



Steinberg Cubase Pro 9.5 £480

Steinberg have just unleashed their yearly 'big' update to their flagship software. **Bruce Aisher** takes it for a musical workout

CONTACT WHO: Steinberg Media Technologies GmbH TEL: +49 (0)4042 236115 WEB: www.steinberg.net **KEY FEATURES** Flux Wavetable Synth; automation curves; direct offline audio processing; snap grid adapts to zoom level; more insert slots; 64-bit (float) processing; new video handling; metronome improvements. **Requirements:** Mac OS X (OS X 10.11 / macOS Sierra) or Windows (64-Bit Windows 7 and above); 18 GB free HD; USB eLicenser.

THE PROS & CONS



Round automation curves and quicker editing

Direct Offline Processing is a great way to apply effects to audio

Adapt To Zoom is a simple, but very effective addition that adapts the snap grid to the zoom level



MixConsole and the broader Cubase GUI would benefit from further attention

Some video features have been dropped with the move to a new video engine

FLUX - A SYNTH AT THE TOP TABLE

Although HALion Sonic SE has its heritage in sample-based content, it also has the ability to host additional synth engines. With the move to Cubase 9.5, Steinberg have introduced Flux, a HALion-based instrument that employs wavetable synthesis. This form of synthesis was developed by PPG, and employed in their groundbreaking hybrid synths of the early 1980s. Unlike synths with fixed waveforms, each oscillator is based around bank of single-cycle digital waveshapes that can be moved between using a modulation source. Combined with a conventional filter section this makes for distinctive, and very powerful, sound creation.



processing remains the same. On this note, the Right Zone has been expanded with additional tabs for quicker access to media, Control Room setup and metering.

One of the headline additions that Steinberg are keen to promote is perhaps the most hard to assess – the 64-bit floating-point mix engine (which can be enabled in the Studio Setup page). They have doubled the number of bits employed by the current 32-bit (floating-point) system, but the difference in sound is not immediately noticeable – nor should one expect it to be. The changes do not alter how audio is stored or output, but do improve the accuracy of internal DSP calculations, particularly when combining multiple audio streams (where rounding errors can be cumulative). CPU load was largely unchanged on the projects I tested, but is reduced when using some plugins. Go to the VST Plug-in Manager and select 'Show Plug-ins

That Support 64-Bit Processing' to see which plugins will benefit. At the moment this applies to very few beyond those from Steinberg.

A more noticeable area where DSP comes to the fore is with the introduction of Direct Offline Processing. This is an extremely neat feature that lets you select audio and apply multiple plugin or Cubase processes directly, and with real-time preview. It is a non-destructive process that is a real time-saver, and great for all kinds of spot-treatments, correction and glitch effects. Those who like to stack up serious processing chains will hail the doubled Insert slot count in MixConsole a triumph. The ability to drag the pre-post EQ/Channel Strip point for each channel is also nice addition.

The Cubase Metronome also gets an update, with a clearer-looking window and click-sound presets (with a bunch of new ones pre-installed). The biggest change though is the

As expected, Steinberg dropped the latest in their annual, larger, DAW updates shortly before Christmas. The established pattern is a full version release every two years, with a .5 version in-between (both requiring a fee).

In terms of aesthetics, there are no big changes in version 9.5, though it seems that font aliasing is different from C9.0, resulting in some smearing in places. This may seem

like a minor gripe, but I have some long-running annoyances with the scalable aspects of the Cubase interface which make it feel sloppy, dated and inconsistent at times. Apple have slowly been removing the use of graduated colour and textured graphics in Logic Pro. Time perhaps for Steinberg to take the lead again?

On a more positive note, three existing plugins (MagnetO plus Vintage and Tube Comps) get a redesign, making them easier to use. A more intuitive interface can lead to better results, even if the underlying

THE ALTERNATIVES



Ableton Live 9 Suite £449

Like Cubase, available for both Mac and PC, and with a loyal following awaiting the release of v10, Live continues to impress.

www.ableton.com



Avid Pro Tools 12 £499

Another cross-platform, industry leading contender that also embraces a subscription payment model (at £25/month).

www.avid.com



Apple Logic X £200

Although the price has been creeping upwards, Logic remains a good-value DAW (if you have a Mac), and continues to be one of Cubase's main rivals.

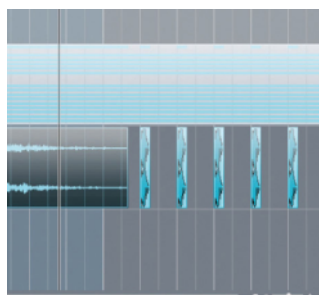
www.apple.com

ability to create custom click patterns, and assign a different pattern automatically depending on the time-signature. For those recording bands or doing a lot of real-time MIDI input, these are all useful features.

One much-anticipated addition to C9.5 is its ability to create smooth automation curves. In previous versions, curves could only be created by adding fixed points connected with straight lines. The new system also includes an automation Range Tool which makes adding and editing automation much quicker. It's sometimes simple features like this, and Adapt To Zoom (that adjusts the snap grid according to the zoom level), that make all the difference. Some great work from Steinberg here.

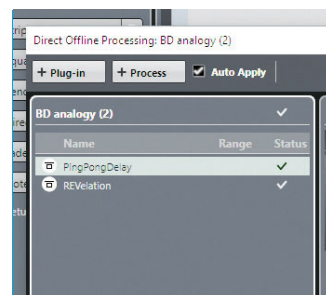
Sound creation is featured in this update with the inclusion of a new Halion Sonic SE synth. Flux is a great-sounding wavetable synth that comes with a bundle of 100 presets. It covers a wide range of sonic territory, from contemporary EDM flavours to old-school PPG-style sweeps and tones. The Sample Track now adds MIDI drag-and-drop, which renders internal MIDI instruments as audio files automatically. For those wanting pre-configured processing chains, Production Presets will be helpful, with a bunch now dedicated to mastering tasks.

Those involved in sound-to-picture are having to endure the changes Steinberg made with the dropping of Quicktime for Windows support (as it is no longer supported by Apple). The new video-engine has also facilitated



CURVES AND MORE Automation has had an overhaul, now featuring smooth, druggable curves as an alternative to the point-based system. This is more intuitive, more musical, and far quicker.

ADAPT TO ZOOM 'Adapt To Zoom' is simple but makes a difference. This 'Grid Type' option adjusts the Snap Grid to the current zoom level.



DIRECT OFFLINE PROCESSING This new feature allows you to apply multiple-stages of plugin processing easily and in-situ. It wasn't impossible before, but functionality was limited.

the dropping of Cubase's 'Replace Audio in Video' function, though there are assurances direct video render export functionality (including audio) is planned for a future update.

As ever, there will always be grumblings amongst some users on what has been ignored – or even

included without obvious interest to them. This is an inescapable fact of live for a leading DAW with a wide-ranging user base. Overall, and despite my ongoing issue with some aspects of the GUI design, this is a broadly solid update and, in my view at least, worth the £51 update fee (from version 9).

For those armed with an iLok and thinking of taking the plunge, whether as a Cubase newbie or potential updater, you can take advantage of the downloadable 30-day demo. **FM**

THE CUBASE FAMILY

Cubase Pro 9.5 is part of a larger family of related Steinberg audio workstations that includes Cubase Artist and Cubase Elements. Running parallel to this is Nuendo. This powerful system has carved out a special place for itself for Film and TV post-production, and game audio production. Its more specialist features don't come cheap, but it is a solid and respected performer.

Cubase Pro 9.5's siblings – Cubase Elements and Cubase Artist – offer considerable savings without skimping on features. Those jumping-ship from another DAW can take advantage of a favourable crossgrade rate.

Nuendo 8 - £1633, **Cubase Pro 9.5** - £480

Cubase Artist 9.5 - £265, **Cubase Elements 9.5** - £85

FM VERDICT

8.9

There are no radical changes, but most new features are well-implemented and worthwhile. Cubase remains an excellent and well-featured DAW