Steinberg Cubase Pro 11

£499

Bruce Aisher takes a look at the latest iteration of Steinberg's popular DAW to see if it is still up there with the best

CONTACT **WHO:** Steinberg **WEB:** steinberg.net **KEY FEATURES** Advanced Audio Export, Sampler Track 2, Scale Assistant, Key Editor (CC curves, pitchbend tracking, Global Tracks), Frequency 2 EQ, Squasher dynamics, Imager plug-in, MultiTap Delay Surround Support, multi-input sidechain, SuperVision analyser, SpectraLayers One spectral editing, Score Editor workflow improvements, new sample content, EuCon Support

THE PROS & CONS

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Advanced Audio Export – some real timesavers here

Sampler Track 2 — adding loop slicing tools ups the game, and makes the quick sampling even more creatively effective

SuperVision – a powerful analyser plugin

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SpectraLayers One – its interface could be unified with that of the DAW

MixConsole could be improved visually and lacks the ability to save and recall visibility, scaling etc across tracks

Some of us still miss the resizable right-mouse toolbox!

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Cubase 11 now includes SpectraLayers One, a trimmed-down version of Steinberg's spectrogram-based audio editor. This concept will be familiar to anyone who has come across iZotope's RX software, and here is integrated into the DAW workflow as an ARA2 plugin (essentially a fully-integrated specialist edit window). Both for sound design and corrective purposes, this is a powerful tool, though it is frustrating that default keyboard shortcuts (and broader GUI) are entirely different to those of Cubase, so navigation can be frustrating when you move between windows.

Another visually-led addition is the SuperVision plugin, a highly-customisable audio analyser, with 18 modules split across six sub-categories covering things like level and loudness, the spectral and spatial domains, phase and waveform analysis. This is a powerful tool for improving and optimising your mixes or identifying problems.
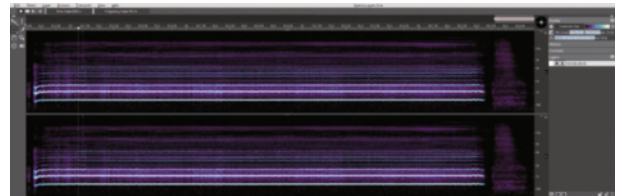

Like a Christmas card from a reliable friend, Steinberg announced Cubase 11 at the tail end of 2020. I normally suggest waiting for at least one or two interim updates before taking the plunge with a new version of any DAW software but Cubase 11 appears to be quite robust. However, the online side of the eLicenser system employed by Cubase did suffer some serious issues just after release, but this was resolved in a matter of days.

One of the headline new features is 'Job Queue Management' in the Export Audio Mixdown window. On the face of it this appears to be an unglamorous administrative tweak. However, it adds some much-needed functionality to the audio export process, and facilitates creating multiple unattended track bounces. In essence you select the tracks to bounce, add them to the queue, add some more, and then run the process while you make a cup of coffee. However, much like Render In Place it is now possible to choose whether tracks are exported dry or processed (with or without Inserts, Groups, Send or Master effects). Export selection can be synced to project window track selection, and file presets make for less configuration adjustments when switching between commonly used formats. Although I welcome Steinberg's real advances here, not all common scenarios are quite covered yet. For example, the channel syncing only works for single channel Instrument Tracks. MIDI tracks assigned to multichannel Instrument Tracks, or Rack Instruments, require you to select their associated audio output channel. This is also the case with Folders, and means that creating stems for grouped sets of tracks in Folders (drums, bass etc) requires some extra (and quite fiddly) work. Despite this, there is a lot to like here, and this addition alone has the potential to save quite a bit of time.

Moving on to sound creation, Cubase Pro 11 takes its Sampler Track functionality to version 2 by adding automatic slicing, LFOs, legato glide and user-selectable audio engine modes. The loop slicing employs hitpoints (or the time grid) to assign slices and, once chopped, maps samples to keys chromatically and allows the resulting MIDI trigger phrases to be dragged into the project window. Whether being used for percussive loops, more melodic material or even semi-random experimentation, this is an excellent addition. On the playback side, the audio engine can be configured for different transpose quality options as well as the new Vintage mode, where bit-depth and sample rate can be lowered. Additionally, the Turntable parameter emulates the way in which vinyl-derived samples could be squeezed into the limited memory of samplers such as the EMU SP-1200, by playing the deck at a higher speed.

On the processing front this version adds support for multiple sidechain inputs, which comes in handy with two of the new plugins
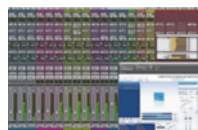
Avid Pro Tools 2020 £499

Although it has a firm stronghold in larger studios, Pro Tools continues to provide stiff competition at all levels of recording and production

avid.com

Apple Logic Pro X £200

Especially if you already own an Apple Mac, Logic offers a lot for the money, and continues to be a strong and solid alternative to Cubase
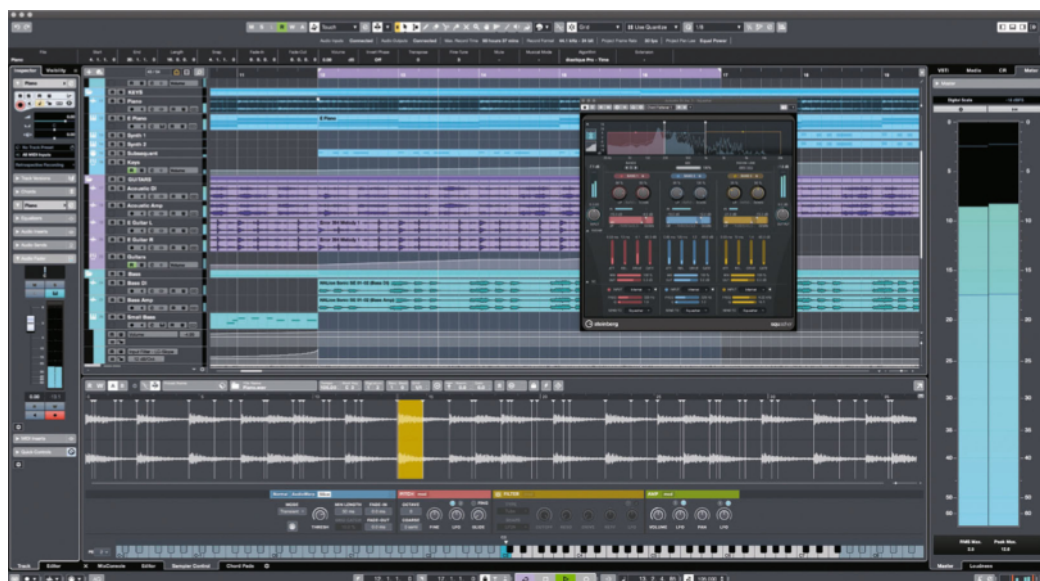
apple.com

Ableton Live 11 Suite £539

Ableton Live has always lagged behind some DAWs when it comes to more traditional recording tasks, but the latest update brings comping and other important additions

ableton.com

ADVANCED AUDIO EXPORT: Audio exporting now includes file format presets and multitrack audio bounce queues

SAMPLER TRACK 2: Audio slicing, vintage sampler playback modes and LFOs are all added to the Sampler Track armoury

SUPERVISION: A well-specified and highly-customisable audio analysis plugin covers most of your metering needs

– Frequency 2 and Squasher. Frequency 2 is an 8-band dynamic EQ, and the ability to feed audio from other tracks into the sidechain detector of a single band is extremely powerful. This is replicated in Steinberg's new Squasher multiband dynamics plug-in, which offers three bands of downward and upward compression. Upward compression (where only lower level signals below a given threshold are subjected to a gain increase) might sound contradictory but will be broadly familiar to anyone who has experimented with parallel compression. It is surprisingly effective in its multiband guise found here. These two, alongside Imager, are all worthwhile additions, though the interfaces would really benefit from being scalable in order to match different monitor sizes.

On the subject of the GUI, C11 sees the Mac version embrace Apple Metal GPU Acceleration, and Windows adding more scaling settings for HiDPI users – though the effectiveness of this will also depend on third-party developers.

There are also some nice additions that improve functionality of the Key Editor. It is now possible to see Global Track information (such as tempo, time signature, video and others) from within the editor window, which will be especially useful for those working with music for media. MIDI controller data can at last be created and edited using automation-style ramps and curves, and pitchbend can be configured to show semitone pitch values. Additionally, the Scale Assistant Inspector matches note events to a musical scale, both while adding events in the editor whilst playing or afterwards by pressing the Quantize Pitches button. If you make use of Chord Tracks you can use this to drive note scale and note choices, but this feature is surprisingly useful even on its own.

Cubase 11 also sees updates to the Score Editor, Eucon support, extra sound and loop sets and numerous miscellaneous tweaks. Whether you see any benefits in upgrading to C11 is down to your personal workflow and creative approach, but even though some of my long-running wishlist choices are yet to be implemented (rearranging mixer tracks, saving mixer configurations, saving external effects routings, consistent GUIs etc) overall this is a solid update. **FM**

FM VERDICT

9.0

Cubase 11 adds advanced exporting, important functional tweaks and an expanded set of plugins. A solid update