Steinberg Nuendo 5

ROB JAMES installs the latest incarnation of Steinberg's so-called Advanced Post, Live and Audio Production System flagship, and likes what he sees and hears.

With this latest major version of the Nuendo franchise Steinberg has concentrated on reinforcing its appeal to a particular group of users. Despite most DAWs trying to be all things to all men — and frequently failing — Nuendo is, at last, focussing tightly on sound for picture and big location music recording. These may appear to be very different applications, but, in fact, there is a considerable overlap in the technical requirements. This process began with V4, when the Score and MIDI Drum Editor, VST instruments, and MusicXML import/export were removed. Sure you can bolt on the so-called NEK (Nuendo Expansion Kit) for music, which adds Cubase 5 functions, but, with the improvements in V5, the main package is now directed towards sound for picture more obviously than ever before.

The Version 4 automation was excellent, but top of my wish list was routing automation; as with most DAW omissions, there were workarounds for this, but these are never as satisfactory as a direct function. My whinge has been addressed and routing can now be automated. Fortunately, Steinberg also saw fit to enhance the routing capabilities with big film mixes in mind. It is now simple to change the bus routing for all selected channels at once using the Direct Routing panel. This is helpful when, for example, it is necessary to route an effect to the dialogue stem then return the routing to normal. Creation of multiple mix versions is simpler since you can route to up to eight destinations concurrently and, where required, up-mixing and down-mixing is fully automated. However, there is no way of varying the send levels independently to individual buses.

Dubbing (rerecording) mixers who — to put it politely — have been around for a while will remember pre-reads *(Never heard of them. Ed)*; these ingenious devices consist of a row or rows of lights, usually located under the screen, that travel across from left to right. When the light arrives at the right-hand side, sound from the selected track arrives at the relevant fader. This is achieved by using a pre-read head on the magnetic film playback machine some distance in advance of the replay head. Those fortunate enough to have experienced pre-reads will know how valuable

they can be. In recent years certain high-end film consoles have implemented a similar function by showing a moving waveform above the fader strip in the meter bridge. To my knowledge, Nuendo 5 is the first DAW to offer the same functionality. Dubbed Wave Meters, these are selected in the extended Mixer View and obviate the need to watch the timeline display at the same time as trying to watch the mixer display. There are no settings; it just works. Being greedy, I'd love to have a zoom option. A regular Nuendo user should buy the upgrade for this function alone.

It is commonplace in post to use a number of sound elements to create a single composite effect. The cues/events involved may well be edited and spread across several tracks. With the Clip Package feature Nuendo enables such composites to be saved as a single entity for reuse elsewhere in the current project, or in another project. Volume and pan automation, as well as fades, crossfades, and volume envelopes, are included. Realtime track effects and EQ are not.

Video support has been comprehensively overhauled. The built-in player is now based on QuickTime, playing anything that QuickTime can cope with — assuming the correct codecs are present. A nice touch is that clicking and dragging in the player window scrubs the video along with the timeline. When a video file is imported it appears as an event/clip on a dedicated track with optional thumbnails and frame numbers. Limited editing is possible — cut, copy, and paste, et al, but not crossfading. You can have up to two video tracks per project with the lower one taking precedence. Video output options are unusually varied, with support for the Blackmagic Decklink video cards and DV over FireWire in addition to the computer screen.

Support for activities such as ADR has been beefed up with import and export of markers as CSV (Comma Separated Value) files and multiple marker tracks. However, there are no wipes, countdowns, and suchlike. Nuendo can now handle CMX3600 EDL files.

Like other Steinberg software packages, Nuendo includes an impressive array of standard VST plug-ins. The collection has now been supplemented by a number of extra processors. A new surround panner enables the entire soundfield to be rotated for effect, or to follow camera moves. PitchDriver is a sound design tool for extreme pitch-shifting without retaining the formants; it is good for monster voices and creating doom tones out of real-world effects. PitchCorrect is the Steinberg answer to all the other vocal correction plug-ins. The leader of the pack is REVerence, Nuendo's VST3 convolution reverb; a library of useful impulse responses is also included with the usual cars, telephones, and spaces. No doubt more will become available. Meanwhile, it is possible to import IRs in WAV, AIF, or AIFF formats, from one to five channels wide. Settings can be saved in two ways: programs and presets. A preset contains all settings and parameters for the plug-in, including all the impulse responses and their settings and positions in the program matrix; programs record fewer parameters and, therefore, offer faster loading times and lower automation overhead.

To better support live recording a large Remaining Record Time display has been added, along with simultaneous track arming/disarming for all tracks, together with a Record Lock.

Many of the other improvements are incremental and/or more prosaic, but it is important to note big improvements in the MediaBay; here keeping track of and manipulating huge numbers of files has been made easier. Although you still have to tag assets to make the best use of it the effort will be well worth it when managing multiple big projects.

Nuendo is making headway in sound for picture. However, persuading professionals to switch from their current workstations remains a struggle. There are sufficient operational differences between the major players to make the learning curve a non-trivial issue. There are a lot of good things in Nuendo, but it does do things its own way. It is anything but 'me too' software — and all the better for it. These latest enhancements sweeten the offer still further and will improve productivity in even the most complex workflows. Anyone looking for a serious workstation should examine Nuendo very carefully. ■

PROS Splendid Wave Meters; good convolution reverb and samples; routing automation and multiple bus sends.

CONS Learning curve; no way to alter send level to individual buses.

EXTRAS It will cost you UK£1492 (including VAT) for the full Nuendo 5 experience from a standing start, UK£207 (including VAT) to upgrade from Version 4, or UK£414 (including VAT) from Version 2 or 3.

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