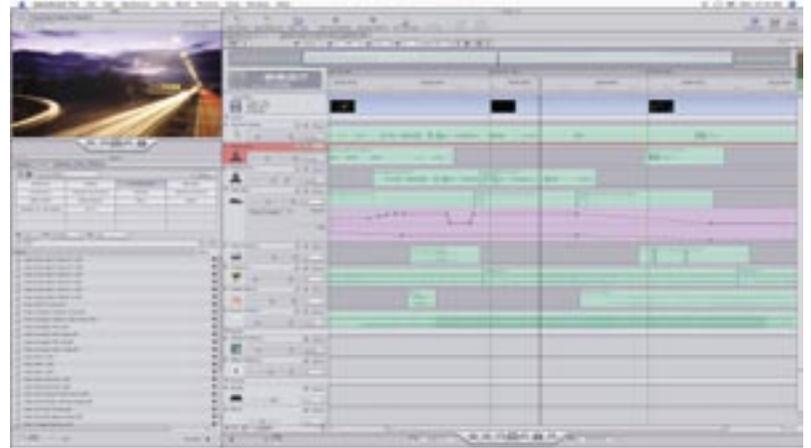# Apple Soundtrack Pro

**Much in the same way that Final Cut Pro has crept up on the video editing market so Apple's sound editing package is doing the same to DAWs. ANDY DAY says Soundtrack Pro has the additional benefit of real integration with the rest of the caboodle.**



**APPLE HAS GONE** from strength to strength since introducing Final Cut Pro almost 10 years ago, with the BBC recently announcing it will use FCP exclusively (eventually phasing out Avid). It's never been a better time to take the plunge into FCP. Bundled with the FCP HD studio package, Soundtrack Pro is Apple's first serious attempt to address audio postproduction within the video editing environment. Before getting into Soundtrack Pro it's worth mentioning the FCP HD studio package.

For UK£900 you get FCP HD version 5, which supports advanced video editing at all professional resolutions from DV to HD (depending on your installed video card). For motion graphics Apple includes its Motion 2 software, basically an After Effects 'killer'. With a similar interface to FCP, getting to grips with creating professional looking title sequences is relatively easy even for novice graphic designers. DVD studio Pro 4 is also included and this allows HD DVD authoring and support for DTS audio. All the applications have a common look to the user interface, which makes moving between the programs easy. For example, a motion DVD menu can be edited in Motion and all the changes automatically update in DVD studio Pro. It's this kind of tight integration that is the real strength of the package, allowing anyone to try their hand at video editing, graphic design, DVD authoring or even audio postproduction using Soundtrack Pro.

It's also worth mentioning that Soundtrack Pro is available separately for £200, which is ridiculously cheap considering the number of plug-ins and effects included, but more of that later. Soundtrack Pro is essentially a DAW package that is a cocktail of GarageBand and Logic with a twist of Quicktime movie support. Don't let the GarageBand reference or the low price put you off though, this is definitely a professional audio package with only a few shortcomings, and I'm sure future releases will turn this into a powerful audio post tool.

SP has two basic modes: Multitrack Mode, where tracks are shown graphically on the time line; and Audio Mode where waveform editing can be performed on individual audio clips. Waveform editing is very straightforward using the keyboard shortcuts with some nice features such as auto trim selection to zero crossings in the waveform, which helps to eliminate clicks between edits. A powerful feature

of Audio Mode is the ability to analyse the clip (or selection) for various common audio problems. These include clicks and pops, hum, DC offset, clipping, phase and silence. Once the analysis is complete you can choose to fix the problems or step through the list and fix selected ones.

I tried the clipping analysis on some over-recorded DV clips with some reasonable results. My conclusion is that for basic fixes the analysis tool is very useful and, as far as I'm aware, unique. Another useful feature of Audio Mode is the action list. Similar to audio suite in Pro Tools, you can apply various AU effects and process to the clip, these can be auditioned in real-time and then applied. The clever bit is that the actions list allows you to easily remove or more importantly reorder effects by simply dragging up or down the list. This is superb for sound design as everything is instantly editable, even though it is file-based processing. When you're happy with the results you can flatten the effects and create a new file.
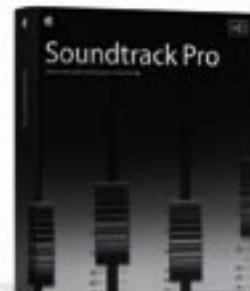
There is an amazing range of effects — everything from reverbs to location noise reduction and a useful ambience sampler, which can be used to fill in gaps in dialogue edits. Audio Mode is very powerful and great for creating new sound effects from old ones or fixing up problem audio clips. When using Audio Mode within the FCP HD studio package, any audio clip can be selected in FCP and sent directly to SP. When fixed in Audio Mode it automatically updates in the FCP project, making this a great tool for video editors to clean up rushes or customise basic sound effects.

Multitrack Mode is a more familiar way to work, with a timeline containing all the audio clips in the project, plus a video track. When using SP standalone, dragging any Quicktime movie into the movie window automatically extracts the audio to a new track. This allows you to edit the sync sound, add any SFX or music, and mix using the mix window (very similar to Logic), adding any of the supplied AU plug-ins. An unexpected feature of SP is the ability to create your own music using a mixture of Apple Loops and overdubs. You get several Apple loops with SP, including drums, bass, guitars, and strings and with several companies producing libraries in all music styles, this could be a good tool for creating temp music tracks.

You even get an application to allow you to

make your own loops. This opens up many creative possibilities for composing to picture using loops, recorded instruments and sound effects. The only downside is that there is no support for software instruments or MIDI within SP, but I'm sure this will be added in a future version. Tempo matching music to picture can be tricky even with advanced sequencer packages, but with SP it's simple — each project has a master tempo envelope, which can be adjusted to make music cues hit certain points of the video. Tracks can then be mixed down into a stereo file and re-imported into your FCP project.

Soundtrack Pro has many other cool features and for the money represents excellent value, however, there are a few downsides, such lack of support for OMF or AAF importing or exporting. This makes it more difficult to use SP as a standalone DAW, but is not a problem when using it with FCP. Another major disadvantage is the lack of support for multitrack audio recording. Only mono or stereo files can be recorded, again this is something I'm sure will be fixed in future versions. Despite these negative points, SP is a very useful tool to have, and while it's not going to replace Pro Tools overnight it does give you some very powerful features at a fantastic price. ■



| PROS | Great Price; excellent selection of plug-ins; some nice innovative features, such as action list and ambience sampler; tight integration with other FCP HD apps; good video support. |
|---|---|
| CONS | No virtual instrument or MIDI support; no OMFI or AAF importing or exporting; no multitrack recording or surround mixing. |

## Contact

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