Propellerheads Reason 3.0

Since the beginning, Reason has been hugely attractive both visually and sonically, and each successive update has always increased the appeal with the addition of new sound sources, effects processors and expanded sound libraries. GEORGE SHILLING continues to have fun and says it's fab.

I WAS DELIGHTED TO SEE in the Propellerhead website Flash trailer for Reason V3.0 a glimpse of a Baby HUI, as I happen to own one, and the promised support for motorised control surfaces as one of the headline new features. The others include the new MClass Suite — a virtual rack of four processors typically used together for adding some overall gloss and manipulation to your masterpiece. The Combinator is a new way of joining together units from the Reason palette to create sound sources or effects that use multiple virtual devices. And a new File Browser makes it easier to find the sounds on your computer among that steadily growing Refill library. There is also a handy new Line Mixer with six stereo channels and an FX send and return; other new features are mostly in the details — there is still no audio recording, and the sequencer remains largely unchanged, save for the useful addition of Mute and Solo buttons for each track, along with 'release' buttons for these at the top. One loss is support for older Windows operating systems and also Mac OS9. I don't miss the latter, it has been a long time since I have booted my machine thus, although undoubtedly there are still a few die-hards *(More than a few. Ed)*.

Installation is straightforward, I was supplied with all the serial numbers and codes to type in, and refreshingly no Internet connecting or challenge/response carry-on was required. As before, there are three discs for Installation, Factory Sound Bank, and Orkester. The Factory sounds from 2.5 are all present but have been expanded from 530Mb to 699Mb with some fab new sounds and samples in addition to all the originals, created by third parties who also offer their own commercial ReFills. After a brief exploration I was keen to get the fader controller working. To my dismay, none of the HUI family feature in the supported controllers list. An email to Propellerheads confirmed the lack of support, and they were reticent as to whether this would ever appear. However, there is much improvement with multiple faders and keyboard MIDI controllers can easily be configured from a new setup page.

A large number of new demo songs are provided and it is well worth studying these for inspiration as they prove that Reason is not just for dance music

— a vast catalogue of different styles is covered here in a most entertaining collection.

The Combinator combines units for instant recall of favourite combinations with all their potentially complex 'rear panel' connections. It makes layering sounds from several devices a doddle. And keyboard

splits augment the possibilities for live use. Any devices can be grouped together into a hosting Combinator rack module, and at any stage dragged back out again. The main panel usefully includes pitch bend and mod wheels, and four assignable knobs for real-time or automated manipulation. These are assigned in the drop-down Programmer panel, which also configures key mapping and velocity range settings. Combis can comprise Effects or Instruments or both, and you can even design 'skins' to change the Combinator's

appearance. On the rear, you can access the entire Combi patch with the Combinator's dedicated inputs, useful for effects chaining. At least one unofficial dedicated Combinator website has already appeared for the exchange of patches.

The MClass processors comprise a 4-band parametric EQ, a 2-band Stereo Imager, a variable-knee single-band Compressor, and a Maximizer that uses look-ahead limiting and soft-clipping. All can be loaded individually or as a special Mastering Suite Combi with all four together. These are very high quality effects, whether used for mastering or general signal processing, but for overall mastering they are only available for tracks created entirely within Reason. With Propellerheads still resisting the temptation to add audio recording to the package, you still have to either Rewire an audio sequencer or import audio into the sampler to create and master tracks including recorded sounds.

The new File Browser makes it far easier to search for and find patches. Different Reason devices are loaded as necessary to audition sounds from your library, and from the main Reason menu I quickly gained the habit of selecting 'Create device by browsing patches'.

Previous versions of Reason have been impeccably stable and worked beautifully straight out of the box. Unusually, 3.0 shipped with a number of bugs, some of which potentially crash the program, particularly when loading old songs. I also discovered problems with the Reload utility that converts Akai CD-Roms into NN-XT sampler instruments or Refills.

If you generally use Reason rewired to a host, this update is incremental rather than revolutionary — there are no new sound modules, and the Mastering Suite components, while excellent, won't necessarily see a huge amount of action for mastering, as opposed to the treatment of individual sounds. The file browser certainly helps the workflow, the Combinator is useful, but I won't be spending much time designing 'skins' for it. However, there are some nice improvements here, and the program is a wonderful source of sounds and inspiration, looks great, and is always terrific fun to use. ■

Reason Drum Kits

A commercial add-on from Propellerheads, this Refill comes on a DVD and includes several drum kits, exhaustively sampled and carefully recorded. For Reason users wanting realistic sounding drums, this is a relatively cheap and easy way of acquiring a very good real drum simulator, without having to run dedicated software such as BFD. There are some clever touches — repeated notes trigger different samples — and the 'hypersampling' is incredibly exhaustive, but you'll need plenty of RAM.

PROS MIDI controller support; improved file browser; backwards compatible; plenty of free and commercial Refills available; still inspiring and fun.

CONS Uses more system resources than previous version; no new sound sources; a few bugs; no HUI support; no real-time counter or tempo mapping in sequencer.

Contact

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