

Sonic Foundry Sound Forge 6.0

An early starter in the PC editor game, Sound Forge has gone through a number of changes and evolutions in its time. The latest version promises to herald a new era for the software.

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ANYONE ON EVEN NODDING acquaintance terms with PC-based digital audio will have heard of Sound Forge. Some will have tried it ten years ago and dismissed it. For those who did, it is time for a re-evaluation. Existing users of previous versions will find many things to smile about.

There is insufficient room here to describe all the features of this bundle so I'll concentrate on the innovations, vices and virtues.

Sound Forge is viewed by many as the digital audio equivalent of a Swiss Army Knife. This description was looking increasingly dubious due to the lack of 24-bit and high sampling rate support. V5.0 addressed these shortcomings. V6.0 goes further by removing a number of others, as well as adding considerably to the functionality and improving the interface.

Sample rates from 2kHz to 192kHz are supported with bit depths from 8-bit fixed to 64-bit IEEE float. Files larger than 4Gb are supported with NTFS formatted drives. High quality conversion between formats is a key feature.

The biggest change in V6.0 is non-destructive editing. All previous versions have allowed non-destructive

previews of edits and effects but once committed, all these activities changed the audio file. Undo was possible only because the previous, unaltered, file was kept. Now, changes are rendered only when the file is saved. This brings huge benefits in speed and fluidity. Rendering is carried out in the background so, while one data window is being processed, the rest are still available for use.

Many of the other changes are improvements to the user interface. Transport controls have been tidied up and are now cleaner and more intuitive (but still no reverse play!). The plug-in chainer can be left on the main screen, docked, while editing. Edits can be adjusted without closing the chainer. The Plug-in Manager is new and allows large libraries of plug-ins and chains to be viewed and arranged in an Explorer-style view. Plug-ins can be dragged straight to a data

window. There is also a user-definable Favourites menu. Further enhancing the plug-in area, the Preset Manager works with Sonic Foundry plug-ins across Sound Forge, Acid and Vegas so favourite presets are conveniently available in all three applications.

V6.0 has inherited some features from Vegas. Docking Windows, used with a little thought, improve productivity by allowing many more Windows to be instantly accessed without going to menus. All toolbars are now fully customisable. The horizontal zoom ratio is now 24:1 i.e. up to 24 pixels to one sample. Two custom zoom ratios can be saved and used to jump between frequently used settings, again saving time.

The video aspects of Sound Forge have also been improved with de-interlace options for interlaced to progressive conversions and stretching of widescreen material to fill the destination frame size. QuickTime can be imported and there is the option of the Main Concept MPEG 1 and 2 plug-in.

Sound Forge has always been an essential tool for the games industry. It is also of considerable interest for streaming since it can manipulate, generate and edit command markers in WMA, WMV, Real Media

and Scott Studios formats.

CD burning has been rationalised across the Sonic Foundry product range. Sound Forge can do Track-at-once burning and the full version of Vegas Video 3.0 does Disc-at-once. The estimable CD architect is no more. Many, myself included mourn its passing, but Vegas Video answers most of my wish list for CD architect and it would not have made sense to develop the two products in parallel.

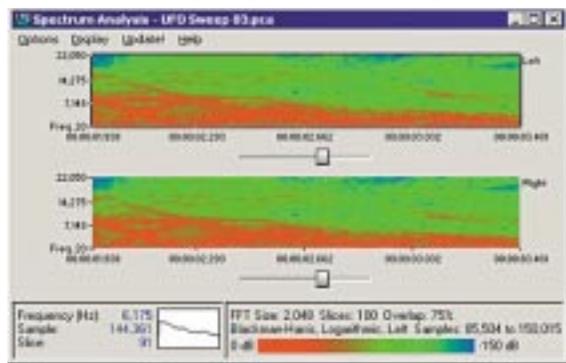
One of the benefits of longevity is maturity, one of the dangers, complacency. Sound

Forge 6.0 is certainly mature and the innovations and improvements over previous versions suggest Sonic Foundry is far from complacent. The package has never been better value for money. Several of the additions, which in the past have been chargeable extras, are now included. Acoustic Mirror is Sonic Foundry's

convolution effects plug-in, Batch Convertor is invaluable for dealing with tedious mass conversions and Sonic Foundry have even thrown in Vegas Video 3.0 LE and 1001 sound effects (sadly missing from the review package).

I am a big fan of Vegas Video and I'm looking forward to playing with V3.0 even if it is the 'lite' version. Apart from its video editing functions, Vegas is no slouch as a multitrack DAW. Like the new improved Sound Forge it is a quick and productive tool. It is also has one of the most intuitive interfaces I can think of.

Sound Forge is one of 'those' products. In some ways it can be irritating. Partly because there are still a lot of glitches when dynamically adjusting parameters, for example on EQ and on previews. But also in the way it makes you do things if you are more familiar with other editors. It does less to shield you from some of the real horrors inherent in digital audio. But therein lies its power. Even if you have one or more major DAW packages, Sound Forge fills in a lot of annoying gaps in the arsenal of 'nuts and bolts' tools. In this latest incarnation, it is a lot more attractive as an everyday stereo editor as well. Don't leave home without one! ■



PROS Essential toolbox; versatile; great bundled extras

CONS Still somewhat idiosyncratic; preview glitches

EXTRAS Vegas Video 3.0 LE is a streamlined version of the Vegas Video 3.0 digital



video and audio editing system. The system allows you to: edit, title, process, and encode video on a PC; apply hundreds of customizable video effects and transitions; split, cut, copy, paste, mix, fade, and crossfade audio tracks; insert customizable text, scrolling credits (titling), and text animation; use multiple file formats in the same project or on the same track, and crossfade them on the same track roll without conversion or rendering; and rotate, resize, stretch, flip, or apply 2D motion to a video track and add keyframeable drop shadows and glows.

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