

Propellerheads Record

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GEORGE SHILLING kind of agrees but it causes him to wonder...

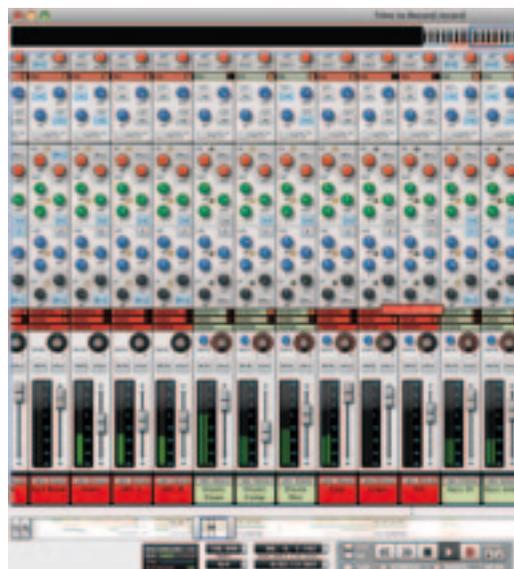


Propellerheads Record is the Swedish company's first completely new piece of software since the launch of Reason in 2001; before that there were ReCycle, ReBirth, and of course the extremely useful ReWire technology. However, throughout the history of Reason (which is now at version 4.01) there have been calls for Propellerheads to include audio recording capabilities. It steadfastly refused to do this while also ignoring the many requests for the inclusion of third-party plug-in capability. Record effectively answers the first of those requests, although the door is still firmly shut on the second, for good, err, reason.

Record is described not as a DAW, but rather as recording software for musicians. It seems that Propellerheads has particularly targeted two types of

user: Reason users who want to record audio, and guitarists who want to record their own material. To those ends, Record incorporates some similar

concepts to Reason, while adding licensed Line 6 guitar and bass processing, and a workflow that should appeal to less technical types. However, as well as a sequencer or arrange window that is similar to Reason's, and a rack system for processors that is also rather similar in concept to Reason's rack, there is an additional window representing a mixer. But not just any mixer, a mixer that looks just like an SSL XL9000K. This has been copied not only in terms of layout but also modelled for the sonic characteristics, including EQ, dynamics and even the main bus compressor. There are some doubts about the accuracy of the modelling but the processing sounds pretty good, and having instant EQ and dynamics without having to instantiate plug-ins certainly hastens workflow. But if Record provides the



simplest route to recording for musicians, it does seem somewhat ironic that they chose to mimic one of the most advanced analogue consoles in history. Imagine having Ozzy Osbourne engineer the session...

Record comes in a slickly designed package that includes an installation manual, a snazzy copy protection USB dongle in a silicon sleeve, some stickers (*Abright! Ed*) and a DVD with the software; the whole thing looks colourful and modern. And that goes for the software too. An Intel processor is required

to run Record on a Mac but Record makes efficient use of multicore processing, always spreading the load. The software also seems exceptionally happy working with very low latency settings, and track counts don't seem to be as much of an issue as with other DAWs. There also appears to be some automatic delay compensation going on behind the scenes, but this isn't of any concern to the end user — it just works. Without the dongle it is possible to run Record by logging into your Propellerheads online account; without any

authorisation there is still demo mode, which unlike most other software will let you create and save your work, but won't let you open previously saved files, which is a nice twist on the conventions of authorisation. If you own Reason and have the latest

version installed, Record makes available all the rack devices therein, vastly expanding the possibilities. For a relatively small outlay it's worth having the extra processors, and to that end there is a generous upgrade path for Reason users (UK£115 from all versions), and a reduced price bundle (£437) of the two programs for those starting from scratch. Record alone is £230 (all prices include VAT).

It's worth noting that there are improvements over Reason's functionality in the rack and sequencer. The rack is no longer restricted to a single unit's width, and there are improvements in the way patching works. The sequencer makes chopping and moving bits of audio around very straightforward, and adopts a useful and intuitive comping system that is not a million miles from Logic's Quick Swipe function. Possibly Record's best feature is its 'always on' time stretching, with two fantastic algorithms. Simply change the BPM and all the audio follows in the most invisible manner. Even the most extreme variations of tempo (between 1bpm and 999bpm) seem to retain all the frequency response of the originally recorded audio with a remarkable 'hi-fi' quality. Handy for slowing down to record the difficult bits!

The three aforementioned windows are accessed by pressing F5, F6 and F7; stickers are provided for your computer keyboard, although most of the sticker sheet comprises promotional logos. Any combination presses result in the screen splitting into two or three sections which can be resized, and in each window there are columns with mini graphics for easy navigation. You also get a floating Tool Window that includes a Devices section showing a small graphic for all available rackable items; these can be double-



clicked or dragged into the rack to create an instance. For ultimate navigation capability a three-monitor setup would presumably be optimum, but the navigation tools are good, and it is easy to jump between related channels and devices.

The top of the Record rack is always inhabited by the Hardware Interface, much like that found in Reason. Just like Reason, you can flip the rack around to see and make virtual cable connections. Creating an audio track results in a track in the sequencer, a channel on the mixer, and an associated audio track device in the rack that allows for patching inserts and so on.

One of the aims of the program's designers was to avoid unnecessary dialogue boxes, so following setup you rarely see on-screen dialogues; the idea is that all the complex stuff goes on behind the scenes. For example, you can happily record mono and stereo 'clips' on the same sequencer track. However, the patching cable graphics on the rear of the rack can become rather complex for the novice to understand.

The selection of Line 6 modelled amps and cabinets

is rather limited as standard but owners of any Line 6 hardware that sports a USB connection, or indeed owners of POD Farm software, can unlock the additional patches relating to their product, which magically appear on the menus in Record's Line 6 Guitar Amp and Bass Amp modules. My iLok authorised version of POD Farm did the trick with no fuss. Also useful to guitarists is a built-in tuner, and there are dedicated buttons for click and count-in.

In use Record is fun, and you could imagine musicians finding this rather easier than learning Logic's foibles and intricacies, although I'd imagine most pro users would miss their favourite plug-ins and the flexibility of Logic or Pro Tools. There is, of course, the possibility to use ReWire to slave Record to either of those as host. There is no native video sync and it's not really geared up for post work — that is not the intention here. Record saves just one file for each song, which contains all the audio and data, but it is fairly straightforward to export standard audio files from within the program. The 'sealed' system provides unparalleled stability and efficiency, the Reason devices have always provided fun and colour, and Record continues in that vein. And the time stretching algorithms are truly stunning. ■

PROS

Attractive audio recording package for Reason users and musicians; supreme time expand/compress algorithm; stable; CPU-efficient.

CONS

No MIDI output possible; no pitch manipulation; no third-party plug-ins.

Contact

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