

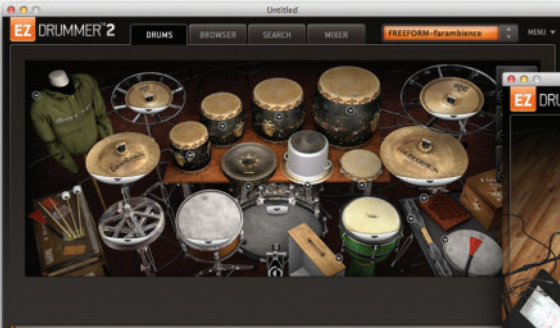
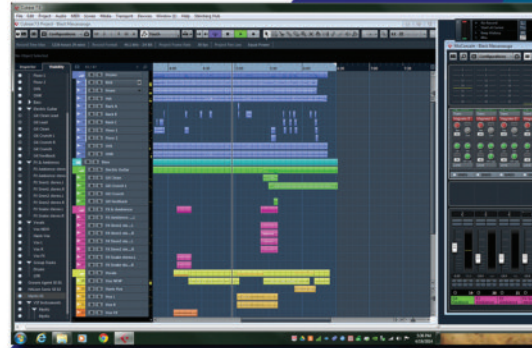
DANTE: Introducing The Studio Of The Future

RECORDING

The magazine for the recording musician

DIGITAL!

The Latest Hardware, Software, and Soundware For Your Studio

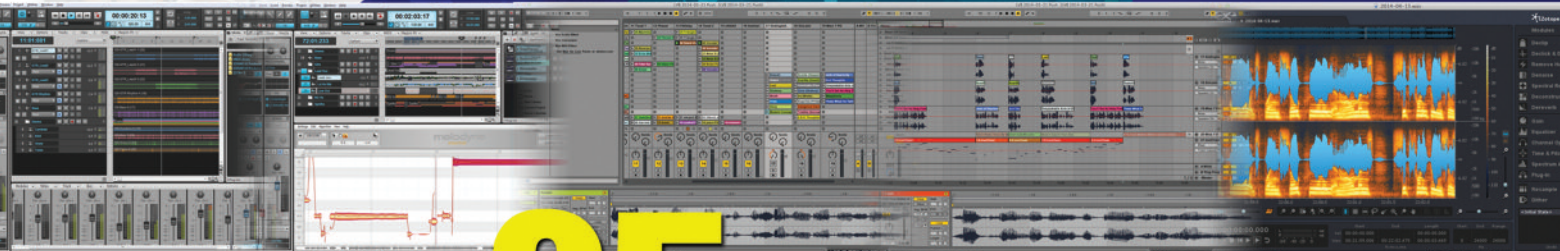


New DAWs For 2014—

Ableton Live 9.1
Cakewalk SONAR X3
Steinberg Cubase 7.5

Toontrack EZdrummer 2

a huge leap forward for the virtual drummer



25 New Products Reviewed:

Arturia • Editors Keys • EZquest • Genelec • Korg
iZotope • Livid Instruments • MakeMusic • Radial Engineering
PreSonus • Samson • SoundToys • Spacial • SPL • Waldorf • WaveDNA

VOL. TWENTY SEVEN
NUMBER NINE

\$5.99US \$5.99CAN



JUNE 2014
USA \$5.99
CANADA \$5.99



The DIY Grab Bag

Reviews by Mike Metlay (with help from Allen Goodman, Sven-Erik Seaholm, and Devon Brent)

In recent issues, we've covered topics like vocal recording, getting great drum sounds, strategies for songwriters, and setting up the best-sounding monitors. In future issues, our readers can look forward to tips and tricks on great guitar recordings, miking a band on stage or in the studio, mixing and mastering advice from the pros, and much more. That's all great stuff, but it hasn't left us a lot of room for computer product reviews! So with my apologies for the brevity of these reviews, here's a collection of 12 computer-friendly products great and small that have come through my office recently. Enjoy!—MM

SAMSON GRAPHITE M SERIES USB CONTROLLERS



Samson (www.samsontech.com) exploded into the USB controller market with the astoundingly affordable and full-featured Graphite 49 (reviewed November 2012), followed by other controllers with varying sizes and feature sets in the Graphite and Carbon lines. The new Graphite M Series has four different offerings, all built into lightweight and compact enclosures that (mostly) easily fit into a laptop bag.

They're all USB powered, class compliant so they don't need drivers, and can be programmed with specific functions and MIDI commands via a free software-based editor for Windows and Mac OS X. Each one comes with a cable (USB A to Mini-B) and a Quick Start guide so you can start playing at once, even without the free Graphite MiniEditor software. With the addition of Apple's Camera Connection Kit, they all work nicely

with iOS devices as well. If your computer has enough USB ports (or if you have a powered USB hub), you can combine all four of them for a comprehensive control solution that's still quite portable, or mix and match them according to your needs.

The biggest yet simplest of the four is the Graphite M32 (\$69.99). It's built in recognition of the fact that for any musician who actually likes to play keyboards rather than poke at buttons, a 25-note keyboard is often too cramped for real work. 32 notes, F to C, gives the user some room to stretch out and play with two hands. The 32 miniature keys on the Graphite M32 are velocity-sensitive; they leave the keyboard a bit too wide for most laptop bags but still quite portable.

The Graphite M32 has a pair of ribbon controllers—a return-to-zero pitch bender and a set-and-forget modulation control—plus a Volume knob, a Data slider, and five backlit buttons: Octave up/down, Sustain, CC, and a Prog button that lets you send MIDI Program Change messages from the keyboard. The modulation ribbon, knob, slider, and CC button can be programmed from the Editor for any MIDI Control Change message on any channel; the CC button can be toggle or momentary. This combines to make for a comfortable set of features in a comfortably sized keyboard for the player on the go.

The Graphite M25 (\$79.99) sacrifices some keys for a smaller form factor (about as wide as a 15" laptop) and more controls: it has a 25-note velocity-sensitive keyboard plus the pitch and modulation ribbons, an endless data encoder, eight knobs, four velocity and pressure-sensitive pads, five transport buttons, and seven function buttons: the five from the M32 plus Pad and Preset.



On the M25, the CC button works differently than it does on the M32; the Pad and CC buttons, lit or unlit in combination with one another, let you access four banks of settings for the four Pads—two banks of four MIDI Notes with aftertouch and two banks of user-assignable MIDI Control Change messages. Those four banks of Pad settings, plus all the other control settings, combine to form a Preset, which can be saved to your computer and stored in one of four slots on the M25; press the Preset button and hit one of the four Pads to load a Preset. All in all, this gives the Graphite M25 a huge set of control possibilities at your fingertips, making it a comprehensive, portable control solution.

We did run into one bug in the Graphite MiniEditor software that's worth mentioning if you have an older version—the Sustain button for both these keyboards will be changed to MIDI CC 0 and toggle behavior whenever you create a new configuration and download it to the keyboard, and it can't be changed after that. Samson was able to verify this bug and says that by the time you read this, a new Editor will be online that fixes this problem.

The other two Graphite M units are smaller and have more specialized controls. The Graphite MD13 (\$59.99) offers 13 velocity/pressure-sensitive pads arranged like an octave of piano keys, plus 6 knobs, Octave

up/down and two transport buttons (Stop and Record/Play), a crossfader, and an endless encoder. All of these controls can have their settings customized as part of a Preset, of which five can be stored in the MD13 and recalled with the first five pads. The pads can also be used to call up MIDI Program Changes, as with the keys on the M25 and M32.

Finally, the Graphite MF8 (\$59.99) is a portable mix control surface, with eight channel strips plus some global controls. Each channel has a short-throw fader, a knob, and two buttons, one of which can have two different functions (one accessible when the Shift key is pressed). There are also five reassignable transport buttons, five assignable function buttons (which also recall five user-programmable Presets), an encoder and a crossfader. All button controls can be set to send notes or CC messages in toggle or momentary mode, including two central Left and Right buttons. Of the five Presets, four are user-configurable in the Editor software; Preset 1 emulates a Mackie Control for bank-based mix and transport control of any DAW that understands the Mackie HUI protocol. Very handy!

I don't have many gripes when considering how many features these little controllers give you for your money. On the M32 and M25, I miss a Sustain pedal jack, or at least a way to set the Sustain button to toggle (or to send a CC other than 64); on the M25 and MD13, I miss being able to use pad aftertouch to send continuously variable MIDI CC information rather than simply have the pads operate as switches. Those small tweaks aside, I see the Graphite M Series as a very affordable and portable set of building blocks for the on-the-go songwriter or producer to create his or her own custom control rig. Choose the one whose features best match your needs, and give it a try!