

## An absolute GAS

**Steven Helstrip grooves with an analogue sequencer, samples a new sound card from Roland and finds a cheap way to upgrade it, and sings the praises of Vienna.**

The problem with sequencing is that unless you have plenty of musical ideas, there's very little you can do other than play through the sounds on your synth or sound card. Unlike a word processor, which gives you a template on which to base a document, a sequencer offers no starting points.

To remedy this, Intrinsic Technology has written an application that enables you to create grooves and musical parts simply by sliding a few faders, pressing a few buttons and generally having fun. It's called GAS, or Grooving Analogue Sequencer, and can run alongside a sequencing package such as Cubase.

The main screen is daunting at first, to put it mildly. But once you're familiar with the myriad controls it really

is just like using an analogue sequencer. The idea is to manipulate up to ten software-generated monophonic parts, which can be on as many MIDI channels. Each part can contain up to 16 notes and has its own sliders for pitch and velocity. Because of the random nature of the program, not everything will sound musical, so there's a scale correction utility to ensure each part is at least playing in the same key.

There are quite a few nice features, like the ability to copy the velocity of one part to the

pitch of another. This works well when applied to percussive, or analogue effects, particularly when a filter is applied. There's also MIDI echo built into the software and an auto-chord facility. Grooves can be saved in standard MIDI file format, allowing them to be loaded straight into a sequencer. The package comes with a video tutorial and costs £76.

### Play your cards

There have been plenty of sound card releases recently. The most interesting is from Roland, which has announced a PCMCIA card. Based on Roland's tried-and-tested Sound Canvas technology, the SCP-55 has 354 multi-sampled instruments and ten drum kits along with DSP-based reverb and chorus effects. Those familiar with the SCC-1 can expect a similar range of high-quality, General MIDI-compatible sounds in addition to two mono, or one stereo, channel for sampling audio up to 44.1kHz 16-bit. The card is expected to cost around £320. An optional MIDI interface is available.

### Making waves

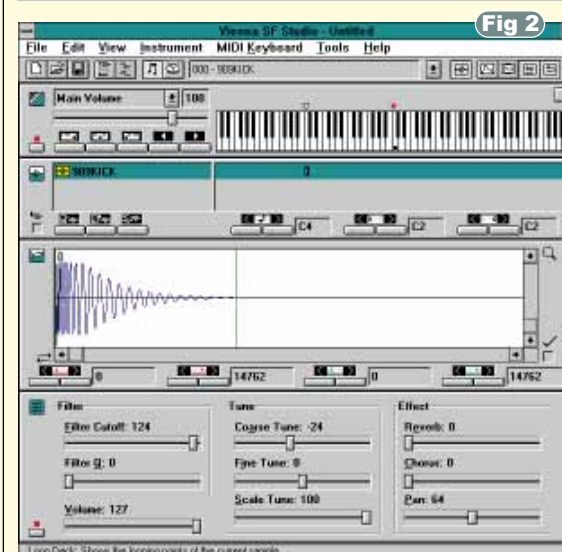
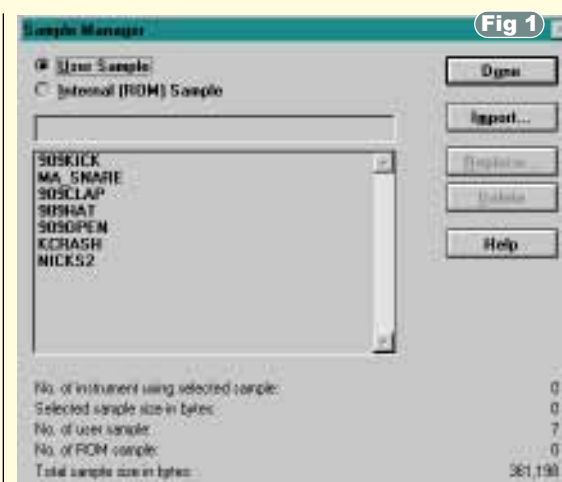
A cheap and easy way to improve your sound card is to add a WaveTable upgrade to your existing card. Easy to install, this sits on top of your sound card and connects via a standard plug.

Orchid has recently reduced the price of all its upgrade boards and you can now have WaveTable quality for as little as £66. The WaveBooster 2 has 2Mb of samples on board, providing 263 General MIDI-compatible instruments. Even better value is the 4Mb version for £90, which has 514 instruments and effects including reverb, chorus and digital delay. Both are supplied with Cubase-Lite.

### Held in AWE

If you have an AWE-32 sound card, chances are you also have Vienna, which is used to create banks of samples. If Vienna wasn't supplied with your card, then it's well worth getting hold of a copy from Creative Labs. It allows you to take any mono 44.1kHz wave file and create an sbk file, or new instrument, that can be played over MIDI, usually from a sequencer. With 512Kb of on-board sampling RAM, up to six seconds of audio can be downloaded to the card — that could be a new piano sound, a selection of percussive instruments, vocal samples or even a combination of these.

The software enables you to create multiple keygroups, which means more than one sound can be assigned to the



**Fig 1** Vienna's import dialogue enables you to use samples from the card's ROM

**Fig 2** When assigning a single percussion sample to an area on the keyboard, you may need to transpose the sample by adjusting the coarse tune

**Fig 3** Give short percussion samples a long release time using the envelope shaper

keyboard. For example, you can have an acoustic bass over the lower keyboard and a piano covering the rest. Layering of sounds is also possible: you could combine a piano, choir and a string pad, for example. This is quite easy to do and there are plenty of other useful features.

Before loading samples into Vienna it's worth spending some time editing them first in WaveStudio. Make sure they are at their optimum level, or volume, and that they start and finish exactly where you want them to — more audio than you need will only take up memory.

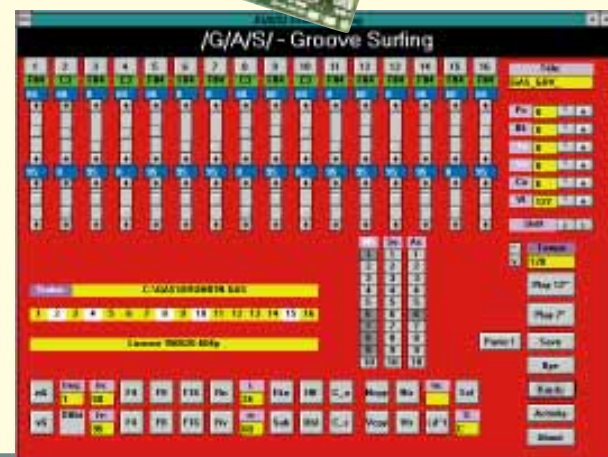
Samples are loaded via the sample manager dialogue box, which can be found in the instrument drop-down menu. Clicking the import button will allow you to select wave files from your hard disk, CD-ROM and the card's ROM chips. Fig 1 shows seven samples which were loaded from various libraries. There are six percussion samples and one drum loop which will be used to demonstrate how to build a new drum kit. The final sound bank, and the accompanying MIDI file, have been placed on this month's cover CD-ROM.

Once the samples are loaded they have to be given a keygroup. To do this, click the "add sample" button followed by the sample to be grouped. The sample will appear beneath the on-screen keyboard mapped to every key on the keyboard.

In most cases, or at least for non-percussion instruments, following the above will produce an instrument patch. But more often than not, further tweaking is required. When dealing with more than one instrument, for example, keys have to be mapped individually. In Fig 2, the 909 kick drum is mapped only to C2, the key

**Top** Upgrading to WaveTable now costs as little as £66 with Orchid's WaveBlaster plug-in board

**Right** GAS allows you to create sequences with an analogue touch. You can then import them into your sequencing software, such as Cubase or Cakewalk



**D-Zone Loopisms Vol 4 — *Huh-huh, hmm, yeah...***

I wasn't quite sure what to think when I saw Beavis and Butt-head on the front of this CD. In fact, it isn't full of "Huh-huh, yeah" and "These guys *rule*" samples. It does, however, have some pretty cool drum loops and samples taken from the TB303, Juno 106 and Matrix 1000. As in the rest of D-Zone's sampling CDs, you are presented with 24 drum loops, not just one or two bars of each, but around 90 seconds of the same loop over and over. The loops have been recorded both dry and with stereo effects. If you have an Akai s3000, you'll also find the digital backups for each loop.

The loops, like D-Zone's other CDs, vary dramatically in style and tempo — from 116bpm funk patterns to 160bpm jungle rhythms. The quality of the recordings are excellent.

The much sought-after TB303 is captured in true style on this CD — great fat bass sounds, through to acid-style bleeps. More analogue patches, but mainly strings and pads, have been taken from the Juno 106. Unsurprisingly they are just preset patches, but are worth having in your collection. The samples have only been recorded at middle C so cannot be multisampled. For just £12.50, though, you can't grumble. This is probably the best value sampling CD around.

There's one drum loop on this month's cover CD as a .wav file and sound bank for the AWE-32.

**Price** £12.50

**Contact** D-Zone 0181 651 2222



the on-screen keyboard is a drop-down menu that lets you select the active program number. There are 128 to choose from and on program change number two you will find a drum loop which was grouped in exactly the same way as the other instruments. To access more than one program from your sequencer, you need to "talk" to each program on a separate MIDI channel.

On this month's CD-ROM (d:\maga-zine\hands\_snd\ ) you will find the sound bank along with MIDI files in standard MIDI file format and as a Cubase arrangement. For this to work, you must first load the sound bank into bank one. This is done from the AWE-32 control panel.

used for kick drum in the General MIDI specification. You can specify the limits of the keygroup by dragging the handles beneath the on-screen keyboard. When you want the sample on just one key, the highest and lowest keys must be the same.

Having the right instrument on the right key is only half the battle. You must then change the pitch, or transpose, that key-group. By default middle C (C4) is set to play the original pitch of the sample. As the kick drum is positioned two octaves below middle C, the "course tune" has to be set to +24 semitones. It should now sound the same as the original sample.

To enable the sample to play right to

the end when you press a key on a MIDI keyboard, the release time of that sample needs to be set to 127. This can be found on the envelope section within Vienna. In this example, I have also set the reverb for each instrument to zero, enabling you to use external effects instead of the built-in ones. You can turn the reverb on again either from Vienna or from your sequencer's mixer module.

Once each percussion instrument has been assigned to a key group, transposed and panned (given a position in the stereo field), it can be saved as a sound bank. But first you can add further instruments to the sound bank and assign them to a different program change number. Above

**PCW Contacts**

Readers' contributions — hints & tips, suggestions, information — are music to our ears. Send them in to the usual PCW address, or to [shelstrip@cix.compulink.co.uk](mailto:shelstrip@cix.compulink.co.uk)

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