



# The **gating** game

The first of a mini-series of MIDI programming tricks sees Steven Helstrip and Rob Young building four-bar gates (without hammer and nails); just a bit of rhythm and a little patience.

**T**o open a mini-series this month, covering MIDI programming tricks, we're going to take a look at gating effects and prove you don't have to be a carpenter to construct a four-bar gate. All you need is a sustained pad sound, a squad of Control Change 11 (Expression) events and a little patience.

Choose a pad sound like General MIDI's Warm Pad (patch 90) and record a single chord lasting several bars. Open your list editor for the part you just recorded and step-write a CC11 event on the first tick of the part with a value of zero. Take two ounces of patience and start creating a gated rhythm: step-write CC11 events on every 16th note beat and give each a value of 127. These are the points at which the

gate is opened and the sound will be audible. Finally, we need to close the gate, silencing the sound, so insert more CC11 events about 20 ticks after each of the "open" events, giving them values of 0. The result should look something like that shown in Fig 1.

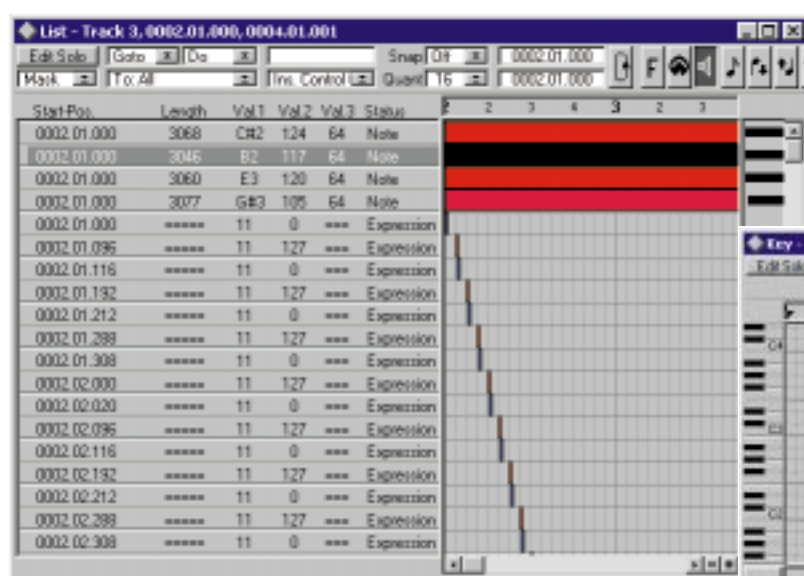
Doing it by the book, that's a gate effect. Admittedly, it's a pretty uninspiring one, but you can use the same technique to obtain far more exotic results. Just remember the basics: decide what rhythm you want, then enter CC11:127s as if they were the chords being "played". Then decide how long each chord should last and enter CC11:0s in the correct positions after the 127s. To add some dynamic colour, reduce the values of some of the controllers currently set at 127

(Fig 2). If all that step-writing gets you down, try recording the rhythm you want to use as notes, then convert them to controllers using a facility like Cubase's Logical Edit (see overleaf).

You can get more out of the gating principle than plain volume-based rhythms by combining the expression events with other controllers. For example, copy all the CC11:127 events to a separate track set to the same channel, convert them all to CC10s (Pan) and edit their values to create the desired panning movements. (Don't bother copying the CC11:0s — the track will be silent at those points.)

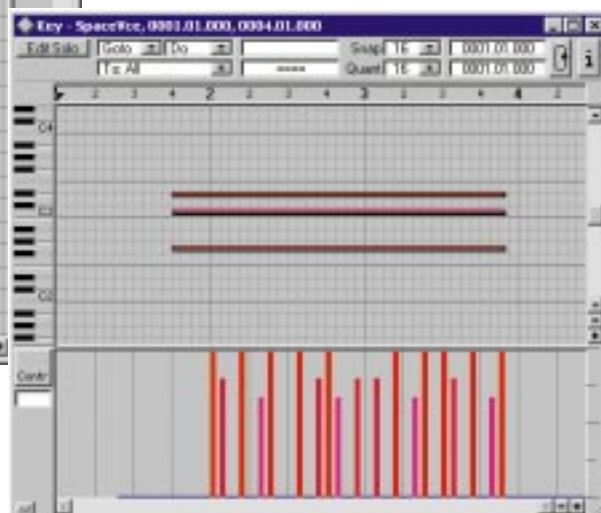
## Express yourself

You can create unusual effects by swapping the expression controller for something different: Yamaha XG devices (among others) have Cutoff Frequency and Resonance controllers which can give you some brilliant wah-type rhythms, or you could set your pitch-bend range to +/- 12 semi-tones and step-enter pitch-bend



**Fig 1 (above)** For the numerically minded, the gate "ons" and "offs" in List view

**Fig 2 (right)** A gate effect in the graphic editor, showing different "on" values for the Expression controller



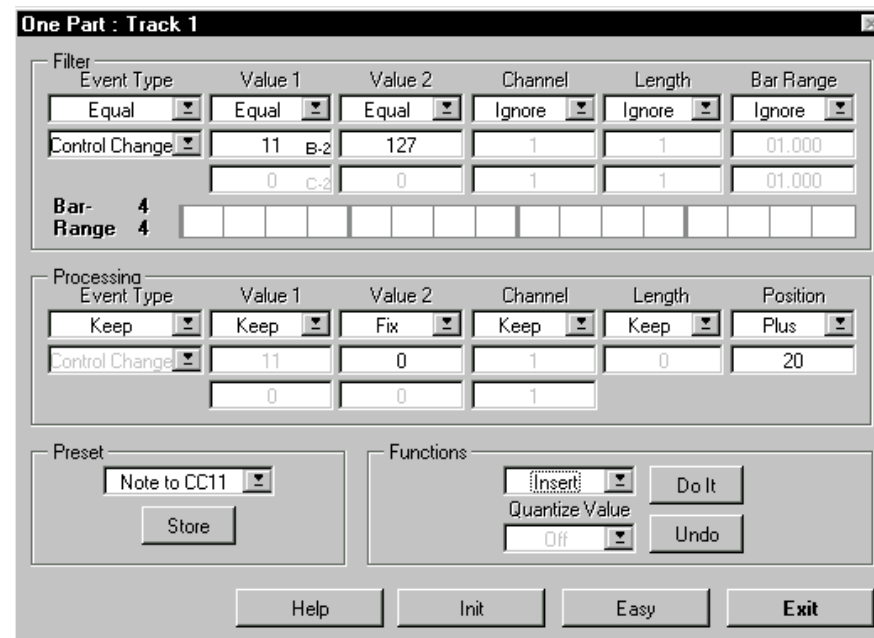


Fig 3 Using Logical Edit to turn the gate off and create a gate effect

events to make the chords jump rhythmically between octaves.

If you like to experiment with weird effects, try this: record a few notes using a sound with a sharp attack such as a vibraphone or guitar and use two expression events to silence the attack portion of each note. With instruments like pianos, where the attack is instantly recognisable, this trick can give a whole

new brain-teasing sound. Or why not apply it to drumkit instruments?

You'll find three short GM-compatible MIDI files on our PCW CD-ROM in the hands\sound folder, demonstrating some of the gate effects covered here. And if you've got any tips and tricks you'd like to share, don't forget to drop us a line.

#### Converting note events into CCs

Once you have recorded and quantised the rhythm for the gate effect, select that part and open Logical Edit. Even though it is well endowed with features, one thing that Logical Edit cannot do is to treat note-on and note-off parameters separately. Therefore, this routine will only take note-ons and convert them to CC:11s with a value of 127. We will tackle the note-off problem in a moment.

In the Processing section, fix the event type to Control Change, and under Value 1, enter fix to 11. Value 2 should be fixed to 127. Ensuring Transform is selected in the Functions department, hit "Do it".

That takes care of the audible bits. Now, here is how to turn the gate off: still in Logical Edit, select expert mode and Filter CC:11s with a value of 127. (See Fig 3 if you're unsure how to do this.) Then, under Processing, fix Value 2 to 0 and enter Plus 20 in the Position field. Back under Functions, select Insert and press Do it. Hey presto, you have a gate effect. You can enter a larger figure in the Position field for longer-held notes. Remember, a semi-quaver is equal to 96 ticks.

### Win a FreeBass FB383 worth £200

Remember the review of this superb 303 clone which appeared in the May Hands On Sound column? Well, the guys at Turnkey were so chuffed when they read it, they asked us if we'd like to give one away. Just to remind you what this 19in rack synth can do, let's recap. It does everything you'd expect of a 303, from the fattest bass sounds, to warm resonant squelches and blips. Get a bassline up and running and you can sit forever just tweaking the knobs: which is what I did with the review model — then I bought it. To win one, tell us: (a) which company manufactured the original 303, and (b) which company is responsible for making this version. Send your entries on a postcard marked "FreeBass Competition" to PCW Editorial, VNU House, 32-34 Broadwick Street, London W1A 2HG, to arrive before 1st August 1997.

■ The competition is open to readers of PCW, except for employees (and their families) of VNU Business Publications and Turnkey. No cash alternative is available in lieu of the prize.

## Methods of Mayhem

Here's a collection of the messiest sounds around. Designed to add a touch of ugliness to your tunes, Methods of Mayhem is described as "an organised chaos engine that takes you from hardness to weirdness". To put a finger on the style, I guess it bridges the gap between the sounds of Kraftwerk, to Aphex Twin and The Prodigy.

Tracks two to eight comprise some seriously busy, and a handful of tame, analogue synth-loops treated with all manner of effects and a lot of distortion. This is followed by a collection of mono and stereo vocoded rhythms created from thin percussive sounds through to fat basses. In the drum loop section, the overall tone is industrial, with tempos ranging from 120 to 160, in 10bpm intervals. Then there's a really long bit of grungy guitar effects followed by more synth effects and percussive hits. Next in store is a load of throat-box effects and noisy atmospheres. The final 12 tracks consist of space and horror vibes, along with spoken words from forties and fifties movies. These can have a great effect within chaotic and ambient music alike when gated and treated with heaps of reverb and delay.

Methods of Mayhem is 74 minutes of ear-splitting fury. It won't be everyone's cup of tea, but if you want to add an experimental edge to your tunes, give it a go. (See PCW Contacts, below.)



## Trigger tips and CC sins

### ■ Tip of the month

Drum sounds are triggers — they play from start to end regardless of note length — so cut all your drum note-events down to four ticks at a resolution of 96tpq (or 16 ticks in Cubase, which has a resolution of 384tpq) to avoid the occurrence of overlapping cymbals, hi-hats or toms that cut one another off. (It will make your drum parts easier to edit, too.) Why four ticks? A couple of GM synths simply ignore any note shorter than that. If yours doesn't, and no-one else will be using your files, cut all the notes down to one tick.

### ■ Sin of the month

Don't use Control Change 7 (Main Volume) for running volume changes throughout a track. Instead, use CC11 (Expression) and place a single instance of CC7 in the very first "setup" bar. Why? If you use CC7 all the way through a song and then decide you need the entire track louder, you'll have to change each and every occurrence of CC7 (and edit all your fades). Using CC11 throughout means that you can adjust the fine-tuning of the entire track by adjusting just that single CC7.

### Change your range

Need to change the pitch-bend range for an instrument? There's a little collection of controllers, collectively known as RPNs

(Registered Parameter Numbers), that can do the job for you. Just insert these controllers into a track set to the appropriate channel:

```
CC101 : 0
CC100 : 0
CC6 : ?
CC101 : 127
CC100 : 127
```

The value for Control Change 6 sets the bend range in semitones, so entering CC6:5 will give you a pitch-bend range of +/- 5 semitones. Most MIDI devices will allow a setting of up to 24 semitones. Make sure these events occur in this order, and on separate ticks, or your device won't respond to them. You should be able to set ranges individually for each channel, but we've come across a few modules calling themselves General MIDI compatible which either allocate the new range across all channels, or (worse still) won't shift from the default setting of +/- 2.

## PCW Contacts

Steven Helstrip and Rob Young can be contacted at the usual PCW address or via email at [sound@pcw.co.uk](mailto:sound@pcw.co.uk). Methods of Mayhem costs £59.95 from Time + Space on 01442 870681.



# Jumping the Q

Rob Young joins Steven Helstrip to urge you *not* to commit the sin of automatic Quantizing: it's inhuman ... avoid it ... better to do it yourself and keep that "natural" feel in your music.

**B**efore we crack on with this month's column, I'd like to welcome Rob Young as a new contributor to this column. Last month I highly recommended his book, *The MIDI Files*, and hoped you would benefit from his experience and ideas. Rob, who's not that "young" really (sorry, I couldn't resist it) will be taking care of MIDI-related topics from now on, while I'll be keeping you up-to-speed on digital audio, sampling and new products. So, here's Rob...

## The Q-word

I'm going to kick off with a rude word (cover your ears, Granny): quantization. There, it's out. "But what's wrong with that?" you might ask. "I use it all the time." Well, quite simply, quantization is to programming what Coca-Cola is to dentistry.

In case you haven't come across the Q-word before, let me explain. Quantization is a sequencer facility which tidies up timing errors in your recording by shifting every note to the nearest beat you specify (the nearest eighth-note, quarter-note, or whatever). Or, put another way, it searches your recording for any hint of human feel and promptly removes it.

The result, when applied to most types of music, sounds unnatural and lifeless, but quantization is an all-pervading sin. Many commercial MIDI files you buy seem to be made by the same robots that build BMWs.

## Careful Quantize

Of course, there's good and bad use of quantize. Cubase's Auto Quantize function definitely qualifies as "bad". Always give yourself a chance to listen to what you recorded before your sequencer gets its claws into it. If the timing does need a bit of

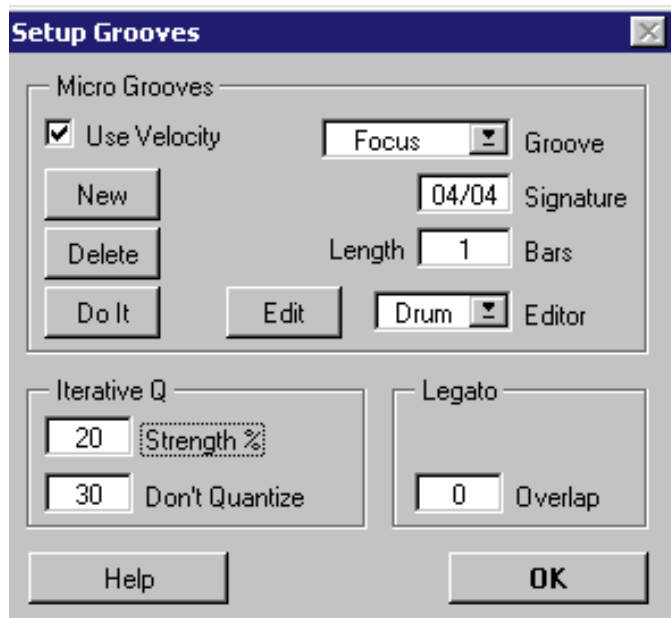
**A 20-30 setting captures the worst goofs without ruining your feel**

tidying-up, don't use Over or Note-On quantize. Unless you're programming a techno track or an obvious synth-effect, you don't want every note bang on the beat.

The most musical result comes from Iterative Quantize, which lets you move the worst offenders in small steps.

Choose Setup Grooves from the Functions menu and enter the settings you want in the Iterative Q section of the dialog.

If you set Strength to 50 percent, a note that was off the target beat by 20 ticks will be ten ticks out after quantizing. Use the Don't Quantize setting to help Cubase



distinguish between bad timing and human feel: if you set this to 16, only notes more than 16 ticks off the beat will be moved.

For the most feel-preserving results, use low Strength and high Don't Quantize settings, such as 20 and 30. In the Arrange window or an editor, select the part that

## Quantization Tips

- Remember that fast tempos need a lower Strength setting than slow tempos: ten ticks away from the beat at ballad tempo is much looser than ten ticks out at rock tempo.
- Use your ears, not your eyes: if it *sounds* okay, it doesn't matter what it looks like in the editor.
- If your drums sound too quantized, try moving whole kit-instrument parts off the beat. Move all your hi-hats four ticks earlier, all your snares two ticks earlier and your handclaps two ticks later.
- Import a good drum part and chain it for the length of the track so that you can turn off the metronome. You'll get a better feel, and you're less likely to have bad timing to clear up later.
- If your music sounds quantized when it isn't, take a look at those velocities. A narrow velocity range for an expressive instrument can sound as mechanical as heavy use of quantize.
- Never chain identical one- or two-bar patterns together, other than for effect. Create three- or five-bar patterns, with subtle variations in each bar (use an odd number since music generally uses four-bar phrases) and string those together instead. If each bar is sufficiently different, the chaining shortcut should be unnoticeable.



needs adjusting and press E (just who is it that picks those hotkeys?). Then have a listen to the result. If you can't hear much difference, press E again to shift the delinquent notes a little more.

### Manual Quantize

The best type of quantize around is Manual Quantize, but you won't find it on any sequencer menu. Just open the Key, List or Drum editor, play back what you recorded and adjust any bad timing yourself. After all, your playing surely wasn't so bad that every note needed adjusting, was it? If it was, don't even edit: just scrap it, give yourself a stern talking-to and record it again.

Manual Quantize is often easiest in the List Editor, where you can left- or right-click a note's starting position to adjust it tick by tick. It takes a bit of discipline though: all those "wrong" numbers might tempt you to move a note far closer to the beat than it needs to be. To give yourself room to work, position the divide bar to show only the start position of notes, as this will let you see more events in the grid.

Something else worth trying is switching Cubase's Snap and Quant values to Off, and using the kicker tools to graphically move a note in single-tick steps.

If complex rhythms appear a tad daunting in the List Editor, have a go using the Piano role, or Key Editor. To keep your sanity, work with one- or two-bar phrases at a time. Remember, loops can be easily set up by dragging the mouse across a selected region of the bar ruler. When the

### Tip of the Month

Cue up to start recording at least two bars before you'll start playing, or use Cubase's Preroll facility (located on the Metronome dialog). After hearing those bars as a count-in, you're more likely to start at the right speed and velocity, and with the right feel. A better result, with less editing to do.

note Info button is active, the selected event's start position is displayed in the top-left of the screen. Similarly to the List Editor, these can be shifted using the left and right mouse buttons. Useful shortcuts include using the cursor keys to move between notes, and G and H to zoom in and out.

Before signing off, I'd like to appeal to readers of this column: you know better than I what you'd like to see covered here, so please do get in touch and let us know. For instance, what MIDI topics do you want to find out more about? What programming problems are you having? What would you like to see on the CD-ROM?

### Terratec EWS 64 XL

In last month's column we had a look at the AWE-64 Gold from Creative Labs. Although it improved on the AWE-32 in many aspects, it wasn't as good as it should have been. I've long since given up nagging Creative to make the "ideal" PC sound card, and, as I always expected, someone has beaten them to it. Yes, I'm talking about the EWS 64XL from Terratec.

If you read our group test of sound cards in last month's issue, you may be familiar

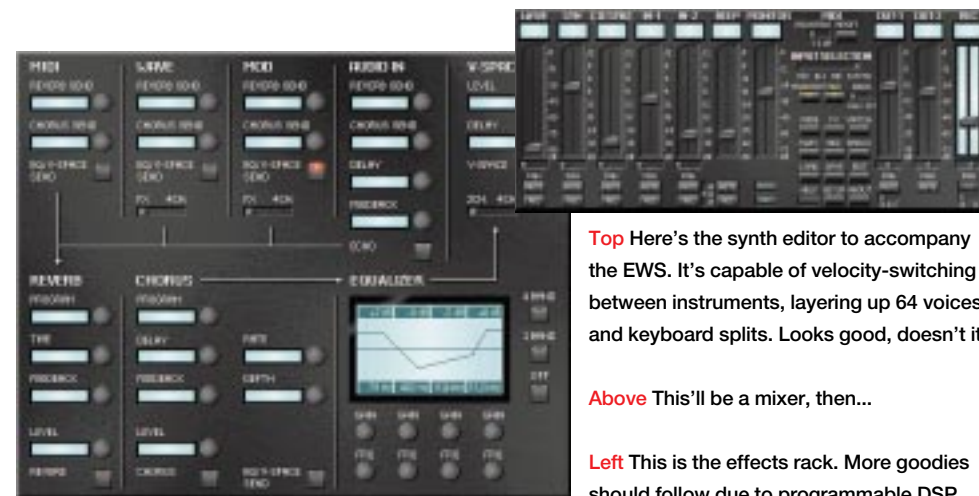
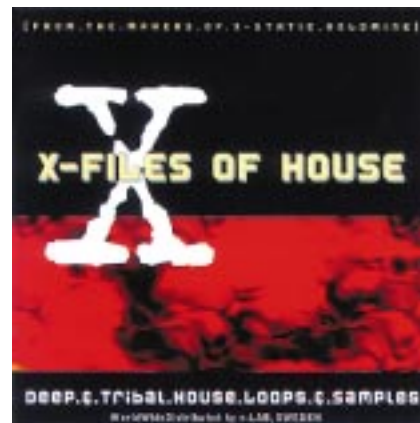
### The X-Files of House

Delving deep into underground house is what this 2-CD set from Sweden is about. Inspired by the sounds of New York and Chicago, X-Files delivers the creamiest house grooves by way of loops, instrument samples and bags of flare. There's no tack on this CD, just throbbing four-to-the-floor beats, classy piano, organ riffs, seriously fat basses and obscure yet usable sounds.

Each track starts with a demo, which is almost a track in itself, followed by the loops and instruments which were used in their making. In many cases, the broken-down parts begin by excluding the kick and going on to leave you with the bare sounds.

If you're into the New York vibe you won't be disappointed with this CD set. The production is superb, the ideas are inspiring, and because everything's tempo-grouped between 120 to 130bpm, there's scope for mixing and matching samples to produce your own dreamy house tunes. Full marks. Don't forget to check out the samples on our cover-mounted CD this month.

■ See "PCW Contacts" for details.



**Top** Here's the synth editor to accompany the EWS. It's capable of velocity-switching between instruments, layering up 64 voices, and keyboard splits. Looks good, doesn't it?

**Above** This'll be a mixer, then...

**Left** This is the effects rack. More goodies should follow due to programmable DSP

with the Terratec brand. It's a German-based company which last year bagged 20 percent of the sound-card market. The EWS 64 is, however, considered to be its first major product with a full-on spec, without the full-on price to match.

So what's so special about it? Well, for starters it's got a 64-voice Akai S1000-compatible sampler with 6Mb RAM (upgradable to 64Mb), a WaveTable synth and two "real" MIDI interfaces. Then there's the S/PDIF and TosLink digital inputs, two digital outs, two stereo line ins/outs and DSP effects which currently offer reverb, chorus, EQ and AudioRendering or 3D sound. Different effects can be applied separately to each of the outputs.

Still unimpressed? The synth/sampler provides 64-voice polyphony in hardware, therefore not draining CPU usage, and it provides the most comprehensive MIDI spec I've seen on any card. The 24dB resonant filters can be controlled in real-time via

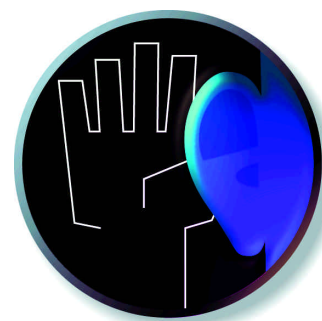
NRPNS. Likewise, Continuous Controllers can be assigned to every editable parameter. These include the panning of drum instruments, reverb send of individual notes, and full control of EQ settings.

The 16-bit card has an extension box in a 5.25in drive bay, providing connectors for MIDI and digital I/O, and there's a headphone output. I haven't got my hands on the EWS but the spec sheets and software look impressive, including Steinberg's Cubasis AV (a halfway house between Audio and Cubase v3). The EWS 64 costs £449 (inc VAT). And no, that isn't a misprint.

### PCW Contacts

Steven Helstrip and Rob Young can be contacted at the usual PCW address or email [sound@pcw.co.uk](mailto:sound@pcw.co.uk).

The X-Files of House set costs £60 (inc VAT) from Time + Space on 01442 870 681 EWS 64 from Imago on 01635 294300



# Going down low

Steven Helstrip has some ideas for programming 303 basslines without a 303. A new sound card from Creative Labs and books about MIDI and dance music come under scrutiny, too.

When I first took an interest in MIDI, eleven years ago, the idea of picking up a book to learn the ins and outs was out of the question. There just weren't any. It has taken some time, but at last it looks as though some worthwhile publications are beginning to filter through, two of which are reviewed later. Also in this month's Hands On Sound, we'll be taking a look at Creative's AWE-64 Gold sound card to see if it really is the answer to every bedroom producer's prayers.

## Programming 303 basslines

Having indulged in TB-303 clones last month, it's time now to impart a few tips to help in the programming department.

The 303 is an incredibly versatile instrument which can be treated in all kinds of ways. You don't actually need a 303 to try the ideas I have come up with here; they will work just as well using any clone, including the demo of Rebirth 383 (RB-383) previewed last month. With any luck, the demo will appear on our CD-ROM next month, and it has a couple of new features: a step counter on each 303 panel, and a manually adjustable sound buffer to cure glitches on slower machines. In the

meantime, it can be downloaded from the Propellerheads web site at [www.propellerheads.se/products/rebirth.html](http://www.propellerheads.se/products/rebirth.html).

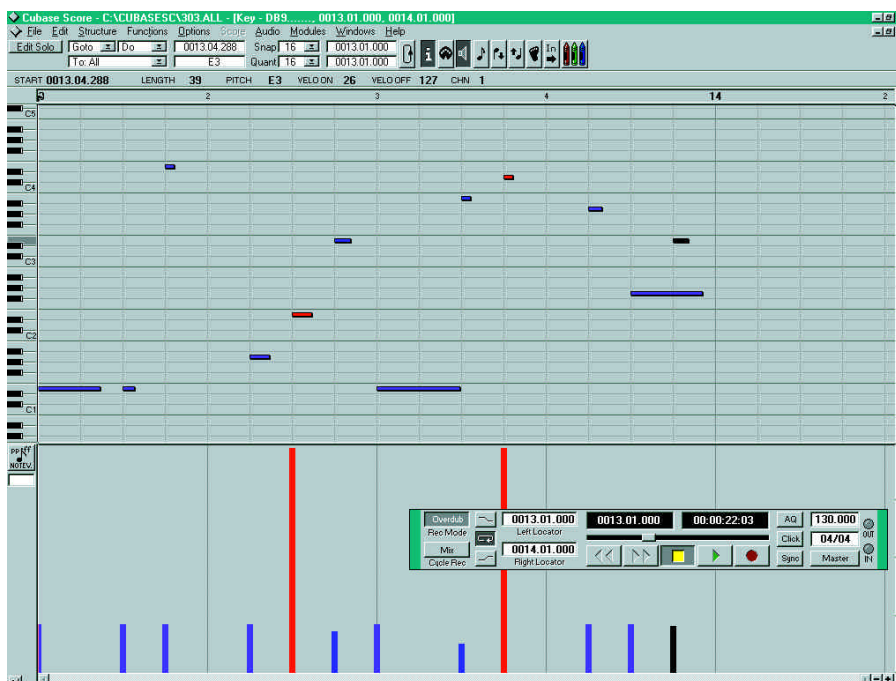
The ideas which follow are illustrated using Cubase but they can just as easily be implemented using RB-383. Before starting,

you to see the notes appear as they come. Likewise, they are just as easily removed.

If you have an idea for the bassline, get it down. If not, select the pencil tool and, based on one note, insert a random syncopated rhythm. If you loop the

sequence over a one-bar loop, you'll soon get an idea for the bits that work. With a rhythm in place, adjust the note lengths to further hone the overall sound, then try moving individual notes so that a melody emerges. Popular intervals worth trying are octaves, minor sevenths and minor thirds.

Most 303 clones respond to high-velocity notes (over 100) with an accent. Using the pencil tool, change the velocities to



An emergent 303 riff created entirely with the pencil tool

set up a TR-909 drum loop. This helps set the scene, since the two instruments go hand in hand. Next, route the 303 through a stereo delay.

At 130bpm, try settings of 231 and 462ms, which correspond to eighth and whole-note delays. This creates a wide, full sound and adds to the overall vibe.

Since the 303's internal sequencer was based on 16-step patterns, the piano role editor, with a 16-snap value, seems a good place to record your bass line. This enables

create a simple sub-rhythm within the bassline. Slides, or portamento, between notes also define that 303 sound.

Next month, we'll be digging deeper into this subject. Until then, get pencilling — it's a great way to come up with new ideas.

## Creative AWE-64 Gold

There is little doubt that Creative Labs' AWE-32 changed the way in which thousands of so-called "bedroom artistes" now create music. The whole concept was



## Music books

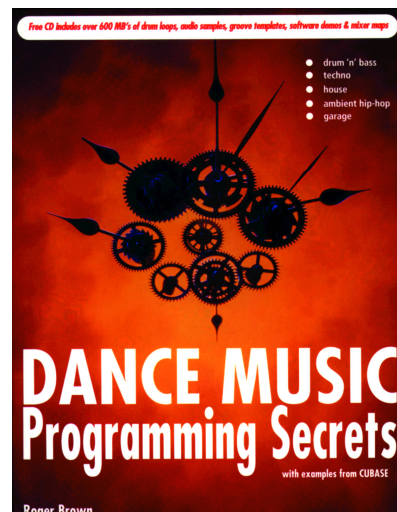
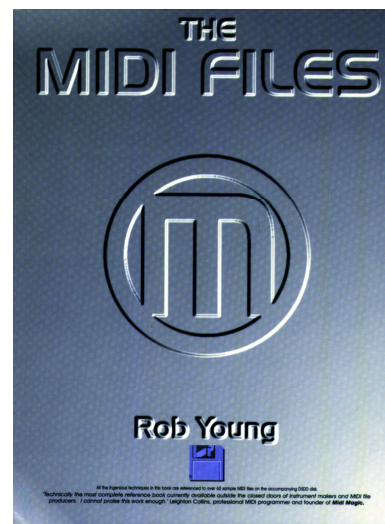
## The MIDI Files

I am often asked to recommend a book to newcomers to MIDI — *The MIDI Files* has just become it. Written in an entertaining, jargon-free style, it begins by telling you what MIDI is, how it works and answering any questions you're likely to have. It intends to guide you through every aspect of the Musical Instrument Digital Interface. If you're thinking about setting up a basic MIDI studio, advice is given on choosing the right sequencer (the pros and cons of hardware and software-based types) and how to go about setting up your equipment.

The main thrust of *The MIDI Files* is honing your programming skills, from learning how to program better drum patterns and create realistic guitar, bass and string arrangements, through to improving your mixing technique. The pages are crammed with valuable hints and tips, many of which are referenced to the accompanying floppy disc containing 60 MIDI files. These include sequencer tricks such as MIDI gating effects, stereo delays, use of portamento, complex percussion fills and song arrangements.

Many of the techniques described have evolved only after many years of experience with sequencers, so this book should give you a useful head start. Well worth the investment, whether you're a novice or think you already know a thing or two.

■ Price £19.95 Rating ★★★★★



## Dance Music Programming Secrets

"The hidden art of programming brilliant, sophisticated, contemporary dance music" is what's written on this book's back cover. Aimed primarily at the novice programmer, it sets out to introduce the basics of programming drum and bass, techno, house, garage and ambient hip-hop styles. There are more than 464 pages with as many Cubase screenshots. Separate chapters deal with programming basslines, rhythmic effects, chords and MIDI effects. There's many a tip to be had, although it's not as thorough as *The MIDI Files* [see above]. The accompanying mixed-mode CD contains five audio tracks that were produced during the writing of the book, and over 600Mb of Atari, PC and Mac files. These include software demos and mixermaps for Cubase and MIDI files to illustrate some of the techniques covered.

I feel the book tries to cover too much ground and doesn't quite get into the heart of programming. If you want to learn how to use Cubase, this book makes a good companion to the Cubase manual: it certainly explains the Interactive Phrase Synth in more detail. There's a section on mixing, and an introduction to digital audio which makes a more interesting read but which has little to do with the title of the book. There's good advice on seeking a record deal with independent labels, too. The same chapter also explores the possibility of pressing and distributing your own work.

I was quite taken aback when I listened to the audio tracks/demos. They are not brilliant or sophisticated and only bear a faint resemblance to contemporary dance music. Has this guy [Roger Brown] been to a club in the last five years? It doesn't sound as if he has.

■ Price £29.95 Rating ★★★

sure to be a success: an affordable card that integrates a sampler, a half-decent synth, a MIDI interface and the ability to record direct to disc.

Although no-one could complain about the AWE-32's feature set, one common criticism was that it was just too noisy.

Creative's new range of audio cards have been designed with a little more thought and with the music enthusiast in mind.

Noise output has been reduced significantly now that the engineers have had a chance to sit down and rethink the board design. The next obvious

improvement is 64-voice polyphony handling and the introduction of Acoustic Physical Modelling. This is achieved with software synthesis, a technology which although still in its infancy is nevertheless something we're going to be seeing a lot more of in the future.

Acoustic Physical Modelling has been available in professional synthesisers for some time now. Yamaha uses it within its range of wind synths to add greater realism and expression to "live" instruments. By

mathematically modelling the characteristics of acoustic instruments (wind, strings and brass), the AWE-64 begins to touch the tip of the iceberg but still falls short of anything realistic. Still, there is a definite improvement in overall realism.

More importantly for the musician, the AWE-64 Gold is supplied with 4Mb of RAM as standard, accompanied by 2Mb, 3.5Mb and 4Mb GM sound banks. This massively improves the synthesiser department. Using Vienna, the sound banks can be stripped down to use only those instruments you require, thus freeing up memory for your own samples.

The Gold edition is supplied with an SP/DIF digital out, which enables the hardware synth/sampler to be plumbed into an external DAC, significantly improving the audio quality and further reducing noise. The analogue outputs have been upgraded to gold-plated RCA connectors (the theory being that gold doesn't oxidise, resulting in better contact with the phono cables). You also receive a MIDI interface kit, a huge wad of Creative software, and a copy of Cubasis Audio on CD-ROM.

At around £199, the AWE-64 Gold is a superb buy: there's nothing around at the moment with quite so many features at anything like this price. If you own an AWE-32, it is certainly worth upgrading.

## Sampling CD: Strictly 12 Inch

If you want to improve your dance floor tunes by any order of magnitude, the first area of production in which to invest is drum and percussion samples. The samples that form the basis of WaveTable drum sets can be effective, given the resources to process, compress and EQ



each sound individually, but this requires a professional studio setup. In the absence of a 96-input desk and rows of rack-mounted effects, why not consider buying a sampling CD, where all the hard work has been done for you?

There is no shortage of CDs providing pre-processed loops and individual samples, but they don't get much better than this. Strictly 12 Inch is an up-to-date, no-nonsense collection of four-on-the-floor loops, which is also supplied with the samples that were used to create the loops.

The CD focuses on house and garage styles, covering tempos from 121 to 130bpm, and is organised so that stripped-down rhythms and individual sounds follow loops of up to 16 bars long. The loops are well constructed and can be used as they come, or for inspiration for new grooves.

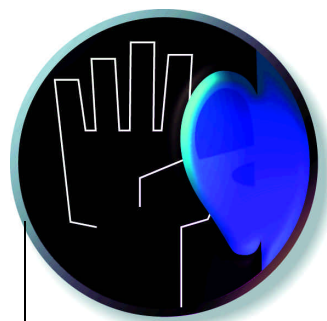
Tracks 87 to 98 comprise one-shot samples of kicks, snares, hi-hats, tambourines and various percussion — in fact, all you're every likely to need in the drum department. The people responsible for this CD certainly knew what they were doing. Check out the samples in the hands\sound folder on this month's cover-mounted CD.

## PCW Contacts

Steven Helstrip can be contacted at the usual PCW address or via email at [sound@pcw.co.uk](mailto:sound@pcw.co.uk).

The MIDI Files and Dance Music Programming Secrets are available from any bookshop or directly from Prentice Hall 01442 881900. Creative Labs AWE-64 Gold costs £199 (£169.36 ex VAT). Additional memory: 4Mb £35, 8Mb £60, from Creative Labs 01245 265265. Strictly 12 Inch costs £59.95 (£51.02 ex VAT) from Time + Space 01442 870681.





# Bass-ic instinct

Remember Roland's classic TB-303 Bassline? Dance music would be devoid of "that" sound without it. It's revived today in software form, to the unabashed delight of Steven Helstrip.

The past month has been quite exciting. Not only have I finally persuaded Internet Explorer 3.0 to recognise my modem, but I've also been inundated by new software releases including updates for WaveLab, Cubase and Recycle. From the products I have received, however, the one to grab my attention and, indeed, much of my free time was the return of Roland's classic TB-303 Bassline. This time around, it's in the form of a software package.

It's hard to believe until you hear it, but the RB-338 Techno Micro Composer from Propellerhead gives you two fully-tweakable and programmable TB-303s on-screen. And that's not all. You also get an equally desirable TR-808 Rhythm Composer, a



**Main story** The TB-303 is reborn, thanks to those clever people at Propellerhead. Have a go at tweaking those knobs for yourself: the demo can be downloaded from [www.propellerheads.se](http://www.propellerheads.se). There are some free samples up for grabs, too

**Fig 1** Loudness Maximiser can pump up your mixes with no noticeable loss in audio quality

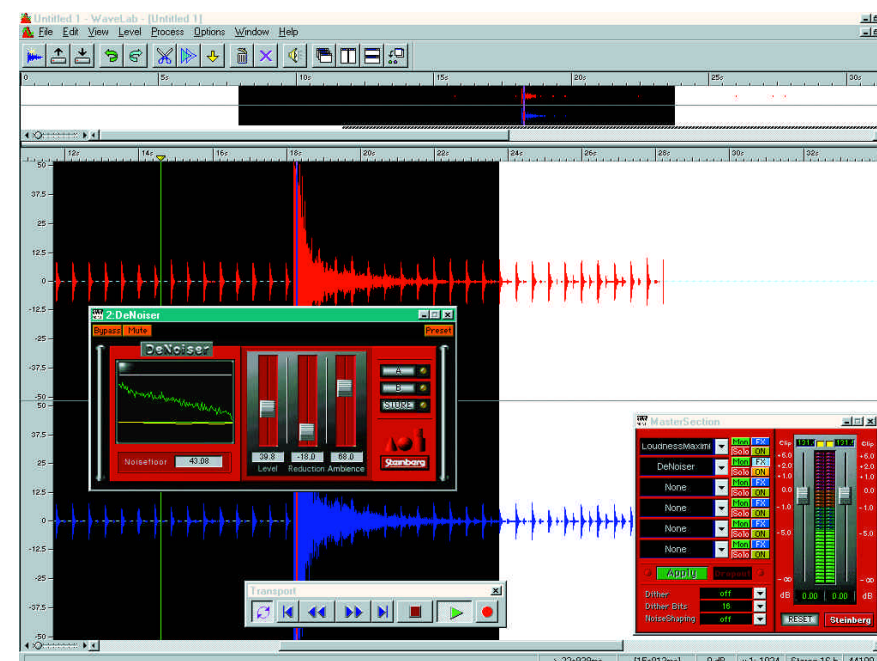
mid-eighties. Up until now, to get "that" sound, you would either have to have been one of those lucky people who bought one new, or wealthy enough to have bought one from the second-hand classified ad pages.

The RB-338 engine models the tonal characteristics of the 303 and 808 in software: it is not sample-based. This represents a major breakthrough in sound technology and will hopefully pave the way for more classic synths to be reproduced in software. It works with any

digital delay unit and a distortion pedal, all in one package.

The unique sound of the 303 has been

synonymous with dance music since the day it was born. The only mistake Roland made was ending the production line in the



**Fig 2** DeNoiser working miracles within a quiet musical phrase

16-bit sound card, including the digital variety, so it's possible to get a decent output signal for studio use.

Although analogue purists will disagree, the RB-338 does sound like the real thing, especially when routed through a valve compressor which can help soften the harsh nature of digital audio. The filter section, which is largely responsible for making the 303 what it is, has been faithfully reproduced and is more convincing than any previous offering. The pattern-based sequencer works in exactly the same way

as its predecessor, and has slide and accent parameters to enable you to get authentic acid riffs.

Once you have programmed your bassline, the RB-338 will sync to an incoming MIDI clock. Alternatively, you can output the sequence to a wave file and import it into any audio-equipped sequencer.

Why the TR-808 was chosen to be implemented rather than the TR-909 I'll never know, since the 909 has far more clout on the dance floor. It's handy to have

## The FAT FB383, a serious clone

Throughout the nineties, nearly everyone in possession of a soldering iron has attempted to clone the TB-303. The first successful attempt to go on sale was the Novation Bass Station, followed by the Deep Bass Nine and a string of others including the RB-338. The FAT FB383 (confused with the names yet?) from Freeform Analogue Technologies, is the latest. I chose to review it here because of its staggeringly low price and versatility.

It comes in a 1U rackmount and is quite possibly the most distasteful design I have ever seen. Looks aside, though, it's a gorgeous synth to have in any MIDI setup. From left to right the front panel gives you tweak tuning, wave shape, filter cutoff, resonance, envelope modulation, accent, decay and volume. The knobs are of a much higher quality to those found on the Bass Station and the Deep Bass 9, enabling accurate and comfortable tweaking. This is

important, since they cannot be operated via MIDI. Being an analogue instrument, the inclusion of an auto-tune button is welcome.

So how close is it to the 303? Very close. It is able to create everything from fat, round, basses through to thin, resonant, blips. The filter, although very lush, doesn't quite crank up to the intensity that the 303 can, though. Since wave shape is variable between square wave and saw-tooth, it is capable of producing a wider range of sounds than the 303. And programming is a joy. Overlapping notes glide, similar to portamento, and velocities over 100 are accented.

I would be happy to pay double the asking price for the FB383. It's a serious instrument at a silly price.

Price £199 (£169.32 ex VAT)  
Contact Turnkey 0171 379 5148



## Creative Essentials — Dance Drums

I like the idea of Dance Drums. One CD, squillions of carefully selected drum samples. This, for once, enables you to find the sounds you're looking for in next to no time, assuming you know what you're after. There are no loops on this CD, though. Oh no. It's better than that. What you get are the sounds used by the professionals to make drum loops; the source code, for want of a better analogy.

As part of the Creative Essentials collection, each sample is provided in .aif, .wav and audio format so there's no audio degradation to endure if you use a soundcard-based sampler. Tracks two to six consist of a complete set of sounds from the coveted 909, 808, CR78, R8 and SP-12 drum machines. Where possible, samples have been recorded with numerous decay settings: for example, there are four 909 kicks.

Although based on just one sound, each has different characteristics — track seven

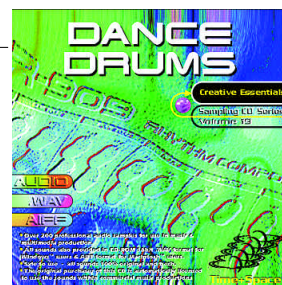
has 30 kick drums to annoy the neighbours with. As ever, there are a handful of fillers, but this is a

handsome collection nonetheless. The remaining tracks contain a mixed bag of snares, crashes, rides and percussion.

On our cover-mounted CD-ROM this month, in the handsound folder, there are ten samples to try out. If they work for you, check out the rest. At less than twenty quid, you can't go far wrong.

Price £19.95

Contact Time + Space 01442 870681



the full 808 kit, though, with tweakable decay for each instrument.

As I write, the RB-338 is still in alpha testing, but it looks set to be released this month. So far it looks and sounds great, and I expect the final will be rock solid. You can't beat being able to tweak the knobs with your own hands, however, so this month's product review is of a true analogue 303 clone (*see page 299*).

Harman Audio will be distributing the RB-338 in the UK but hasn't yet decided on the price. If you happen to be in the United States, you should be able to pick one up for less than \$200.

#### WaveLab update

By the time you read this, WaveLab 1.6 should be available as a free update for existing users of 1.5. Released last December, 1.5 introduced professional real-time plug-in modules for mastering and remastering audio tracks. With the 1.6, you can now master and burn a CD all from the same package. Whole tracks, or selected parts of an audio recording, can be dragged directly into the CD-Track list.

The CD writing capabilities support full PQ coding and editing of PQ markers. Drivers are supplied for most CD writers, allowing up to four-speed CD-writing.

On the subject of WaveLab, I recently checked out two new plug-ins and was seriously impressed with the results. Loudness Maximiser (*see page 298*) is designed to increase the perceived volume of an audio track, to give it more clout. Even tracks that have been normalised to digital

0dB can be raised up to a further 6dB, depending on the type of material. The Soft/Hard parameter enables further modifications. By applying a positive value, the bottom end of the material is tightened up, enabling a higher gain setting. This works well with dance-orientated music and can really toughen up your mix.

DeNoiser (*see page 299*) is based on the non-trivial task of spectral subtraction. You don't need to understand this technology to get great results since the plug-in is intuitive. The display shows an estimation of the noise floor, along with an FFT snapshot of the current signal. This enables you to set up the three parameters ensuring that only noise is taken out, with no loss of signal. I successfully cleaned up some of my own old tracks and was amazed by the results.

Because the modules work in real time, you can listen to the effect they're having while the music is playing. What's really neat is that you can feed a signal into your PC, process the audio and output the results straight to DAT.

Both modules cost £299 (£254.47 ex VAT) and are available from Harman Audio.

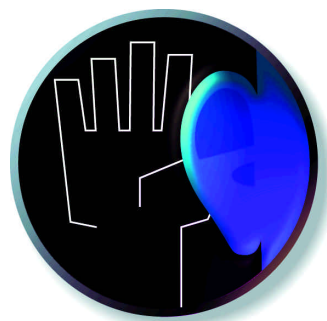
#### PCW Contacts

If you have any hints or tips, MIDI-related items or general comments, contact **Steven Helstrip** at the usual PCW address or email him at [sound@pcw.vnu.co.uk](mailto:sound@pcw.vnu.co.uk)

**Harman Audio** (for the RB-338, and the Loudness Maximiser and DeNoiser modules)  
0181 207 5050

**Time + Space** (for Dance Drums CD)  
01442 870681





# Generation X

Koan Pro, which randomly generates musical ideas, is now in Silver, Gold and Platinum formats and active on the internet. Steven Helstrip tuned in and turned on to its ambience.

From the letters and email I receive, it has become apparent that the occasional hardware review would be appreciated on these pages. So from on, I'll be on the look-out for new and appealing products to put to the test.

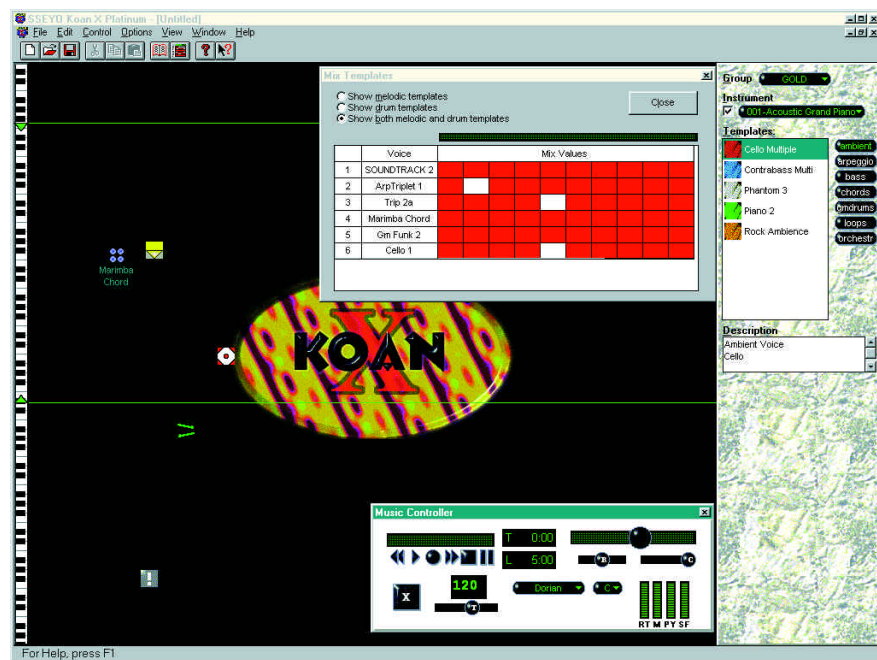
For this issue, I got my hands on the stunning ZA2 digital audio card from Zefiro Acoustics, which you, too, can lust after once you've checked it out. We also have news of an emerging audio standard for the internet, some useful MIDI tricks, the customary sampling CD review and a stack of goodies to enjoy on this month's CD.

## Koan Pro

Last year I met up with Brian Eno to see how he was using Koan Pro to write generative, ambient music. Koan, which I wrote about in March 1996, randomly generates and develops musical ideas for up to nine hours at a time, and all from a modest 100Kb file. Eno later released an album of "Koan" music. It wasn't available on CD, however. It came on a floppy disk.

On the disk was a jukebox-style utility and enough music to last the weekend. Using only an AWE-32 as the sound source, there was only so much you could expect, but the music was interesting enough owing to the random nature of the Koan engine: each time a track was played, it would develop differently. In fact, you would never hear the same piece of music played twice.

Twelve months on, Koan has been adopted as a new, low-bandwidth music format for the internet. To help the format along, a new application has been developed to allow even the most modest of musicians to create generative music.



**Fig 1 Koan X Platinum:** Create "ever-changing" music easily by dragging pre-recorded phrases, or templates, into the mix window. Templates exist for most styles of music, from ambient through to techno. By applying rules to the templates, your music can take on a life of its own...

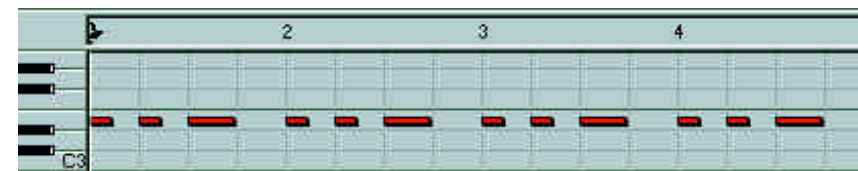
The new software, Koan X, comes in three flavours: Silver, Gold and Platinum. The Silver edition can be obtained as a free download from the sseyo web page and comes with 30 musical templates to be used as starting points for your arrangements. Although it's a radically cut-down version, it can be used to produce up to two minutes of music — ideal for creating free music for web sites. Gold provides 30 further templates, General MIDI and Soundfont support, and better editing facilities. It will generate up to eight hours of music. The Platinum version, shown in Fig 1, has it all: 100 templates, automated muting/mixing, and the ability to output songs to either MIDI or wav files.

You can find a copy of the Koan X Silver on this month's CD. Gold and Platinum versions are available from sseyo's website, [www.sseyo.com](http://www.sseyo.com), via secure credit-card transaction, priced £15.99 and £32.99 respectively.

## Trigger happy

The only good to come out of studio noise was the invention of the gate. This is a hardware device, usually rackmounted, that turns the input signal from a noisy keyboard, say, to either on or off. When closed, no sound can pass through, reducing cumulative noise. When triggered by an audio signal, the gate reopens.

A neat feature found on some gates is



**Fig 2** A typical gating rhythm, two semi-quavers followed by a quaver, seen as note lengths

the ability to open the gate from an external trigger, enabling you to create rhythmic patterns from any sound. This is a prominent feature in today's dance music, used frequently with synth pads and vocals. When a sustained chord is routed through a gate, a sound source from a second keyboard can be used as the gate trigger. By playing or sequencing a pattern on the trigger, some great effects can be created.

It is possible, using MIDI volume messages, to create a similar effect, although it cannot cure any problems you have with noise. A typical rhythm used for gating is two semi-quavers followed by a quaver, repeated over and over. This can be seen in Fig 2 as note lengths. Be aware, however, that note lengths should be reduced by 50 percent, to allow the gate time to open and close. If they are legato, the gate will remain open.

## Newtronic gates

Newtronic has produced a compilation of 100 MIDI gating effects, along with panning and volume fade effects, available on floppy for £14.95 (Fig 3). The disc contains some excellent syncopated rhythms which are superb to have at hand. To use them, you import the MIDI file to your sequence and set the MIDI channel to where you want the effect. The panning effects, likewise, are not too difficult to program, but save you time and aggro.

## Zefiro Acoustic ZA2

To record audio to your PC without adding noise in mountain-sized proportions, the

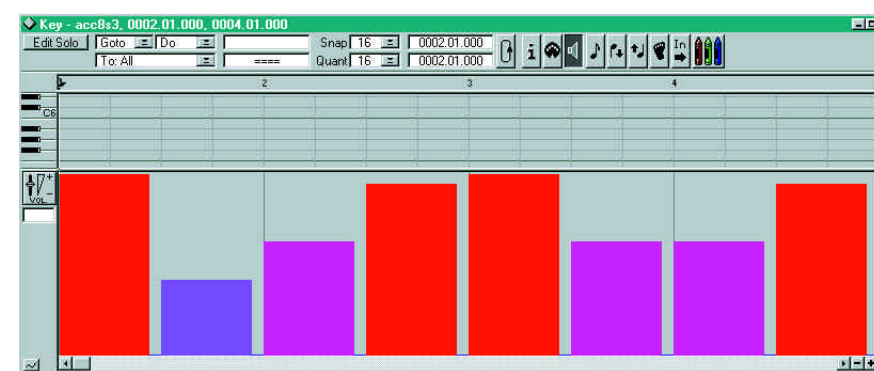
analogue to digital conversion must be performed by an external ADC, such as a DAT player. The ADCs found on sound cards just aren't up to the job, and even if they were, they would be subject to interference from the myriad goings-on inside your PC.

The Zefiro Acoustics ZA2 is a new DSP-based digital audio card designed to work alongside any digital source, be it a sampler, DAT machine or another hard-disk recording system. The single 16-bit ISA card provides SPDIF, Toslink fibre-optic and AES/EBU digital in/out as standard, and is supplied with DSP utilities to support 20-bit recording and MPEG2 playback. Providing your PC has two high DMA channels available, the ZA2 will work in duplex mode and has no problem handling as many audio tracks that your PC can throw at it.

Installing the card was straightforward, even with two other sound cards present. The accompanying driver software, seen in Fig 4 (page 306), can be accessed effortlessly from the Task Bar: such a simple idea and it works a treat. The icon also indicates whether or not the card is synced to an incoming digital clock.

All digital outs on the ZA2 function simultaneously: inputs are software selectable. There's also an analogue output for monitoring. With some help from the DSP, the ZA2 will up or down sample data, enabling real-time sample conversion. For example, you can feed a 48kHz DAT stream to the card, but actually record at 44.1kHz. Likewise, you can play a mono, 11kHz, 8-bit sample from disc and output to DAT at the

**Fig 3** Newtronic's collection of MIDI gating effects will help you get the rhythm right



## Creative Essentials' World Class Breaks

World Class Breaks is the fifteenth CD to be released under the Creative Essentials label. Like the rest in the series, a mere 20 quid buys you 200 samples, in this case drum loops in both audio and 16-bit sample format for Windows and Mac systems. Ten genres of dance music have been covered: hip hop, swing, acid jazz, house, garage, and jungle are among them.

For each of the ten styles there are twenty loops. These are essentially four grooves, with five variations on each, but this is no bad thing since it enables you to vary the drum patterns throughout your songs. Each of the four grooves within each style are tempo-grouped with 5bpm intervals.

John Dunne, the producer, seems to have hit the nail on the head with the swing, acid jazz and seventies funk patterns, but seems to have lost the plot with the house and garage patterns, which lack imagination and are stale in comparison.

Taking the overall package into account, though, this is still a great CD at a great price. The samples used to create the loops would have been appreciated, but isn't that the usual story?

There are five loops on this month's cover CD in the hands\sound folder. Have fun!



standard 44.1kHz 16-bit stereo.

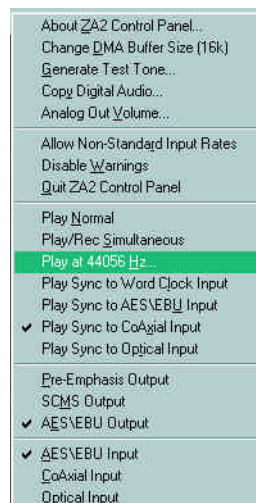
The ZA2's OS is downloaded to the card at system boot, allowing the card to be upgraded with new software which will be

made available on the net free of charge. DSP algorithms are also in development, making real-time effects such as EQ and reverb possible in the

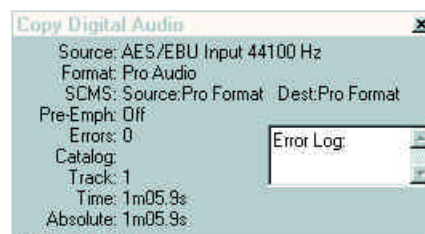
near future. Hard-disk backup software is supplied with the card, enabling 1.2Gb to be stored on a standard two-hour DAT.

I've had two weeks to check this card out, and it's been a joy. I no longer need a digital patch bay, since I have had the DAT plumbed-in on the AES/EBU and the sampler on SP/DIF. I'm assured that multiple cards work together with Samplitude and SAW to provide up to six independent outs, although I don't suppose Zefiro would let me have another two cards to check it out...

Zefiro Acoustics has succeeded in putting together a truly versatile and future-proofed card at a superb price. It could show the CardD a thing or two.



**Fig 4** The driver software which accompanies the Zefiro Acoustic ZA2

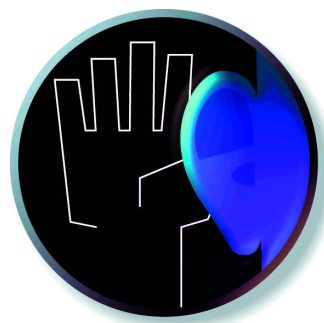


## PCW Contacts

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**Newtronic** 0181 691 1087  
**World Class Breaks** £19.95 (inc. VAT and delivery) from Time + Space 01442 870681  
**Zefiro Acoustics ZA2** £397 (inc. VAT) from RKMS 0115 961 1398; [www.rkms.com](http://www.rkms.com)





# Tricks for kicks

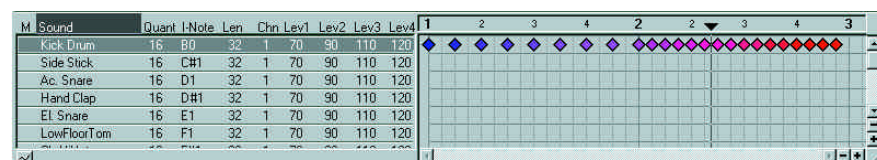
Steven Helstrip stays on the beat with the second part of his drum workshop, examining the possibilities for kick drum patterns and providing advice on working with drum loops.

**F**ollowing on from last month's Sound column, let's look further into the subject of drum production. Last month I focused on producing rhythm tracks, gave tips on how to make kick drums *really* kick, and ways to program interesting hi-hat patterns.

## Following the pattern

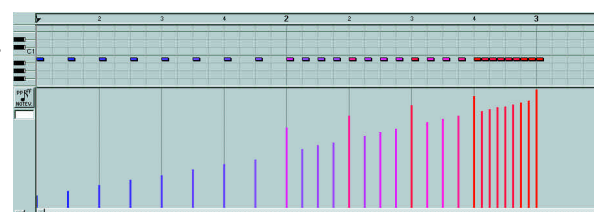
Having looked at techniques for beefing-up kick drums, let's explore the possibilities for kick drum patterns.

The corresponding MIDI files have been provided on this month's cover-mounted CD-ROM in the sound\midi folder. The MIDI file for Fig 1 is named "fig1.mid" and so on.



**Fig 1 (above)** Introduce semi-quavers in the penultimate bar

**Fig 2 (right)** Demi semi-quavers are introduced for greater intensity



The files can be imported, via the File menu, into any sequencer and edited further.

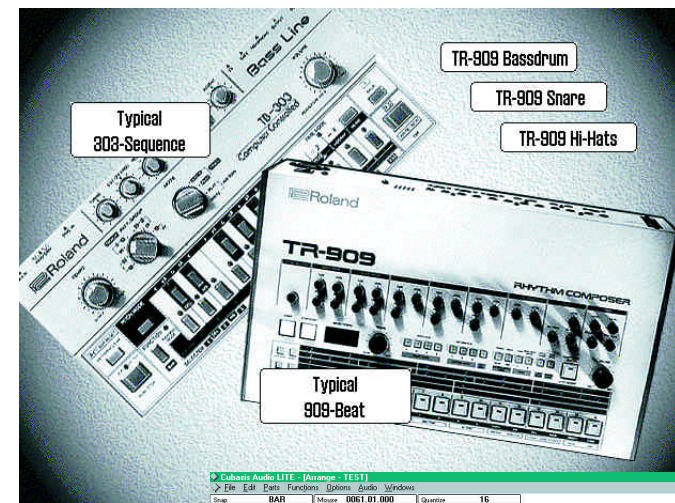
As a general rule, the kick drum's job is to establish the tempo of the track by

playing predominantly on the beat. Too much activity in the kick quarters can clutter up the bottom end, leaving little room for the bass to breathe. However, there are times when the kick can be used more creatively, most often to introduce a new musical phrase or section. Depending on the length and structure you are working to, this usually occurs at the end of an 8-, 16-, or 32-bar phrase.

It can also be effective to have an "event" to introduce the kick just before it comes in for the first time. For example, two bars before the kick comes in, try a pattern that fades in playing quavers, then introduce semi-quavers on the penultimate bar (Fig 1). This pattern is quite basic but, with a little imagination, can be developed. Depending on the style of track, you may want to use more, or fewer, notes.

Fig 2 shows a similar pattern, but this creates greater intensity because demi semi-quavers (or 32nd notes) are introduced on beat four of the second bar. There is also an accent on the beat throughout the second bar, which is shown more clearly in the piano role editor.

Experiment with these examples using a piano role-style editor by changing note velocities. For instance, try accenting the



**Fig 3 (left)** Listen to the two most sought-after pieces of kit in the Dance Workshop: the TB303 and the TR909

**Fig 4 (below)** Cubasis Audio Lite's got 32 tracks and plenty of gizmos for easy sequencing

offbeat, moving or deleting notes. It is also worth experimenting with semi-quaver triplets, 16T.

The examples provided so far are only effective if used twice, or four times at the most, throughout the track. But variations can be used subtly at 16-bar intervals.

The "Fig3.mid" file (not shown here) because our pages aren't wide enough) plays a 32-bar pattern, with a two-bar lead-in. At the end of each 16-bar section there is an event, or fill. Additionally, each eight-bar section is introduced with an extra note on the offbeat of beat four. This MIDI file could be used as a rough template for the kick track when starting a new song.

## Getting your kicks

■ When using a kick drum on its own MIDI channel, it is possible to use pitch bend to create a glissando effect when knocking out 16- or 32-note rhythms. Experiment with different pitch bend ranges to achieve various effects.

■ If you have an effects unit, try recording a single kick (at original pitch) with a heavy reverb. This can be used on beat number one of a 16- or 32-bar section in order to add impact.

If you do not have an effects unit, don't worry. There is a sample of a verbed-out kick in the samples folder of our CD-ROM, called verbkick.wav (a mono sample). There

are also two other kick drums to add to your collection.

## Hit me with your rhythm tricks

When you are limited by equipment, it can be difficult to achieve professional-sounding rhythm tracks, so you should opt to use drum loops. When working with loops, however, you are restricted to the groove determined by the sample.

Cutting a one-bar loop into eight segments can provide more flexibility because you can play in your own groove. If the drum loop is sparse, it may be possible to chop out individual hits, like snare and hi-hats. This can be achieved using any wave editor, such as Wave Studio. Simply mark the section you would like as a new sample, press Control C and paste into a new file. With up to eight samples on different keys, you have the freedom to sequence new grooves, and even leave out instruments.

If you have an Akai sampler, an even easier way to do this is to get hold of Recycle (see "PCW Contacts", page 314). This program analyses drum loops, works out where the individual hits are and cuts them out (Fig 7). It then creates new key

## Creative Essentials — House & Garage Construction

You rarely get change from £60 for a sampling CD, and not even at this high price can you guarantee high standards. So I was more than surprised when I listened to this new, budget, mixed-mode CD and found it to be right up there with the best as far as quality and consistency are concerned.



There are over 200 solid breaks, synth loops, stabs and basses in audio, .aif and .wav format, grouped by tempo from 120-160bpm. This CD is well-suited to those who work with audio-equipped sequencers, as many drum loops have been recorded in stages. For example: part one of a loop might consist of kick, closed hats and tambourine; part two introduces open hat, then snare.

The bass loops and arpeggios are well-produced and wouldn't sound out of place on today's dance floors. You also get multi-sampled pianos, organs and strings thrown in, plus 14 vocal samples.

For £20, this is truly one of the best value-for-money CDs I have come across. You can find seven samples from House & Garage Construction on this month's cover-mounted CD, in our Sound\samples folder.



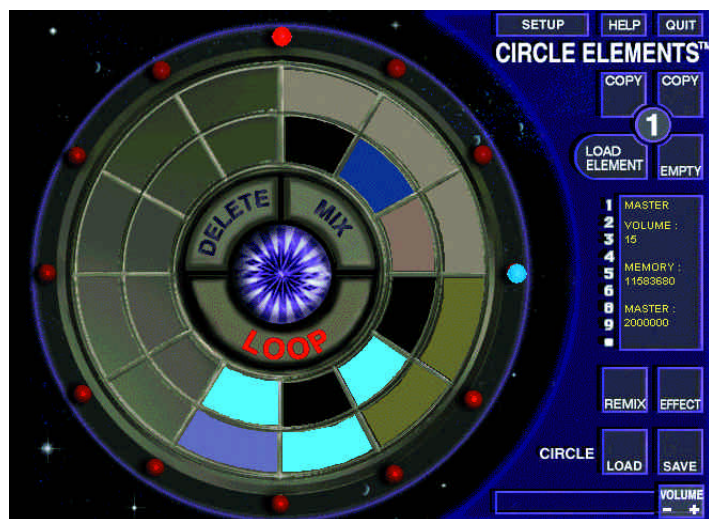


Fig 5 (left)

Arrange full-on dance tunes by loading musical phrases into the segments

Fig 6 (below)

I'm not sure about the name, but some of the effects are pretty good

track two for more musical elements.

Sound Lab Fun Tool enables you to add effects to wave files. These include sweeping filters, flanging, bass boosting and primitive time-stretching. Once you have achieved the desired effect, you can export the new file to, say, Circle Elements or Cubasis.

The music workshop begins to explain the basics of piecing together a dance track. There is a glossary of terms and nice photographs of the TB303 and TR909, as can be seen in Fig 3.

groups, assigns the new samples to them and sends them back to the sampler via SCSI. At the same time, a MIDI file is created to play the loop back in its original form. From then on, you can remove notes or create new grooves. It provides a lot of flexibility and is particularly useful for drum and bass tracks.

#### Big bundle for a thin wedge

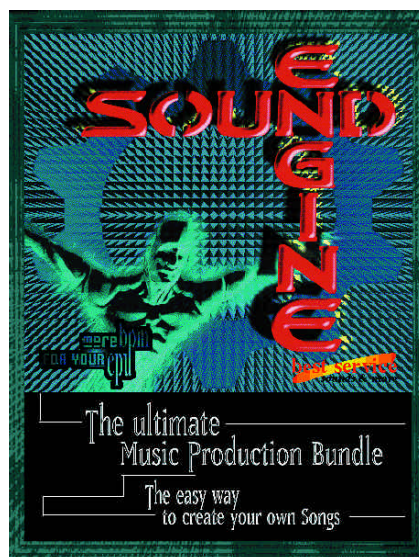
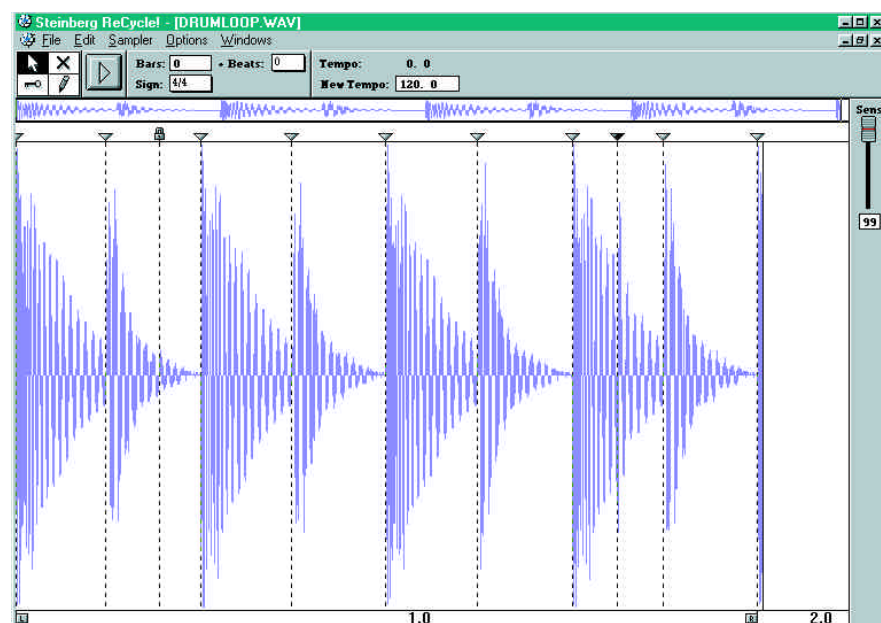
Sound Engine is a new, low-cost, software and sample bundle from Time + Space. A shade under 40 notes buys you a copy of Steinberg's Cubasis Audio Lite, Circle Elements, Sound Lab and a multimedia dance music workshop. You can choose any CD from the 30-strong Creative Essentials library — they normally sell at £19.95 each.

Although Cubasis Lite is a stripped-

down version of Cubase, it nevertheless has 32 tracks for sequencing MIDI and wave files and has grid and notation editors for fine-tuning your performances. Circle Elements is a sample-based sequencer which comes fully-armed with hundreds of pre-recorded musical phrases and drum loops. You need no musical knowledge to achieve results, as the phrases are grouped by tempo and work together in almost any combination. You only have two tracks to play with, but once you have a tune on the go you can mix them down onto one track, freeing up



Fig 7 Recycle analyses drum loops, finds the individual hits and cuts them out

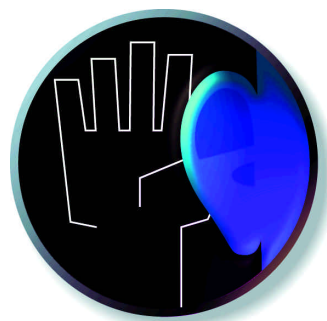


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Recycle is available from Harman Audio 0181 207 5050  
Sound Engine £39.95 (incl. VAT), House & Garage Construction CD £19.95 (incl. VAT), both from Time + Space 01442 870681, fax 01442 877266, email [sales@timespace.com](mailto:sales@timespace.com); web [www.timespace.com](http://www.timespace.com)





# Rhythm demon

Steven Helstrip moves to that toe-tapping, hip-swinging beat as he advises on the best way to include drum sounds in your work. Plus, some tasty multimedia titles, and something exotic to get all you ravers, er, raving.

**D**rums and percussion have never been as important in music as they are in today's dance-orientated market. They set the pace, determine the groove and generally drive a track along, providing it's done carefully. Later we'll be looking at ways to beef up

created on. I don't want to rant on too much about the M word but I thought I should let you know about a new title I recently came across, called Discovering Keyboards, from Voyetra.

If you're not content with just playing them, and are interested in what makes

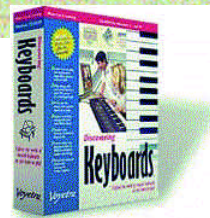
them tick, how they evolved, or just want to improve your playing, Discovering Keyboards could help out. The package comprises five categories, including a detailed tour of keyboards right back to early spinets, a section on understanding MIDI and synthesis, keyboard lessons, a songbook, and, for when you just can't take any more, three arcade-style games to test your knowledge and playing abilities.

The keyboard lessons make use of video footage and varied exercises to introduce music notation, theory and playing technique. With a MIDI keyboard connected to your PC, your progress can be monitored as you work your way through three courses. In the songbook you'll find tunes that range from classical, through to folk music. If there's nothing to your liking there, you can import your own or someone else's MIDI files. Songs can be viewed as traditional notation and later printed as

sheet music.

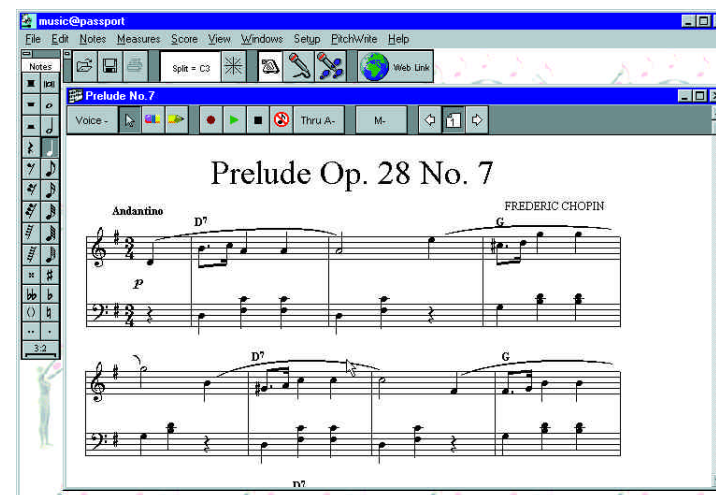
At a shade under 80 quid, Discovering Keyboards might strike you as an expensive hobby. But it's great fun and works out cheaper than paying for five hours' worth of private lessons. I wish it had been around 15

**Left** Here's how your PC makes music, allegedly  
**Below Left** That's the box it comes in  
**Below** Enter the land of keyboards, from early spinets to the latest synth technologies

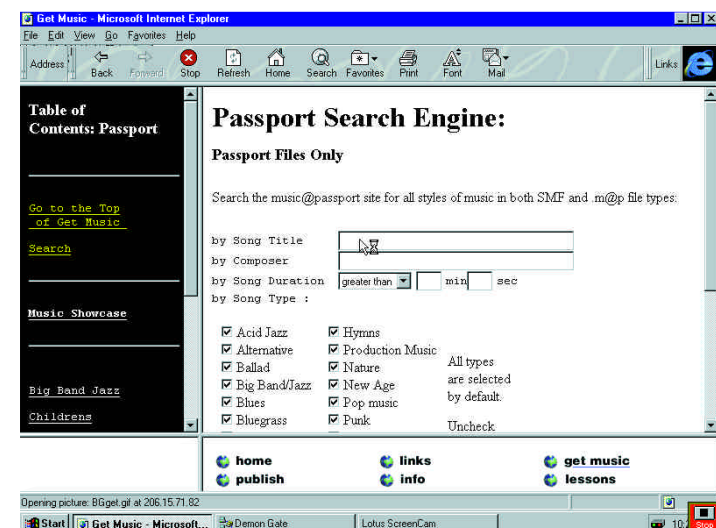


kick drums and add interest to hi-hat patterns. First, though, news of two new software packages.

Unlike the internet, which I consider to be still in its infancy, multimedia has finally reached the stage where it can be used to get results, quickly. I say this because it is only now that rock solid titles are surfacing, and the hardware needed to run them is no longer confined to the workstations they are



Have your music published on the net within minutes with Music@Passport



Passport's internet search engine doing its stuff

years ago when I was just getting started.  
**Discovering Keyboards** £79.95 (incl VAT)  
**Contact** Turnkey (see "PCW Details" box, page 294)

## Music@PassPort

One of my biggest hopes for the internet is that one day it will be able to cope with sufficient chunks of data so that music of CD quality can be transmitted in real time. It might just be another 15 years, though, before this comes along. Until then, we'll have to make do with noisy 8-bit files, which take an eternity to download.

An alternative way to get hold of music on the net is to download MIDI files. They're not difficult to find, and files exist even for tracks that haven't been written yet. Passport Designs has launched a new site to coincide with the release of its new notation package, Music@Passport. The idea is that, at the click of a button, you can have your music published on the net as soon as you've finished it. The site contains

a detailed MIDI file search engine, so if you're looking for a particular song, it shouldn't take long to come up with the goods.

Music@Passport is essentially an upgrade to Music Time, and in addition to its internet links, has some neat new features, the best of which is PitchWrite. This enables practically anyone to record and sequence music, since it converts any incoming audio signal (someone singing, playing guitar, etc) into MIDI data. I haven't had a chance to check it out yet, but I'm assured it works well, assuming you can sing in tune. Music@Passport comes with its own microphone and a copy of Microsoft Internet Explorer, all for just £99.95 (incl VAT).

**Contact** Turnkey

## Creating better rhythm tracks

Simple, uncluttered rhythms tend to work best in dance music. Listen to Robert Myles' Children: it's the perfect example. At the busiest times, all that comes through is a four-on-the-floor kick drum, an off-beat



hi-hat pattern and a hand clap. The best place to start when programming rhythm tracks is with the kick drum. Don't simply opt for the one featured on your last track, though: go out and find or create a new one. Fresh sounds inspire new ideas.

The 909 kick drum has dominated dance music for the past decade. However, it is seldom used without being treated. Try doubling it up with a sub-bass note, tuned to the key of the track — this will add considerable depth. Be careful, though, not to have the sub-bass too high in the mix. For more punch, combine it with, say, a kick drum tuned to two or three octaves above. Again, spend time getting the balance right between each element.

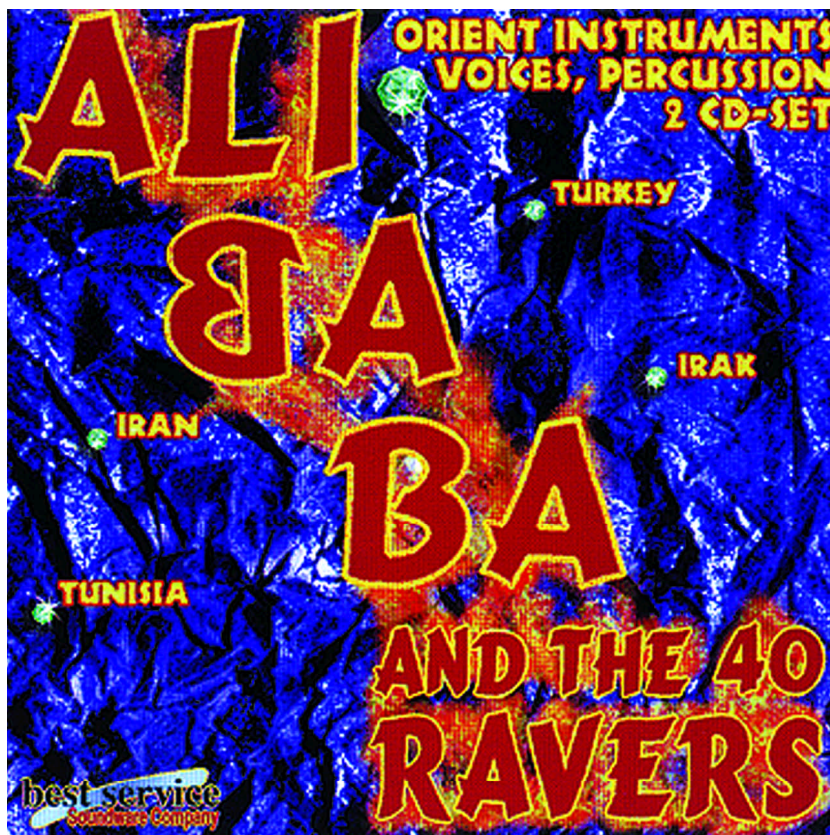
Only when you're happy with the sound should you think about EQing. To give the sound a hard edge, try boosting at around 1kHz. If you have a compressor in your setup, give your kick drum (and bass) priority. Compression tightens up low frequencies to provide "professional" studio results.

There's always a danger with hi-hats to just simply play in a semi-quaver (16ths) pattern. Try to avoid this; it's been heard a million and one times before. Give the listener something interesting to listen to: for example, choose two, or three closed hat sounds (it could even be the same sound with different filters, or pitch) and alternate between them. Play around with their velocities to create a groove, and even offset the odd note so that the pattern isn't too metronomic. At the end of an eight-bar pattern, trip the listener up by introducing a skip in the pattern, or by accenting a particular note. Hi-hats cut through better when positioned slightly off-centre in the stereo field. If you have two hi-hat patterns going, it is sometimes effective to have them panning in opposite directions.

Next month we'll be carrying on with drum production tips and looking at ways to extract individual hits from drum loops. Until then, happy sequencing.

#### Sounds on the net

- Several issues back I mentioned some of my favourite audio utilities that I have collected over the years; the one I still use most frequently is a simple tempo/delay calculator. Since then, I have discovered an even better version that calculates delay settings in dotted and triplet note values. It can be downloaded from [www2.cybernex.net/~jonwitte/ddtc.html](http://www2.cybernex.net/~jonwitte/ddtc.html)



### Alibaba and The 40 Ravers

Instruments from the orient abound on this two-CD set from the Best Service Soundware Company. Having recovered from the giggles induced by the title and made some sense of the poorly-translated introduction in the booklet, I sat myself down for over two hours of intense foot tapping, fingers poised by the sampler.

On track one there's a demo of what's to come, followed by another 197 tracks, grouped into a myriad of unpronounceable musical genres based on geographical location. Many of the instruments, likewise, don't roll too naturally off the western tongue.

The quality of playing and the recordings of instruments on this CD is highly impressive, most of which are stereo. You might have difficulty making use of tunes played on some of the more obscure instruments, but on the whole the standard is high. I do feel that the CD could be more flexible in providing single-shot samples of individual instrument samples. Although there is a huge range of authentic melodies and percussive grooves, it never hurts to have a go yourself at creating loops.

Whether it's Turkish Orchestras, ethnic choirs or just some good old bongo samples, you won't go far wrong with this CD which promises to add a touch of Eastern spice to your tracks.

**Alibaba and The 40 Ravers**

Price £59.95 (incl VAT)

Contact Time + Space (see "PCW Details")

- Another site worth visiting, providing you're an AWE-32 owner, is [hanna.lysator.liu:7576/awe32/wav](http://hanna.lysator.liu:7576/awe32/wav). There you will find stacks of samples ready to download to the card.
- If you're running low on effects units, you can now use your PC to produce real-time effects such as reverb, choruses, etc. You do need, of course, a sound card and a copy of Realtime. This can be downloaded from [www.glue.umd.edu/~bmarinar/realtime.html](http://www.glue.umd.edu/~bmarinar/realtime.html). Realtime also has a 64-band

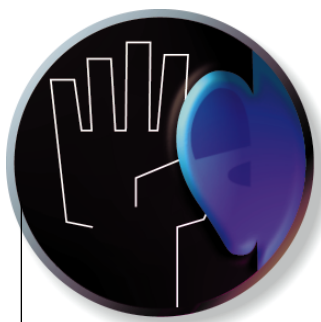
graphic EQ and the ability to save samples (post-effect) to disc.

#### • PCW Details

If you have any hints or tips, MIDI-related items or general comments, send them to **Steven Helstrip** at the usual PCW address or at [sound@pcw.vnu.co.uk](mailto:sound@pcw.vnu.co.uk)

**Turnkey** (Discovering Keyboards,  
Music@Passport) 0171 379 5148  
**Time + Space** (Alibaba and The 40 Ravers)  
01442 870681





# The key to good editing

Editing is *such* a chore. Never mind: Steven Helstrip has some tips to lighten the load. He's also been wiling away the hours discovering shortcuts in Cubase — cue Christmas!

**E** editing MIDI events has never been my favourite hobby, and neither is it ever likely to be. There are, however, a few tricks to make editing easier. The ones I'll describe here are demonstrated using the Key Editor in Cubase, but the same principles can be applied to any piano role-style editor. Also, I'll be counting down the Christmas Tips Chart, looking back at significant software developments in 1996, and writing out my wish-list for someone I stopped believing in when I heard Take That weren't getting back together: Santa Claus.

## Easy editing

It's fair to say that piano role editors are mainly used for correcting start points and note lengths. When working with more than one track based on a similar idea, multiple tracks can be viewed simultaneously by highlighting them and opening the editor with Control-E. Clicking

on a note will make the part it belongs to active in the editor. Notes which do not belong to the same part are still visible, but are reduced in size. This method of editing makes it much easier to correct note lengths in relation to other parts, and is ideal for creating perfect velocity crossfades between two tracks.

The Key Editor in Cubase is also ideal for drawing and re-shaping volume and CC

curves. When it is necessary to, say, create a pattern of Continuous Controllers to effect the filter of an instrument, the bottom portion of the screen can be expanded and used to display CCs graphically. To enter CCs with the mouse, simply hold Alt while scribbling in the lower division of the screen.

Entering semi-quavers, or other note lengths, on a single note can be achieved quickly using the brush tool. Select this from the toolbox, following a right click of the mouse button — particularly useful when building "cannon-fire" snare fills. The velocities of the part can then be faded using the gradient tool in the lower half of the screen.

## Sequencers of note

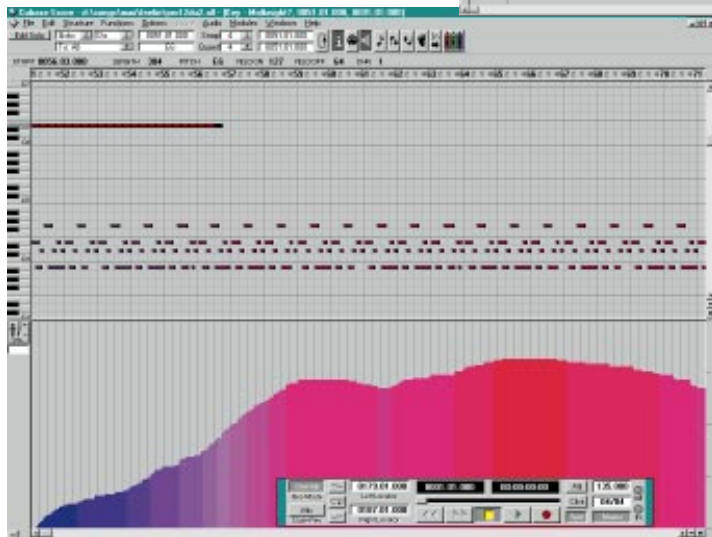
Towards the end of 1995, Steinberg released Cubasis Audio, which created a new breed of application on the PC: the affordable audio

sequencer. Little over £250 bought you a miniature version of the industry standard sequencer, Cubase, and the ability to record up to four stereo tracks of digital audio sampled at CD-quality. What made this even more appealing was that no specialised hardware was required, just a plain and simple sound card. Within six months, practically every known sequencer was updated to support audio tracks.

Before Cubasis Audio arrived, a similar application would have set you back around £800. Of course, this left other sequencer developers no choice but to reduce their prices, which was good news for all of us. Earlier this year, Steinberg surprised us all



**Above** Version 3 of Cubase came as a pleasant surprise in 1996



**Left** Drawing and re-shaping volume and CC curves using Cubase's Key Editor

## Cubase shortcuts chart

I've been having fun discovering new shortcuts in Cubase. And rather than just keep them to myself, I thought I would compile a Christmas 96 Top Ten Short Cuts Chart. You could have some fun over the festive season just trying to say it.

10. And straight in at ten this month, it's that old favourite, Control-Alt-P. This will swiftly position the left and right locators around a selected part, or parts, in the arrange or edit windows.
9. Climbing seven places, the asterisk key secures number nine. In a moment of inspiration, asterisk will kick Cubase straight into record mode.
8. At eight, it's Shift and PgUp/PgDn for the quickest way to fast forward and rewind through your tunes.
7. Down four places to seven is double click in the arrange window while holding shift. This will select every part on a given track.
6. A non-mover at six is Control-K, to copy parts.
5. At five, Control-Alt-Z will take you to the last part within an arrangement.
4. At four it's another Control-Alt key combination, this time with the letter I. This will hide/display the track info column, which is useful when you need to free up space on your screen.
3. A new entry at three is Alt and the Scissors Tool. When you need to splice a 16-bar part into, say, one-bar sections, hold down Alt while cutting within the first bar of the part. If you need to join the parts together again, this can be done while holding Alt and clicking with the glue tool.
2. Holding at number two this month, it's plain and simple G and H. These two keys enable you to zoom in and out of your arrangement on the horizontal axis. With Shift held down, you can zoom in and out on the vertical axis.
1. And finally, at the top of the Christmas Top Ten Short Cuts Chart, it's shift and function keys 2-12, which allows you to store current left and right locator positions. To recall the locators, simply recall the function key where it was stored.



**Logic Audio for Windows 95** is a powerful application on high-end PC hardware

again when it released version 3 of Cubase. Not only was this the first major upgrade in what seemed an age, it came complete with a full-blown audio engine and 32-bit wave editing, all at no extra cost. Consequently, sequencing software fell in price again.

Another major event of the year was the release of Logic Audio for Windows 95. Logic hasn't been too successful on the PC, since it has always been a demanding application that only comes into its own when placed in complex MIDI setups and alongside pro audio hardware. As the Mac seems to have been graced with better audio hardware, it has attracted many Logic users. Now that more high-end hardware has become available, however, PCs that are equipped with Logic are better suited to power users.

## Dear Santa...



Firstly, Santa, can you explain why Cubase now requires 12Mb of disc space just to install? Less than three years ago, I ran Cubase from a low-density floppy and still had enough space to save a handful of tunes. What's going on?

One of my least favourite pastimes is spending hours sifting through sampling CDs to find the right sounds or textures for the tracks I produce, so what I'd really like to find beneath the tree this year is the definitive sample collection. It should contain 30 or so snares, kicks and hats to match with warm pads and deep, fat basses that'll make any track rock. How about a belltree sample? They're nice this time of year. The CD should have no vocal hooks — they are *always* dreadful. After all, if somebody comes up with a half decent tune, why would they give it away for somebody else to exploit?

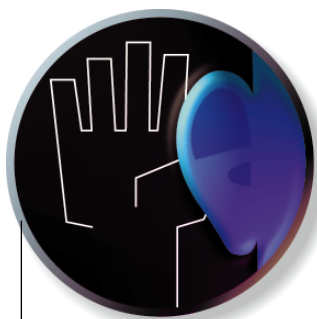
A 21in monitor would be nice, too. And a cordless mouse and keyboard. If the mouse never needed to be cleaned, that would be much appreciated.

And finally, Christmas wouldn't be the same without a Terry's Chocolate Orange. So if you don't mind. Cheers!

## • PCW Contacts

If you have any hints or tips, MIDI-related items or general comments, send them to the usual PCW address, or to [steven\\_helstrip@pcw.ccmil.compuserve.com](mailto:steven_helstrip@pcw.ccmil.compuserve.com)





# The art of noise

Background noise adds atmosphere to music tracks. Steven Helstrip looks at sampling CDs and how to layer sound for more depth.

Every once in a while, the need for day-to-day sounds such as footsteps, creaking doors and voices, pops up in music production. If you have the time and a portable DAT machine, you shouldn't need to travel far to find the right sounds, providing it's not tropical rain forest ambiances that you're looking for. In the absence of a pocket-sized DAT, the next best thing is to get hold of one of the many "world effects" sampling CDs.

There is a drawback with sampling CDs: your soundtrack (whether it be for a game, film or multimedia) won't be completely original as somebody, somewhere, will have used the same sounds. Later we'll be looking at ways to change commercial samples to make them unique but first let's have a look at what is available and how they can be used.

By far the largest and most varied collection of world sounds and special effects come from the BBC sound effects library. Although many of the recordings are in their late twenties, they still sound great today, especially from vinyl if you can get your hands on it. BBC recordings are restricted for use in amateur productions, which means they're fine for use in home movies and shareware games titles. However, if you have bigger plans for your music, then you'll need to take a look at what's on offer from the larger sampling CD specialists. BBC sound effects CDs can be found in larger record stores and start from around £8 each.

Time + Space has a range of sampling CDs crammed with everyday sounds, and without limitations on use. Global S.F.X., which is part of the Creative Essentials range, covers sounds from vinyl static (the



This CD-ROM, from Creative Essentials, holds over 200 stereo samples. There are nine of these samples on our cover-mounted CD-ROM this month

one sound you wouldn't expect to hear on CD) to police sirens and railway station announcements. There are also plenty of unusual sounds to be found such as spray cans, staplers and toasters. There are over 200 stereo samples in both CD audio and .WAV format.

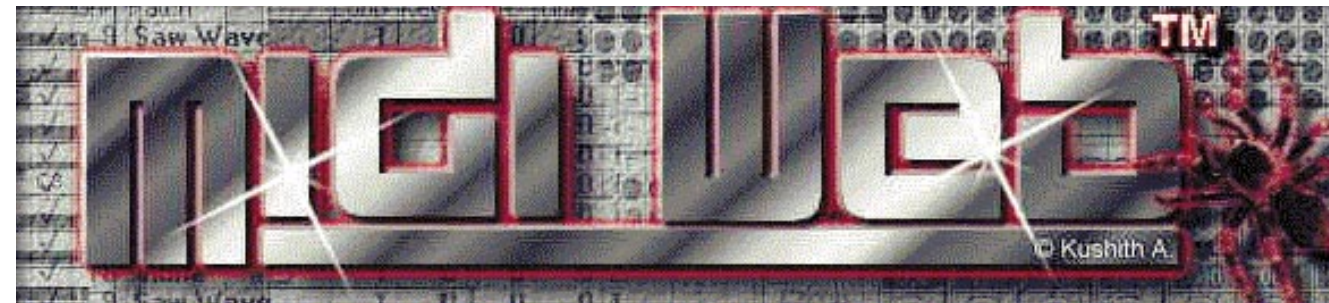
The quality of the recordings is excellent although not as warm as some of the earlier BBC recordings. There are nine samples from Global S.F.X. on our free, cover-mounted CD-ROM this month. If you like what you hear, the CD can be purchased for a shade under 20 notes.

Everyday sounds can be used creatively in all styles of music, from ambient to pop. The Art Of Noise were one of the first bands to carry this off successfully using samples from nature, such as running water, horses and countryside ambiances. To make these

types of sounds work, they must contrast well with other musical elements and help paint a picture of what the music is about.

If you listen to the B52's Love Shack, you can hear a party atmosphere mixed in quietly in the background. It's not something you consciously hear at first but it's there and adds to the fun nature of the track. This is maybe why it was such a successful track. It cheers you up, and makes you want to get up and dance.

At the opposite extreme, if you listen to the soundtrack along with the effects from Doom, you can almost feel the atmosphere it creates. The music is tense and draws you in, while the sound effects scare the hell out of you. Try playing Doom without the sound, and you'll notice a huge difference in the quality of the game play. Sound effects enhance games and film on a huge scale



(Above) If you're on the internet, check out [www.midiweb.com](http://www.midiweb.com) for sample MIDI files, discussion and new ideas.

(Right) Creative Labs' home page is also useful for getting hold of the latest drivers

and are, more often than not, treated to make them sound larger than life.

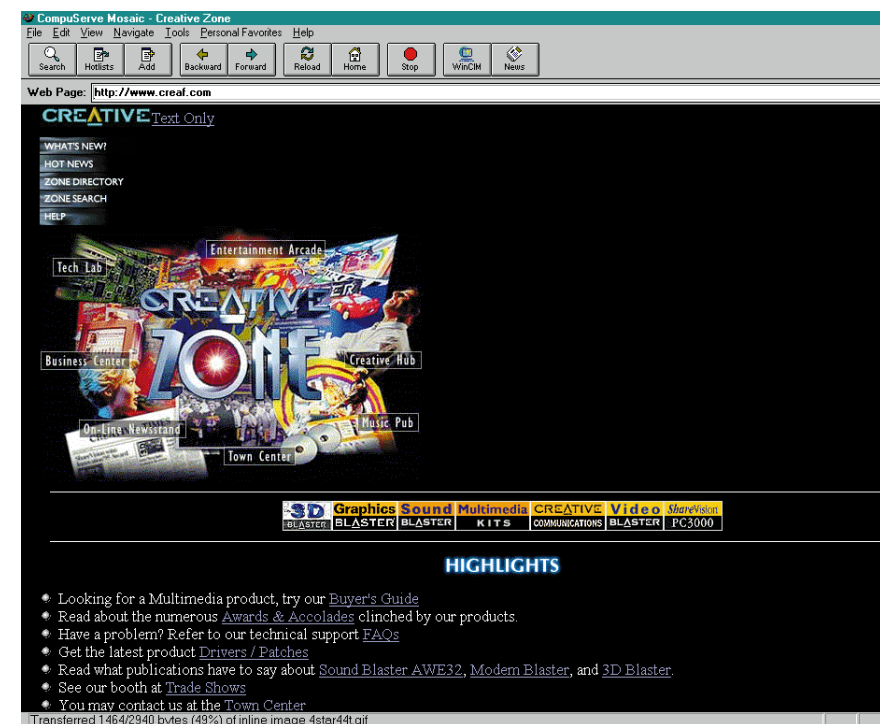
## Treating sounds

In the seventies, techniques for making sounds appear larger than they really were, involved adding a touch of reverb or a short echo. With slightly more technology around today, there are more tricks we can use. Let's say we wanted to create a party atmosphere, like the one on the B52 track. This can be created with just a multi-track tape recorder, one microphone and two people who don't mind making fools of themselves. A stereo microphone would help save time but is not essential.

To start with, record 30 seconds of conversation on to one track. This could be a tape track, or a digital audio recorder, such as Cubase Audio. Then record 30 seconds of clapping in time with the music and throw in the odd cheer and laugh. When the two tracks are played back together, you have the beginnings of a party atmosphere. The more takes you record, the bigger the party becomes.

By panning each track slightly off centre, you can create a wide and natural sound. Adding a touch of reverb (preferably stereo) to some tracks will help voices appear distant and more natural. If you have a surround processor, such as the Ultrafex II or Vitalizer, try routing the return from the reverb through it to add more space and depth. This technique of layering voices can be applied to any other sound.

Let's say we have a mono sample of a jet aeroplane, but would ideally like a stereo sample of Concorde passing overhead. To make the sound bigger, begin by sampling the jet and playing it back at a lower pitch along with the original. Try mixing in a touch of white noise, which is essentially what we



hear from a jet plane. If you don't have a synthesiser, record some white noise from a television set. By applying a short delay, say around 20ms, to the overall mix, and a touch of reverb, you'll be well on your way.

To make the aeroplane seem to pass above, fade in the mix while panning from left to right and fade out again. As a jet gets closer, we tend to hear more bass, or more of the lower frequencies. Ideally, we need to put the mix through a high pass filter. Gradually close the filter as the jet gets closer and open it up again once it has passed. You could also crank up the bottom end as the jet gets closer to give it that extra rumble. Sound enhancement processors can be used to thicken the overall mix.

## Net noise

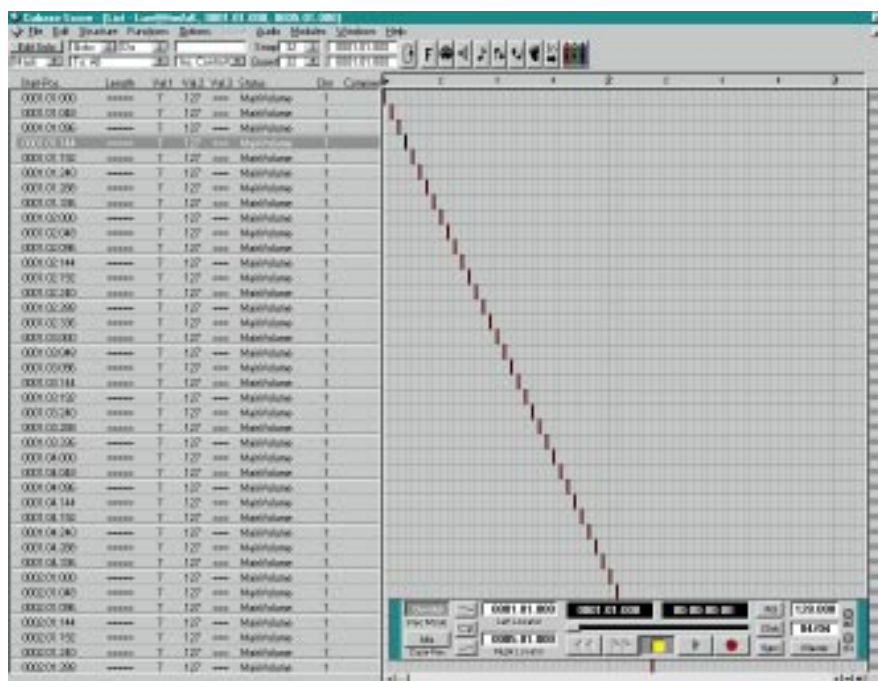
I rarely log on to the internet because I fear that someday I might pass the point of no return and be tempted to dine with a Cyber-chick at the Internet Café. Not a warming thought. So, I limit myself to just half an hour

each week. I must admit I have spent more than my allotted time over the past few days digging up the better sound-related sites.

The first is Creative Labs home page, Creative Zone, which can be found at [www.creaf.com](http://www.creaf.com). In addition to an abundance of useful tips, you can download the latest drivers for Creative's cards along with soundbanks and MIDI files for the AWE-32. The latest drivers for the AWE-32 are worth getting hold of as they let you record and play back samples simultaneously, making the card better suited for D2D work.

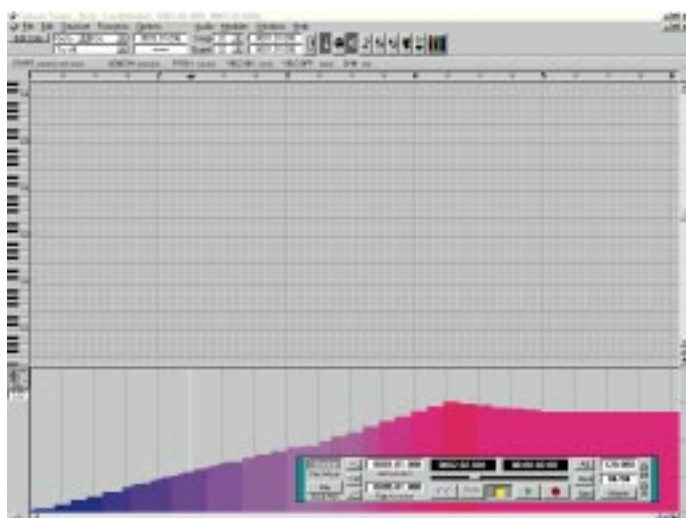
The next site of interest is the MIDI Web, which can be found at [www.midiweb.com](http://www.midiweb.com). MIDI Web is a user-supported site that has recently been nominated one of the best 25 computer-related sites. Because it's user supported, it relies on you to keep it up-to-date with fresh MIDI files, text tutorials, source code and new ideas. At the moment there is demand for Mac products, so please send anything you have to [upload@midiweb.com](mailto:upload@midiweb.com). Currently, the site





(Above) The fill command in Cubase allows you to insert a string of controllers at a given resolution

(Right) The key editor can be used to create a fade in/out



has a wealth of resources, from tutorials and DIY projects to samples and shareware applications. You'll find a zillion links to other interesting web sites, too, but that's quite enough on the internet.

#### Smooth tip

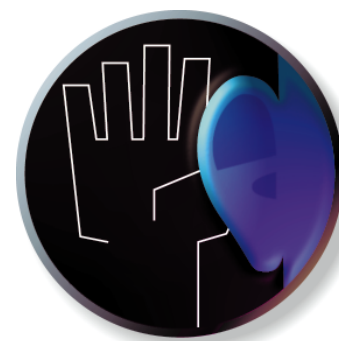
Anyway, back to some more useful tips, courtesy of Martin Simpson in Duns Tew, Oxon: "I noticed several months back that you discussed ways to use controller messages in Cubase to create smooth volume curves. I have been trying your ideas and recently stumbled across the 'Fill' command in the List Editor. This allows you to insert a string of controllers (or CCs) at a resolution determined by the current quantise value.

So if you do a fill with insert controllers selected and a quantise value of 32, Cubase

inserts 32 controller messages in each bar of the selected part. However, Cubase defaults to inserting controller value 1, which is Bank Select. To change all the controllers to volume messages, hold down Alt while double-clicking on one CC. Then type 7, which is the controller for volume, and all events become volume CCs. To then create a fade in/out, go into the Key Editor and use the gradient tool to draw a curve. The same trick can be applied to panning information (CC10), or any other CC." Thank you for the tip, Martin.

#### PCW Contacts

If you have any hints or tips, MIDI-related items, or general comments, send them to **Steven Helstrip** at the usual PCW address, or to [steven\\_helstrip@pcw.ccmail.compuserve.com](mailto:steven_helstrip@pcw.ccmail.compuserve.com)  
Time + Space (Global S.F.X) 01442 870681



# Crash test dummies

Well, it's one way to test the resilience of your PC — send it hurling out of the boot of your car. Steven Helstrip's Seagate drive survived to play another day. Plus, MIDI matters.

**C**hristmas is coming. I know this because I couldn't get into my house the other week, as about 200 press releases had been deposited through my letter box, stopping me from opening the door. I eventually got in through a small window at the back.

Press releases don't usually make it to the top of my bedtime reading list. About this time of the year they get pretty close, though, mainly because manufacturers actually have something interesting to release in time for Santa's global visit.

You'll be relieved to hear that I'm not going to share every press release with you, just one that I'm sure will be of interest. It came from Turtle Beach — you know, the people who make sound cards, and whose press releases read something like:

"Multisound Pinnacle, The Ultimate Pro Level Sound and Music Card". How many times have I heard that? In fact, it actually is, or should I say will be when it's released in October. I've been asking Creative Labs to make this card for the past two years, but it has been pipped at the post.

The Pinnacle is the first affordable card to offer an optional professional SP/DIF digital input and output, 20-bit digital audio processing resulting in a signal-to-noise ratio in excess of 96dB, room on-board for 48Mb of sampling RAM, a pretty hot wavetable synth from Kurtzweil providing 4Mb of high-quality samples, and individual effects for each channel. And that's just the start. It will work alongside the Tahiti to provide four individual audio ins and outs, and provides a WaveTable daughterboard connector for the now mandatory Yamaha DB50XG.

The Pinnacle, which is priced at £489,



Remixing is simple and fun with MixMan. Load the CD, hit a few keys on your keyboard, and that old tune will never sound the same again

or £599 with digital I/O, should set new standards for PC sound cards. One thing is certain: it will make hard disk recording on the PC a worthwhile venture.

## Having a crashing time

On the subject of D2D, I can now wholeheartedly recommend Seagate drives to anyone thinking of buying a few gigabytes of space for recording audio to. This follows a recent incident I had the misfortune to be involved in. I won't go into the gory details, but my PC, which was in the boot of a Golf GTI, landed 20 yards away from the car minus its cover. On inspection, the hard drive had taken a serious battering and the PCB was on its last legs. I didn't fancy my chances when I finally reassembled the PC but, believe it or not, when I switched it on, I listened joyously to the whirring of the hard disk and nearly had kittens when I read "Starting Windows 95". The monitor survived the

crash too, although the keyboard was missing a few keys.

## In the mix

Hiding beneath the mountain-sized pile of press releases that came into my possession recently was a CD-ROM from Time + Space, called MixMan. Remarkably, it wasn't a sampling CD, so I gave it a spin.

The idea of MixMan is to take a pre-written piece of music, in this case eight kicking dance tunes, and remix them just by hitting a few keys on the computer's keyboard. Each track can be broken down into key elements, chopped and changed around, and mixed in with other tracks' elements.

This is what interactive music is all about — you can have loads of fun with it. If you come up with a particularly stomping tune, you can run it off to cassette and annoy your neighbours while impressing your mates.



At £39.95 this is a "must have", considering the many hours of fun you'll have creating professional-sounding music.

#### Desperately seeking more MIDI

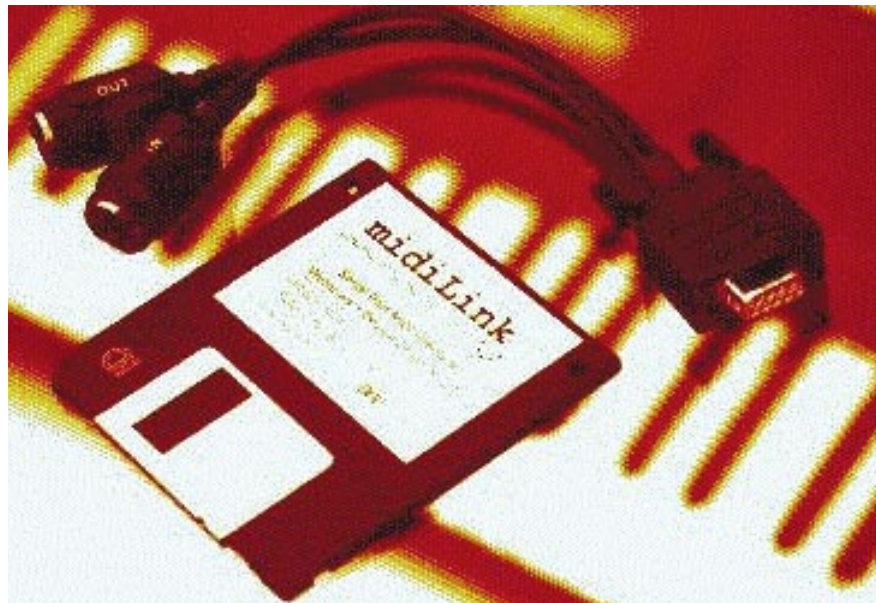
*Q. "After reading your excellent article in a recent issue of PCW, I am after information regarding adding additional MIDI ports to my PC. I am using an AWE-32 sound card as my MIDI port at the moment, and I'm using Cubase as my sequencer. The thing is, I desperately need another port. Can I just add a dedicated MIDI card? How much are they?"*

andrew@wmedia.demon.co.uk

A. MIDI ports are akin to computer memory in that you never seem to have enough of the wretched things. If you need just one additional port, the cheapest solution is to buy an additional sound card. You might not need another FM synth, but it will provide you with another MIDI port and a second audio device, enabling you to play back several tracks of digital audio simultaneously. You can buy a basic SoundBlaster Pro card for around £30, or even cheaper secondhand.

So where's the catch? Unlike Macintosh systems, in a PC it can be tricky to get two sound cards to work together, especially if you have other cards installed. What is certain is that you'll have to configure IRQs and port addresses to ensure the new card doesn't conflict with other devices. This is not impossible to achieve, but it could cause a few headaches. If you have MSD installed on your system, this should give you some idea as to which IRQs and ports are not in use.

Alternatively, you could install a dedicated MIDI interface. These come in



More MIDI without tears: Et Cetera's MIDI Link

many shapes and sizes and provide between one and sixteen additional ports. One card I would heartily recommend is the MIDI Edge 1x4. For a shade under 130 notes you get one MIDI input, with four independent outs providing an extra 64 MIDI channels. A wavetable daughterboard connector lets you add Yamaha's excellent DB50XG card. Software supplied with the MIDI Edge enables two cards to be used simultaneously.

For £69, Et Cetera Distribution has a neat little gadget by the name of MIDI Link, a software-driven MIDI interface which addresses a cable that connects to the serial port. This is ideal for use with notebooks, and could save you a visit to a manicurist once you've broken all your nails trying to change jumper settings on sound cards.

● See page 307 for contact details.

#### Home brew

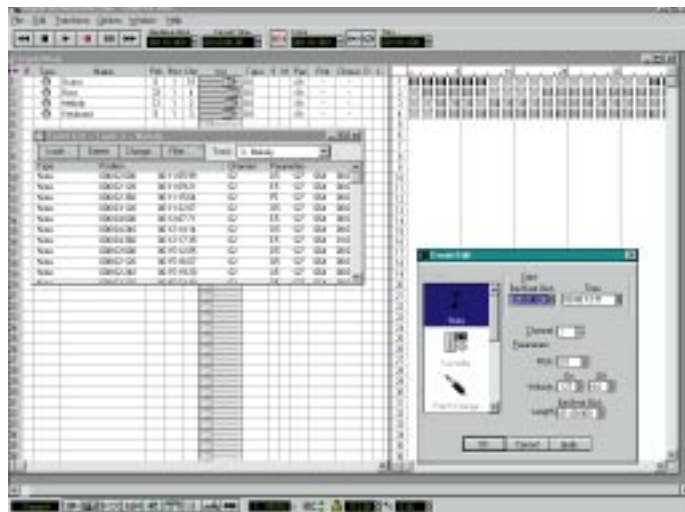
*Q. "I intend to set up a basic home recording studio. I own a MIDI keyboard (a Korg X3) and have a modest 486 PC with 8Mb of RAM installed, which is currently running Windows 3.11. The X3 has a built-in sequencer but I find it cumbersome to use, and restricting. How I can get a sequencer up and running on my PC? Do I need a sound card, and what sequencer would you recommend? I don't have loads of spare cash at the moment and would therefore appreciate a cost-effective solution."*

martin@manic.co.uk

A. If you shop around, you'll find there are plenty of good deals out there that will get the X3 talking to a sequencer on your PC. To save you the hassle, I had a little shop around for you, and discovered some pretty amazing deals. First off, let's have a look at the options available.

The Korg X3 has a "host computer" interface on the rear panel that lets you connect it directly to the serial port of a PC or Mac. The cable can be obtained directly from Korg and costs just £8. In addition to this, you'll need software drivers, which will set you back a further £7.50. Together, these provide a two-way MIDI connection to your PC. Now to the sequencer. I have always recommended Steinberg's Cubase; the reason being that Cubase is intuitive and therefore easy to learn and quick in use. It's also the industry-standard package, so if you wind up in a studio some day, you can be sure they'll have the

Digital Orchestrator Plus is currently bundled with Yamaha's Sound Edge, an ideal software/sound card combination for low-cost home recording



p307 >



Recipe for success: If you're bored with your sounds, jazz them up with LoveTone pedals

software you're used to working with.

The standard issue of Cubase 3.0 costs around £330. If that's too much to swallow in one go, it's worth considering Cubasis, which comes in at £129. It doesn't have all the features its older brother has, but it's a good place to start.

Another option is to buy a sound card and software bundle. The advantage here is that you'll have a device for playing digital audio and MIDI tracks simultaneously. The best deal I came across was from Turnkey, which is currently selling Yamaha's Sound Edge with a free copy of Digital Orchestrator Plus for only £79. This is a good deal because the full retail price of the Sound Edge is usually £149. And to buy Orchestrator Plus, you'd normally need to shell out another £99.

#### Love those sounds...

*Q. "I have been writing dance and techno music as my main hobby for several years. The problem I have is finding quirky sounds that make my music different from everyone else's. I have a 24-channel mixing console, an Akai S3000 sampler and several sound modules. Are there any general tips you could let me and other readers know about, that could transform my sounds?"*

A. The S3000, or any other sampler, is a fantastic creative tool and should be the place to start. There are several ways to source quirky sounds. Sampling CDs are fine, but you can be sure other people have access to the same sounds. I suggest you have a go at making your own.

When I'm looking for "off the wall" sounds, I start with a timbre near to what I expect the end result to be. Then the fun

starts. Say, for example, you're looking for a quirky sound that resembles waves crashing. Rather than just using a raw sample of waves crashing, try putting the sound through some effects boxes.

My favourite collection of effects come from LoveTone guitar pedals. Although they were designed to create those grungey, wah wah, and fat chorusey guitar sounds, they also work a treat when digital sounds are put through them. Because the pedals are designed for professional use and built with the best components, they rarely add any unwanted noise and have a great knack of making digital samples sound warm and almost analogue.

The Meatball and Big Cheese pedals (triggerable filter and fuzz box respectively) often find their way into my tracks. TB303 basslines sound fantastically rich, yet dirty when sent to the Big Cheese. Anything that goes through the Meatball more often than not turns to gold.

LoveTone pedals aren't cheap, but you do get more than what you pay for. The Meatball costs £199, the Big Cheese £129 (via mail order only).

#### PCW Contacts

If you have any hints or tips, MIDI-related items or general comments, send them to the usual PCW address, or to **steven\_helstrip@pcw.ccmil.compuServe.com**

**Time + Space** 01442 870681

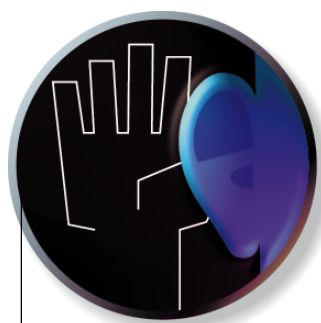
**Et Cetera Distribution** 017706 228039

**Korg UK** 01908 857100

**Harman Audio** 0181 207 5050

**Turnkey** 0171 379 5148  
www.demon.co/turnkey





# The Logical conclusion

Steven Helstrip winds up his tips on Logical Edit. There's news of the latest Logic Audio release, and there's a Chinese Candle Snuffer on the Cuckooland CD.

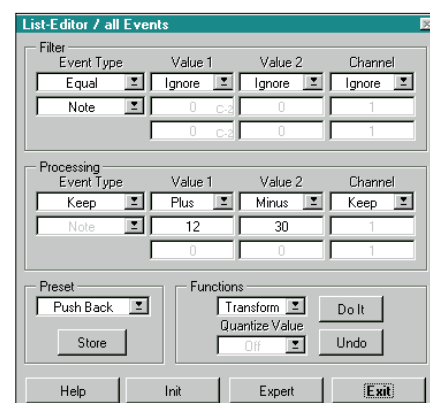
Last month we began to unravel the workings of Cubase's Logical Edit. So let's carry on from where we left off, digging further into Logical's Expert Mode and into some of the more advanced functions within Easy Mode. If you didn't see last month's column, we talked about the three elements of Logical Edit (Filter, Processing and Functions) and ways to utilise them. It is important to grasp how these work before moving on to more complex topics.

While on the subject of Logic, Emagic's long-awaited Logic Audio for Windows 95 has finally arrived. You can check out its main features below, or see the full review in this month's *First Impressions*.

## More 'easy' Logical Edits

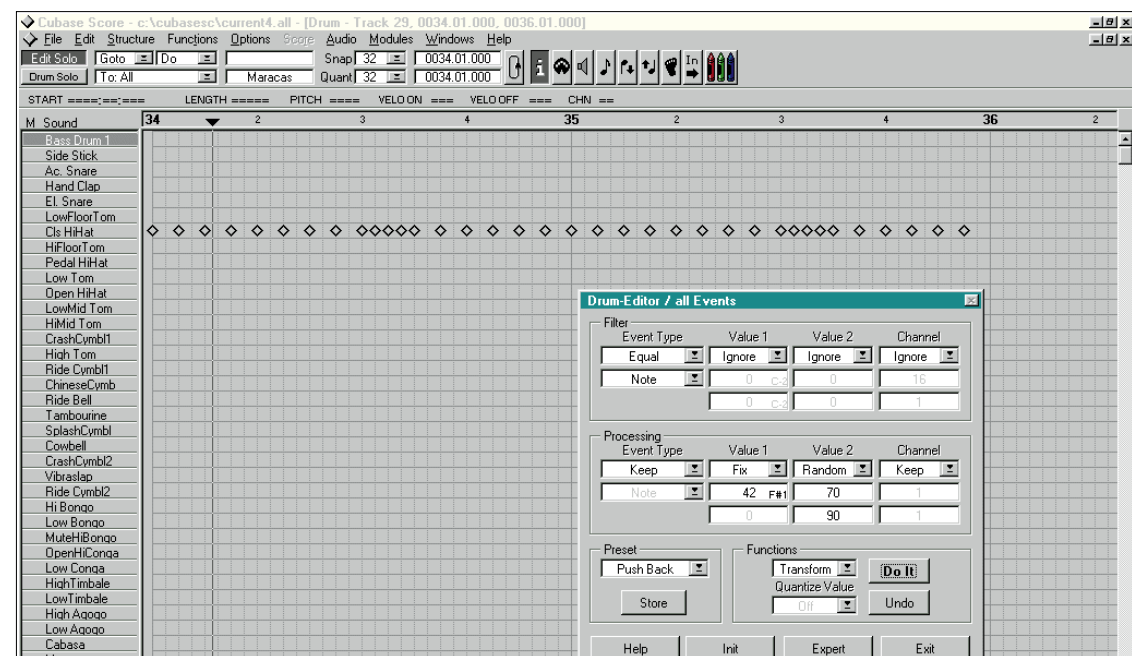
It is often necessary to thicken textures by doubling notes over an octave. Most do this by copying the part to another track, transposing it and then lowering its velocity. A simple Logical Edit routine can perform this task much quicker. **Fig 1** shows you how.

Select the part and open Logical Edit. We're transposing notes, so the Event Type must be set to Notes. No more filters need to be set. In the processing section, value one (notes) is set to plus 12, or 24, should you want to add a part two octaves higher, and value two (velocity) is set to a minus value. If "Insert" is selected in the functions dialogue, the notes will be copied when "Do It" is clicked. If Transform is selected, the



**Fig 1** Logical Edit provides simple routines for transposing and changing the velocity of notes notes will not be copied, just transposed.

When working with Logical Edit, it often helps to have the List Editor open in the



**Fig 2 (left)** Here, random notes are fixed so that they play back on F#1, the key for closed hi-hats

**Fig 3 (below)** Expert mode allows more complex edits as there are more parameters to play with

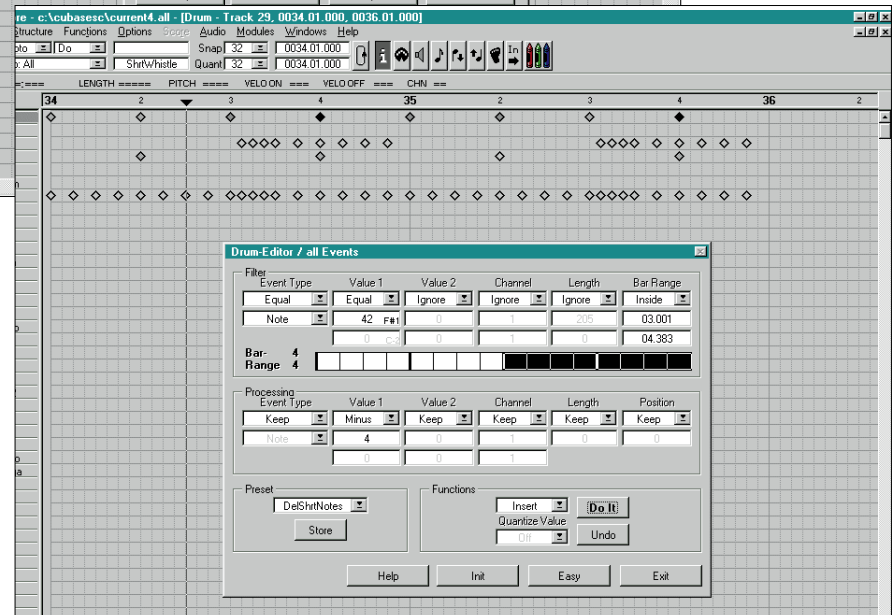
background. This way you can see, as well as hear, the effect it is having. Set it up to delete everything, other than notes. This is quite a useful routine to store in the preset menu.

When recording complicated hi-hat or percussion tracks on a single instrument that includes 32nd notes, or demi-semi-quavers, they can be recorded on several keys and later fixed to the correct key. **Fig 2** is set up to fix random notes to play back on F#1, the key for closed hi-hats. It also applies random velocity to each note but within the range 70 to 80. To copy the same pattern to, say, a tambourine, use Logical Edit as shown in **Fig 1**.

## Expert mode

In Expert Mode, you have more parameters to play with. In the Filter section, two new fields are added, namely Length and Bar Range. The length field is very useful since it allows you, for instance, to select crotchets and convert them to minims.

You can also set up an edit to delete or copy notes above or below a certain length. Bar Range enables you to change things that occur within a given region: for example, between the first and third beats. **Fig 3** is set up to copy all hi-hat events that occur after the third beat to a snare drum, key D1.



## Logic Audio arrives for Win95

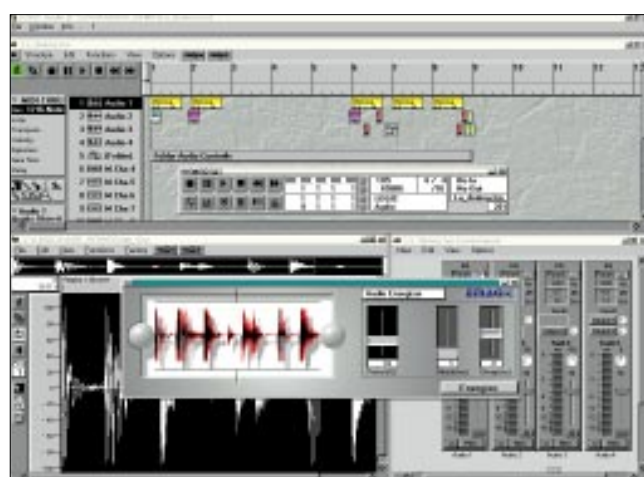
Logic's success on the PC hasn't been overwhelming, partly because it has always been considered an over-complex sequencer suitable for the most demanding programmer or producer. If your demands are high, and you need total integration with your studio, then it makes sense to buy a Macintosh system, simply because it has better hardware support. So, Logic is a massive success on the Mac.

This could soon change as professional hardware from the likes of Digidesign becomes available: its AudioMedia III is now shipping for the PC and provides digital-in, digital-out, stereo-analogue-in and stereo-analogue-out (£599 plus VAT). Each can be used independently and

configured in various send/return combinations. Coupled with its Session software, AudioMedia III is a professional, 8-track digital workstation. The whole package costs around £900 (plus VAT).

The latest release of Logic supports AudioMedia hardware and enables environments to be set up to control audio mixing, including EQ settings. All mixes can be automated and edited as MIDI messages in the Hyper Editor. Logic is the first Win95 enhanced sequencer, so at last you can save your songs with long filenames. All audio processing is 32-bit, which means you don't have to wait a lifetime just to normalise a take. You can also process audio parts as they are playing.

Logic Audio is still a complex



**Here's the latest version of Logic Audio, in full 32-bit glory**

package, although overall navigation has been made easier. You'll still need to invest a lot of time getting to know the package. It's a bit like chess in that it only takes a few hours to grasp the

basic principles, but it could take many years to master. If you have the time, and need, for what is probably the most advanced sequencer around, Logic is worth the investment.

## Zero-G Cuckooland Vol.1 - Unhinged

This is one remarkable CD. Its title doesn't give much away, but suggests it may be a little on the strange side. To be honest, it's a lot on the strange side, but that's what makes it so interesting. The first track contains 98 seconds of assorted madness. Madness that is described as "Gravel Brass", "Chinese Candle Snuffer" and "Difficult To Describe". Difficult to describe it may be, but it's fun to listen to and easy to incorporate within ambient and trancy tunes. If you're looking for textures and loops for use in film or games, there's plenty on this CD to get excited about.

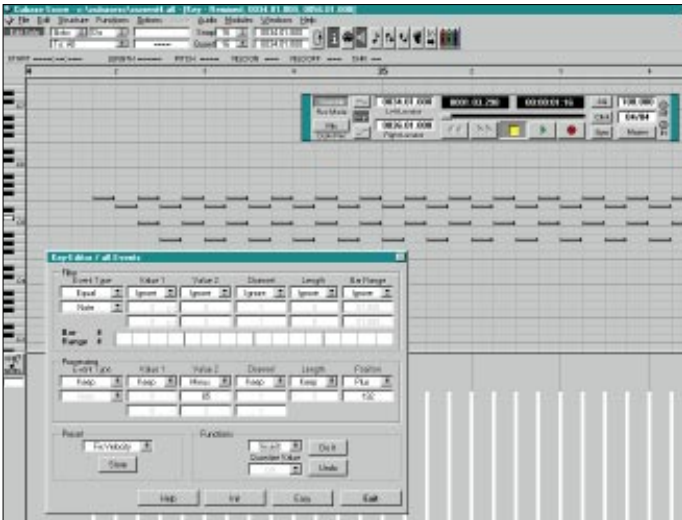
Tracks two to 82 contain hundreds of out-of-the-ordinary loops. Some are percussion-based while others are natural ambiences saturated with effects. The rest are impossible to describe. Artists that come to mind, though, include Leftfield, Massive Attack and Art Of Noise. Many of the tracks are compositions in their own right. When you buy this CD, you license its contents for use in commercial and non-commercial music.

Tracks 83 through to 98 contain musical "one shot" samples. There are basses, snares, kicks and assorted industrial sounds. There's even a sample of a cat on Mars... how very strange. Cuckooland costs just under £60 (incl. VAT), which is a lot to shell out, but it's money well spent if you're looking for something different to spice up your tunes.

Cuckooland is distributed by Time + Space (see page 311) and a free 72-page catalogue is available from them, featuring hundreds of CDs and CD-ROMs.







**Fig 4** Here, an echo effect is created by setting a delay on the synth line

Expert Mode provides more parameters in the Processing section along with three extra Operators. These include Invert, which inverts events, given that value 64 is the axis. Small values become large, and vice-versa. ScaleMap makes notes fit within a given scale, and Flip, which behaves similarly to Invert, allows you to set your own axis.

**Fig 4** is set up to create an echo effect. The synth line will repeat an eighth later, with a lower velocity. You can experiment

with different delay lengths given that each semi-quaver equals 96 ticks, or points.

#### PCW Contacts

If you have any hints or tips, MIDI-related items or general comments, send them to the usual PCW address, or to [steven\\_helstrip@pcw.ccmail.compuserve.com](mailto:steven_helstrip@pcw.ccmail.compuserve.com)

**AudioMedia** 01753 653322

**Digidesign** 01753 653322

**Sound Technology (Logic Audio)**  
01462 480000

**Time + Space (Cuckooland vol. 1)**  
01442 870681

#### Helstrip helps out...

**Q** "I'm a DJ who uses CDs. This causes me two problems, as I'm a chart returner who is sent a lot of promo records weeks before commercial release, and occasionally the tracks I want to play either aren't released or aren't available on CD.

My PC is a Pentium 90 with 16Mb of RAM running Windows 95. I have a Creative Labs SoundBlaster 16 card and a HP4020i CD writer. I have been sampling-in my favourite promo tracks into the PC at the full 44.1kHz, 16-bit quality, and writing the .wav files to CD using the Easy CD Audio software, thus creating a mini promo EP each week to use over the weekend. My Denon DN2700F CD player has no problems reading the CDRs, and will perform all the usual functions on them like looping and sampling.

I use the Creative Wave Studio supplied with the sound card to edit certain tracks to make them more DJ-friendly, and the Easy CD Audio software will allow me to convert a track from CD directly to a .wav file, thus keeping the full digital quality of the track.

I am interested in purchasing a more advanced sound editor and I want it to be able to perform the following functions. Firstly, to perform high-quality time-stretching. I have downloaded a demo copy of Steinberg's Wavelab from the internet and this will indeed do this on a full track with good-quality results.

Secondly, I want to be able to strip out the

background noise from my sampled tracks. This noise would include the needle in the record, on the vinyl, any noise from my Citronic mixer and any from my sound card. The sampled CDs actually sound okay in the club, certainly no worse than playing the vinyl, but you can tell when a fully digital CD is played. I can't seem to find software that will fulfil this function, although I am certain it must exist."

**Andy Elvers (wooski@dircon.co.uk)**

**A** WaveLab is probably your best bet for time-stretching and editing samples in general. Because it's written in 32-bit code it's extremely fast, and version 1.5, to be released around August/September time, will support real-time plug-in modules. Several modules will ship with the package, including a Delay generator, Chorus, Auto-panner, EQ and a Leveller.

Once registered, users will receive a Reverb module free of charge. Optional plug-ins will include a De-noiser and De-clicker, which are perfect for re-mastering and removing unwanted vinyl crackles.

Another move worth considering might be to upgrade your sound card to, say, a Turtle Beach Tropez. Because it has a greater signal-to-noise ratio, your recording will inherit less hiss. The playback quality will be cleaner, too.



# The value of logic

**Down in the depths of Cubase lurks Logical Edit: Steven Helstrip unearths its creative possibilities.**

Logical Edit is a powerful yet seldom-used editor found lurking in Cubase's drop-down menus. It is rarely used since it can be difficult to grasp, but once you have uncovered how it works, it can save you hours of ploughing through grid and piano-roll editors sifting out unwanted data.

It can also be used as a sophisticated "search and replace" tool, enabling you to convert, say, volume to panning information while deleting any other Continuous Controller information (see *Hands On Sound*, February '96).

## Logical presets

When Cubase is first installed it sets up ten Logical edit routines that can be found in the Functions menu (see *Fig 1*). Such presets include Fix and Fade-Out Velocities. As with all editing in Cubase, only selected parts are affected.

To get a feel for what Logical Edit does, first record and quantise, say, a percussion track that includes many instruments. Next, select the part and apply each Logical preset one by one, listening to the effect it has. The presets mentioned above carry out simple, yet useful, functions. But there are some less obvious presets, like Push Forward and DelShrtNotes, that may need explaining.

DelShrtNotes deletes notes below a certain length that are likely to have been keyed in by mistake when playing a diffi-



**Fig 2** The Filter, Processing and Functions areas of the Logical Edit page

cult part. It's possible to change the criterion that specifies a "short note" (this will be covered later). Push Forward and Push Back behave similarly to track offset and permanently move data according to how it is set up. Half-tempo reduces the speed at which the selected part, or parts, are played back. It doesn't physically change the tempo at which Cubase is playing, or any parts other than those selected.

## Editing presets

Before editing the presets it may be useful to understand how Logical Edit works.

Very simply, Logical Edit performs its tricks once filters and other criteria, such as ranges, have been set in the edit page. Filters "tell" the editor which data to work

with, and ranges specify values: for example, only process notes between E2 and E3. You can access the edit page from the edit menu or by pressing [Control]-[L].

Logical Edit operates in two modes; easy and expert. Most edits can be set up using the easy mode and this is what we'll examine now (expert mode and the more complex areas of easy mode will be tackled next month).

The Logical Edit page is split into three sections: Filter, Processing and Functions (see *Fig 2*). There is an additional dialogue box for naming and storing presets.

## Filter

There are four columns in the Filter section that are used to select the events and ranges you wish to manipulate. The first column, Event Type, is fairly self-explanatory.

Events you can select include notes, CCs, poly pressure, aftertouch, program change and pitch bend. You cannot select velocity as an event since it is part of note information.

The first row, in column 1, enables you to set the basic condition for the filter and the second selects the event type. There are three conditions from which to choose: Ignore, Equal and Unequal. When Ignore is selected, all MIDI events will be affected by the filter. When the condition is set to Equal, only those events that are selected in the second row will be affected. If Unequal is selected, everything except the selected event will be affected.

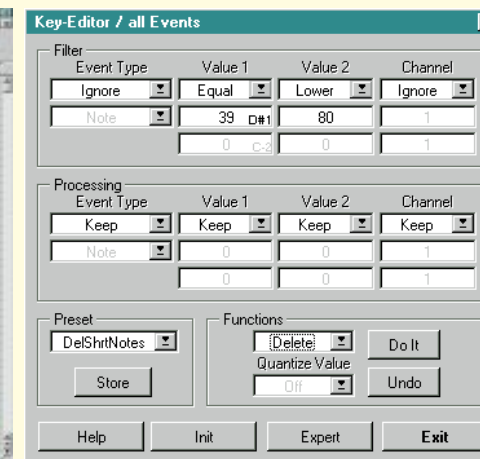
When dealing with note events, the second column, Value 1, refers to MIDI note numbers (or pitch). If you are dealing with CCs, then Value 1 becomes CC number, etcetera. Like Event Type, Value 1 has conditions. These include Ignore, Equal, Unequal, Higher, Lower, Inside and Outside. Ignore means that all events (in this case, notes) will be affected. By setting the condition to higher, all notes higher than the value in row 2 will be affected.

## Chord of the Month

This month's number is C7 with a flat ninth. It works nicely as an extended Dominant chord when playing in a jazz style in the key of F major.



**Fig 1** It's logical, Ed



**Fig 3** (far left) Un-quantised percussion

**Fig 4** (left) Same track, different claps

**Fig 5** (below) Delete certain aftertouch events

There is a third row for columns two, three and four. These enable you to set conditions that affect events within a range. For example, setting the condition to "Inside" allows you to set two values. If these values were to be set to 64 and 127, only events that are between 64 and 127 will be affected.

The third column, Value 2, relates to velocity (or CC values when working with CCs) and has exactly the same conditions as Value 1. The fourth column, which is rarely used, applies to MIDI channels. Sometimes it is only necessary to use the filters section to achieve results that would normally take forever using the list editor (see *Figs 3, 4 & 5* for examples).

*Fig 3* shows a typical unquantised percussion track with many instruments playing the same part. The following example shows how to quantise just one instrument, or sound, within that part to retain a natural, or "live" sound. The instrument, or sound, to be quantised is the kick drum, which is mapped to C1, or MIDI note num-

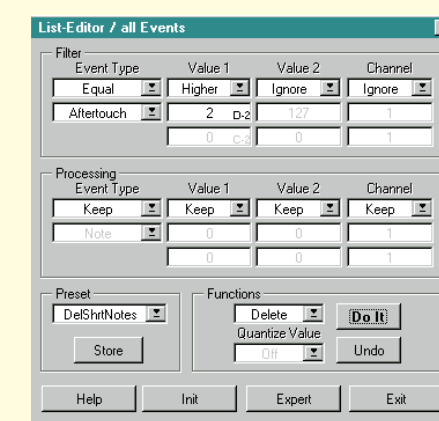
ber 36. Under Value 1 in the Filter section, enter the condition "Equals" and the figure 36. This tells the Logical Editor to deal with this note only. Then, you need to tell the editor what to do with it. In the Functions dialogue, select Quantise with a value of four. And finally, press "Do it".

*Fig 4* is based on the same percussion track. This example, though, is set up to delete all hand claps that have a velocity below 80. It involves setting up Value 2 to "Lower" than 80 and selecting delete in the Functions dialogue.

*Fig 5* is set up to delete all aftertouch events greater than two.

## Processing and Function

Once you have mastered the Filter section, the Processing dialogue becomes a very powerful and useful tool. It looks very similar to the Filter section, yet instead of setting Conditions you apply Operators. These define a process that Logical Edit should apply to the filtered events. Operators include Keep, Plus,



Minus, Multiply, Divide, Fix, Value 2, Dynamic and Random.

The best way to get acquainted with the Processing dialogue is to select preset Logical Edits to see how they are set up. For instance, if you look at Fade Out Velocity (*Fig 6*), you can see that the Filter is set up to deal with note events only. Value 2 (Velocity) in the Processing section is set to Dyn (Dynamics) and has a



## D-Zone Solo AWE-32 Compilation and Wav

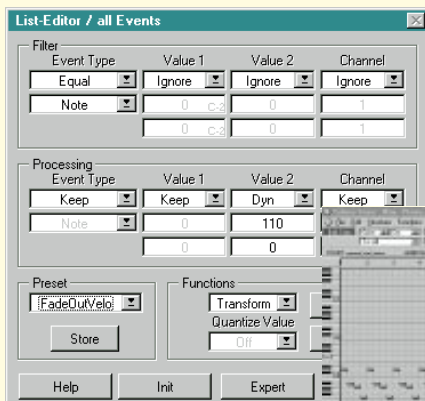
D-Zone's Loopisms for the AWE-32 compilation came into my possession several months back. With over 850 samples, it contains nearly half of D-Zone's entire sound library. The Solo compilation contains most of the rest of D-Zone's archive and is available as two

separate CDs in either sbk or wav format.

You get more than 550 digitally recorded and edited samples ready for use in every conceivable style of dance-orientated music. The samples are compiled from the three volumes of WorkStation and Jungle Joose CDs. You also get working demos of Steinberg's entry-level sequencer, Cubasis, and Cool, a Windows wave editor. WorkStation 1 features samples from Roland's last attempt at making a decent analogue-style synth, the JD800, while WorkStations 2 and 3 are packed with "live" instruments from the E-MU Proteus range. Jungle Joose contains around 30 loops and, allegedly, the only bass sounds you will ever need — don't think so.

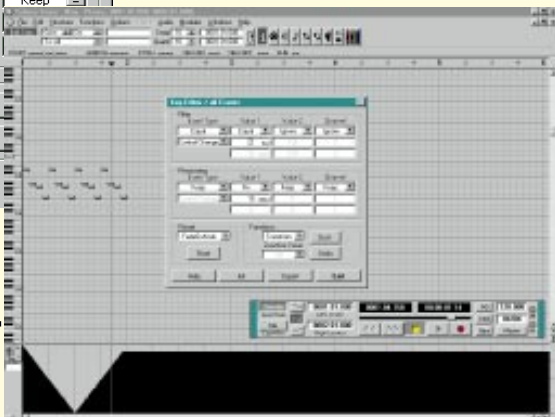
Samples are sensibly arranged within folders, which makes it easy to quickly find the right sounds and loops. There are also "low RAM" versions of the larger samples, enabling instruments to be loaded within the standard 512Kb on the AWE-32. This is a fantastic collection of dance sounds for an equally impressive price (see *PCW Contacts*).

● *D-Zone Solo AWE-32 Compilation is distributed by Time + Space.*



**Fig 6 (above)** Create a fade  
**Fig 7 (right)** Go ahead: "do it"

Transform has been selected within the Function dialogue. When "do it" is clicked, all volume CCs are converted, or transformed, to pan CCs. If "Insert" is selected within the Function dialogue, then volume CCs are copied to pan CCs.



starting value of 110 and a final value of zero. Therefore, when the process is applied, a fade, or diminuendo, is created over the length of the selected part. To create a fade-in, or crescendo, simply exchange the two values. The values can be changed to begin and end at any level or velocity value you choose. To save the edit parameters, click "Store" while holding down the Alt key. You can then give it a name by double-clicking the preset that was replaced.

The next example (*Fig 7*) changes volume information (Continuous Controller no. 7) into panning messages (CC no. 10).

In the filter section, the Event Type has been set Equal to Control Change and Value 1 Equal to 7. This tells Logical Edit only to look for, or filter, Volume information. In the Processing department, Value 1 has been "fixed" to a value of ten and

Next month, we'll be delving deeper than deep into the depths of logical editing. Until then, have fun with these examples. If anyone has created any useful edit routines and would like to share them with other readers, please let me know. ■

### PCW Contacts

Readers' contributions to the Sound column are music to our ears. If you have any hints or tips, any MIDI-related items or general comments, send them to the usual PCW address, or to [steven\\_helstrip@pcw.cmail.compuserve.com](mailto:steven_helstrip@pcw.cmail.compuserve.com)

**Time + Space** (D-Zone Solo AWE-32 Compilation, £24.95) **01442 870681**





## Short and sweet

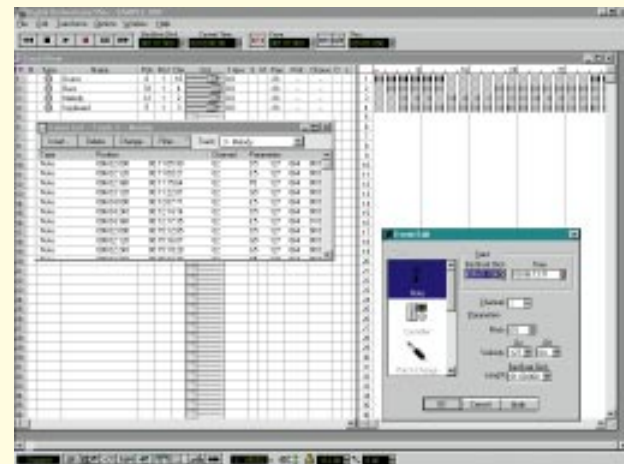
**Steven Helstrip rounds up a batch of simple yet essential sound and MIDI utilities.**

This month, we'll be taking a look at a wide range of essential sound and MIDI utilities which I have rounded up over the years. Many of the utilities covered here have been placed on this month's free, cover-mounted CD-ROM — so give them a whirl. They can be found in the soundutils folder. First, though, I thought I'd let you know about a new, low cost digital sequencer from Voyetra.

### Digital Orchestrator Plus

Orchestrator is the latest MIDI sequencer to be kitted out with audio. In addition to over 1,000 MIDI tracks, you can now record, edit and playback any number of audio tracks, limited only by your PC's processing power and disc space. I spent a few hours with it and was surprised at how quick it is to learn. The on-line help is excellent and you also get video tutorials provided on CD-ROM.

In the MIDI department, Orchestrator Plus offers all the usual editing facilities including score, piano role and grid edit pages. There are stacks of useful high-end features, too, including humanise quantise, track offsets and a larger than large SMPTE display for when your monitor has



### XGedit

Last year, Yamaha released the DB50XG WaveTable daughter-board based on its MU80 synthesiser. At around £140, it is without doubt the best value synth, providing you

*Digital Orchestrator Plus has many professional audio features*

already have a PC and sound card. What makes the board so special are its effects and real-time control of sound parameters using NRPNs — that's non-registered parameter numbers to you and me.

The preset patches, or instruments, are not particularly special, but once you start to tweak them, you can create some excellent effects. As you can imagine, you need to be a MIDI wizard to program instruments from within the edit pages of a sequencer. That's where XGedit comes in.

XGedit provides a user-friendly interface to the XG chipset, enabling you to access every parameter using knobs and sliders, rather than seemingly endless rows of numbers. Edits are performed and heard in real-time. You can gradually

apply a filter to a bassline and slowly increase the chorus depth without hearing any glitches as the changes kick in.

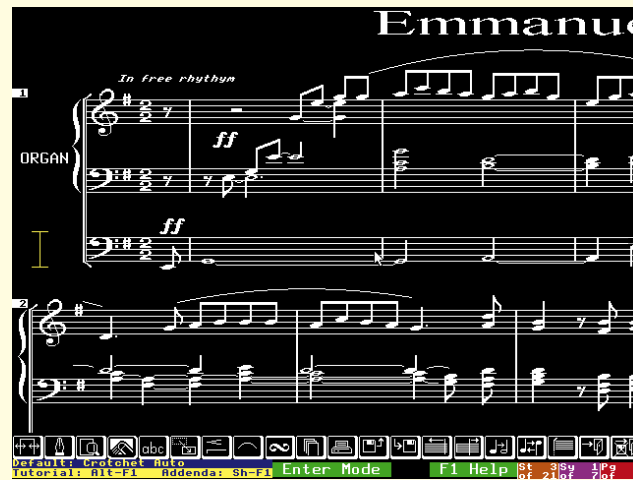
Edits can be saved as standard MIDI or system exclusive files and later imported to a sequencer. Where XGedit becomes really useful, though, is when using it alongside a sequencer with a multi-client MIDI driver, such as Multimid. The registration price is £25 and you can make contact on 100270.2603@compuserve.com.

### Multimid

Multimid allows up to eight MIDI applications to access a device at the

### Chord of the Month

This month's triad is G aug5 (i.e. G with an augmented fifth). It's a great chord to slip in when playing 12-bar blues in the key of C, before returning to the tonic chord.



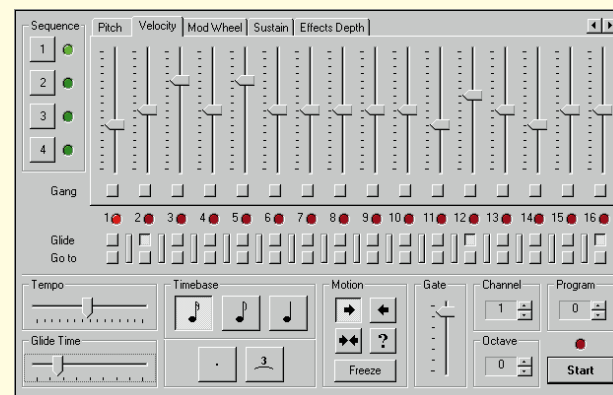
*The DOS-based NoteWorthy 2*

of a synth editor, such as XGedit, to a track in your sequencer. When playing back a strings sequence, for example, you can manipulate the instrument from the editor

same time — rather like having a toilet with eight seats. Without a multi-client driver, it is not possible to access a MIDI port simultaneously from two pieces of software. Neither is it possible to route the data output from one application to the input of another. Multimid enables you to do both of these.

The best example of Multimid doing its stuff is when you want to record the output

and record your movements. Another task Multimid can take care of is routing MTC, or MIDI Time Code, between applications, enabling them to be synchronised. The current version, 1.04, is written in 16-bit code and therefore only works with Windows 3.1 MIDI drivers. Until a 32-bit version is written, Windows 95 users may find it worthwhile re-installing their old sound card drivers. Registration price is \$39.95 (contact; seib@t0.or.at).



### NoteWorthy 2

NoteWorthy is a low cost, easy to use DOS-based notation package. With more substantial features than

*Seq-303 is an analogue-style sequencer for Windows 95*

your average utility, it's more of an application, really. However, from the amount of letters I receive regarding budget notation software, I thought I'd include it here.

Noteworthy is best described as a DTP package for music notation since there is no support for MIDI. Don't be put off, though. The way you enter notes on a staff is very intuitive. If you want a G, for example, you press G on the keyboard. It's that easy. There's a full range of symbols, from grace-notes to *dal segno* signs, and all marks are free formatting so you can place them wherever you like. The layout tools are very comprehensive and quick to learn. Registration charge is £45 from Braeburn Software (01750 721854).

### Chord Factory

This is a simple but useful utility to play and display the notes within chords on a piano keyboard. There are 20 chord extensions from which to choose (minor sixth, major seventh, and so on) and a stave to show accidentals within each key. Chords can be played through any MIDI port or sound card. The charge for registration is £25. Call Openfeature on 0181 518 6245.

### Tempo-Delay Calculator

Another extremely simple, yet useful utility. It works out six different delay settings in milliseconds, given any tempo. This enables you to quickly program your digital delay unit or synthesiser to repeat (echo) at regular intervals in sync with the tempo, or speed, of the track. Registration costs \$5.



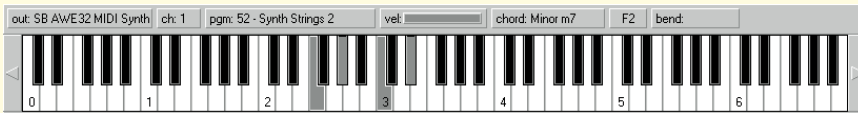
## PC Dance Tools

You can probably recall being told never to judge a book by its cover. Well, I am about to amend this old maxim to include sampling CDs as well. PC Dance Tools isn't going to win any prizes for its cover design, neither will it win any prizes for its content because there aren't any up for grabs. If there were, however, this CD might just be nominated for the best all-round PC sample collection in the dance category.

There are no less than 1,200 samples practically filling this CD. Whether it's kick drums, breakbeats, vocals, bass sounds or synths, they're all on here. What's more, they are also available in various formats ready to download to whichever sound card or sampler you use. These include Digidesign's SampleCell II, AWE-32 and standard wave files for Turtle Beach cards.

All samples are arranged into categories and banked together for easy finding. Many of the instruments are also multi-sampled across different regions of the keyboard and pre-looped. As a result, the sound banks are quite large — over 1Mb in most cases. Drumkits, which include Roland's TR808 and 909 sets, are fully mapped out across the keyboard and, where possible, conform to the General MIDI layout.

At £49.95, this CD is a touch overpriced when compared to D-Zone's compilations but it may be worth the investment if you're hoping to expand your sample collection and cannot find the time to arrange and layer patches. PC Dance Tools is distributed by Time and Space (see the *Contacts* panel, below).



The MIDIKeys on-screen keyboard

### Seq-303

This is an analogue-style sequencer for Windows 95 inspired, presumably, by Roland's TB-303. It allows you to create excellent sequences by setting sliders for 16 stages, or notes. You can apply *portamento*, or glide, between individual notes and set the velocity for each. All you need to use it is a sound card and a little imagination. It can be synchronised to other MIDI applications and output MIDI to any port. Seq-303 is freeware. Contact Jim Johnson at 70461.10@compuserve.com.

### Dumper

Here is another short, but useful utility. It takes any Windows wave file recorded at 44KHz 16-bit mono and "dumps" it to any sampler that supports Sample Dump Standard, including most Akai, Roland and E-MU samplers. Dumper is freeware: contact 70662.1252@compuserve.com.

### MIDIKeys

This is an on-screen piano keyboard that lets you play instruments from any sound source using just your mouse. It's great for checking out sounds when you can't be bothered to switch on a MIDI keyboard. MIDIKeys also plays chords. Simply select the chord type and click the root note on the keyboard. Registration will cost you the price of a postage stamp for a completed and mailed registration form: 76702.1603@compuserve.com.



## Competition

As I was compiling this column, I received some email offering 50 CD-ROMs packed with AWE-32 utilities and sound banks in return for a blatant plug. So here goes. This excellent CD from High Wings Media Services contains over 100 sound banks and samples along with a sound bank editor, a demo of Cubase and a list of utilities as long as my arm.

You'll also find a handy program to digitally extract audio from CDs and a demo of Software Audio Workshop. All you have to do to win a copy is send a postcard to the address shown below. The first 50 to arrive will receive a copy absolutely free. (If you're not so lucky you can buy a copy for only £12.95).

● **Send your post cards to: PCW Sound Utilities Competition, High Wings Media Services, Denver Wings Media Services, Denver House, Acton Burnell, Shrewsbury, SY5 7PQ.**

## PCW Contacts

If you have any MIDI-related items or general comments, send them in to the usual PCW address, or to [steven\\_helstrip@pcw.cmail.compuserve.com](mailto:steven_helstrip@pcw.cmail.compuserve.com)

**Turnkey** 0171 379 5148 (Digital Orchestrator Plus)

**Time + Space** 01442 870681 (PC Dance Tools)





## Rise and shine

**Polishing up Win95's audio performance and upgraded Windows software for AWE-32 are at the top of Steven Helstrip's ladder this month. Plus, short-cuts to keyboard skills.**

Improving the audio performance of Windows 95 is a subject that seems to have every MIDI-related Web page talking at the moment. Although Windows 95 has bags of utilities to increase disk performance, sometimes these can have a negative effect when it comes to recording and playing back audio.

From the many hints and tips I have come across, I have found three that work effectively:

### 1. Read-ahead optimisation

This is a feature that Windows 95 uses to increase disk performance. It works by reading more data from disk than is actually requested by an application.

In most cases, full optimisation is recommended. However, you may find that turning this function off will provide better results when playing back multiple tracks of audio.

It is also worth experimenting with 16 and 32Kb settings. To adjust these settings, open the Control Panel and double-click "System". Then go into the Performance section and select File System: a slider enables you to choose from 4 to 64Kb of read-ahead optimisation. There is no definitive setting, since every machine is different.

### 2. Disk cacheing

Unlike Smartdrive, found in Windows 3.1, the disk cacheing system within Windows 95 does not have a fixed size. The amount of memory needed for cacheing can increase when disk-intensive applications are running, which in turn forces data stored in memory to be paged out to slower virtual memory. This can interrupt the data flow needed for solid audio performance.

By setting a maximum size for the cache, you can avoid some performance

degradation. To do this, you need to insert a line into the System.ini file, which can be found in the Windows directory. Under the heading [vcache], type

MaxFileCache=2048

If you have only 8Mb of RAM installed, this amount should be set to 512.

### 3. Virtual Memory

When left to its own devices, Windows 95 will determine the size needed for the SwapFile, or Virtual Memory.

Like its disk cacheing system, this can increase and decrease in size depending on how it sees fit. By setting a fixed size, audio performance can sometimes be improved. It is recommended that you allocate two and half times the amount of RAM you have, for a SwapFile. Therefore, if you have 8Mb of RAM, the SwapFile should be set to 20Mb. The applet to change these settings can also be found in the Performance section of the System dialogue.

### Windows 95 in AWE

Windows 95 software for the AWE-32 is now available from Creative Labs. It contains updated drivers and support for long file names in each application.

One of the best reasons to upgrade, though, is to take advantage of the new control

panel, which makes the handling of sound banks and samples much easier.

The control panel allows .wav files to be loaded into RAM without having to create sound banks and provides a "virtual" keyboard, enabling you to play samples without having to load up your sequencer.

I have several grudges, though. Firstly, Vienna doesn't like to share the AWE-32 with any other MIDI applications. Therefore, when you need to edit a sound bank, you must first close down any MIDI applications that are running.

Secondly, you still cannot save entire sessions, or the contents of user RAM, as one file. This is very frustrating: each time I need to go back to an old song, I have to load anything up to 20 files, individually.

Thirdly, several months back I mentioned that the paths and file names for user banks are stored in a file called sbwin.ini; in the new software, this file no longer exists. It's now stored in the Windows 95 Registry, as I recently discovered. In stumbling across this, however, I have devised a system that allows whole sessions to be saved and re-loaded. It's a bit cumbersome, I admit, but it works. The file you need can be found buried deep inside the registry editor. To run this, type "regedit" from the Run dialogue found in the Start menu.

To quickly find the folder needed, select "Find" from the Edit menu and type User-Bank. The contents will be displayed in the right-hand column. From the File menu you then need to export this file, preferably to a new folder since this will enable you to quickly find the files at a later stage.

There are two ways in which you can manipulate these files. By clicking the right

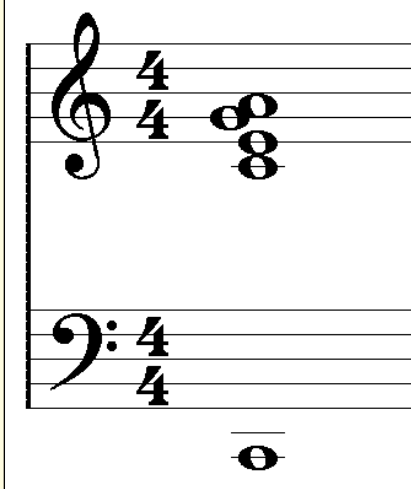


*The new control panel for the AWE-32 makes life easier, but not too much*

### Chord of the Month

This month's chord is C6. It is often used to thicken texture in blues pieces and is popular among guitarists.

When played with an A in the bass, the chord becomes Am7.



mouse button on the file icon, you can select either Edit or Merge. Edit displays its contents as text, which can then be copied and pasted into your sequencer's notepad for future reference. Alternatively, Merge enters the data back into the Registry. When you next restart Windows, the files will be automatically loaded, saving

you the time of finding and loading them individually.

● **Windows 95 tip:** The quickest way to restart Windows is to hold down Shift and select "restart computer". This restarts Windows only and not the PC.

### Cubase goes audio

Last month I wrote about an update for Cubase Score 2.0 that fixes problems with printing and enables Windows 95 users to see the MIDI activity display. Since then, and less than six months after Score 2's release, the boys at Steinberg have updated Cubase to version 3. They don't hang around, do they?

Although there's nothing new or exciting to be found in the MIDI department, audio has been added to each program along with 32-bit editing. Existing prices will remain, which means you can buy the industry standard package with audio thrown in for only £329 (incl VAT).

Like Quark XPress is to publishing, Cubase has always been the only serious option for the professional market. Before now, this was reflected in the price of Cubase Audio; a massive £900. Now, at a fraction of that cost, it will force the likes of Cakewalk and Musicator Audio to be significantly cut in price, which

is good news for all of us. If you want to find out more, there's a review in this month's First Impressions.

### Play-along-a-Liszt

I am often asked, "What's the best way to learn the piano, or keyboards?" Always, my answer is that

*Cubase now comes with eight tracks of audio as standard*

### Creative Essentials: Electric Dreamz

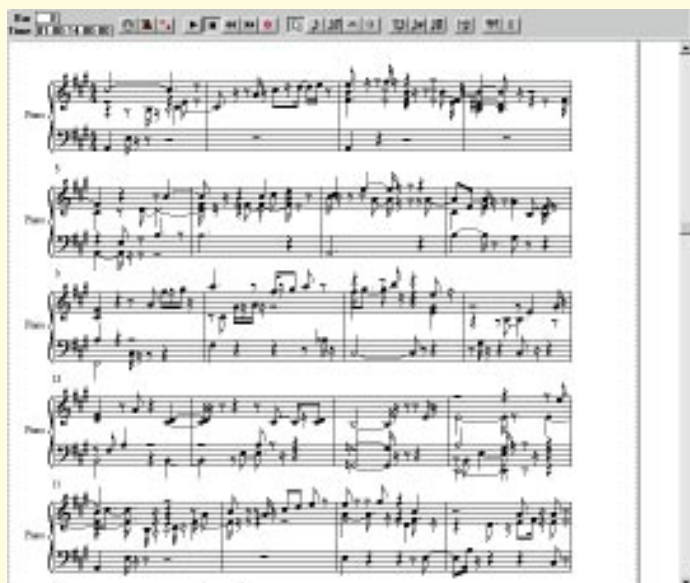
This is the fifth CD from the Creative Essentials library. Like the others in the series, it has over 200 samples in both audio and 16-bit .wav format. It starts with around 40 analogue pads (which bored the socks off me) before getting into some meaty Bass Station samples. Many of these have been recorded over several octaves, and with varying degrees of filter applied to them.

After the Bass Station come some mad analogue effects, which definitely belong in The X Files. Further into the CD come a load more effects, then some more and, er, some more. Some of the sounds available are quite curious, with names like Spanner in the Works, Welcome to the Machine, Glass Spider and Night Stalker.

Many samples originate from a wide range of analogue synths. However, some rather unorthodox instruments have been used, too. Screwdrivers, a frog and tin cans are just a few of them. If you're looking for original sound effects to use in games or film, this CD is a worthy buy. Otherwise it doesn't have much use. Electric Dreamz is available from Time + Space.







*Importing MIDI files into your sequencer enables you to view and print full scores*



*You, too, can be a great classical, jazz or ragtime pianist with the Pianist series*

there isn't a best way, and that nobody should go through ten years of classical training if all they want to do is play "Roll out the Barrel" down at the local on a Friday night.

At the end of the day, nothing can beat a solid practice regime: say, one hour a day, or more if you have the time. There are, however, lots of short-cuts if you own a PC with a sound card or MIDI setup.

Every style of music is now widely available in standard MIDI file format; from Bach to Bon Jovi and everything in between. By loading these files into a MIDI sequencer that has a score editor, not only can you view the music and print it out, you can also hear it being played by the professionals. The main advantage of using this method is that you can slow songs down, solo the left-hand part, and even loop difficult sections until you have per-

fected them yourself.

There are also plenty of programs around to help you learn technique and improve your reading. One of my favourites is the Pianist series, a collection of eleven programs covering classical, jazz, ragtime and Gospel styles.

Each program comes with around 90 MIDI files, all professionally recorded, with a weighted MIDI keyboard. An on-screen keyboard displays the keys being played and you can view each piece in traditional notation, too.

In addition, you can test your music knowledge with the trivia quizzes and find out everything you ever wanted to know, and more, about each composer featured in the programs. The accompanying MIDI files can be imported into any sequencer for further study.

The Pianist series is available for Win-

dows, Mac and Atari ST, from Turnkey. If you hurry, you'll get a free copy of The Ragtime Pianist with any order.

### PCW Contacts

Readers' contributions to the Sound column are music to our ears. If you have any hints or tips, any MIDI-related items or general comments, send them in to the usual PCW address, or to [steven\\_helstrip@pcw.ccmil.com](mailto:steven_helstrip@pcw.ccmil.com).

**Creative Labs** (Windows 95 software for the AWE-32 from around £12)

01743 248590

**Harman Audio** (Cubase updates, £329 incl VAT) 0181 207 5050

**Time + Space** (Electric Dreamz, £19.95) 01442 870681

**Turnkey** (Pianist series £49.95 incl VAT) 0171 379 5148



# Maxing your MIDI

**Don't put up with moaning MIDI's. Steven Helstrip shows you how to get more from your music machine.**

IT'S ABOUT TIME WE took a closer look at getting more out of your setup. So, here I've selected some sound Helstrip tricks to help you squeeze more from your MIDI.

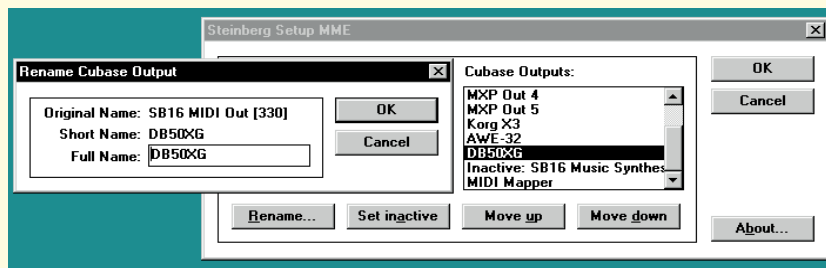
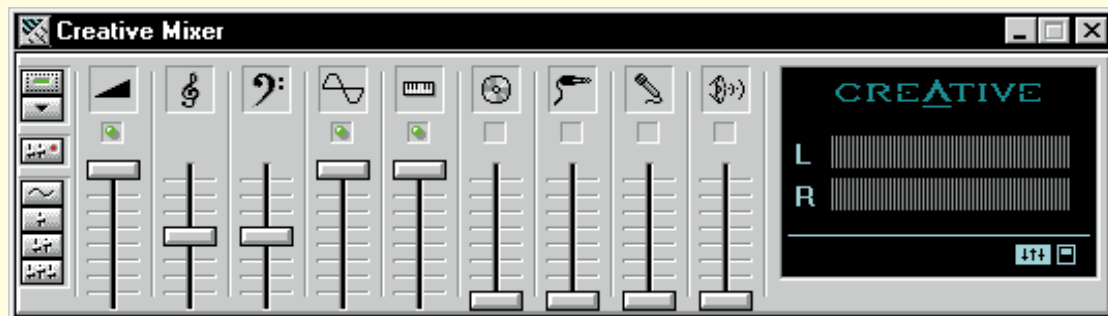
## ● Less noise from your PC

Noise is a problem within every MIDI/audio setup, whether it's a standalone PC with a sound card, or a more complex studio setup. The first thing to do is to ensure that your sound card is fitted in to a slot as far away as possible from other cards: graphics cards and other intensive processors create the most audible interference. While you do this, position the card as far away as possible from the PC's power supply.

Using high-quality shielded cables between your sound card and mixer, or amplifier, reduces noise and considerably improves sound quality. The mini stereo-jack-to-phonos cable supplied with sound cards are often poor quality. For around £3 you can buy a solid mini stereo-jack-to-two-phonos converter, which will convert your card's output to phono plugs, allowing you to invest in decent cables. You can buy the converter from Tandy.

Most sound cards have individual amplifiers for each component (WaveTable synth, CD-audio, mic and line inputs), adding to the noise problem. Muting those not being used helps considerably.

AWE-32 owners should permanently mute the microphone input and use the line input to record, since the mic input is particularly noisy. Setting the master volume



**Top** *Muting the Mic and Line inputs can help reduce noise from your sound card*

**Above** *Give your sound card a recognisable name from the MME setup in Cubase*

to maximum will improve the signal-to-noise ratio. If there is any distortion, reduce the gain settings on your mixer channels.

## ● Friendly MIDI ports

If you use Cubase and have several MIDI ports, you can rename them in the Setup MME drivers application. So, for example, instead of selecting SB16 MIDI Out (330) you can give it the name of the instrument connected to it. In my case, this is Yamaha's DB50XG daughterboard.

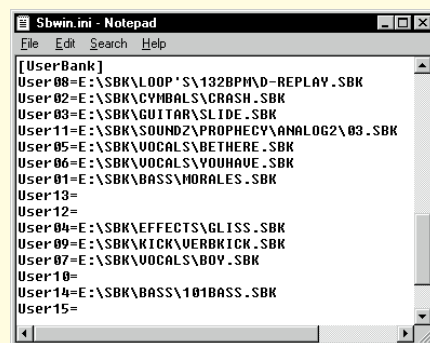
## ● Saving AWE-32 sessions

When I last counted, I had nearly 2,000 sample banks (SBKs) for the AWE-32. Remembering which ones I have used in a

particular song, and their locations, was just about impossible, since no application exists that allows you to save entire sessions. Nevertheless, I have come up with a solution. When you load a sound bank, an

entry is made in the user bank section of SBWIN.INI, noting its filename and path. Having completed a song, you can copy the ini file (located in the Windows directory) and paste its contents to the notepad within your sequencer. Returning to that song later will enable you to quickly reload any samples you have used.

*The Sbwini.ini file provides you with a reference to all the samples you've used on a particular song*



## Let's face the D-Zone and dance

The people at D-Zone have been knocking out sampling CDs at quite a rate over the past few months. DanceZone is the latest product and one of its best so far — assuming dance-orientated CDs are your cup of tea. As usual with the Loopisms series, you get 25 pre-looped loops (if you see what I mean), and a load of "one-shot" samples. This time, the samples are courtesy of the Korg Prophecy and all are recorded at middle C. There are 125 samples in total, ranging from analogue sequences to slap bass timbres.

From now on, all of D-Zone's CDs, including this one, will be mixed mode, which means all the samples will be provided in audio and Windows .wav format. On the CD-ROM partition you will also find each sample in SBK format ready to be downloaded to the AWE-32 sound card — a nice touch.

The loops are predominantly house/garage orientated, although there are several jungle-esque loops to be found. Inclusion of the loop from Todd Terry's mix of Everything But The Girl's "Missing" (one of the best-selling singles, ever) was a bit cheeky, I thought — you couldn't possibly use it and get away with it!

For just £12.95, this is another "must have" for your collection.

Owners of AWE-32 cards shouldn't hesitate.

There's even a playable demo of Rise of the Triads on the CD for when you need a break, and a demo of Cool, the Windows sound editor.



● *Loopism's DanceZone is distributed by Time + Space (see "Contacts", page 317)*

## ● Save time with templates

How many times have you recorded a "four on the floor" kick drum pattern? And how many times have you tapped in 16s on the hi-hats? Because most sequences start life with a rhythm track, why not create a folder for frequently used sequences?

The tracks can be saved as complete arrangements (kick, snare, hi-hats, tambourine) or, for more flexibility, as individual parts which can be imported into any sequence. You can customise templates to name tracks, or set up drum maps, to free up more time for you to be creative.

## ● Change for the better

If your MIDI setup is limited to a 16-part multitimbral synth such as a sound card, it doesn't mean you are limited to using just 16 instruments within a song. By using program change messages, you can alter sounds during a sequence.

For instance, if on channel 1 you have a violin that plays only at the start of the track, you can switch to any other instrument once it has stopped playing by inserting a program change message.

Bear in mind, though, that most synthesisers take a fraction of a second to

## Cubase Scores under Windows 95

Here's news of an update for Cubase Score 2.0\*. Anybody running version 2.0 under Windows 95 will have experienced several problems, the most annoying of which is that the activity display doesn't work. This has now been fixed, and there are several new features — one of which is a new "virtual" MIDI port which allows you to output via the Windows MIDI mapper.

Most of the problems associated with printing and editing scores have been eliminated, and there's improved text handling. Keyboard commands which make use of the Alt Gr key proved to be a problem for many users since not all keyboards have the key. This can now be simulated using Control and Alt.

\* The current version is 2.03. Updates can be obtained from Harman Audio (see page 317).





## Chord of the Month

This month's mega-chord is G minor with a ninth. The notes in the chord are: G, B flat, D, F and A — the ninth gives the chord a jazz flavour.



copies to transmit on a separate channel. Subtly panning the individual instruments will create a wide sound.

### ● Creating chorus effects

Playing two identical parts on the same MIDI channel causes a flanging, or chorus, effect. You can alter the effect by changing the velocities of each part.

### ● Create delays

If you don't have delay, or echo, built in to your synthesiser, you can create your own by copying parts to several other tracks. By offsetting the copied tracks, a delay effect is created. Delayed tracks can be reduced in volume or velocity and panned to create stereo effects.

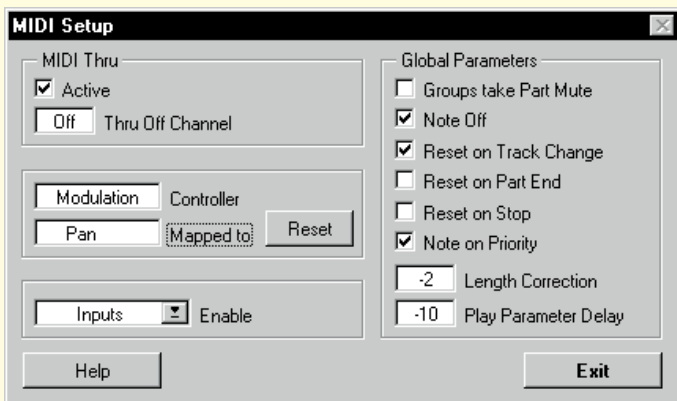
### ● Storing cue points locator positions in Cubase

You can store cue points in Cubase in two ways: as song position, and as left and right locator positions. To store your current song position (for example, the start of a chorus), hold shift and press 0-9. To recall cue points,

change sounds. Any program change messages should therefore be made, say, a whole bar before the new instrument is required to play, to avoid any glitches.

### ● Mapping events

Panning an instrument, or effect, within a song can give a track greater stereo presence. However, inserting pan messages (continuous controller no10) is time con-



*Mapping controllers in Cubase can save you hours of inputting CCs manually*


suming and incredibly dull. Mapping a controller, such as modulation, to pan or other CC will allow you to record data in real time from your MIDI keyboard. In Cubase this can be done from the MIDI setup dialogue box. Going back to templates, you can save tracks or parts containing just the pan information for later use in other tracks.

### ● Massive string pads

By layering sounds you can create a bigger sound. Layering works particularly well with strings and pianos, although you can experiment with other timbres.

There are two ways to layer sounds. The first is to set several instruments to receive on the same MIDI channel when connected to the same MIDI port. If channels are fixed, as they are on sound cards, you can alternatively copy whole tracks within your sequencer and set the "ghost"

simply press the location at which it was stored.

The same procedure is used to store locator positions, only these are saved and recalled using function keys. If a part is highlighted in the arrange window, pressing Alt Gr (or Control and Alt) and P will position the left and right locators around it. 

## PCW Contacts

Readers' contributions to the Sound column are music to our ears. If you have any hints or tips, any MIDI-related items or general comments, send them in to the usual PCW address, or to [steven\\_helstrip@pcw.ccmil.com](mailto:steven_helstrip@pcw.ccmil.com). [compuserve.com](http://compuserve.com)

**Harman Audio** (Cubase updates)  
0181 207 5050

**Time + Space** (DanceZone)  
01442 870681





## Pick 'n' mix

**Good production and mixing can enhance your work no end — Steven Helstrip explains how to max your trax. There's a new regular item on chords, too, and news of the latest sampling CDs.**

I was considering changing the name of this column to *Hands On Sound and Sampling CDs*. After all, I talk of their wonders all the time and they have become almost as important to making "modern" music as the sampler itself.

Walk into a typical studio and in addition to the mixing console, a pair of Yamaha NS10 monitors and a rack of outboard gear, you can be sure to spot loads of sampling CDs. Whether it's because we can no longer program our own drum loops and bass sounds, or because sampling CDs simply save a lot of time, I'm not sure. But one thing is certain: sampling CDs are here to stay.

### Time for a new collection

Just when you thought that there couldn't possibly be any more room for new products, Time + Space brings out a whole new collection called *Creative Essentials*. At less than £20 each, this collection is intended for musicians new to sampling and perhaps the professional who's strapped for cash. There are 30 discs in the series that cover practically every conceivable style of music. They should also appeal to games and multimedia developers who will find hundreds of special effects and weird sounds included. As well as containing audio tracks, each CD provides the samples in 16-bit Wave format on a CD-ROM partition.

So are they any good? I listened to the first ten in the collection and was surprised



*Rhythm Guitar & FX, one of the Creative Essentials Sampling CD series*

at how many samples you get for your pound; there are between 200 and 400 per disc. The quality of the samples is consistently high, although some of the CDs have a disappointingly limited range of ideas and styles. Two discs that are worth checking out are *Rhythm Guitar and FX*, and *Dance Vocals*. For more info, call Time + Space (see page 327).

### Structurally sound

No matter what anybody says, a good song is a good song — even if it has been recorded directly onto two-track tape using nothing more than an acoustic guitar and a vocal. Any record company can spot a good song, so even if you haven't had the opportunity to give it the "big" production, you should still submit your work. Nevertheless, it's incredible what a differ-

ence good production can make. Over the next couple of issues, we'll be looking at production and mixing ideas that can transform tracks using a few simple tricks.

### Laying the groundwork

Once the song has been written, spend some time building a picture in your mind of how you want the finished track to sound. A good song can be recorded with most tempos and styles, so decide what kind of overall feel it needs, whether it's rock, dance, jazz or Bhangra. Also decide what instruments you want on the track; will the whole track be sequenced and use samples? Would a live guitar add to the production?

If you're running low on ideas, listen to a few CDs in your collection and you'll be able to hear what ideas have worked for other artistes. There's nothing wrong with "copying" production ideas, provided your song doesn't end up sounding exactly the



same as somebody else's.

Before committing yourself to recording the track at a studio, work at home or with your band on the pre-production, which is simply building a rough idea of how you want the track to sound. You might not have all the effects and a 20-piece orchestra to work with, but it does give you the opportunity to try out new ideas.

It's always helpful — if not a necessity — to have an outside opinion at the pre-production stage, so take a friend along to the studio or rehearsal. If you have the time, record as many different ideas as you can — listening to the result at a later stage, with a fresh pair of ears, will allow you to be a better judge of what works and what doesn't.

When working on the pre-production don't worry too much about the overall mix — your time will be better spent getting the instrumentation and arrangement right. Do, however, spend time with the vocal: after all, this is the most important part of any song. Try to think of it as the icing on the cake.

## Chord of the Month

This new addition to the Sound column is to cater for the high level of interest in chords. Every month from now on, we will be introducing a new chord. Eventually, we will run out of chords and have to start over again, but that won't be for several years.



This month's chord is **A maj7/9**.

The notes in the chord are:

A / C sharp / E / G sharp / B

It's a fantastic chord to go to in the chorus of a song containing a verse written in A minor — try it.

## Loopism's AWE32 Compilation

**D-Zone** was the first company to introduce low-cost sampling CDs and its Loopism collection is great value. The CDs cost around £10 a time, each comprising 25 drum loops and up to 100 instrument samples. Although on each CD you may find only a handful of instrument samples that are worth using, every loop can nevertheless be described as brilliant, professional, inspiring, up-to-date, classy... the praise goes on.

The AWE 32 Compilation contains every loop and sample from the first six CDs: that's over 850 samples covering just about every genre of dance music. Of course, you will need an AWE-32 to access these loops but there are few people who don't own one; if you're one of them, then it's worth the investment if you're looking for a low-cost sampler.

The CD is sectioned into two folders, loops and soundz. Under the loops folder you will find sub-folders arranged by tempo ranging from 64 to 172bpm.

Each loop has been edited and looped and is ready to download to on-board RAM. It is recommended that you have 2Mb installed on your card, since some of the sound banks are larger than 512Kb.

Under the soundz folder you will find a further six folders for each of the six CDs. Samples have been taken from such synthesisers as the Vintage Keys, Korg M1, Juno 106 and Matrix, and drum machines that include the TR909 and TR808. My only criticism of the drum samples is that the sounds haven't been key grouped or mapped across the keyboard. Instead, each sound has to be accessed by sending a program change message. Thus, if you want to

use six of the sounds from the TR909 kit, you'll need to reserve six MIDI channels instead of just one.

This is the definitive AWE collection to date. And at £29.95, it's an absolute bargain.

● *Loopism's AWE 32 Compilation is distributed by Time + Space.*



*Loopism's AWE 32 compilation*

A big mistake many bands make is to spend all day recording the instruments, so by the time it comes to the vocals it's half past three in the morning. By this time, the vocalist is absolutely knackered and cannot perform to his or her best. If you

have access to a sampler, it's a good idea to record a rough guide track and lay down the vocals first. Later, these vocals can be sampled and added to the track.

Fig 1 Outline of a typical commercial song structure

Intro (perhaps the chorus)	Try and keep it to around eight bars.
Double verse	Two verses; eight bars each.
Bridge (optional)	An eight-bar phrase that links the verse to the chorus. A good section in which to introduce strings and build on ideas.
Chorus	Again, usually an eight-bar section — this is the most important section and should contain the hook. The hook (the catchy bit) doesn't necessarily have to be the vocal; it might be by a keyboard riff, or include both.
Link (optional)	A one, two or four-bar section to link the chorus and third verse. It gives the listener a short "rest" from the song, too.
Verse	Try to make this verse "bigger", which might mean adding percussion, a more solid rhythm track, or new musical ideas.
Bridge	The second bridge may use the same lyrics as the first. Musically, it can remain similar to the first.
Double chorus	Your chance to firmly "implant" the hook on the listener.
Middle eight	This section should take the listener on a different journey. It may be in a different key, have new instruments playing and contain new lyrics. It may just be a repeat of the bridge using different instrumentation; strings only, for example.
Outro	Four "full on" choruses. You might have a counter-melody and lots of vocal ad-libs. The easy way to end the song is to fade out, although a definite end can work just as well.

Hook, line and sinker

If you're working to a commercial structure, your track should be no longer than four minutes. Try to get the main hook into the track within the first 30 seconds; usually the chorus. This will keep the listener interested. Starting the track with the chorus is very popular these days and it usually works. I have outlined a typical commercial song structure, in Fig 1, for you to use as a rough guideline.

Probably the most important thing to remember at the production stage is the saying "If it sounds good, then it's right". Regardless of how wacky your idea may sound, or look on paper, try it out. You may be pleasantly surprised. At the same time, try not to be precious about your work; if it sounds good to you but nobody else "gets it", then try something else.

● Next month: more production ideas, and a closer look at mixing.

PCW Contacts

Readers' contributions to the Sound column are music to our ears. If you have any hints or tips, any MIDI-related items or general comments, send them in to the usual PCW address, or to [steven\\_helstrip@pcw.ccmail.compuserve.com](mailto:steven_helstrip@pcw.ccmail.compuserve.com)

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