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### Quantum Leap Stormdrum 3

#### pros

An Aladdin's cave of exotic world percussion, pristinely recorded from five mic positions. Features powerful ethnic drums and percussion ensembles, and some great tuned percussion. Fabulous Japanese taiko drums are the jewel in the crown. An extensive performance menu includes hits, flams, rolls, licks and multi-instrument loops.

#### cons

The instrumentation is so large, it's hard to keep track!

#### summary

Mickey Hart's 40-year love affair with ethnic percussion spills into the digital realm with this excellent new sample library. Based on the drummer's personal instrument collection and featuring a superb set of taiko drums and slamming ensemble impacts, Quantum Leap Stormdrum 3 contains over 150 instruments performing hits, licks and multi-percussion loops. Recorded from five mic positions, these colourful samples are a great asset for composers and can be used in many musical settings.

#### information

Quantum Leap Stormdrum 3 DVD format €351; Mac or Window's hard drive €439 (content is identical). Prices include VAT.

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[www.soundsonline-europe.com](http://www.soundsonline-europe.com)

## Quantum Leap Stormdrum 3

### Percussion Sample Library

Reviews : Software: Instruments

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### The third instalment in Quantum Leap's Stormdrum series explores the private percussion collection of a legendary American drummer.

Dave Stewart

Long before the current crop of 'jam bands' first stepped on stage, '60s Californian rockers Grateful Dead were mapping out the territory with exploratory live shows peppered with long, spacy improvisations. For most of their 30-year career, the Dead (whoops, showing my age there) featured two drummers: founder member Bill Kreutzmann and kindred spirit Mickey Hart, who joined in 1967. Both players introduced an assortment of non-Western percussion instruments into their setups, helping to lay the ground for the explosion of interest in world music which started at this time.

Mickey Hart's musical journey continues to the present day. A student of African and Indian drumming, he picked up a Grammy Award in 1991 for his best-selling album Planet Drum, featuring percussionists from around the world. His interest in ethnomusicology also led him to write books on the history of drumming, and to campaign for the preservation of recordings of global musical traditions in danger of extinction. Hart's personal percussion collection has now been extensively multi-sampled in Quantum Leap's all-new Stormdrum 3 sound library, opening up a new digital global outlet for ethnic instruments acquired on his travels.

Released in 2004, the original Stormdrum library combined ethnic and rock drums, percussion, rhythm beds and beats in a Kontakt/Intakt package. Its sequel 'Stormdrum 2 — The Next Generation' (love the title) placed the emphasis on large, ambient ethnic drums, exotic metals (including the hang drum, subsequently heard on a million TV soundtracks) and processed 'sound design' percussion. Stormdrum 2's Pro Upgrade added extra instruments, notably an array of ethnic drums and toms performing booming, high-octave bangs. (Read the SOS review of Stormdrum 2 at [/sos/apr08/articles/ewqlibraries.htm](http://sos/apr08/articles/ewqlibraries.htm).)

Continuing the acoustic themes of its predecessor, Stormdrum 3 features multi-samples of ethnic drums and percussion, both tuned and unpitched, from around the world. In addition to Mr Hart's private collection, multiple instruments were loaned to the project by Remo Belli, founder of the Remo drum company. A complete list of Stormdrum 3's extraordinary range of instruments can be found in its manual, which can be downloaded from [www.soundsonline-forums.com/docs/QL\\_SD3\\_Manual.pdf](http://www.soundsonline-forums.com/docs/QL_SD3_Manual.pdf). The samples were performed by Mickey Hart, Chalo Eduardo and Greg Ellis, with producer and self-professed percussion maniac Nick Phoenix weighing in on a set of improvised four-player percussion grooves.

Quantum Leap Stormdrum 3 (hereafter referred to as SD3) is formatted exclusively for EastWest's Play engine, which has been upgraded to Play 4 (more of which later). The samples were recorded in EastWest's Studio 1 from five microphone positions, ensuring compatibility with the Hollywood series of orchestral libraries and facilitating surround mixing. SD3 is available on hard drive or on DVD (the content is identical), and uses 84.7GB of disk space. The library requires an iLok security key (not provided); system specifications are listed at [www.soundsonline.com/SD3](http://www.soundsonline.com/SD3).

#### Dead Big

SD3 takes the 'big ethnic drums' concept of its predecessors to new levels: amongst its larger items are a gargantuan, 10-foot-wide rectangular Remo frame drum and a Japanese taiko weighing as much as a grand piano. Also jostling for floor space is a rack of three outside, surdo-like drums known to Deadheads as 'The Beast', an evolving stage accessory originally constructed by Mickey Hart for recording music for the film Apocalypse Now. If you seek similarly dramatic impacts for your movie soundtracks, the small selection of loud ensemble tom hits in 'Lord of Toms Ensemble' are the kind of grand slams which will pin a movie audience to its seats.

On a more subtle note, the beautifully clean, deep-toned hits of the large drums in 'The Beast' rack sound like a cross between timpani and orchestral bass drum, but their crescendo rolls' ferocious, distinctly unsubtle rock attitude will tear your head off. 'Remo Table Drums' also delivers ominous, orchestral-bass-drum-like sonorities; this circular floor-mounted instrument is designed for people to sit round it and play together. All very sociable, but I would caution against using it to serve food in case one of your dinner guests decides to do an impromptu Keith Moon impression. The Table Drums patch contains a superbly dynamic 85-second performance which starts almost inaudibly with quiet, throbbing eighth-notes and builds to a thunderous crescendo.

While these patches sound pretty huge, the prize for the heaviest strikes in SD3 goes to the multi-instrument 'Dragon Ensemble', featuring several players performing a large menu of fortissimo hits and rolls on various combinations of bass drums, floor toms, large ethnic drums, cymbals and gongs. They sound absolutely monstrous. Though I sometimes joke about the speaker-shredding potential of percussion



Play 4's GUI: note the new 'Tune B' control, which can be used to alter the pitch of SD3's loops without changing their tempo. If you want to do the reverse, simply change your song tempo and the loops will sync to it!



Mr. Hart positioned between an African gourd marimba and 'The Beast', his rack of custom surdo drums.

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GLOSSARY: technical terms explained



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samples, several of the hits described above do contain a frightening amount of low-end energy, so to protect your speaker cones, be careful about monitor levels when playing them!

### Taikover

EastWest describe SD3's Japanese drums as "the Holy Grail of taiko samples". While I detected no unearthly, sacred radiance emanating from my computer, I did notice a few overload lights coming on when I banged the massive 60-inch Hira-daiko. Unsurprisingly, both it and the 800lb, 46-inch Nagado-daiko drum produce profoundly deep and bassy tones, the latter rumbling like a small earthquake. I was also impressed by the solemn, ritualistic atmosphere of the 36-inch Nagado-daiko's 'Head A' patch.

The 'taikoway menu' continues with a generous collection of smaller Shime-daiko drums, whose high-pitched, boingy hits set off EastWest Studio 1's room ambience to great effect. Played with both mallets and sticks, all the taikos perform straight hits and rolls, crescendo and decrescendo rolls of various lengths, percussive shell hits and scrapes. For me, the most impressive sound in this section is not a thunderous fortissimo hit (though there are plenty of those): it's a sustained, looped roll played very quietly on the largest taiko, setting up a spine-chilling, low-pitched vibration that seems to threaten an outbreak of paranormal activity.

Without undergoing a religious experience, I can say this collection of taiko drums (some of which were specially built for the project) is everything I prayed for, and its wide range of dynamics, pitch and timbre should keep composers and programmers happy for many moons.

Other large ethnic drums in SD3 include African djembe and ashiko hand drums, cajon and yambu (snared wooden boxes which combine the wiry buzz of a military snare drum with the low, dull thud of a packing case), a full-bodied and powerful Middle Eastern dumbek, and the distinctive boom and clatter of the two-headed Indian dohl drum, which will add a cheerful bhanga flavour to your trancey dance mixes.

### Small & Medium Drums

While the big drums described above work a treat in dramatic film scores, real-life ethnic drumming relies far more on a range of quieter, subtly differentiated hits. These are found in abundance in SD3's smaller drums section, which spans the globe from New Guinea to South America with stopovers in Bali, Tibet, Nepal, India, Pakistan, the Middle East and Africa. Although not strictly ethnic in origin, some interesting items appear courtesy of the US Remo company: played with mallets, a set of five mini-drums (originally designed as full-scale instruments for the 1996 Olympics) have an attractively tuneful, bongo-like flavour, while the company's 12-inch tubano combines the bass tone of a djembe with the slappy, cutting edge of a large conga.

Though standard Latin congas and timbales are not included, their musical territory is covered to some extent by (respectively) cohongas hand drums performing lively, smartly executed conga-like grooves, and the high-pitched, clanging rim shots of the repanique. Scintillating fast rolls on a pair of Bauer bongos evoke hot Latin nights, while the Brazilian cuica friction drum performs its usual repertoire of moans, groans and anxious puppy barks. All good interjections to throw into a mix, though the cuica's free-form performance samples aren't designed to fit into a groove.

SD3's far-reaching menu of smaller drums covers every imaginable timbral nuance, from the primitive, commanding tone of a New Guinea drum through to the sophisticated rhythmic language of Indian tabla. There are no tabla grooves, but their single hits cover a good tonal range. The characteristic pitch-bent 'gulp' of the larger tabla drum is here executed slower than you would normally hear in Indian music, robbing it of some of its urgency. By contrast, the African talking drum's pitch-bending performances are commendably vigorous, though I don't understand what it's saying!

Other highlights include nicely tuned Middle Eastern frame drums and the unmistakable, air-driven bass 'whomph' and sharp finger hits of clay udu pots. I'll also mention the two-headed Indian pakhavaj barrel drum (spectacularly misspelt in the patch list), if only to infuriate my spellchecker. However one spells it, the last word in this section must go to the Tibetan damaru rattle drum: apparently this raucous instrument was originally constructed from two human skulls. Despite the Grateful Dead connection, I'd like to think not in this case.

### Tuned Percussion

Boasting a large repertoire of intricate traditional pieces, the African balafon xylophone is one of my favourite instruments. SD3 has two of them: 'Balaphone' (sic) plays keyswitchable hits, flams and rolls, sounding not unlike a Western marimba though with a less sustaining upper register, while 'Gourd Marimba' has a more ethnic flavour and a sweeter attack. The characteristic buzz heard in some balafons is absent from both,

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The Gong Show: Mickey Hart awaits word from the control room on when he should deliver his next mighty blow.

but that's OK: the upside is that the beautifully clean tone of these distinctive, highly playable instruments will work in many different musical styles.

Indonesian angklung rattles provide another exotic tuned-perc colour. Tuned in octaves, their twin bamboo tubes make a bright, woody 'cluck' when shaken, and can produce delightfully clamorous sustained rolls. As with Indonesian gamelan, no two sets of angklung are tuned exactly the same; SD3's set are well flat of concert pitch, but if you tune them up 35 cents or so they'll fit nicely with Western instruments in the key of F# major. A concert-pitch chromatic mapping would be handy, if EastWest/Quantum Leap's programmers ever get a spare moment!

Speaking of Indonesia, Mickey Hart's 'Dark Star Bells' are tuned to a very pretty, tempered version of that region's five-note pelog scale. The instrument is a set of miniature, handmade bronze tubular bells which the drummer played on live versions of the popular Grateful Dead song: they sound a little like a softly played glockenspiel, producing a lovely, mystical and alluring chime. 'Englehart Bells', a resonant and melodic set of agogo-like bells made by instrument maker Pete Englehart, cover similar ground but have a harder, more assertive attack. Both instruments have a chromatic mapping option. Though their pitches are less determinate, the library's high-pitched Asian crotales (tuned mini-cymbals) sound exquisitely clean and transparent.

### Metal Mickey

SD3's 'Metals' category includes a diverse range of instruments. Brass Tibetan singing bowls feature performances in which the beater is rubbed steadily around the rim, creating a gradual harmonic build-up which evolves into a moody, hovering drone. If you're partial to that kind of new age, 'healing music' sonority, the delicate tinkling of wind chimes, mark trees (aka 'brass chimes'), mini-cymbals and finger cymbals from around the globe, along with the wafy chimes of the enigmatic ice bells, will also help soothe the savage beast.

The same can't be said for the terrifically noisy, clasy racket of Balinese ceng ceng hand cymbals, which frankly are more likely to give you a heart attack. In gamelan dance performances the ceng ceng are often heard banging out 16th-note rhythm patterns at a ridiculously fast tempo; no such licks are provided here, but you can program your own with the single hit samples. Gamelan fans can also use the library's metal slit gong and Turkish copper pot to imitate the tuned 'kettle gongs' of Javanese and Balinese gamelan, albeit over a greatly reduced pitch range.

Returning to more familiar timbres, the Latin agogo bells in this library are excellent, but if you want an eclectic alternative, the unusual and comparatively mellow chime of African boat bells would be a good timekeeper in an ethnic drum arrangement. Though it's something of an acquired taste, the taut, percussive twang of the single-stringed musical bow known as the berimbau could be, er, another string to an arranger's bow, though it only plays two notes a tone apart. There are two berimbauts in SD3, tuned respectively to E (not Ab as stated in the patch list) and B.

The pride of Mickey Hart's gong collection, a large 36-inch Thai gong, sounds superb: its massive, ultra-deep tones lie somewhere between the pure low bass note of a Javanese 'gong ageng' and the more explosive, unpitched noise of a Chinese tam tam. Hearing its aquatic performances in 'Gongs In Water' is an interesting experience! A large, serious-sounding Burmese gong and a selection of Wuhan Chinese gongs round off this splendid selection, which also includes a good array of cool bowed cymbal performances and spooky, disembodied rubbed gong effects.

More eerie groans, slithers and screeches, not to mention metallic clonks and gurglings reminiscent of faulty plumbing, can be found courtesy of the library's three waterphones, which also contribute percussive, metallic spoke hits and rolls. An altogether less disquieting set of effects, painstakingly recorded by Nick Phoenix in several antique clock shops, offers a large menu of ticks, tocks, bongos and assorted mechanical noises from clocks of all sizes.

### Shake, Scrape, Rattle & Knock

SD3's headlining instruments are supported by a workmanlike cast of ethnic woodblocks, ratchets, slapsticks, shakers and scrapers. Notable among the last category are 'Thailand frogs' and a quijada scraper, traditionally made from the jawbone of a donkey, horse or zebra. Any thoughts of alerting the RSPCA were dispelled when I realised that the Thai effort is actually a guiro-style instrument, and that the unfortunate horse-like animal having its jawbone scraped had probably expired some time before the recording session. The quijada also contains some uncredited jingly hits which sound like an ancient sistrum rattle.

On the subject of jingles, the tambourines in this library have drumskins and are played with sticks, so are therefore not suitable for programming pop-style tambourine loops. The slightly rough, ethnic tone of most of the shakers and rattles probably also precludes conventional pop usage, but colourful, ear-catching items like deerhoof rattles and gourd shakers are a perfect fit for the ethnic drums. If you need something more soporific, the slow, trickling pours of Mickey Hart's rainsticks soothe the soul like a rain shower in the desert.



Some of the large Japanese taiko drums in SD3 were specially made for the project.



"Now, have I brought enough mallets?" Mickey Hart takes an inventory of his metal hand percussion.



Producer Nick Phoenix joins in the musical action, playing a selection of ethnic drums in the four-player 'live loops'.

It's worth noting that the logdrum in this collection plays only one note, leaving the slightly metallic-sounding tongue drum to provide multiple pitches. The real-life log in the 'Redwood Tree' patch is a 12-foot tree branch: struck with a thick stick, it emits loud, hollow, highly resonant deep knocks, such as those rained on your front door by a TV license inspector.

### Jam Today

Having spent countless hours, days and weeks deep-sampling a quantity of percussion and drums sufficient to fill a warehouse, the SD3 musicians went into the studio for half a day and had a good old jam. The idea of four percussionists letting rip at the same time would normally fill me with fear, but this quartet avoid the worst excesses of Jam Hell by listening to each other, leaving space and playing in time with the click track — an indication of the players' collective studio experience. The result is a collection of 23 improvised, tempo-sync'd multi-percussion pieces, each of which has been sliced into between 10 and 42 sections of four or eight bars' length, giving users a grand total of 805 loops to play with.



SSL dynamic effects (bundled free with SD3) are now available for all EastWest Play libraries.

While many loops have a bustling African tribal drums feel, others are more spacy and atmospheric; 'Acapulco' contrasts a full-on, multi-drum carnival ambiance with quieter sections featuring a pulsing low drum and bells, while 'Fantasy Bird' features nice open passages played on large drum and gong, as well as some wildly extroverted solo balafon excursions. Overall, the sonic menu is varied, imaginative and entertaining; it seems that most of the instruments in the library get hauled out at some point, and 'The Beast' gets a good workout.

Inevitably given the approach, some loops get a touch over-busy, but others break all the way down to sparse notes from a solo player. Because everyone played live together, it isn't possible to isolate the various elements as you would when using a conventional construction kit library. That said, the performances are all bang on the click, loop perfectly and can be arranged in any order.

The loops automatically sync to your sequencer's tempo, or if running Play stand-alone on your desktop, to Play's internal Engine Tempo Sync setting. Each loop's tempo (between 90 and 120 bpm) is listed, and you'll get best results if you stay somewhere in the vicinity of the original tempo.

### All To Play 4

SD3 is the first library formatted for Play 4, an upgrade of EastWest's sound engine which is free to registered users. EastWest have replaced the reverb engine in Play 4 with the Quantum Leap Spaces 'true stereo' engine; other innovations include a new mixer window (details below) and an extra tuning control which changes the pitch of samples while leaving their length intact. In a push to give users more sound-shaping tools, EastWest licensed a collection of effects processors from Solid State Logic.

The SSL effects bundle comprises a dual high- and low-pass filter, a four-band parametric EQ with adjustable Q, a compressor, noise gate, expander and a transient shaper which can be used to exaggerate the attack at the start of a note (useful for making drum hits more percussive). There's also a master stereo bus compressor. Effects may be chained together in various different ways, with a choice of serial or parallel (side-chain) routing. The SSL processors are gathered together neatly in one window, sporting authentic-looking, retro-styled controls which positively scream 'pro audio'.

Play 4's new mixer features virtual long-throw faders and a calibrated readout of levels and pan positions, making it easy to precisely match settings. The mixer shows levels for all the mic positions of every loaded instrument, and it's now possible to separately load each of the five positions (formerly, you had to toggle between the fourth and fifth).

EastWest have created new 'true stereo' reverb presets for Play 4's reverb engine, some of which are included in Play 4 as standard. Additional reverb presets are bundled with the SSL effects. The SSL/EW effects package comes free with SD3 and all future Play libraries, but to use them with all the earlier Play libraries requires a single upgrade fee of €79.

### Conclusion

This admirable percussion library has educational as well as musical value, but even if you can't tell a berimbau from a bongo, you'll have a lot of fun playing its big drums and slamming 'Dragon Ensemble' hits. For those that like to dig beneath the surface, the manual provides enormous detail on the patches, performances and sample mappings, as well as Play 4's new technical features.

To hear the samples in action, I recommend Nick Phoenix's video demos at EastWest's web site, which demonstrate how quick and easy it is to whip up exciting arrangements with this collection. Upholding the high standard of its predecessors, Stormdrum 3 is a credit to all involved, and another milestone on the long road of Mickey Hart's percussive pilgrimage.

### Alternatives

Since it's based on one man's private percussion collection, Stormdrum 3 includes a number of unique, custom-made instruments you won't find elsewhere. Nevertheless, the library bears comparison with Evolution Series World Percussion, a very large 204GB collection containing a good selection of instruments recorded from seven mic positions. More modestly proportioned alternatives include Vir2 World Impact: Global Percussion (12.2GB), Project SAM's 13.8GB True Strike 2 and Yellow Tool's Culture (9GB).

### Microphone Positions



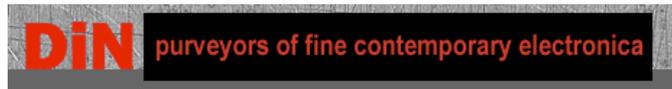
Play 4's new mixer page displays individual mic positions and master faders for every loaded instrument. Pressing the small yellow button with the faders symbol causes the microphone channel strips to be hidden, enabling you to view more instruments on screen.

All of Stormdrum 3's instruments have five mic positions except the live loops, clockwork effects and 'Dragon Ensemble' multi-percussion ensemble, which are presented in a full stereo mix. Patches default to loading both the Close and Hi-Fi positions, giving a full, detailed sound which blends the presence of the close miking with a transparent room ambience. The five mic positions used are:

- Close: An array of eight close microphones mixed down to stereo. Fairly dry-sounding.
- Mid: A centrally placed tree of mics roughly 15 feet from the instruments.
- Hi-Fi: A super-clean signal path optimised for a clear, transparent room sound. These mics are the same distance from the instruments as the Mid mics, but set slightly wider apart.
- Main: A 'Decca tree' of Neumann M50 mics positioned 20 - 25 feet from the instruments.
- Vintage: A vintage signal path using RCA ribbon mics positioned 25 feet from the instruments.

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