

Steinberg Nuendo 3

Steinberg's flagship package has had the power, flexibility and speed for some time now but the release of V3 adds some interchange and picture related bells and whistles that make it a winner for audio post. **ROB JAMES** says it's ready.



SOME DEBATES (arguments, disputes, fights) just never seem to end — Macs versus PCs, digital or analogue, coffee or tea. (*Good to see you covered all the important ones. Ed*). Sometimes it just comes down to personal preference; sometimes there is real substance to the debate. In the DAW world, the ongoing battle for dominance between native processing and systems with added DSP horsepower continues to give some of us endless scope for talking into the night (sad though that may be).

There is a fundamental truth that makes the question almost irrelevant. For the sake of argument I'll call it the 'mirage effect'. In other words, just when it seems as if the oasis might finally be within reach, you look at it again and it appears to have receded into the distance. As the art of the possible advances, so do our expectations. Where once we were reasonably happy with 16 bits at 44.1kHz, now we expect at least 24 bits at 96kHz. We expect our DAWs to play pictures and preferably HD at that. This results in a seemingly perpetual arms race — more DSP, faster processors, more memory and faster, bigger storage.

Steinberg was among the first to champion the cause of native processing. Perhaps too early because Nuendo took a very long time to appear as a street ready product and longer still to achieve a decent measure of stability. It was not until Nuendo 2 appeared that people really began to take notice. For most of us, the native v DSP argument can now be safely ignored

because both are more than powerful enough to do serious work at sensible sampling rates. There is a lot more to achieving success in this competitive market than mere power and capacity.

Most of the additions and changes in Nuendo 3 are of greatest interest to sound for picture users with support for import and export of AAF (Advanced Authoring Format) at the top of the list. AAF is regarded as a 'must have' these days. While I acknowledge its merits, AAF is not the whole solution. AES31 is very important too, and Nuendo supports it. Another headline grabber is maybe the price; Nuendo 3 now costs UK£1234.03 (+ VAT).

Many of the other significant new features are enablers, improving housekeeping and file and project interchange. Media management tools have been improved by the addition of user definable Event Attributes and stronger search functions. These enable and encourage the creation of personal sound databases. Renaming of multiple Clips, regions and Events is quick and secure. 0.1% pull up/down options have been added in the QuickTime and DirectX video players. This can be used to adjust video files generated by NTSC telecine processes to match the original audio.

A legacy of Steinberg's previous owners, Pinnacle, is to be found in the presence of X-Send project import from Liquid video editing applications. Nuendo 3 also includes the Studio Connections protocol developed with new owners, Yamaha. This promises much better integration between the workstation and external hardware such as audio interfaces, outboard effects and mixers. I look forward to experimenting with it when I get the software upgrade for my mixer.

On the operational side, Warp to picture is one of the more interesting innovations. Warp tabs can be added to positions in an audio event then dragged to hit specific points. This has obvious applications in fine

tuning ADR. Find the plosives and other visible sync points, and then drag them into sync with the actor's lips. The audio will be stretched to fit. As with any time-domain manipulation, results vary depending on the material. Steinberg has provided user control over three parameters to fine-tune the process. Grainsize controls the size of the chunks the audio is chopped up into, Overlap determines the percentage of the grain that will overlap others, and Variance sets a variation in the positioning to improve smoothness. There are obvious music and effects applications for this process too.

In the mixer, AFL/PFL has been added with a new Audition bus. This is a 'direct' dedicated monitor output and can be configured to match the physical monitoring system. At least in part, all this is to support the WK-Audio ID Controller, but will no doubt come in handy in other configurations. Pressing the new L (Listen) button on a channel PFLs or AFLs the channel or channels to the Audition bus.

The clever MixConvert plug-in translates between formats. Nuendo automatically inserts an instance of this whenever an object is routed to another object with a different channel format, for example 5.1 to a stereo group. Parameters of the downmix are user adjustable.

Hardware outboard is enjoying a resurgence in popularity. Recognising this, Nuendo enables external effects to be set up to appear just like software plug-ins complete with delay compensation, although this must be set manually there is no analysis function.

The 'Automation Follows Events' switch does what it says, very useful for sound effects. For example, you can set up the panning for a jet fly past or similar and copy the event complete with panning (and any other automation) to another place where the same effect is required.

With Nuendo now clearly aimed at post, the price increase makes sense. The post fraternity demands a lot of features that seldom hit the headlines because they just aren't sexy enough. Real, hands-on, support is also expected and this costs. The question is whether enough people can be persuaded to switch their allegiance to Nuendo. Version 3 has the right ingredients to merit a place on the shortlist while there is still considerable scope for future development. A few high profile endorsees are helping to get it noticed, but in this notoriously conservative market it is word of mouth and highly visible support that actually sells the product. ■



PROS

Event automation; Warp Audio interesting; solid.

CONS

I-O patching can be confusing at first; still no reverse sync play except via shuttle; no CMX import or autoconforming.

Contact

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