

Steinberg Nuendo V2

Upgrading a popular and established software package presents challenges to the manufacturer and the existing user. **ROB JAMES** states that progress deserves to be hard-won because it's worth it.

NEW VERSIONS OF SOFTWARE packages are often disappointing. It is common practice to use analysis of existing users wish lists and the desires of the marketing department as the main basis for development. I have a problem with this approach. I believe it is a manufacturer's duty to be at least one step ahead of what the users think they want, otherwise we would still be physically cutting up bits of tape.

Fortunately, Version 2 of Nuendo, while it incorporates many of the user wishes and no doubt the marketing department's as well, also demonstrates some real innovation. Nuendo has changed in some fairly fundamental ways and the flip side of this is potential disgruntlement, if not alienation, of some of the existing user base. Many of the solid virtues of the first version remain although existing users may find conversion requires a little effort.

Of the 200 or so new features, by far the most significant relate to surround.

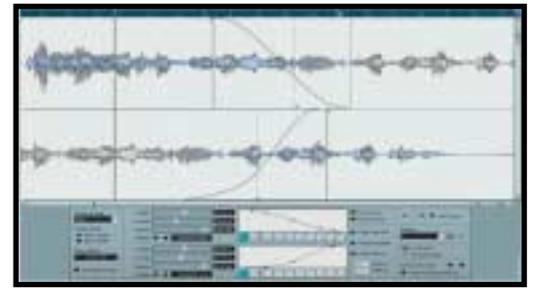
The entire signal path now has a multichannel architecture. Every input, audio track, effect return, group and output can be up to 12 channels wide with a click of the mouse. Dedicated effect returns are also

new but really should have been there in the first place.

Buses can now have sub or 'child' buses. This can simplify the complex routing inherent in the more exotic formats. For example, a 5.1 surround bus might have child buses for Ls Rs and LR. Thus, sources only destined for LR or Ls Rs can be routed directly without worrying about surround panners, etc. To cater for concurrent mixes in different formats there are some new 'plug-ins'. A 6:2 mixer and an 8:2 mixer allow for quick stereo checking but for other formats you will have to provide extra buses.

Methodical set-up is the key to a happy life with Nuendo 2. In the initial learning phase there is considerable scope for confusion in the patching between Nuendo and the audio hardware and there are no default connections. The menus and set-up screens for these operations could be clearer although careful naming of hardware inputs and outputs will make all the difference and make moving projects between studios a much smoother operation. Similarly, developing templates for specific purposes is highly recommended.

Under the Devices menu there are now four mixers listed, any of which can be opened at the same time.



These 'mixers' are, of course, simply different ways of viewing the same information. Each may be customised with wide or narrow channel displays, effects slots, EQ, and different types of channel visible.

Continuing this theme, Nuendo 2 is one of the first software DAWs to really explore the concept of 'less is more'. Despite the immense list of new features (see the panel), there is a way of making life simpler. For example, if you never use MIDI or the scoring facilities, then all references to them can be removed from the menus and the resulting menu configuration stored and recalled. In effect, the user can design an interface suitable for the specific job.

These are all hallmarks of a maturing application. There is a wide gulf between daily, intensive use and casual acquaintance. All too often, intensive use reveals the shortcomings a casual user will miss. Despite support for AES31, Open TL, OMF and Premiere Generic EDLs, not to mention different sample rates and bit-depths, curiously there is no support for CMX EDLs – usually considered the lingua franca of EDL formats – and no support for AAF or MXF as yet.

Notwithstanding this, the number of file formats supported is prodigious including Vorbis Ogg and other exotica which, combined with user-definable frame rates, make Nuendo a natural suspect for multimedia and games soundtracks. Optional plug-ins are available for Dolby Digital and DTS encoding, further extending its range and scope.

The 2Gb barrier has caught out more than a few people attempting to use DAWs for lengthy live recordings. Steinberg has overcome this problem in Nuendo 2 with support for WAV64.

Many other developments in this release relate to productivity and to making life easier for multiple users. Delay compensation can become a major headache when multiple plug-ins are used. Nuendo can now calculate the delay for you and add the appropriate amount to all unprocessed signals.



New feature highlights

MIXING: FX return channels; multiple input and output bus objects with sub buses; multichannel architecture through the entire signal path; plug-in delay compensation; surround panner in channel sends; unlimited number of VSTi, Rewire 2 and group channels; narrow, wide and extended mixer views; balance, dual pan and combined pan stereo panning modes; print insert effects and EQ to audio while recording; two postfader insert slots per channel; postfader VU; automation X-Over, Auto-latch, Trim, Overwrite; automation data moves with audio events.

FILES AND FORMATS: Wave64 breaks the 2Gb barrier when recording; MP3 Pro; OGG Vorbis; REX 2; DTS Encoding and import of preview files (with optional Nuendo DTS Encoder); WMA and WMA Pro; WMV and WMV Pro (video and audio); import sample rates to 384kHz; multichannel files exported as split or interleaved; enhanced OMF support.

RECORDING AND PLAYBACK: multiple user-definable record destinations per track; online recording – record starts when valid time code is received; project scrubbing and shuttle; shuttle speeds triggered with key commands.

EDITING: second track list with fixed tracks; Inspector provides all track settings; folder tracks for group-based overview; time-stretch tool allows snap-based stretching of material; preset curve tools for automation editing; real-time nondestructive crossfades; crossfade editor with user-definable fade times; separate FX return mixdown; hit point detection.

GENERAL: multiple timelines; user-definable frame rate for multimedia applications; double display counters in transport and tool bar; configurable toolbar; menu entries can be hidden and menu structure can be stored and recalled; preferences can be stored and recalled selectively; single preference entries can be switched by key commands; configurable track controls.

PLUG-INS: multiple VST plug-in directories; Datube; Rotary; Vocoder; StepFilter; Bitcrusher; Ringmodulator; MIDI Gate; SPL DeEsser; QuadraFuzz; Q; Denoiser; DeClicker; Apogee UV22 HR; Mix 8 to 2; Multidither; Surroundscope; Integrated waveshell support for Waves plug-ins; submixer for rerouting and distance compensation in ms or metres.

MIDI AND MUSIC: Drum Editor; Logical Editor; Score Editor; MIDI Device Manager; Audio/Tempo analysis and Audio/Groove analysis; Slice and Stretch for audio loops, automatic tempo matching; MIDI step recording; Soft and Analytic quantise; MIDI plug-ins.

VARIOUS: MMC slave; time-stamping relative to start time; audio resampling offline process; new track sheet printing options.

Preferences and Key Command Sets can be selectively stored and recalled; track control display is configurable, as are toolbars. Features such as real-time crossfades and snap-based stretch will contribute to time saving for many users.

It is very encouraging to see some acknowledgement of the different requirements of music and post. Metering and plug-in inserts can now be pre or postfader, essential for post. New automation modes such as Auto-latch and cross-over reinforce the impression that Steinberg is seriously considering the ways people really want to work.

A crossfade editor seems to be one of this year's 'must have' features. The Nuendo version offers the usual selection of fade shapes and a plethora of adjustable parameters. I would prefer to see more effort devoted to reducing the number of key presses and/or mouse clicks and moves required to accomplish common edit and fade operations. Maybe this is quibbling when there are already so many productivity enhancements.

Multiple timelines enable several time-base formats to be displayed together, such as Feet and Frames and Time.

TC/IP networking management functions have been enhanced to allow several users to work on the same project. Although I wasn't able to test it, there is also the possibility of using networked multiple PCs or Macs to extend the processing power for a single user by farming out the processing tasks between them. In effect, parallel processing across multiple machines. Hyperthreading, the Intel technology that makes a single processor behave more like two, is also supported. Ignoring benchmarks, the Nuendo 2 engine feels a lot smoother and more efficient in everyday use than its predecessor.

Major improvements to the core editing functions include hit-point detection for loop editing and cue splitting and more convenient fade and crossfade tools. As with any new DAW software release there are the obligatory new plug-ins. Perhaps the most significant are the inclusion of a choice of Apogee UV22 and multidithering, acknowledging the importance of this part of the process.

The headline price of Nuendo reflects the state of the market. It is undoubtedly worth more. A serious Nuendo system is going to cost UK£10,000 by the time a SCSI storage sub-system, synchronisation options and a decent set of converters is taken into account. As with its immediate competition, the software is a steal.

Nuendo 2 begins to fulfil the original premise and promise of the native processing paradigm. While it accommodates DSP hardware such as the UAD-1 and TC's Powercore, simply upgrading the host computer can bring a real increase in everyday functionality. In the PC world, 3GHz processors with Hyperthreading have already fallen to a street price around the UK£250 mark and the pace of development shows few signs of abating.

Steinberg should be encouraged by the increasing number of high profile people using Nuendo for very serious and technically complex tasks in film and music production. Both camps will find much to please them in this version. Many promising rivals have fallen at the hurdle of intensive real-world use, often for seemingly trivial reasons. All too frequently the seemingly trivial turns out to require a ground up rewrite of the core software.

Nuendo has passed some major milestones without faltering. The breadth of hardware support is widening with Asio drivers for Merging Technologies Mykerinos

cards now available.

However, as is so often the case with real innovation, the true significance of Nuendo 2 is the wide vista of possibilities it opens up. Far wider in fact than could conceivably be addressed in a single release. This is a good thing. Better to give a glimpse of possible futures while maintaining utility than to expect a conservative market to embrace totally new concepts overnight. The flip side of this is there will be some who immediately understand where all this could lead and will be hungry for instant progress. Hopefully, patience will be rewarded, the foundations have been laid for some very interesting future developments. Meanwhile, it is well worth upgrading to Nuendo 2 for the more immediate benefits. ■

PROS

Some real signs of innovation; maturing nicely; considerable progress in several areas.

CONS

No CMX import or AAF/MXF support; EO could be better; still no reverse sync play except via shuttle.

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