

Bitwig PC MAC Bitwig Studio 4 €379

Bitwig Studio has always been an innovative and impressive DAW, but will version 4 bring it the audience it richly deserves?

> It's seven years since Bitwig Studio first appeared, bringing with it a fresh approach to audio and clip arrangement that made many of the established DAWs feel sluggish and, quite frankly, a bit old-fashioned by comparison. In the intervening years a program of regular updates and full version upgrades have enhanced its features, expanded the bundled content and generally finessed its offering. Nevertheless, the underlying concept, which combines linear clip arrangement and performance style clip launching has remained the same.

Same difference

Where Bitwig Studio differs from many of its competitors is by providing its two key concepts (Launcher and Arrange Timeline) side by side in the same tracks. This is not only easy to understand but also aids with drag-and-drop functionality, better integrating the creative, performance and arrangement aspects of

music production. In fact, drag-and-drop is featured throughout Bitwig, as is a deeply integrated modulation system with 36 Modulators. This is further developed via The Grid and its 'any signal connected anywhere' methodology. Here either synthesis (Poly Grid) or effects (FX Grid) are patched together from the 175 available modules.

"The headline addition in version 4 is Comping and, in typical Bitwig fashion, this feature is part of a clip"

Of course, no DAW is complete without a selection of instruments and audio effects (Bitwig has 90 in total). You're also furnished with a decent Library of sounds, patterns and presets. Further features include integrated timestretching (Scale) powered by zPlane's excellent Elastique. There's also support for MIDI polyphonic expression (MPE).

What's new?

Bitwig Studio 4 brings with it some key updates, enhancing both traditional DAW features and also pushing the creative boundaries. The headline addition is Comping. In typical Bitwig fashion this feature is part of a clip, and is achieved by cycle recording in either the Launcher or Arranger. The resultant Takes are edited in the Detail Editor Panel at the bottom and automatic colour coding keeps things clear. Take regions can be selected, trimmed and renamed, and different takes easily swapped in

“Operators add a new and very powerful dimension to how and when MIDI or audio events are triggered”

and out of a region. There's also individual region gain and the option to slide the position of each or all Takes. What's more, any overdubs on the clip are simply added to the available Takes – very handy. Using Bitwig's Layered Editing Mode you can also apply the same comp edits collectively across multiple clips.

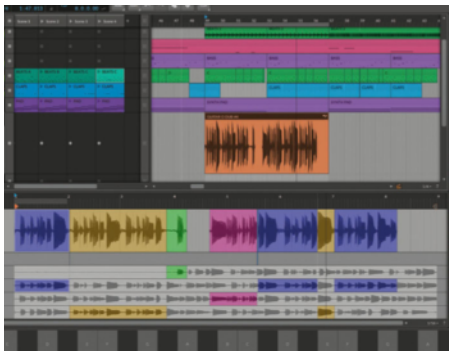
All these features give excellent flexibility for those recording audio, but Bitwig Studio 4 also provides an excellent comping option for working with existing audio. Fold to Takes launches comping by splitting an existing audio file at a user-defined length into a number of user-defined multiple Takes. We found this was great for reworking or finessing loops.

Operators

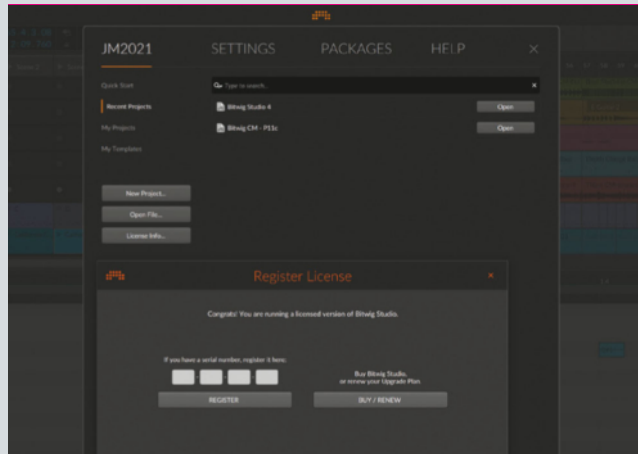
Next up, Operators. These add a new and very powerful dimension to how and when MIDI or audio events are triggered. The four options – Chance, Repeat, Occurrence and Recurrence – are pretty self-explanatory once you get started. Accessed via a panel in the Inspector you can activate them individually and have up to all four running concurrently if desired.

The first two options (Chance and Repeat) control whether an event plays and how many times. Occurrence includes nine 'conditions' and influences how an event is played with respect to other events or within a repeated loop. Occurrence also includes a Fill Mode condition (on or off) that ties in with the global Fill button. This allows you to create a bunch of events that only play when this button is engaged, and also define a bunch of events that don't play. In essence the way a fill often works in a track. And yes, you guessed it, Fill Mode can be mapped to a MIDI controller or indeed automated via its own lane. Excellent stuff.

Finally, Recurrence allows you to specify when an event plays as part of a looped clip. You can choose between 2 and 8 cycles of the loop and then specify on the graphic which cycles the event will play on. Overall, Operators provide



Both new recordings and existing audio files can take advantage of Bitwig's new take based comping system



To keep receiving new updates and versions after 12 months you'll need to invest in an Upgrade Plan

Upgrade planning

Payment schemes for DAWs and plugins have become increasingly complex, and rightly or wrongly there is clearly a trend towards subscriptions and ongoing payment plans. Bitwig operates a reasonably straightforward scheme whereby any new purchase includes all updates for 12 months from registration, and if you happen to time this well, this could even be a full version update. When the plan runs out you can keep using the software and you will get any further minor support updates released for that version.

At the end of the 12 months you can also purchase the Upgrade Plan. This will provide you with continued full

updates for another 12 months at which point you can choose whether or not to renew it. The Upgrade Plan is completely optional and can be purchased at any time. It may seem like an unnecessary expense, however, Bitwig releases quite regular incremental updates, and with full version updates roughly every two years, it's highly likely that you'll get one full version update within that additional 12 month period.

One other advantage of maintaining your upgrade plan is that you have access to development beta versions ahead of release, and this has been the case for version 4.

a new perspective on humanising, randomising, programming and manipulating sounds.

Existing Bitwig users will be familiar with the Expressions option, which allows you to specify real-time changes within audio and MIDI events. Perhaps inspired by the Operators feature, you can now apply a randomising Spread range to these parameters, and you will see a real-time visual representation of this. Further v4 changes include improved export formats; you now have five options (WAV, FLAC, OPUS, OGG and MP3) with selectable bit rates. And on the import side you can now import data from FL Studio (FLP) and Ableton Live (ALS) sessions. In addition to support for OSX, Windows and Linux, Bitwig 4 runs natively on Apple Silicon machines. There is also proper language localisation for Chinese, Japanese and German, including all the labelling, in-app documentation and interactive help.

Bitwig Studio 4 offers some great new features and shows how a fresh approach to an existing concept such as comping can bring better functionality. In a future update we'd love to see the Bitwig team apply this ethos to pitch correction. Nevertheless, Bitwig's forte remains its creative features and v4 pushes these into ever more weird and wonderful directions. **cm**

Web bitwig.com
Info 12 month Upgrade Plan €169

Alternatively

Ableton Live 11
cm294 » 9/10 » From £69

This clip-based performance DAW offers excellent features and extensive soundware support

FL Studio
cm260 » 9/10 » From £76

FL's loop based heritage has a loyal band of devotees who also enjoy its lifetime free updates.

Verdict

For Excellent comping option
New Operator feature
Free upgrade for registered owners with valid upgrade plans
Better export and import options

Against We'd love to see integrated pitch correction

Bitwig Studio 4 is not an earth-shattering update, but the new features are excellently implemented and it's a highly creative DAW

9/10