

Sample CDs

*Reviewed by
Brad Watts*



BLACK BUTTA

Black Butta is a CD of beats, basses and tweaks for Hip Hop/R&B production, programmed and engineered by Jeff 'Madjet' Taylor in his Minneapolis studio. Jeff Taylor's programming credits read like a who's who of the American R&B scene: Janet and Michael Jackson,

Barry White, BoyzIIMen, Gladys Knight, along with film soundtrack work such as The Posse and Beverly Hills Cop III. The list goes on and on.

All tracks up to number 44 are construction kit affairs with the tempos all hovering around the 80 to 110 bpm mark. These start, as you'd expect, with the full version of what each kit sounds like, and then the individual elements. Some of the bass lines in these kits are wonderful with lovely low end. Track one provides Midi files for many, but not all, of the construction kits in PC and Mac format. From there on come a collection of full program loops and drumloops. The drumloops are very clean and therefore great if you're chopping away with something like Recycle. If you check out Madjet's web pages and read his equipment list you'll see why. Akai, Alesis, Lexicon and Mackie all have firm footing in Jeff's studio. Following the loops there's a selection of drumfills, some of which I've never heard, and a selection of guitar licks, horn and sax riffs, and some useful sound effects. There's never more than five or so loops to each CD track so you don't get lost in amongst each track. Thank you, Mr Taylor.

The emphasis here is on quality, not quantity, and I feel this is a good thing. What can really do your head in with sample CDs is listening through thousands of loops when searching for the right one, and getting so lost that you forget the vibe of what you are searching for. Black Butta is a concise collection of well programmed feels that should prove invaluable when you require a 'black' feel for your material. Very smooth and the bass is great.

EastWest \$99.95



DRUM'N'BASS CONSTRUCTION KITS

Drum'n'Bass Construction Kits is a double CD from East West. The first disc offers about 20 different D'n'B feels in a 'construction kit' layout. Each feel comes in with a demo and then the following track plays all the elements within the feel. First the

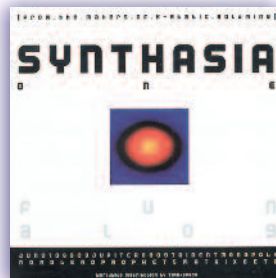
loops, then bass, all the melodic parts followed by the individual drum hits. Easy to put together and then add/subtract the bits you don't want. All the tempos bounce between 158 and 172 bpm as one would expect for the D'n'B vibe.

CD2 continues with another twenty different vibes in the same kit formula, until you reach track 36. Here you get thirty-odd

D'n'B/jungle loops where the programmers have cut one and two bar loops into quarter note lengths. Their theory is that if you don't own the Propellor Heads Recycle program or a decent sampler, you can load these sections into your favorite portion of RAM, map them to a note each, and then mix and match (hey, new dance genre?) the notes for your own frenetic D'n'B drum feels. Great idea! Seems to work just fine too, but you've still got to keep to the suggested tempos. I think I'd rather Recycle. Not that much of an innovation.

Besides which, the programmers could do with a few lessons in truncating and fading out, not to mention some of the simply filthy recordings! I know D'n'B is a fairly gritty sound at times, but surely it's easier to add grit than take it away. All the basses sound like they're done on an S1000, you know those horrible envelope clicks you get on old Akai samplers - not good! The actual feels are okay though, and the loops are quite good. Good for the vibe, not so much for slick new sounds.

EastWest \$99.95



SYNTHASIA ONE

Synthasia One comes from the e-Lab crew and hails from the Time + Space stable of sample CDs. Virtually eponymously titled, the CD holds about 1100 recordings of all those synths you may want the sound of but don't have the original synth. Sound familiar?

Yep, a whole swag of synth sounds all ready to pop into your sampler. There's a ton of synth sample CDs around, but which ones are better usually comes down to how long you spend searching for a sound. Synthasia One is a very well laid out CD. Anything that involves a tempo has it accurately noted in the booklet and everything else on it is easy to find and load up.

As you'd expect there are all the obligatory analogue favourites. You know the drill - TB303, TR909, Jupiter 8, Prophet 5, Matrix 6 (an awesome box by the way), Bit 99s, the Korg Poly 61 and Trident, a Juno 106 and a Nord. Phew! Them there's techno toys!

All the instruments play an assortment of arpeggios, bass lines and riffs. As well as some decent riffs, there are individual notes with separate pitches for proper multi-samples should you need a better representation of a certain machine. There's a whole bunch of 303 riffs that are just what you expect a 303 to do, heaps of rave type arpeggios, effects, 909 sets and general analogue mainstays. Track 90 is quite cool, some stereo effects that remind very much of that Brit-pop kind of sound.

I wouldn't say this was anything out of the ordinary apart from the fact that Synthasia One provides a pretty good, well recorded tool box of techno sounds for the folk who can't afford, find or be bothered to carry around any of the heavy old analogue monsters that this genre of music demands. A must if that's what you're into.

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