

# Reviews in Brief

## Apple GarageBand

Would you believe it 99! Not so long after Apple's acquisition of Emagic they release a simplified audio program of their own! The old 'buy the company so you can integrate their features into your software trick'. It's little wonder Emagic has streamlined its product range and dropped its 'entry level' versions of Logic. No longer will Logic Gold be an option for the total audio beginner. Instead those folk will be steered towards GarageBand, Apple's answer to the old 'recording studio in the computer' trick. That's not to imply GarageBand is a Logic rip-off. The program borrows a number of concepts from various audio sequencing packages including ProTools, Cubase, Acid and Apple's own SoundTrack.



GarageBand comes as part of the iLife suite and enjoys the distinction of not sporting an 'ave' prefix, which sets it apart from the other iPrograms of the collection. Although iTunes, iDVD and iPhoto have all seen upgrades, all three have already enjoyed their debuts. GarageBand is definitely the killer application of the foursome. Plus at \$79 for the suite you're hardly going to begrudge yourself a play.

The installation of GarageBand assumes you are running a G4 with a DVD ROM drive, as the installation places about 1.5GB of Apple format loops. Apple Loop Format is really the big news behind GarageBand. According to the specs, these files are a little more than just samples. But embedded within these files along with the AIFF sample data is key, tempo and transient information, much like the data stored within Acid or Rex2 files. Midi data used to create the loop is also embedded along with effects patch information. Consequently, an Apple Loop dropped onto an audio track (or 'Real Instrument' track) will play back the sample along with the Acid-esque ability to change pitch and tempo on the fly. Dropping a loop onto a track utilising AudioUnit-based software instruments uses the Midi information. It's really quite seamless. The slap happy user can throw loops about to their heart's content. Everything stays in time and in pitch.

Sample CD manufacturers have been quick to offer collections of samples in Apple Loop Format so there'll be no end of source

material for the would-be producer. As for the standard-issue set of loops, these are completely royalty and copyright free. Apart from all these technicalities, GarageBand is so dead simple to use. Loops can be thrown into position so readily that you'll have a song up and happening in 10 minutes, seriously. A cohort and I banged together half a dozen tunes in a little over two hours. Of course you can record your own Midi and audio – a feature apparently for advanced users. Once a track is finished to your exacting ear, GarageBand conveniently renders your track and places it in your personal playlist within iTunes – ready for burning to CD, dumping to your iPod or broadcasting onto the web. It's really fun, cheap and just the ticket for anyone needing to 'knock up' some music in a hurry.

*Brad Watts*

*Price: \$79*

*Format: AudioUnit.*

*Apple Australia: 133622*

## NuEdge Developments Sonic Charge $\mu$ Tonic

Over the next few issues of AT we're going to help steer your browser at some excellent downloads from various software developers. What these developers have in common is that all of them make excellent sounding, highly useable soft synths and/or plug-ins and all of them come free and yet fully functional (except that some have an occasional nag asking you if you would like to register). At this point I should also say sorry to Mac users as this is mainly PC-only territory...



First up is the Sonic Charge  $\mu$ Tonic VSTi from NuEdge developments. The URL is [www.soniccharge.com](http://www.soniccharge.com), so go and get it. The  $\mu$ Tonic is coded by Magnus Lidstrom; best known for his Malstrom synthesiser that appeared in Propellerhead's Reason 2.0.

The  $\mu$ Tonic is an eight-voice drum and percussion synthesiser which has an 808/606-style pattern-based drum machine engine. The voicings used are 100% synthetic (i.e. no samples) and are rendered in real time. To access each sound's parameters and sequencing options is as simple as clicking on the individual

buttons at the top of the screen, which are numbered using Roman Numerals. The oscillator and filter sections are used to 'sculpt' each sound and both of these sound fantastic. According to NuEdge, "the sound synthesis in the  $\mu$ Tonic is based on a new proprietary technique that eliminates the need for any low-resolution approximations or quantisation. (This technique also gives all parameters a practically unlimited resolution.)" If this all sounds a bit much to get your head around, don't worry because Magnus provides you with plenty of preset sounds and patterns so you can easily hear what is on offer.

There is also a per-voice EQ section, which although limited in terms of its Q functionality, sounded good. The EQ section also sports distortion and pan 'knobs' for dirtying things up and, well... panning! Because of the  $\mu$ Tonic's VST 2.0 functionality, I had a lot of fun in Emagic's Logic automating all of these settings, which opened up a lot of sonic possibilities. NuEdge also give users a small section to the right of the screen called the Velocity Sensitivity section that controls how Midi velocities and pattern accents affect the sound. There are three different settings: two of which control the volumes of the oscillator and the noise respectively, and one that controls the amount of pitch modulation on the oscillator. This is a nice touch that provides further 'tweakage' for the Midi programmer.

You can program the  $\mu$ Tonic from either your Midi keyboard and your sequencer's piano roll Midi editor or build patterns within  $\mu$ Tonic for each sound at the bottom of the screen with the 16-step, easy on the eye egg-shaped buttons. Once you are satisfied with the results you can easily load these patterns into one of the 16 pattern store buttons. Magnus provides you with a large bank of presets to get you started and (again) I suggest you take a look to check out the possibilities. Like the 606's and 808's of yesteryear, there are the ubiquitous accent buttons for each step but there is also a 'fill' button that adds a roll on the note(s) selected – nice!

Although this plug-in is fully functional, the Marylebone Station 'ding-dong' sound followed by the pommy stationmaster's voice asking you to register every eight minutes or so can drive you a bit barmy. However, to get off the platform, so to speak, the registration fee is a paltry US\$69, which is well worth the asking. Highly Recommended.

*Cal Orr*

*Price: US\$69*

*Formats: PC VST only; VST/AudioUnits version for Mac 'on way'*

## **Native Instruments Intakt**

Intakt is the third and latest addition to Native Instruments' range of sampling software. It's based on the same engine found in its older and more comprehensive brothers, Kontakt and Kompakt, but has a few surprises of its own.

Intakt is a sampler designed to deal with rhythmic-based loops in either a production or live performance situation. Intakt will happily deal with a healthy range of sound formats including AIFF, WAV, SDII, REX and EXS, as well as .NKI instrument files from Kontakt and Kompakt. This gives you the ability to transfer highly edited samples without losing their inbuilt characteristics.

Native Instruments has included three sampler modes with which to control your audio playback in Intakt.

**Sampler:** Operating as a standard digital sampler, Intakt will play back the sample while making pitch changes depending on the tempo set. This standard 'pitch and time' process is handled with ease by Intakt, producing clean signals even at extreme pitch variations.

**Beat Machine:** Intakt uses a peak detection algorithm to divide the different sounds within a sample so these sounds can be mapped and played back as individual hits, aka 'beat slicing'. The different slices are marked and can be individually controlled, with settings for pitch, direction, pitch/amp envelope, distortion, delay and LFO. The sensitivity of the markers can also be controlled, so you can simply break the sample in half or into an infinite number of smaller hit samples. Beat Machine allows you to then rearrange the sample to create a whole new sound, rhythm and effect chain effortlessly and effectively. Beat Machine may not be breaking new ground but it does its job easily and elegantly.

**Time Machine:** is a granular synthesiser that stretches and compresses the sample's speed in real-time while playing it back in the original pitch. When the Time Machine mode is selected, the sample is analysed by your computer. Predictably, the length of this process is dependent on the sample length. You can also re-tune your samples or tracks in semitone steps while preserving the speed of the sample.

**Effects:** on board you'll find Lo-Fi, Distortion and Delay as well as Filter and Master Filter sections that can all be triggered simultaneously and edited either as a preset or on-the-fly



to keep your train of thought alive.

One big inducement to get hold of Intakt is the bundled sample library sourced from East West and Zero-G. The 1.2GB of samples have been optimised for use with Intakt including construction kits that include complete sets of drum and instrument loops plus the edited slices.

The Intakt interface is very easy to navigate even if you're a Native Instruments software novice. Working with Intakt within compatible programs is also a no-brainer. By way of comparisons, one of my old standbys, PHATmatic Pro, broadly falls into the same category as Intakt, but for my money the NI feature set and file format compatibility makes it a winner.

*Andre Cato*

*Price: \$449*

*Formats: VST, Audio Units, DXi, RTAS, Stand-alone, ASIO, Core Audio, DirectSound  
Major Music Wholesale: (02) 9545 3540*

## LinPlug Albino Version 2.0

Built by Peter Linsener with sounds and presets developed in conjunction with Rob Papen, the Albino soft synth for VST 'stands out from the crowd' – as its name would suggest.

Peter's company, LinPlug, makes a veritable swag of other VSTi for Mac and PC (eight in all) of which the RM1V drum sampler and Cronox softsynth are probably the best known. Rob Papen on the other hand is a Dutch sound designer who has created presets for the Emu Orbit 3 sound module and Access Virus synth. Great-sounding presets are extremely important in a synth and this is where the Albino does not let you down. With the full version you get 1,250 Rob Papen presets that fully audition the breadth and depth of this synth's programmability.

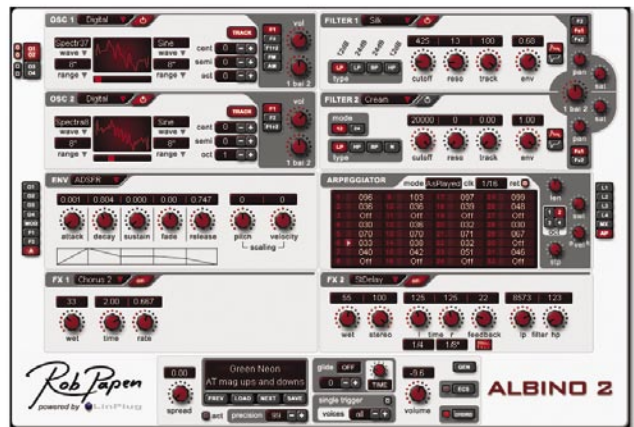
The Albino VSTi synth is based on a modular architecture. Sound generation is provided through three types of oscillator – 'Digital', 'Analogue' or 'Noise'. The Noise filter dial provides sound generation ranging through white, pink and brown(!) 'Noise' flavours. Two individual stereo filter modules are provided, each with two filter types – poetically dubbed 'Silk' and 'Cream'. There are four LFOs and eight envelopes, all of which sound good and are routable in the LinPlug modulation matrix. This modulation matrix facilitates many complex modulated routing options. For example: you can route all the usual velocity and aftertouch controls to any Midi-controlled destination or route internal sources such as the LFOs to a variety of destinations using this matrix, making it easy to create evolving sounds.

The Albino also has a comprehensive effects section consisting of two independent stereo effects units, each with the choice of seven effects processors. The eight effects are: Delay, Chorus, Phaser, Saturation/Filter, Reverb, Stereo Delay and two new

effects: Chorus 2 and Flanger. The effects sound good and – apart from the reverb section – offer enough parameters for user tweakability. I guess you would normally use some reverb on a send or as an insert after the synth so that really isn't problematic.

New to v2 is a re-vamp of the GUI which has re-designed knobs and a whiter appearance overall. It was also great to see an excellent-sounding and beautifully-designed arpeggio section that has a four octave range with up to 32 steps. Each step can have its own velocity or be tied to the notes surrounding it to provide slurs. Users also have the ability to turn notes off and there are 18 time signatures at your disposal ranging from 1/1 right through to 1/64. The arpeggio section also contains controls to alter the swing, length and velocity of the steps used. Albino 2 also sports 25 new digital waveforms, improved Midi control and an oscillator sync option. Linplug also claim to have improved the analogue and digital oscillators.

After a short while with the Albino I soon discovered its fantastic sound quality and easy-to-manipulate parameters. The Albino definitely has a sound all its own. The pads are really distinctive in a lush, deep and sonorous way and the lead sounds in particular were very silky, creamy and infectious. I investigated the bass



presets least of all, but from what I did hear, they too seemed well crafted to compliment a variety of styles. Most importantly, all the presets were great springboards for all sorts of compositions.

Visually, the Albino is different to other synths. It sports red LCD-like panels to display its parameters, which are a little tiring to look at after a while. The ability to change the colour of these displays would be a welcome option, however, this is of small import and no reason to distract you from seriously considering the Albino for your soft synth arsenal – it might just help you stand out from the crowd.

*Cal Orr*

*Price: \$299 (boxed version)*

*Formats: VST2 (Mac or PC) or Audio Units (Mac only)*

*Audio Chocolate: [www.audiochocolate.com.au](http://www.audiochocolate.com.au) or [www.linplug.com](http://www.linplug.com)*

## Cakewalk Project 5

Project 5 is Cakewalk's latest piece of software. Although it sounds as if it might service spy satellites or be a prototype for some secret weaponry, it really isn't that sinister. Project 5 is, in fact, a "complete soft synth studio for electronic musicians" that attempts to make a musician's songwriting workflow a lot quicker and easier through the incorporation of samplers, instruments and effects in one seamlessly integrated workstation. Project 5 is

a standalone program for PC that operates on Windows XP and 2000 only. Although standalone, Cakewalk has made it available in your favourite host sequencer by incorporating ReWire technology. I tested this in Sonar 3 and it worked seamlessly.

Project 5 is similar to other pattern-based creation tools in that it has a piano roll editor called P-Seq and an analogue-style step sequencer called Synchron 32. The sound creation modules really are the heart and soul of Project 5. Firstly Psyn is a classic synth with two filters, three LFOs, four oscillators and five six-stage envelope generators. Psyn also incorporates ring modulation, cross modulation and FM synthesis. Psyn has a sound all its own and is easily manipulated using all the above parameters. Project 5 also has a sampler component called the DS864. It can import Akai S5000/6000, Kurzweil K2000, Soundfont 2, WAV and AIF formats. The DS864 has filters, EQs and LFOs on hand to manipulate anything you import into a project. A dedicated drum sampler called Velocity enables the import of LM4, WAV and AIF file formats and sports filters, sample edit and modulation parameters of its own. Cyclone DXi is also included which is more or less an Acid-style looping tool, which got my thumbs up a



year ago when it first appeared in Sonar 2.0 XL. NPulse is a drum synthesis module that has varying parameters to tweak depending on what sound is chosen. Several proprietary effects are also supplied with Project 5. They are: exciter, reverb, chorus/flanger, compressor/gate, parametric EQ, spectral transformer and some tempo sync'ing effects: delay, phaser and modulation filter. All of these except for the Spectral Transformer had a similar skin so visually they were a bit unappealing but all sounded good and did what they said. Cakewalk has included a VST adapter (the same one found in Sonar 3 – see review this Issue) so you can expand your soft synth and effects arsenal quite easily. Of course DirectX support is standard.

I found Project 5 to be quite capable of producing the groove-based, club-driven sounds of today but don't rely on any of the demo songs on the disk to show you this as they were rather lame. Instead, go to the Project 5 site and download 'Smallfoot' by Grandpa Mojo to get a decent idea of what the program can do. I have to whinge at this point about the extremely low output volume of Project 5. If, like me, you're constantly swapping between programs, I urge you to pull your master faders or amp volume down first, because when you leave Project 5 for another program,

the resulting increase in volume can be shocking... or worse.

I had some fun in Project 5 but it definitely has some pretty stiff competition from the likes of Fruity Loops, Propellerhead's Reason or indeed the well-appointed Arturia Storm when it comes to this modular, all-in-one style workstation.

I advise checking all the options and their pricing because I think it is a case of "if the suit fits, then wear it" with these workstations. Maybe Project 5 will be tailored to your way of working.

Cal Orr

Price \$795.00

Formats: Standalone, VST, DirectX.

Intelliware: (08) 8277 1722 or sales@intelliware.com.au

## SizeMik Sound Vocalist Modelizer

I s'pose it had to happen, and it has. We've had mic modelling; some of the most revered outboard ever has been 'sampled'; and now for the first time the vocalists themselves have been modelled. SizeMik Sound are the boffins behind the algorithms for breakthrough products by PakTek and XiT Designs, and they have obviously done their homework here. Original multitrack recordings of some of the most famous recordings ever made have been sourced, and the unique 'fingerprint' of each of the vocalists has been painstakingly modelled.

Practically, what this means is you can now record your own vocal performance and have it transformed, incredibly realistically, into the vocal performance of a variety of famous vocalists. We're not only talking about the timbre of the vocal but also intonation and delivery.

Just to quickly kick things off I downloaded a Midi file for *Imagine* and sang the vocals into my DAW via a standard dynamic mic. I then booted up Vocalist Modelizer to apply the process. After a couple of minute's rendering time the Modelizer did its thing. And the results were amazing. I could have sworn John Lennon was there with me in the room. Once the process has been applied you can then tweak the individual parameters – and this is where the fun really starts. Each Vocalizer model has its own distinctive set of parameters that pertain to the nuances and foibles of that singer. Along with more standard 'Diaphragm', 'Vibrato' etc, the Lennon model had a 'McCartney' virtual fader, which when pushed hard imbued the vocal performance with an increased urgency of delivery, while the 'Yoko' pot offered a more relaxed timbre and a more 'behind the beat' performance.

A quick flick through the other models reveals such parameters as 'Bourbon' (Axel Rose), 'Pizza' (Meatloaf), 'Bling-Bling' (P Diddy) and the list goes on. The nomenclature may seem amusing, but SizeMik has done a tremendous job at tapping into the visceral – as soon as you reach out for the controls you instinctively know what the results are going to be.

Rarely does AT rave about a new product release, but the Vocalist Modelizer is truly something out of the ordinary. Stable, not too processor hungry, stunningly realistic... the Modelizer truly offers a glimpse into the future of vocal recording. Top marks, SizeMik.

I have to stress that the review copy was a beta version passed to me at NAMM and at the time of going to press there was, as yet, no Australian distribution. Shipping in the US commences at the beginning of April. If you'd like an update on the software's progress I'm happy for readers to email me directly on: [chris@alchemedia.com.au](mailto:chris@alchemedia.com.au).

Christopher Holder