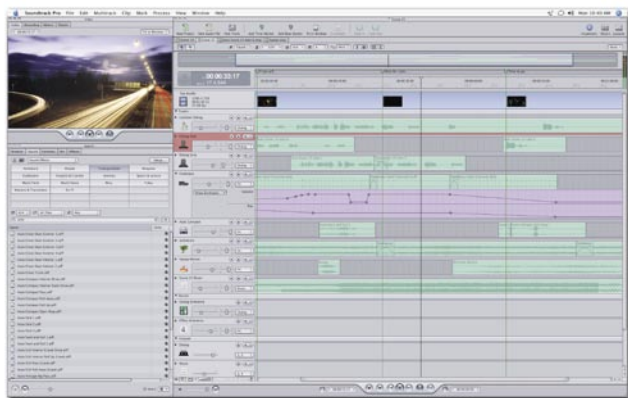


# Reviews In Brief

## Apple Soundtrack Pro

With Apple Computer steadily taking over the media production world with its stable of professional applications, the need arose for a sound editing application centred on the audio needs of vision professionals. The most recent advancement across the Apple's entire 'Pro' suite sees high definition picture and sound resolutions catered for. Soundtrack Pro, a direct upgrade from the original Soundtrack application (although it's light years ahead of the original), is the associated software for such situations, and the most recent to acquire HD status.

On initial inspection of the Soundtrack interface, it's not



difficult to work out what the Emagic team has been up to in between Logic updates; they've been busily putting together applications such as GarageBand and Soundtrack Pro. Much of the styling and indeed work patterns are borrowed from the inner workings of the Apple flagship audio software. However, there does also appear to be many concepts borrowed from the Avid/Digidesign school of thought. Consequently Soundtrack Pro seems like a cross between ProTools, Media 100 and Logic Audio – I dare say a perfect hybrid for vision editors keen to spruce up their audio edits at the last minute, or to actually get their audio to a final production point. Being part of the 'Pro' suite of applications, Soundtrack Pro follows the same 'grey on grey' aesthetic.

The application provides four main windows to operate within. Firstly, there's the Project window where audio clips are arranged on tracks. This section also contains the Waveform editor. Double clicking on an audio clip opens an extra 'tab' in the Project window. You can have as many waveform edit tabs open as you wish and save wave edits as separate Soundtrack Pro documents. The Mixer window does just that – it's a mixing console with access to buses and multiple outputs – outputs of course being dependent on the audio hardware in use. The Media & Effects Manager window allows you to locate and audition audio files and the Utility Window is the GUI through which you can view video, set up recording and keep an eye on

master level meters. Unlike the complexity of a program such as Logic, all windows in Soundtrack Pro can be visible at once, so there's no constant flitting about between screens. Seamless file transfer to and from Final Cut Pro should allow vision and sound editors to work on the same project without the transfer headaches of the past. Soundtrack Pro files can be easily exported to Logic Express and Pro.

Soundtrack Pro comes with around 50 built-in plug-ins including the brilliant convolution reverb Spacedesigner. The Reduce Noise plug-in will also win many hearts in vision land. There's a stack of sound effects and musical AppleLoops to piece music together and being the HD application that it is, sample rates up to 96k are supported, as are 24-bit word lengths. It's all incredibly powerful considering the price and indispensable for vision editors wishing to sweeten up their audio, or indeed build their entire soundtrack from the ground up.

*Brad Watts*

*Price: \$399; upgrade from soundtrack: \$149*

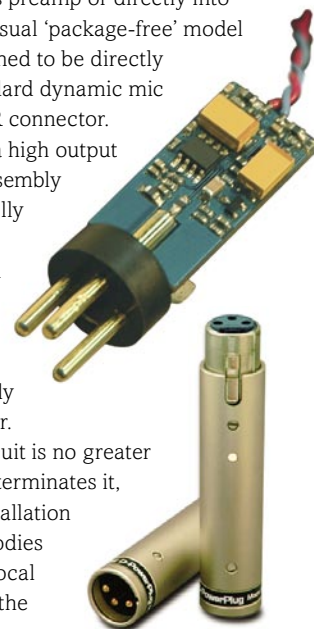
*Apple Australia: [www.apple.com.au](http://www.apple.com.au)*

## Rode D-Power & D-PowerPlug

Rode has introduced an interesting little accessory called D-Power. It's essentially a preamplifier circuit for boosting a microphone's signal strength. In situations, for example, where a mic is connected to a huge cable run the resistance and capacitance of the cable invariably causes a dramatic loss of signal strength and therefore sound quality. D-Power is designed to overcome this problem, and it does so simply and effectively.

D-Power comes in two guises: a packaged preamplifier unit that looks a little like a sexchanger (D-PowerPlug), that's patched inline between a microphone and its preamp or directly into the back of a dynamic mic. The unusual 'package-free' model (D-Power Assembly Board) is designed to be directly retrofitted into the handle of a standard dynamic mic by replacing the mic's standard XLR connector. Once fitted, the mic then becomes a high output dynamic. The D-PowerPlug and Assembly Board both provide +20dB of virtually noise-free gain. Although both units require phantom power, each model works at 100% down to a level of 12V – enabling their use with consoles such as the Yamaha EMX series PA heads, which generally only put out about 15V of phantom power.

The retrofit D-Power adaptor circuit is no greater in diameter than the XLR plug that terminates it, and a mere 54mm long, making installation inside most dynamic microphone bodies a simple affair. With your average vocal mic and a hot soldering iron, fitting the unit is a 10-minute job.



I initially tested the D-PowerPlug in-line with a regular Shure SM57 on a little project desk. The signal-to-noise ratio noticeably widened when D-Power was applied inline and phantom powered. This was important as the mixer had a fair bit of self-generated noise, and even when the cable was tripled in length, the extra noise was negligible. Although this little amplifier circuit is principally designed to drive long cable runs, it's also great for patching into systems with inadequate and/or noisy preamps.

Next I drove the D-Power with a separate phantom supply from the head of the cable run (about 50 metres now), which also worked well – without any introduced signal from using a completely separate power circuit for the phantom supply. This ingenious little device allowed me to use rugged, robust dynamic capsules at some distance from a routing/recording device – the benefit being that it allowed me to use a dynamic mic that would have otherwise been, in all practicality, impossible. The character of the high output dynamic for the capture of atmos was pleasantly surprising, with much less top-end fizz than the shotgun mic I had used for the actual shoot...

Lastly, I employed both D-Power drivers to 'hot-up' the level of my 'ball and biscuit' STC microphones during a drum tracking studio session, and again they did exactly what they were supposed to – noiselessly bumping the level up into the desk, giving the poor old mic pre a bit of a rest.

There are so many other situations where this little device will come in handy its beyond the scope of this short review to list them all. They seemed to work fine with a passive DI, and really made a difference to crappy old tape recorder mics – I don't doubt that many people will be packin' some of these in their bag of tricks by the summer. *Henry Brister*

*Price: D-PowerPlug \$109; D-Power Assembly Board: \$57  
Rode Microphones: (02) 9648 5855 or sales@rodemic.com*

## Mindprint Trio

Mindprint isn't the first company that springs to mind when one considers studio control centres, but its Trio devices may change that. Designed more with the domestic market in mind the Mindprint Trio gives control over monitoring volume, speaker choice, headphone levels and throws a couple of preamps into the deal. Designed to sit on your desk, the Trio takes up a minimal amount of space and saves you reaching toward a rack just to organise a quick recording. Very much like a master section from a console, the Trio provides three sets of speaker choices, a mono and dim button as well as separate volume control over two sets of headphones. A larger master volume control knob is situated on the bottom right of



the unit so you can quickly grab it when some fool points a microphone straight into your nearfields. Unlike similar products such as the Mackie Big Knob and the Presonus Central Station, the Trio includes a microphone preamp section that includes high and low EQ control along with an interesting 'FAT' control and a low cut filter. The mic pre section includes 48V phantom power for condenser mics. The line input section includes high and low equalisation to boot.

LED metering for input or output sits bang in the middle of the unit surrounded by the Mindprint 'brain' labyrinth design. To the rear of the Trio are your headphone outputs, and insert points for the mic pre as ¼-inch jacks. A single set of monitor outputs appear as ¼-inch jacks with the remaining two monitor outs presented as RCA plugs. Staying on the RCA tip is I/O for your DAW or audio card. None of the inputs or outputs are balanced apart from the XLR microphone input. For pristine connection to

your computer-based recorder the Trio offers an optical S/PDIF I/O that will accept sample rates of up to 96k. The unit can operate as either master or slave digitally. The Trio seems well suited to recordists looking for a system to consolidate their voiceover recordings and would make a reasonably good partner for the optical port on your G5.

*Steven Somerhill*

*Price: \$899*

*CMI: (03) 9315 2244 or [www.cmi.com.au](http://www.cmi.com.au)*

### **Native Instruments Absynth 3**

'Absinthe' is a murky green liquor. It's composed mostly of alcohol, plus the psychoactive chemical from Wormwood. Hemmingway and many others used it habitually for 'inspiration'. It once was banned, but is now fashionable among those fancying themselves part of the bohemian intelligentsia.

'Absynth 3' is a Virtual Instrument, developed by Native Instruments. Available as a stand-alone application for Windows and OSX, or as a plug-in for VST, Audio Unit, and RTAS-capable hosts, there is good reason to associate the drink with the synth – there's a deep, dark world hiding within both.

For starters, Absynth's GUI is emerald green, redolent of its namesake. The GUI has buttons that take you to editing windows for Patch, Waveform, Effects, Envelope, LFO, and Midi. The Main window has a mini-keyboard, output meters, patch/bank management and Midi sliders, as well as file and setup menus, but it's within the editing windows that you start to get an appreciation for this synth's hidden kick.



Inside the Patch window you'll see three Channels, each with its own oscillator(s). It's these Channels that generate and shape Absynth's sound.

Absynth offers subtractive, FM, and ring modulation synthesis. Oscillators can also be based on classic-style or granular sampling. It also supports a unison mode (3x8 Oscillators),

as well as real-time waveform fractalisation. If that wasn't enough to wet your whistle, Absynth lets you pump an audio signal through its oscillators, turning it into an unconventional effects unit.

There's a lot that's unique about Absynth, but its waveform and envelope management are *truly* special. Not only is there a huge selection of waveform presets, you can also draw your own. The resulting waveforms can be used in oscillators, LFO's and waveshaping, yielding an almost infinitely variable sonic palette.

As you get stuck into editing the 1000 presets that come with Absynth, it becomes obvious that the resident envelope control is incredibly powerful – each envelope can have up to 68 breakpoints! It's easy to draw in envelopes and, thanks to its time-axis layout and synchronised animated wiper, even easier to see how they affect your sounds as they play back. Although many synths allow you to control basic parameters with LFO's, Absynth's envelopes control dozens of parameters – even effects settings. Envelopes can be looped or re-triggered, letting you repeat them, à la LFO's on steroids.

This is one tasty synth. It has comprehensive surround capabilities, a universal library (for storing envelopes, waveforms, and more), plus excellent sounding filters and unique effects. (Try the Resonator or Pipe – both are intoxicating!) Updaters have been released addressing a few minor bugs carried in the initial release and it's now very stable.

Absynth gives you the standard pads, leads and pulsing loops, plus much more. If you do sound for film or music production, this machine is guaranteed to induce the most pleasant sonic dreams, just grab the Absynth demo and take a sip.

*Bryan King*

*Price: \$549*

*Major Music: (02) 9525 2088 or [www.majormusic.com.au](http://www.majormusic.com.au)*