

## Free Instruments

Move beyond oldies like Synth1 and u-he Tyrell. Here's the new breed of legendary free soundmakers for the post-fact generation



## Full Bucket Audio FB-3300

A clone of the Korg PS-3300 synth, which was a '70s classic, FB-3300 is a three-oscillator synth with some very old-school options and a truly vintage sound. The PS-3300 was effectively three Korg PS-3100 synths in one; Full Bucket also emulate that one as another plugin, available separately and also for free.

FB-3300 is an intensely analogue synth, giving you brilliant bass tones, wavering lead lines and characterful effects. Some great sequenced sounds are also possible. There's a learning curve that takes time to ascend, but once you've got your head around the Modulation Source and Target selection within FB-3300, you'll have a lot more command over its vintage synth tones, and you can't put a price on that...

[music.fullbucket.de](http://music.fullbucket.de)

**VERDICT 9.2**



## Digital Suburban Dexed

An excellent recreation of the Yamaha DX7's take on FM synthesis, Dexed not only apes its six oscillator formulations and its sonic results; it also lets you trade SysEx patches with the original and other emulations. Dexed is such a comprehensive free instrument that, as you can imagine, all the sonic possibilities of FM synthesis and the original DX7 are possible, from brash brass to bows and bells.

[asb2m10.github.io/dexed/](https://asb2m10.github.io/dexed/)

**VERDICT 9.1**



## Spitfire Audio LABS Series

This strain of expertly recorded individual instruments requires you to download Spitfire's host plugin, but the rest of it is completely free. Choose from individual instruments on the Spitfire website, ready to play through the LABS plugin in your DAW. Options span the range from the plain and normal – Drums, Strings, Soft Piano – through the nicely experimental – Amplified Cello Quartet, Frozen Strings, Modular Piano – to the more esoteric and very particular Charango, Moon Guitar and Granular Whalesong.

Each instrument is pretty simple, with only minimal controls to adjust the sound to your liking. But it's the Spitfire sampling quality that counts for most here, with the expert recordings feeling like they don't need much tweaking in order to feature in any professional track. Over the years, the LABS series has turned into a massive compendium of sonic possibilities, and a convincing entry point into the rest of the Spitfire range.

[labs.spitfireaudio.com](https://labs.spitfireaudio.com)

**VERDICT 8.7**



## Matt Tytel Helm

There are plenty of free synths out there, but it's hard to find one that's as fun and playable as Helm. At its heart, it's a two-oscillator subtractive synth, with a bigger choice of waveforms than many classic options, with some steppy, rampy low-bit options included. A very interesting filter can morph between low and high pass models; amp, filter and mod envelopes offer standard ADSR controls, and there are three LFOs to get your hands on.

But Helm goes further than the standard options, adding in a step sequencer, and effects including Stutter (Beat Repeat), Distortion, Delay and Reverb, plus a snazzy Formant filter. All in all, the impressive functionality and list of features make Helm a synth that should be inside everyone's plugin folder for bread and butter synth sounds, and then some.

[tytel.org/helm](https://tytel.org/helm)

**VERDICT 9.1**



## IK Multimedia Syntronik

An underrated source of all things classic synth, Syntronik has a paid, 'full' version, but there's no huge need to buy it, unless you're a full-time patch jockey who only surfs the presets. Inside Syntronik's free version, you get virtual versions of hardware including the Minimoog; Roland's Jupiter-8, Juno-60 and TB-303; the Oberheim SEM, Sequential's Prophet-5, Yamaha's CS-80 and a good few more, and you get access to a good group of controls too – it's not exactly the full gamut of controls for each synth, but rather a decent, easy selection for variety.

Presets are thin on the ground in the free version, but you can set up four layers of patches to split or layer around the keyboard, a virtual rack for five effects with choices of amps, distortions, dynamics, modulators, reverbs and delays, and there's also a pretty comprehensive arpeggiator, with control over note, velocity, length, swing and more.

[ikmultimedia.com](https://ikmultimedia.com)

**VERDICT 9.0**