet makes for a sonically expansive and satisfyingly playable arsenal of faux organs.

8/10

AmpleSound Ample Metal Eclipse \$119

Web www.amplesound.net
Format PC/Mac

Beijing-based guitar emulation specialists AmpleSound have garnered high scores on these pages with their 'acoustic' Ample Guitar M (9/10, **cm191**) and Ample Guitar T (9/10, **cm192**).

Running in the same host engine (VST/AU/AAX/RTAS/standalone), Ample Metal Eclipse is a 3.5GB virtual rendition of the ESP Eclipse I guitar, with eight articulations (Sustain, Palm Mute, Hammer On, Artificial Harmonic, Pull Off, Legato Slide, Slide In/Out) captured for every fret.

Sound shaping is done via the main controls and a rack of eight virtual effects pedals (no amp sims, though - you'll need to run it through your own), but what makes it 'metal' is the sound of the guitar itself, the low default tuning (C G C F A D) and the library of metal-orientated riffs included for loading into the Strummer sequencer. Tablature in various formats can also be loaded into the Tab player, and the engine does a superb job of playing it back.

AME sounds so astonishingly realistic and expressive that we can forgive its poor documentation, lack of presets and the standalone host's tendency to crash periodically.

8/10



Best Service Organum Venezia £63

Web www.timespace.com
Format PC/Mac

Developed by V3Sound in collaboration with Symphonia Concert Library, and running in the supplied Best Service Engine instrument (VST/AU/standalone), Organum Venezia is a sampled pipe organ "recorded near Venice, Italy". There's not much to the interface - just 18 buttons for activating a range of single stops and combinations, and sliders for volume and convolution reverb depth - and being a pipe organ, there's only one velocity layer, of course, which explains the tiny 330MB footprint.

For that full-on organ sound, all you have to do is activate the Tutti button, which combines all stops, and sounds suitably majestic. For custom tones, the individual stops - Trumpet 8, Flute 4, 8 and 16, Prestant 4, Celeste, etc - serve as a small library of stackable layers, while the Combis comprise various combinations of stops, some of which aren't available singly.

The pipe organ is all about power, and Organum Venezia certainly has plenty of that. We do wish the interface wasn't quite so featureless, but the sound is good and the price seems fair.

7/10



Soundware round-up



Fluffy Audio TimeDrops \$69

A joyfully mad Kontakt 5 library (1GB) that enables 'freezing' and manipulation of the loaded sample using a variety of granular playback modes and other controls. The movement of grains is visualised by the Waveform and Window displays, and modulation comes in the shape of an ADSR envelope and an LFO. On the down side, while you can import your own samples, doing so is such a faff that you won't really want to. With its 92 lengthy included samples, though, TimeDrops gives you a wealth of starting points, in a very powerful engine, for conjuring up all kinds of pads, drones, atmospheres and rhythm beds.

www.fluffyaudio.com

9/10

Mode Audio

Deep Instinct – Sylenth1 House Presets £13

60 deep/tech house patches for LennarDigital's evergreen synth, plus 50 MIDI files for auditioning them. The programmer's skill and confidence are evident throughout, from the beefy basses and ear-stabbing leads, to the edgy pads, energetic arps and funky gated patterns. And while this is about as expensive as a preset library of this size should ever be, in our opinion, the inclusion of the MIDI files pushes Deep Instinct comfortably back over the line.

www.modeaudio.com

8/10



Goldbaby

Unrealistic Vibrating Particles \$39

A 2GB library (1427 samples) of "synthetic FX" made with Goldbaby's extraordinary collection of vintage and modern gear. It's a spectacular panoply of chiptune-style runs and burbles, picturesque drones and atmospheres, threatening sirens, energetic rises and drops, explosive impacts, delicious melodies and more, produced with the exquisite attention to detail we've come to expect from the 'baby. Suitable for use in all styles of dance and electronic music, UVP is a library you may well find yourself calling on for every project, and the value for money is simply ridiculous.

www.goldbaby.co.nz

10/10



Audiority

Relative Dimension £30

100 Omnisphere 2 presets and their associated samples (1GB), aimed at film scorers and ambient composers. The vast majority of the library is textural, from shadowy, haunting beds to brighter, harsher soundscapes. The remainder is rhythmic – arps and pulses of the brooding, mysterious kind. Omnisphere's modulation and effects have been put to good use, and the patches lend themselves perfectly to manipulation using The Orb. Our only concern is that Spectrasonics' mighty synth comes well stocked with this kind of stuff out of the box; but if you need more, this is a solid buy.

www.timespace.com

8/10



Rhythmic Robot

Platter £20

The source samples (vintage synths) for this three-oscillator Kontakt 'string machine' were pressed to vinyl and replayed on a 60s Danette and a 1910 hand-cranked record player – flip between the two with the Vintage switches. Add in modulation, vinyl-emulation processing and other effects and you have quite possibly RR's weirdest instrument yet. We're not mad about the rotary sample selectors (we'd rather they were stepped) or sure how much mileage there is to be had in such an overtly 'antique' sound, but for lovers of the strange and dusty, this is clearly a must-have.

www.rhythmicrobot.com

8/10



Sample Magic

Soma Records Samples £20

Slam's legendary label makes its soundware debut with this 640MB pack of techno loops, one-shots, MIDI files and sampler patches. Everything is generated by synths and drum machines, as befits the genre, with the loops - at 127 and 130bpm - taking in stemmed drums, basses, percussion, pads, synths and effects, and the one-shots covering drum kit elements and synth hits. The overarching mood is dark and menacing, the production is absolutely first class from start to finish, and there's a trove of quality noises to be discovered here.

www.samplemagic.com

9/10



Niche Audio

Sublime Techno £25

Niche Audio's latest Maschine/Live project pack taps an unspecified roster of analogue synths and drum machines for "over 90%" of its sounds, resulting in a supremely phat, up-front library of 17 techno/tech-house Groups/Drum Racks (plus 51 Instrument Rack and Simpler presets for melodic play in Live), and 12 genuinely release-quality full projects (two of them Live-only). There's also a WAV version available for the same price, but we'd question its value, since the playability and convenience of the instruments and their effects chains are key.

www.loopmasters.com

9/10



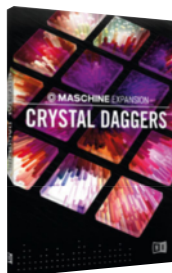
Native Instruments

Crystal Daggers £44

The "perfect blend of underground and mainstream for crossover appeal", this Maschine library draws on hip-hop, EDM, trap, R&B and beyond for its 45 kits (incorporating 20 presets for Monark, 40 for Massive, 15 Drum Synths and 320 samples), ten projects and 202 patterns. The cross-pollination of genres results in a broad spectrum of sonic flavours from kit to kit, but the production style is generally clean and spacious across the board. As ever with NI's Maschine Expansions, you get a lot of stuff for your money.

www.native-instruments.com

9/10



Eventdyne

EDM Loop Essentials £16

50 four-bar drum loops, some with synth elements layered on top, presented in Full, Kick only and (often multiple) No Kick versions. The beats are fulsome, the production is in-your-face and thoroughly mix-ready, but with every sample starting and ending with an eighth-note (at 128bpm) lead-in/out, they don't actually... well, *loop* without preparatory editing. Not ideal. Also problematic is that the pack feels like the Drum Loops folder from a larger library, which makes the price tag a little awkward - a shame because the sounds themselves really are excellent.

sounds.beatport.com

6/10



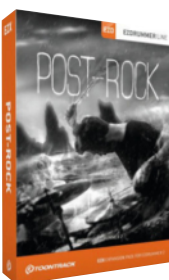
Toontrack

Post-Rock EZX £42

Recorded at Reykjavik's Sundlaugin Studios, Post-Rock adds four artsy new kits to your EZdrummer or Superior 2 library: Tama Starclassic, 1964 Rogers, Yamaha Oak Custom and Sakae Trilog, plus Zildjian, Sabian and Bosphorus cymbals, and a handful of quirky percussion sounds (Tibetan singing bowl, studio stairs, etc). The kits share a common organic character and warmth, but there's enough variety between them (the Sakae comes in brush and mallet versions as well as sticks) to make them equally useful. The included grooves, played by Arnar Gislason, are great, too.

www.timespace.com

9/10



Samplephonics

Roots Revival £35

A good reggae sample library is a rare thing indeed, and this 2.3GB epic from Samplephonics is one of the best we've ever heard, comprising over 550 loops (including ten construction kits) and 370-odd one-shots. Being based on consistent studio recordings of a live band (bass, drums, guitar, percussion, melodica, various keys, synths and FX), using it does entail signing up to one particular production style, but that actually brings cohesion to the pack, maximising its utility. Beautifully performed, tightly produced and resolutely focussed, Roots Revival is wicked.

www.samplephonics.com

9/10



Sample Tools by Cr2

Melbourne Bounce 2 £13

The quirky house sub-genre gets its second dedicated sample library from Cr2, consisting of another 15 'drop' construction kits (including MIDI files and presets for the Sylenth1, Massive and Spire synths), ten bass multisample sets, and ten kick drums sampled at every note of an octave. Each kit is 32 bars long at 128bpm, and includes dry and wet versions of all lead elements. Bold, brash and bursting with enthusiasm, Melbourne Bounce 2 is even more inventive and bonkers than its predecessor - a bargain for any dance music producer.

sounds.beatport.com

10/10



Loopmasters

Back to the 80s £30

Delivering exactly what it says on the tin, Back to the 80s is a 789MB smorgasbord of nostalgic electro- and pop-inspired synth (bass and lead) and drum machine loops, hits and multisamples, exuding the bouncy, optimistic character of the era. As well as the period instrumentation, the requisite old-school effects are in full force, too - ie, there's a *lot* of reverb going on. With plenty of very usable material to be plundered, and an impressive level of diversity, particularly in the drum loops, Back to the 80s is a retro trip worth taking.

www.loopmasters.com

8/10

