

# cm mini reviews

A rapid-fire round-up of sample libraries, ROMplers and music gear

Sono Elements

**eTron \$19**

Web [www.sonoelements.com](http://www.sonoelements.com)

Format PC/Mac, VST/AU

A virtual take on the Mellotron (the Birmingham-built tape-based ancestor of the sampler, made most famous by the flutes in The Beatles' *Strawberry Fields Forever*), eTron packs 200MB of samples into Sono Elements' proprietary sample playback engine. You get seven of the 'Tron's best-known sounds – Cello, Strings, Choir (Women), Woodwinds, Brass, Flute and Choir (Men) – selected using previous/next buttons.

The lack of a menu for instant selection is irritating. With the exception of Choir (Men), which loops endlessly when held, each sound extends for the full eight seconds, delivering the authentic release 'drop' of the real thing. We wonder if there's an issue with Choir (Women), though, as it only lasts six seconds and cuts off very abruptly – clearly not how it should be.

The looping thing is strange, too: we're mystified as to why we can't set all sounds to loop like Choir (Men) – and why Choir (Men) can't be set to *not* loop, not that that matters.

Anyhow, there's an ADSR envelope onboard for shaping the amplitude profile within the eight seconds, while the misnamed Tremolo effect is actually an auto-panner, and not a particularly good one at that, thanks largely to its unsynced but nonetheless stepped Rate control.

Further effects include a tastefully short reverb, a gentle low-pass filter, and three flavours of noise: Vinyl, Tape and Hum. Vinyl and Hum give you plenty of range, from very quiet through to excessively dominant, and are both thoroughly convincing, but Tape is far too loud even at its lowest setting – it needs recalibrating.

There are a few small niggles in there, then, but assuming that these can be addressed in an update, the eTron makes for a good and highly affordable source of Mellotron sounds.



The playback engine is decidedly basic, but then, that's to be expected at this price, and the samples have been well captured.

**7/10**

EastWest

**Hollywood Choirs Diamond Edition \$799**

Web [www.soundsonline.com](http://www.soundsonline.com)

Format PC/Mac, VST/AU/standalone

Built on 59GB of 24-bit multisamples of separate male and female choirs, and running in version 6 of EastWest's own Play engine (plugin and standalone), Hollywood Choirs is evidently targeted at the professional composer market, and even the most cursory of explorations quickly reveals it to be an incredibly high-quality choral 'construction' tool. The basic patches consist of 36 vowels and consonants for each gender, including staccato, legato and vibrato options, plus breath and unpitched consonants. Consonants have two dynamic layers, while vowels have three, and the mod wheel is used to crossfade between them. The Main 13-mic array can be broken down into Close, Stage, audience-perspective and ambience mixes for discrete levelling and panning.

The recently improved WordBuilder phrase design interface is quite remarkable. Load the Male or Female WB Multi preset, type in some text for conversion to Phonetic and Votox (or enter either of those two formats directly), and the engine will do a generally very impressive

job of having the choir sing it back to you, stepping through the constituent syllables with each new note. It's by no means perfect – as expected – but the system offers deep manipulation and balancing of letters, syllables and phonemes, and with a bit of work it really is possible to get your virtual choir singing intelligible phrases. A useful library of preset lines in English, Latin, Italian, Spanish and German is included: "Blood will run", "Listen to the wind", er, "Necromancer drinks from the heart of darkness"... that sort of thing.

The lack of solo choir sections is a negative – it's very much all or nothing in that sense – and manually combining vowel and consonant patches across multiple channels isn't the fastest of workflows when not using WordBuilder, but Hollywood Choirs is still a knockout choral library for movie and game composers.



The less expensive (\$665) Gold version is also worth considering while you're there, incidentally, offering just the main mic mix at 16-bit quality in 8GB of samples.

**9/10**

# Soundware round-up



## Sonuscore Origins Vol 4: Oud & Qanun £61

The latest Origins library recreates its titular Middle Eastern string instruments for dual or solo play. The Multi Arpeggiator Designer enables expressive arpeggios and cross-rhythmic sequences to be programmed easily, while the 12 Color presets set up the onboard effects to transform the sound – though, oddly, you can't save your own. Great for its 'realistic' emulation, but the magic lies in its sound design potential.

[www.timespace.com](http://www.timespace.com)

9/10

## Sample Magic

### 90s Deep House and Garage £15

450MB of evocatively old-school beats, b-lines, vocal cuts, keys, mini construction kits and one-shots, mapped to various sampler formats. Everything is at 124 or 128bpm, and the capers kick off with 28 suitably swung, 909-driven stemmed drum loops (140 files) and 72 subby basslines, the latter with MIDI files also provided. The melodic side of things takes in classic-style chordal riffs, pads and more, played on synths, organs and EPs, and also including MIDI files; and the 11 'Inspiration Kits' make for great starting points. Funky, uplifting and authentic, and a total bargain.

[www.samplemagic.com](http://www.samplemagic.com)

9/10



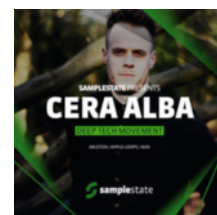
## Samplestate

### Cera Alba – Deep Tech Movement £25

The UK tech house producer gets his soundware on with 650MB (1GB including REX files) of tough beats, burly basses and ear-catching melodics. The 18 stemmed drum loops are superb – dark and relentless; we particularly like the more densely layered ones. In the Music Loops folder, the clean and distorted piano riffs are a highlight, but there are some great finds among the lead lines, pads and vocals, too. A solid, well-priced collection for producers of all flavours of techno and house, Deep Tech Movement is well worth checking out.

[www.loopmasters.com](http://www.loopmasters.com)

8/10



## Audiotent

### Division Deluxe £57

124 presets for u-he's sublime Diva virtual-analogue synth plugin, plus MIDI files accompanying 107 of them for demonstration purposes, and WAV renders of said example performances. The presets span the full range of sound types – arps, basses, pads, plucks, leads, chords, FX and drums – and are all well programmed and sound great, and the MIDI files are useful enough. The WAVs serve no real purpose, though, and we just can't get on with that hefty price tag. The cheaper Standard version doesn't really help, either, losing 17 of the presets and all the MIDI files but only dropping the price to a still-excessive £37.

[www.audiotent.com](http://www.audiotent.com)

7/10



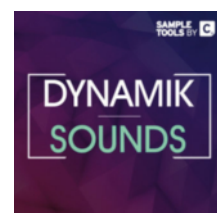
## Sample Tools by Cr2

### Dynamik Sounds £16

Cr2's new one takes on melodic house and techno, and the 20 stemmed drum loops (152 files) characterise the subtle genre split, shifting between the darker sound of techno and the bouncier vibes of house. The basslines, meanwhile, are brooding and unfussy, making space for the 55 diverse but generally techy synth and sequence loops – lead riffs, pads, arps, etc. As ever, six very well produced construction kits serve to both educate and provide plenty of further usable material, and a cache of one-shots and Sylenth1 presets add to the possibilities. One of their best yet.

[sounds.beatport.com](http://sounds.beatport.com)

9/10



Rankin Audio

**Akira The Don – LoFi Hip Hop £35**

The LA-based DJ/producer releases his first sample pack in conjunction with production team Aurists. It's an exposition of seven full-length construction kits, consisting of drums, basses, melodics and FX, ranging in style from jazzy to soulful to almost easy listening, but with a commonality of off-kilter hip-hop beats, filthy electric basslines and a crackly vinyl crust. The stems are essentially duplicates of the loops, but laid out on a timeline, which makes the whole lot feel bigger than it really is. Because of that, we're not sold on the value proposition; a shame, as there's some fabulous material here.

[www.loopmasters.com](http://www.loopmasters.com)**7/10**

Native Instruments

**Polar Flare £44**

Serving up "an otherworldly take on contemporary electronic music", this 622MB Expansion maps more than 500 one-shot drum and percussion samples into 40 Maschine Groups and 47 Battery Kits. The Maschine Group patterns have been rendered as 36 WAV construction kits, and 50 Massive and Monark patches are included, but Maschine users also get a ton of Drum and Bass Synth presets, 13 Instruments and eight fully realised projects. The production style brings to mind the likes of Bonobo and BoC, with a palpable sense of iciness and desolation throughout. Also noteworthy are 64 gorgeous vocal samples.

[www.native-instruments.com](http://www.native-instruments.com)**9/10**

UNDRGRND Sounds

**Retro Memories £30**

A slightly tricky one to quantify, Retro Memories is a lo-fi electronica library in the broadest sense of the term, but its main focus is on referencing the sounds of the 80s, particularly when it comes to the styling of its drums and basses. Consisting of 279 loops, 69 one-shots and 153 MIDI files, it could hardly be described as UNDRGRND's most generous offering to date by any stretch, and while there are some excellent sounds to be had – the Pad and Chord Loops folder is full of inspiring noises – we didn't find ourselves as wowed as we have been by their previous output.

[www.undrgrndsounds.com](http://www.undrgrndsounds.com)**7/10**

ModeAudio

**Suspense £18**

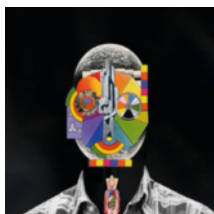
The latest library from Mode comprises 12 loop construction kits of a dramatic, foreboding, John Carpenter-esque bent, complete with tail samples and MIDI files. With its eerie pads, creepy synths, imposing drums, throbbing bass shapes and cinematic FX, Suspense at first feels like an overly succinct resource for media production; but upon listening to the samples in isolation, rather than mixed as 'tracks', its musical remit becomes more clear. While the tracks here are pretty forgettable, the loops that come together to form them are interesting, evocative and very much ripe for redeployment.

[www.modeaudio.com](http://www.modeaudio.com)**8/10**

Letherette

**New Depths Subscription**

Perfectly described as suitable for anything that "needs a sticky beat" but primarily aimed at hip-hop and house, New Depths sees Letherette pushing synths, samples and found sounds through a variety of analogue gear – including an Akai reel-to-reel – to create a small but well-formed library of beats and atmospheres. It's crusty, crackly stuff, with the drum and percussion loops demonstrating incredible imagination, and you never know what you're going to get next. It's just a shame the Synths folder is so tiny, as the four loops that it does contain are really quite beautiful.

[www.noiz.com](http://www.noiz.com)**8/10**

Toontrack

**Fusion Fills £21**

Following from the stellar Fusion Grooves, drummer Luke Oswald lays down 700+ one- and two-bar fills as MIDI files for Superior Drummer 2/3 and EZdrummer 1/2, divided between various categories (Halftime, Midtempo, Syncopated, Latin, Soca, Linear, Hip-Hop Fusion, etc), in the style of Colaiuta, Weckl, Gadd and peers. Again, we're not clear on Oswald's definition of 'linear' (he's definitely hitting more than one thing at a time!), but that aside, this is the perfect complement to its pyrotechnical partner, and hours can easily be lost splicing fills together to form your own custom fillings.

[www.timespace.com](http://www.timespace.com)**9/10**

RV Samplepacks

**Chilled Hip Hop Instrumentals £25**

15 supremely laid-back hip-hop tracks broken down into separate instrumental folders. As well as one or two electric or acoustic basses and their stemmed drum loops, each track features multiple melodic instruments, including pianos, flutes, guitars, horns, synths and more. The production and composition are first class, but the presentation is slightly at odds with itself – the underlying construction kit format is concealed by the folder structure but puts dead space into the music loops, reflecting arrangements. Why not just organise them as construction kits?

[www.loopmasters.com](http://www.loopmasters.com)**8/10**

Loopmasters

**Signals – Chilled Downtempo & Trip Hop £35**

It's refreshing to open a Drum Loops folder and find nothing but fully mixed beats, rather than stems, so Signals gets a point for that – even if it features a few repetitive variations and uneven quality at times. It's the non-percussive material that most impresses, though – a truckload of perfectly-poised basses, keys, leads and more that any downtempo producer would relish. We love that every loop is at least four bars long, too, giving space for development.

[www.loopmasters.com](http://www.loopmasters.com)**9/10**