WHAT IS IT?
A fully featured sampling/synthesis virtual instrument

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HIGHLIGHTS
1 An enormous and hugely varied sample library
2 Great synthesis and sample manipulation options
3 IRCAM time-stretch and granular synthesis

MOTU MachFive 3 | £349

With its latest update MachFive is starting to look like a secret weapon. *Stuart Bruce* investigates…

MachFive is one of the most sophisticated virtual instruments that I have ever encountered so this review comes with one major caveat: this is an overview. The manual runs to over 200 pages and with good reason.

Right, it's a sampler and plays back samples with all of the sophistications you would expect. Keygroups, dynamic layers, envelopes and filters which allow you to build and sculpt incredibly complex instruments with excellent internal and external MIDI performance controls. Then you have Loop Lab which allows you to slice up your loops with a full-screen edit page and then drag them as audio straight to an audio track or, if the slices are set to individual key

groups, as a MIDI file to a MIDI track for some ReCycle like action.

Manipulation of samples doesn't stop there either. MOTU describe the sound sources available as oscillators, so there are sample oscillators and pure synthesis oscillators. The five sample oscillators go from the simple sample to IRCAM stretch and granular synthesis options. In each oscillator you can manipulate the sample by looping sections, inserting other samples, crossfading and setting start/end points. The stretch and granular oscillators give yet more creative possibilities (see *The IRCAM Effect*).

Control of the key groups is handled by the edit section and this is where you can apply level control, filters and

envelope and LFO settings. Here again you find a high level of sophistication with huge numbers of filter types (over 50) including Xpander, modelled on the Oberheim of the same name. I own one of those and these filters are very close to the originals and sound fantastic.

MOTU have taken something of a modular approach to MachFive so you can apply modulation to almost any parameter by right-clicking on the knob and selecting a source. If you need an extra envelope or LFO you can make them so mod sources are pretty much unlimited. This is great, especially when layering up big multi samples, and a godsend in sound design. Once you have all of this in place you can then apply some audio effects to the overall patch. These include equalizers, compressors, delays, reverbs including IR versions and the new SparkVerb, distortions and lots of modulating effects. The list is huge and they add yet another layer of excellent sound manipulation so that your patches sound well and truly production ready.

The magnificent seven

But it's also a synth. Those pure synthesis oscillators are no little add on; this is a huge new feature in MachFive and worthy of its own review. There are seven oscillators: Analogue, Analogue Stack, Wavetable, FM, Drum, Organ and Noise. Each of them does exactly what

it says on the tin – from the warmth of an analogue synth right through wavetables from some classic digital machines to the percussive attack of FM, seven very distinct characters that cover pretty much most forms of synthesis developed in the last 60 years. You have all the modulation and filtering possibilities you can imagine and, of course, you can build patches using the synth oscillators and the sample based ones so you can get all those hybrid sounds too.

The Event Rack is another great feature. You can work on parts or whole patches. The arpeggiator has three modes, the classic hold down a chord and it arpeggiates, a chordal mode and a mono mode for basslines and sequences. Further, there are script processors which do things like step bass programming, chords from a single note, a strummer which arpeggiates a chord when you move the mod wheel, and more. A whole slew of creative effects is possible and you can create your own processes for specific events.

MachFive also allows you to import patches from Kontakt (up to version 4), Giga, EXS24, Akai, EMU, Ensoniq and more. I tried it with Kontakt and EXS patches and it works a treat. Great if you want to put all your patches in one system and, of course, with all the filter and mod effects available you can make great new sounds impossible to achieve in the original machines and software.

The IRCAM effect

The IRCAM institute in Paris has been at the cutting edge of electronic music from the very early days of synthesis. MOTU have licensed their granular synthesis and time-stretch software and they both deserve their own mention.

The time-stretch is one of the best available anywhere (check out our time-stretch feature in FM286) and its inclusion in MachFive 3 opens up huge numbers of possibilities. Whether you use it to time-stretch a whole track (which it does incredibly well), to fill in missing notes in a sample set, or to provide incredible pitch changes to create amazing otherworldly sounds from simple samples, it will be something you return to again and again.

The granular version takes this to extremes, creating whole shifting soundscapes and insane stuttering madness using anything from single notes to whole tracks. The two of them together add hugely to the soundscaping possibilities of the instrument and also provide you with state-of-the-art time-stretching software worth $249 as a standalone.

Stacks of samples

Now a word about the 45GB sample library, which falls into three sections. Firstly, Loops and Instruments with the staples of sampled sounds, strings, ethnic, drums, percussion, choirs and synths plus a wide selection of drum and instrument loops. While some of them lack a little sophistication, the quality is very high and there is a huge range to choose from. Next, Biospheres is a massive selection of sampled and synthesized patches with plenty of choice across multiple genres and there is something for everybody in here. Finally come the big multi sampled instruments like Upright Bass, Piano, Star Drums, Latin percussion, Guitar, Electric Bass and a stunning Fender Rhodes. Extremely realistic and beautifully recorded, they really show off the capabilities of MachFive. Listen to some of the Audio examples to see what you can do with them.
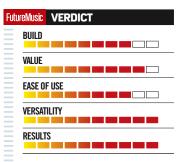
We were already impressed with MachFive but this update takes it to a whole new level. It's quite possibly the most sophisticated virtual instrument around and the creative possibilities are pretty much endless. Highly recommended. **FM**

> "Possibly the most sophisticated virtual instrument around and the creative possibilities are endless"

The synthesiser modules certainly set MachFive 3 apart from all the other samplers on the market.

ALTERNATIVES

Kontakt 5
£339
With an equally huge sample library and a very similar feature set (excluding the synth modules) including an excellent new time-stretch, Kontakt is the major competitor. While lacking the synths, it does have the biggest available set of excellent third-party sample instruments.
www.native-instruments.com

Pro Magix Independence Pro
296 euros
A powerful sampler with plenty of filters, FX and now with time-stretch too. The sound library is huge (over 70GB) and is extremely varied. Mac and PC too.
pro.magix.com

Steinberg HALion 5
£284
This is a big powerful sampler with time-stretch, bags of FX and filters, Slice software and much more. A potent instrument, certainly up there with the best.
www.steinberg.net

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RESULTS

A hugely powerful instrument, it has instant great sounds plus endless sound design possibilities.