WHAT IS IT?
Streamlined virtual sample slicer and groovebox

CONTACT
Who: Sugar Bytes
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HIGHLIGHTS
1 Intuitive and easy to use
2 Good onboard sounds
3 Clearly coming to iPad!

Sugar Bytes Egoist | €99

This 'groove sketchpad' aims to inspire. Is there more to it than meets the ear asks *Ronan Macdonald*?

The latest release by Berlin-based developer Sugar Bytes is a 'mini-DAW' that combines sample-slicing with beat programming, synthesis, step sequencing and creative signal processing. Divided into three main pages – Slicer, Bass/Beat and Effects – Egoist runs as a VST/AU/RTAS/AAX plug-in and standalone, and is intended for use as an electronic music sketchpad rather than a complete production environment.

The Slicer page facilitates the chopping up of samples, either imported or from the included library,

which packs in 760MB of beats, chords, basses, synths, vocals, FX and more. Up to 16 slices can be created (automatically, based on the transients in the sample; or manually, by dragging the slice handles around) for triggering by the 16-step sequencer or MIDI note input. Each step houses a 16-notch slider for specifying which slice it triggers, and there are lanes for per-step modulation of level, pitch (up to two octaves up or down), playback direction and envelope shape (attack and decay). Further tweaking is on hand with the global Pitch, Length and Envelope parameters, and a limiter and, like all of

Egoist's sequencers, the Slicer's can be set to run forwards, backwards, forwards then backwards, or randomly.

Beats and basslines

Bass/Beat plays host to a sample-based drum machine and a very simple bassline synth. The drum machine includes 15 kits, each one containing a selection of 32 kicks, snares and hi-hats. Even though the range of sounds on offer is pretty broad, the inability to import your own or mix and match between kits is disappointing.

Programming drum patterns is done by clicking hits into the three drum-specific lanes of the bottom-most sequencer, with multiple clicks cycling between regular and 'attenuated' hits, the global level of the latter determined by the Att knob. And that's it on the percussion front, apart from per-drum level and pitch control, and the same normalising limiter as the Slicer.

The Bass module is a one-oscillator virtual analogue synth, switchable between square and saw waveforms, and boasting a trio of filter types modelled on those of the Roland TB-303, Minimoog and Korg MS-20. The only editable parameters are filter

cutoff and resonance, amp envelope decay, overdrive and filter modulation (an LFO or an envelope – not both at once), but it sounds impressively warm and weighty, and is very easy to program, with four octaves of range and a cleverly designed sequencer lane for setting note length, glide and tie status.

The Effects page borrows from Sugar Bytes' lauded Effectrix, enabling a small but well-formed array of seven processors – Reverb, Chorus, Delay, Filter, Lo-Fi, Tape Stop and Looper – to be applied to Slicer, Beat and Bass via another step sequencer, triggering each effect in and out on its own lane. The effects themselves sound fantastic, but having a single shared sequencer for all three sound generators seems needlessly restrictive – I don't think it would compromise Egoist's workflow to allow them one each.

Workin' it

Fast, productive workflow is what Egoist is all about. It offers enough in the way of compositional and processing power to allow raw ideas to be worked up without the endless distractions of a full-on DAW, and with the ability to randomise sequencer steps, slice

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The Sum Of Its Parts

Although Egoist isn't meant to be a DAW in anywhere near the full sense of the acronym, it does give you everything you need to string patterns together into songs. The sequencer section at the bottom of the interface switches between Pattern, Part and Song modes. Patterns (you can have 16) are individual Egoist 'states'; Parts (a project can contain six, each set to 2, 4, 8 or 16 steps in length) are chains of up to eight one-shot Patterns (defined as verse, chorus,

etc); and Songs are sequences of up to 16 Parts. As well as regular sequencing, Patterns and Parts can be triggered by MIDI.

While you may never get as far as using Egoist to develop full track

structures (you'll probably move to your main DAW for that), being able to extend Patterns into Parts is certainly useful. And the presence of the Song mode reinforces the idea that this really would make a nifty iPad DAW.

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musical sketches to the next stage – there's no audio or MIDI export, and only a single stereo output into the host DAW. No MIDI export means you're stuck with Egoist's limited drum and synth sounds unless you transcribe everything into your MIDI sequencer by

markers and effects parameters, as well as handy sequence nudge buttons for shifting patterns left/right and up/down a step at a time, it also gives you plenty of easy fixes for those moments when inspiration has left the room.

However it doesn't present any real options when it comes to taking your

hand, while the absence of audio export makes it less fluid than it could be as a quick-and-easy groove production solution. The paucity of plug-in outputs isn't quite such a significant failing (and at least automation is fully supported), but it all adds up to a bit of a fail in terms of integration.

While I certainly hope to see this particular issue addressed in a future update, I reckon the reason for its currently solipsist nature is that Egoist was actually conceived and designed for iPad first and foremost. After all, Sugar Bytes have very successfully ported their Thesys, WOW2, Turnado and Effectrix plug-ins to Apple's mighty tablet already, a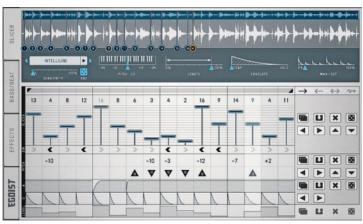nd Egoist would make the perfect fit – literally, in fact, with its iPad-friendly 1024x768 GUI. I'm speculating, of course, but Egoist is a fun and genuinely productive tool – export limitations aside – and the prospect of taking to the road with it on iPad, too, is truly exciting. Here's (confidently) hoping, then, that we see it land in the App Store soon and get its Mac/PC horizons expanded with version 1.1. **FM**

> ## "I reckon the reason for its solipsist nature is that Egoist was actually conceived and designed for iPad"

The sequencing Effects section will be more than familiar to users of Sugar Bytes Effectrix

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FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD

VALUE

EASE OF USE

VERSATILITY

RESULTS

A superb platform on which to kick musical ideas around, but it's lacking in the export department.