

# cm mini reviews

A rapid-fire round-up of sample libraries, ROMplers and more

## Sonivox Playa £129

Format Mac/PC, AU/RTAS/VST/standalone  
Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200  
Web [www.timespace.com](http://www.timespace.com)

As you might imagine, Playa is aimed squarely at the hip-hop market. It comprises a set of MPC-style drum pads welded onto an otherwise traditional ROMpler interface. The pads enable you to trigger multiple sounds from single MIDI notes. For example, Pad 1 can be linked to C3, E3, and G3 within the currently loaded patch, then all three notes can be played from one key on your MIDI controller.

However, you're limited to using Playa's presets – it's not possible to load up your own, or even mix and match the supplied ones. Thankfully, the included material is pretty good, and while it would have been nice to see orchestral and workstation keyboard sounds better represented, the drums, leads and guitar patches are great. At £100, Playa represents reasonable value for money. It doesn't stand up that well against something like Ultimate Sound Bank's Plugsound Pro, and there are a few niggles with the sampler engine: for example, the minimum release time is zero, which is generally undesirable, because it causes audible clicks. Nevertheless, Playa is still worthy of consideration for those looking to expand their hip-hop arsenal.

8/10



## Native Instruments Acoustic Refractions €69

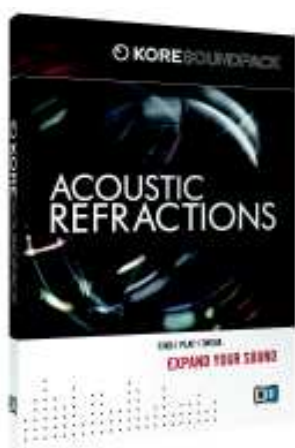
Format Absynth/Kore SoundPack  
Contact [info@native-instruments.de](mailto:info@native-instruments.de)  
Web [www.native-instruments.com](http://www.native-instruments.com)

This is an Absynth-based SoundPack, specialising in "idiosyncratic" pads. However, it stands as an exercise in intricate sonic design rather than just a collection of weird noises. In fact, it's all about claustrophobic, abstract soundscapes, atmospheric ambience and extremely epic percussion.

The Kore software's parameter knobs have been put to great use, and these enable much more audio sculpting than is generally possible with other SoundPacks – if you don't like a certain aspect of the patch, you can alter or simply fade out the offending part with the relevant knob. Also, morphing between scenes using the Variation Cells is highly effective.

With 99 presets, Acoustic Refractions may have less content than some of the more expensive libraries in the same style, but it's such a high-quality offering that you still get a lot of bang for your buck. If you need blockbuster sounds for a relatively low price tag, then this is a must.

10/10



## audiorealism technoBox £5.99

Format iPhone/iPod Touch app  
Contact [info@audiorealism.se](mailto:info@audiorealism.se)  
Web [www.audiorealism.se](http://www.audiorealism.se)

The company behind ADM and ABL Pro have applied their DSP skills to an iPhone app with a Roland TB-303 synth emulation, a drum machine, and sequencing. The synth has tuning, cutoff, resonance, envelope mod, decay and accent knobs, all ready for multitouch mayhem. Unlike a 303, you can fade between square and sawtooth waveforms, though in true 303 style, the pattern sequencer is fiddly, often resulting in 'music by accident'. It sounds fantastically authentic, with all the rubbery glides and screaming resonances you could desire, though the lack of distortion and delay is a bummer.

The drum machine operates in 808 or 909 mode, with 11 sampled sounds for each, and swing too. Simply tap the 16 boxes to program beats. Aside from a tempo control, manual, and song sequencing, that's it. Niggles aside, this is the most convincing, fun and jammable iPhone 'acid machine' around.

9/10



## Toontrack Jazz EZX £55

**Format** PC, Mac, EZX  
**Contact** Time+Space, 01837 55200  
**Web** www.timespace.com

Roy 'Futureman' Wooten is the latest 'celebrity' drummer to have his sound immortalised by Toontrack in an EZX add-on for EZdrummer and Superior Drummer 2.0.

Jazz EZX is, as the name implies, designed for primary purpose of getting that loose, rattly, modern jazz drum sound into your computer-based music productions. To that end, it comprises two snare drums (14" Pearl Solid Maple and 14x3 1/2" Leedy piccolo), two kick drums (18" Pearl Reference and 22" Ludwig Maple Psychedelic), 10" and 12" Pearl Reference toms, and 14" Pearl Reference and 16" Slingerland Radio King floor toms, although you can only have one of the two kicks, snares and floor toms loaded at a time. On the cymbals front, we're given a 22" Zildjian K Constantinople ride, a Paiste Fast Crash, a brushed 22" Zildjian K Constantinople Medium ride and 14" Masterworks Meritamon hi-hats. All these

elements sound fantastically earthy and 'live', and the whole lot can be switched to brushed mode, complete with snare swirls. A tour of the included MIDI files (none of which were played by Wooten himself, slightly disappointingly; he just 'performed' the single hits) reveals an impressive dynamic range across the board, and as ever with Toontrack's drum ROMplers, owners of electronic drum kits are in for a real treat - for a 750MB soundbank, Jazz EZX is remarkably expressive.

The only real issue is, inevitably, that this is a very specific tonal palette, which may not be hugely useful for anything other than jazz styles. The inclusion of the 22" kick offers enough power for one half of a backbeat, but the snares,



cymbals and toms are very jazzy indeed - as they should be, of course. So, if you're in the market for a 100% authentic, 100% playable jazz drum kit, this is a winner. If you're after something more versatile, though, be aware that when Toontrack say Jazz, they really mean it.

**8/10**

## Amidio Inc Noise.io £5.99

**Format** iPhone/iPod Touch app  
**Contact** via website  
**Web** noise.io

Noise.io is designed to be used in performance, jacking your iPhone into a console or DAW input, but it's just as happy with a pair of headphones. And despite an allusion to FM synthesis, and a promise that noise.io "does not reflect or copy any existing synth structure, design or principles", it seems to be a rather straightforward monophonic subtractive synthesiser (not that there's anything wrong with that). Two oscillators and a noise generator provide the raw sound, while a decent selection of filters shape the audio before two LFOs and an S&H generator provide variation. There's even a selection of real-time effects.

The promise of revolutionary structure seems to be manifested in the strange cross symbol on the right of the display in editing mode. Using a series of thumb-driven sliders, you can fold back the sound from each generator into any of the other generators or the filters. The result can be a pleasing doubling effect that can fatten the sounds and add resonance to the filter.

The wide selection of bundled presets illustrates the breadth of this engine, covering TB-303 style basses, hanging chimes and percussive hits with aplomb. But there is a downside, as the unusual interface takes some perseverance - the glowing bricks and astronomical analogies aren't immediately intuitive.

A touch-sensitive modulation matrix can be used to control three separate parameters. Pitch on the horizontal, filter cut-off on the vertical, and portamento by holding down a second finger is the standard configuration, but you can route modulation sources and



destinations with a surprising amount of flexibility. It's a long way off the immediacy of Korg's DS-10 on the Nintendo DS, but that's missing the point.

Noise.io's real strengths are the quality of its synthesis and its bargain price, and while it's less immediate than a Kaoss Pad, it's certainly more portable than an Access Virus.

**9/10**

# Soundware round-up

Mutekki Media

## Audio Boutique €85

Contact [info@mutekki-media.de](mailto:info@mutekki-media.de)

Web [www.mutekki-media.de](http://www.mutekki-media.de)

Format WAV, REX2, Apple Loops, Audio, Kontakt, EXS24, Battery, Sampler

This collection of dance sounds from Mutekki concentrates on the minimal, glitchy end of house music, and does a very decent job of it. While the single drum hits aren't quite up to the standards of Mutekki's revered Vengeance series, they're still pretty good, and the claps are supplied in mono and spread stereo versions, which is a excellent touch. Everything on the disc is 127bpm, and while there's not a great deal of stylistic variety here, electro and minimal producers will find plenty to get their teeth into, as will anyone who likes to dabble in glitch.

8/10



Philtre Labs

## Bollywood Elements

£81

Contact [sales@timespace.com](mailto:sales@timespace.com)

Web [www.timespace.com](http://www.timespace.com)

Format WAV, Apple Loops

Indian sample library specialist Philtre Labs take you on a tour of the subcontinent with this lovingly-crafted collection of traditional instruments, including familiar favourites like flute, sitar and mandolin, as well as more exotic fare such as tumbi, ravan hattha and saragni. Thankfully, you don't have to know what these are to enjoy the superb playing and high quality recording. Even with 1.3GB of unique material, we found ourselves pining for more content. The lack of REX versions is a pity, but despite that, this is still an outstanding buy.

9/10



Dark Side of the Tune

## Tritone \$120

Contact [info@darksideofthetune.com](mailto:info@darksideofthetune.com)

Web [www.darksideofthetune.com](http://www.darksideofthetune.com)

Format WAV

This three-disc collection eschews genre-branding and instead concentrates on a "vibe-driven" approach, with a different theme for each one (available separately for \$50 a pop). Unfortunately, the style of the discs is all over the place, and while variety is no bad thing, the inconsistency in both sample quality and style makes this library very hard to put to use. There are some decent synth, guitar, bass, drum and FX sounds to be found, but the seemingly random grouping means that you'd have to take the time to go through the entire lot, sorting the wheat from the chaff (of which there is a fair amount).

5/10



Loopmasters

## Reel People Broken Beat Nu Jazz and Soul V1 £40

Contact via web

Web [www.loopmasters.com](http://www.loopmasters.com)

Format Acid WAV, REX2, Apple Loops

This collection of instrument and percussion samples has authenticity written all over it, with gorgeous-sounding drum hits, sizzling brass stabs, rolling live breaks, rocking house beats, squelchy synths and groovy bass/guitar lines. The quality is absolutely superb throughout, and this library will definitely appeal to those who make any kind of funk/soul music. The only downside is that some categories only feature a couple of samples, and more would have been appreciated, but with so much well-recorded content, this is a bargain.

9/10



Loopmasters

## Zed Bias Deadly Dub Constructor £25

Contact via web

Web [www.loopmasters.com](http://www.loopmasters.com)

Format WAV, Acid, REX2, ReFill, Live Pack, Apple Loops, Halion, Kontakt, EXS, SFZ, Stylus RMX, Live Presets and NN-XT

Producer Dave Jones (better known as Zed Bias) has produced plenty of dance music under various monikers, including the breakthrough garage track *Neighbourhood*, and as part of Hospital Records' Phuturistix. Here he lays down seven construction kits that display dub, garage and dubstep influences, and thoughtfully, all the sounds are supplied as one-shot samples and loops. A selection of bonus beats and loops is also included, which increases the value of the library no end. So, while it's not world-beating, Deadly Dub Constructor is decent value for money.

7/10



Loopmasters

## Synthetic Sequences £20

Contact via web

Web [www.loopmasters.com](http://www.loopmasters.com)

Format WAV, Acid, REX2, ReFill, Live Pack, Apple Loops, Halion, Kontakt, EXS, SFZ, Stylus RMX, NN-XT and Battery

With 45 basses, 43 drum loops, 62 synth loops, 18 vocoder loops, 51 drum hits and 72 MIDI loops, this is far from the biggest library around. Thankfully the sounds are top notch, offering a healthy dose of analogue chunkiness that combines old-skool synth and videogame flavours with tight modern production. Everything runs at 128bpm, but it's easy to chop out one-shots for work at other tempi. It would have been nice to have a folder of single hit basses and synths in addition to the drums, but even so, this is a useful collection.

8/10

