

Softube PC MAC Monoment Bass \$99

The Swedish masters of analogue emulation make their second foray into softsynth design with another sample-based instrument

> When revered analogue modelling specialists Softube unveiled their first synth, Parallels (8/10, **cm270**), earlier this year, we were surprised to learn that it was built on a library of samples, rather than heralding the expected debut of a potentially benchmark-setting virtual analogue oscillator design. Well, we can't deny a tinge of disappointment at that architectural situation remaining unchanged for the follow-up, Monoment Bass (VST/AU/AAX), a monosynth dedicated to dance music bass sound creation, powered by a 2GB sample library. Parallels won us over with its character, colour and brilliant modulation system, though, so we'll judge its new stablemate equally on its own merits here.

Sources direct

Monoment Bass mixes three stereo sample layers together to form a raw tone. Sources A and B draw on a 100-strong library of recorded synth samples, while the Analog Dirt layer

accesses a smaller roster of 15 noises and five attacks. The Source sounds were put together in collaboration with sound designer Tobias Menguser, each one captured as three samples per key (every third note, G0 to F3) from his enviable collection of rare analogue and digital synths, including the Nonlinear Labs C15, Modal 002, Kawai K5000 and Jomox Sunsyn. Sounds

"Softube's filters are always sure to impress, and Monoment Bass's low-pass model is right up there"

are categorised descriptively in the selection menus - Analog Clean, Analog Dark, Digital Noisy, Digital Punchy, Organ, Processed, etc - and the two Sources are blended using the Source Mix knob. Source B can be kicked up or down an octave and detuned by up to 100 cents either way, and an optional frequency crossover enables separation of A and B at anywhere from 20-400Hz - useful, as the Sources can't be individually filtered. The Analog Dirt source, meanwhile, is routable to the filter or straight to the main output, and mixed in with the Aging control, which also dials in subtle random pitch and attack modulation for a more 'analogue' sound. Velocity sensitivity can be disabled, and portamento is applied to legato notes only or all notes, with glide time of 0-500ms.

Down and dirty

Softube's filters are always sure to impress, and Monoment Bass's low-pass model is right up

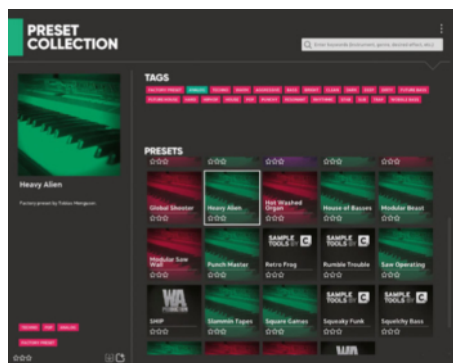
“Astonishingly, the LFO can only run free, rather than retriggering with each incoming note – not ideal”

there. Perfectly poised for bass design, it offers a choice of 6, 12 or 24dB roll-off slopes and imposes beautifully manipulable distortion when the resonance is cranked up. Filter modulation comes in the form of an envelope, which we'll come back to momentarily, and an LFO. This morphs between triangle and saw waveforms (so no sine), with the Shape control bending the wave into a 'shark fin', and runs at up to 50Hz unsynced or between 1/16 and 4/1 synced. Astonishingly, though, it can only run free, rather than retriggering with each incoming note – not ideal in any LFO, but positively bewildering in this particular instrumental context.

Almost as controversially, the amp and filter envelopes have been simplified to an extent rarely seen in any 'serious' synth. For the amp, the attack, decay and sustain portions are covered by one knob, Punch, which dials in a continuum of dynamic shaping from 'Slow rise' fully counterclockwise to 'More attack' clockwise, while the Release stage gets its own control. The filter envelope takes a slightly different approach, its all-governing Type knob going from 'Slow rise' to 'Fast decay', and the Amount setting the modulation depth. The visual feedback in the filter display is great, making it obvious what's happening to the response curve after tweaks to the envelope and LFO, but skilled programmers would be better served by a proper ADSR envelope setup.

Bass intent

And that, along with the Effects section – see *Keeping it simple* – is really all there is to it. Monoment Bass provides the newcomer to production with a very capable solution for generating powerful, weighty basslines for house, techno, EDM and the like in no time at all. The sample library is laden with thoroughly viable full-fat source material, and the controls couldn't be easier to get a handle on. However,



Sadly, Softube are still rolling with the software industry's shoutiest, most intrusive preset browser



The company's expertise in effects development shines through

Keeping it simple

Monoment Bass's Effects section consists of five boiled-down modules, calibrated to best serve the processing of low-end tones, and all of an exceptionally high standard sonically. Drive serves up low-frequency or full-bandwidth distortion, using algorithms lifted from Softube's acclaimed Harmonics plugin (9/10, cm266), while Ambience is an ingenious short reverb with five diverse algorithms and a Bass/Treble Tone control – we'd love to see this one worked up into a plugin in its own right. EQ is a combination of tilt EQ and bipolar cut-only shelving EQ; Multiband is a roundly effective one-

knob multiband compressor with helpful metering; and Spatialization is a mid/side processor for monoising low frequencies and widening the highs.

Although the effects modules are just as reductive as Monoment Bass's envelopes and other elements, that overt simplification seems to make the most sense in this particular department. This is partly due to the fact that the processes on offer are all quite focused and don't demand a great deal of leeway when deployed on bass tones, and partly because the staples that aren't covered – chorus, delay, etc – are easy enough to add using external plugins, of course.

while such approachability is generally a good thing, in this case, it does come at the expense of depth, and some of the obvious omissions cut quite deep – proper envelopes, per-Source filtering and shaping, and any form of pitch modulation chief among them.

The other, separate issue is the mildly depressing implication that Softube are content to go all-in with hardware-sourced samples rather than coding their own analogue oscillators, which doesn't sit at all comfortably alongside the renown they rightly enjoy for the unquestionably superlative quality of their component modelling. Essentially a well-made ROMpler, Monoment Bass offers little to meaningfully differentiate it from countless Kontakt libraries, so we really hope the company have yet to reveal their full technological ambition when it comes to instrument design. In fact, if anything, Monoment Bass is a step backwards after Parallels, which boasted much more in the way of modulation and versatility. Don't get us wrong: the plugin itself sounds good (in fact, the faux analogue filter and distortion, and effects are quite magnificent) and certainly makes it almost embarrassingly easy to come up with 'mix-ready' bass tones in a hurry. It's just all a bit... underwhelming. **cm**

Alternatively

Technique Recordings Parallax cm263 » 9/10 » £50
Drumsound & Bassline Smith's sub-smashing Kontakt bass library

Rob Papen SubBoomBass 2 cm254 » 9/10 » £80
Not as immediate as Monoment Bass, but much more powerful

Verdict

For Admirably beginner-friendly
Solid sample library
Superb analogue filter and distortion
Excellent effects

Against No pitch modulation
LFO is always free-running
Envelopes need 'advanced' ADSR mode
It's another ROMpler, and we can't help but expect more from Softube

Sound design novices will have a ball with Monoment Bass, but a fair amount of frustration awaits more experienced users

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