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EastWest Quantum Leap Stormdrum 3

DRUM SAMPLE LIBRARY

A must-have for film composers, **Alan Branch** explores the wild sounds of EastWest's new Stormdrum 3 sample library.

STORMDRUM IS a name prominent with film composers and sample freaks for its series of incredible drum sample libraries. Now with the third instalment we see producer Nick Phoenix combine forces with drumming rocker Mickey Hart, best known for being part of American band Grateful Dead, and drumhead pioneer Remo Belli.

The emphasis of Stormdrum 3 (SD3) is more on a natural drum library, although not kick drums, snares, and the like, but rather rare, unusual, and esoteric instruments. SD3 serves up a massive collection of multi-sampled sounds, (with a rather alarming spec of 86GB of required free hard disk space!) recorded at EastWest Studio 1 and performed by Hart, Greg Ellis, Chalo Eduardo, and Phoenix. Each instrument, apart from the Live Loops, was recorded from five separate mic positions and each can be adjusted in the new PLAY 4 software, from up close to the wide and spacious. The Live Loops are a bonus part of SD3 and feature sections of multi-instrument jams made during the recording sessions. Mapped to a constant tempo, you can move from one loop to another seamlessly while beats are auto-synced by the PLAY 4 plug-in to a DAW's tempo.

SOUNDS

Phoenix has taken his expertise as a film composer and creator of various percussion libraries and combined the advancement of the PLAY 4 software with

instruments from Hart's own private collection, Remo's hand-picked drums, hired percussion, and even drums he had specially built. The SD3 collections are too numerous to list but are divided into seven folders of instruments within the PLAY software and grouped by types including: Big Drums, Gongs Clocks Waterphone, Metals, Shakers, Small Drums, Taiko Family, and Woods.

PLAY 4 SOFTWARE

SD3 is the first of EastWest's virtual instruments to use the new PLAY 4 software, a 64/32-bit Mac and PC plug-in including Avid's new AAX format, as well as a standalone version. Features include better performance, new time-stretch/tuning, a new mixer including sub channels for mic positions, and the addition of some SSL licensed processors including the highly respected SSL Bus Compressor. In addition, there is a new 'true stereo' reverb from EastWest.

IN USE

PLAY 4 is a simple to use virtual instrument with a Mixer, Player, and Browser window. The featured instruments are impressive and the sheer size and sonic impressions of the sounds are so striking it's extraordinary. The Japanese Taiko Family, for example, is an incredible collection of the dynamics and atmosphere of the Taiko drum, all captured with the lush ambience of the EastWest studio. There are a huge variety of subtle bells, bowls, and shakers right through to thundering drum sections.

Controlling the loaded instruments with the new PLAY engine via keyswitch notes and articulations helps achieve a natural sounding performance. For example, the Round-Robin articulation alternates up to eight samples one after the other so the sound is continually changing even though the sample is being played from the same key. An articulation list can be seen after loading an instrument and in some cases there are over a dozen different keyswitches for a single instrument.

The mixer displays a channel strip for each instrument loaded, and each of those includes the five mic position sub channels with each one also featuring an FX section containing the new SSL channel strip, reverb control, and SSL Bus Compressor. The addition of the SSL helps to complete the package as its four-band EQ, gate/compressor, and transient shaper are great tools for sculpting drum sounds, adding to an attack or softening a hit, or notching a rumble or tone within a drum resonance.

The main Player window shows at a glance how much system resources are in use, the layout of any keyswitches, the reverb and delay selections, as well as filter controls, sensitivity, envelope, and tuning. The new Time Stretch Tuning has two options: 'A' being the original EastWest control that affects the speed by raising and lowering pitch, and 'B', which is the new real-time stretch where the playback speed



remains the same while changing the pitch.

OVERALL

Stormdrum 3 has a job to live up to with its predecessors' heritage, and I think it does as long as you need percussion. There are so many sample libraries out now that have been mangled to hell and back it's nice to see Nick Phoenix return to his roots with detailed recordings of rare, unique, and even purpose-built percussion instruments. Mickey Hart's drum collection is obviously important but it's also the performance of each instrument that's the key, with some of the ensembles quite breathtaking in their sonic footprint. PLAY 4's layered articulations, the True Stereo Reverb, and mixing options ensure it's easy to create realistic compositions. Care

has to be taken when playing back some time/pitch-shifted sounds as once you drift away from the original tempo, artifacts can clearly be heard, and I'm unsure if I personally would use the new SSL FX addition, as I would prefer to use my DAW for processing. However the combination of 86GB of incredible percussion layered into the PLAY 4 software makes SD3 once again an impressive and versatile virtual percussion instrument that's sure to inspire.

THE REVIEWER

ALAN BRANCH is a freelance engineer/producer. His long list of credits include Jamiroquai, Beverley Knight, M People, Simply Red, Depeche Mode, Shed 7, Sinead O'Connor, Bjork, and Sade. www.alanbranch.com

INFORMATION

Feature set

- 86GB of eclectic drum sounds from the collections of Mickey Hart, Remo Belli, and Nick Phoenix
- Five user-controllable mic positions for each instrument
- New PLAY 4 64/32-bit software with Pro Tools 11 (AAX) compatibility
- SSL FX section including EQ, Dynamic Channel Strip, Transient Shaper, and Stereo Bus Compressor

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