

# cm mini reviews

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

## Toontrack EZbass £129

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

Toontrack's EZdrummer 2 (10/10, **cm205**) and EZkeys (various scores for various versions) virtual instruments give music producers everything they need to create authentic sounding drum and keyboard tracks; and now the band is one step closer to completion with the introduction of EZbass.

At the heart of EZbass are two multisampled electric bass guitars - a 'Vintage' Fender Jazz and a 'Modern' Alembic, totalling around 2GB of samples - each of which is used as the basis for a variety of presets that, in typical 'EZ' style, incorporate fixed effects racks. These take in amplification, EQ, reverb, chorus, distortion and more, and although you can't simply build your own rack from the ground up, the presets provide more than enough starting points to get the sound where you want it to be.

Both basses come in picked and fingered versions, and a comprehensive spread of keyswitching articulations enable realistic performances to be played via a MIDI keyboard,

from the expected slaps, downstrokes, ghost notes, etc, to the more technically complex Polyphonic Legato and Slide.

Like its percussive and melodic counterparts, though, EZbass features its own powerful clip and song sequencing environment, which lets you really go to town designing incredibly convincing basslines within the plugin itself, either from scratch or based on any of a huge library of included MIDI grooves. You can even drag a drum kit or keyboard MIDI file in to automatically generate a compatible bassline framework, and convert audio bass recordings to MIDI, both systems yielding impressively accurate results.

EZbass absolutely delivers on its promise of making utterly lifelike b-lines a snap to put together. The two multisampled instruments



sound fantastic and contrast well (and we don't doubt that expansion packs will add more in the future), and the sequencing tools are first class - it's essentially a complete mini DAW for electric bass. Another EZ win for the Toon', we can't recommend EZbass highly enough.

**10/10**

## Plugin Boutique Scaler 2 £50

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

Plugin Boutique's rather brilliant compositional assistant plugin, Scaler, automatically detects the closest scale to an incoming sequence of MIDI notes, then suggests a collection of chords that would work well with it, and lets you arrange them into a progression. In our review in **cm253** (9/10), we described it as a "powerful aid for musicians of all ability levels".

Version 2 adds a ton of features that take the core concept in various new directions. Not least of these is the ability to apply its harmonic detection magic to audio as well as MIDI clips, either imported or played in in real time. As with all audio analysis algorithms of this kind, accuracy can depend on the nature of the source material, but it's generally very impressive. DAW-synced playback now enables Scaler's suggestions to be auditioned in context, too.

Breaking Scaler out of its previous 'blocky' playback, the new Performance mode allows chords to be played with any of over 200 preset MIDI Performance phrases, or using the

onboard arpeggiator and strummer. Then there's the addition of 30 new instruments for auditioning, a ton of new chord sets and scales, voice grouping, a whole new page dedicated to designing custom modulations, the Pad View for keyswitching between progressions, a Humanize function and more.

We're also pleased to see that deeper editing of your final chord progression prior to export is now possible. It's still not the graphical piano roll-based interface we'd like to see eventually implemented, but being able to apply the aforementioned Performance patterns and adjust chord duration (up to 4x) and Repeat number (ditto) is a major improvement on the limited options of v1.

On top of all that, the new MIDI Capture function records Scaler 2's real-time output for



subsequent dragging out as a MIDI file, which is pretty nice.

A huge upgrade - albeit with a commensurate ramping of its already not-inconsiderable learning curve - Scaler 2 is a unique, ingenious and endlessly rewarding writing tool that you'll turn to time and again.

**9/10**

# Soundware round-up



## Native Instruments **Infinite Escape** £44

Minimal house is the subject of NI's latest Expansion, giving everyone 1.5GB of construction kits and one-shots for embellishment or origination of their own ultra-chic dancefloor numbers. It is particularly amenable to Maschine and Battery users, who get the deconstructed sources of said 'songs' in the form of 40 Groups (complete with MIDI patterns) and 45 Kits, respectively, plus 70 Massive and Monark presets. The beats are crisp and glitchy, basses tight and subby, melodics delicate and subterranean, and production is pristine. One of the best Expansions yet, we dare say.

[native-instruments.com](http://native-instruments.com)

**10/10**

Loopmasters

## **Future IDM** £35

Citing Bonobo, Four Tet and Bicep as influences, this 950MB library aims to cater to your more thoughtful electronic productions. Vintage xOx-boxes feature heavily in the Drum Loops folder, which wasn't entirely expected, given the name of the pack; and the basses, synths and FX are pleasingly rough-edged in their sound design and production. There are some great sounds to be found in Future IDM, but conceptually, it doesn't really live up to its title, sounding decidedly old-school to our ears, particularly in the beats. That styling isn't a problem in itself, of course, but potential buyers be warned.

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

**7/10**



MrJohnnyBatch

## **Processed Acoustics** \$26

The Noiiz subscription service has made quite a name for itself in the last few years, thanks in no small part to a vibrant community of soundware providers cooking up quirky libraries that you can now also buy individually outright. Processed Acoustics is a prime example, with producer MrJohnnyBatch treating recordings of a variety of acoustic instruments - upright bass, flutes, guitars, tuned percussion etc - to all sorts of electronic processing. The result is a colourful pick'n'mix of hybrid wonky rhythms, uplifting pads and skittish arps, full of sonic surprises.

[noiiz.com](http://noiiz.com)

**8/10**



Zero-G

## **Ignition** £57

A 1.6GB library of cinematic atmospheres, drones, impacts and FX, clearly aimed at sound designers working in movies, games and TV, but offering plenty for the musician seeking interesting noises, and sources for risers and suchlike. The whole thing is rolled into a very usable Kontakt engine, but the 400-odd samples are the point, many over 30 seconds long, and all spectacularly evocative. Highlights for us are the 'Percussive Impacts', 'Transitionals' and 'Ambiances and Textures', but we wouldn't miss the 'Vocal Dialogue' folder, which feels out of place.

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

**9/10**



WA Production

## **LoFi Illusion** \$20

Intriguingly (but rather misleadingly) described as serving up "a 1950s Motown feel with a 1960s psychedelic approach to lo-fi", LoFi Illusion is a tightly configured collection of samples, MIDI files and patches for laid-back, vinylistic productions of all kinds, from hip-hop to synthwave. In the loops department, you only get 30 beats and 50 melodics, but they're all crackers - warm, musical and groovy. Then there are 120 drum, percussion and synth shots, and 50 Serum presets, the last taking Xfer's synth down a mellower path than that normally travelled.

[waproductio.com](http://waproductio.com)

**9/10**

