Maxing your **MIDI**

Don't put up with moaning MIDIs. Steven Helstrip shows you how to get more from your music machine.

IT'S ABOUT TIME WE took a closer look at getting more out of your setup. So, here I've selected some sound Helstrip tricks to help you squeeze more from your MIDI.
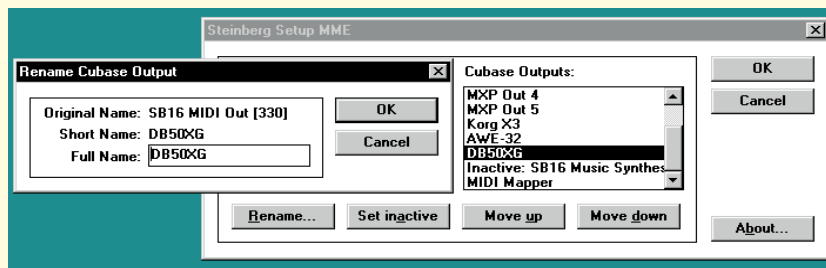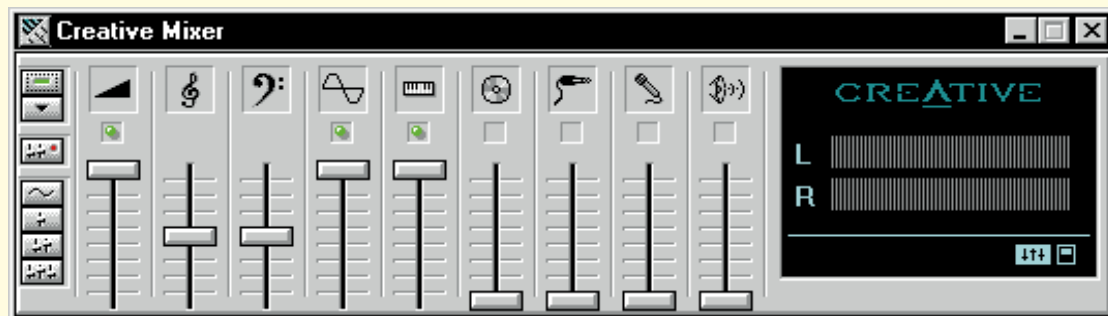
● Less noise from your PC

Noise is a problem within every MIDI/audio setup, whether it's a standalone PC with a sound card, or a more complex studio setup. The first thing to do is to ensure that your sound card is fitted in to a slot as far away as possible from other cards: graphics cards and other intensive processors create the most audible interference. While you do this, position the card as far away as possible from the PC's power supply.

Using high-quality shielded cables between your sound card and mixer, or amplifier, reduces noise and considerably improves sound quality. The mini stereo-jack-to-phonos cable supplied with sound cards are often poor quality. For around £3 you can buy a solid mini stereo-jack-to-two-phonos converter, which will convert your card's output to phono plugs, allowing you to invest in decent cables. You can buy the converter from Tandy.

Most sound cards have individual amplifiers for each component (WaveTable synth, CD-audio, mic and line inputs), adding to the noise problem. Muting those not being used helps considerably.

AWE-32 owners should permanently mute the microphone input and use the line input to record, since the mic input is particularly noisy. Setting the master volume

Top *Muting the Mic and Line inputs can help reduce noise from your sound card*

Above *Give your sound card a recognisable name from the MME setup in Cubase*

to maximum will improve the signal-to-noise ratio. If there is any distortion, reduce the gain settings on your mixer channels.

● Friendly MIDI ports

If you use Cubase and have several MIDI ports, you can rename them in the Setup MME drivers application. So, for example, instead of selecting SB16 MIDI Out (330) you can give it the name of the instrument connected to it. In my case, this is Yamaha's DB50XG daughterboard.

● Saving AWE-32 sessions

When I last counted, I had nearly 2,000 sample banks (SBKs) for the AWE-32. Remembering which ones I have used in a particular song, and their locations, was just about impossible, since no application exists that allows you to save entire sessions. Nevertheless, I have come up with a solution. When you load a sound bank, an entry is made in the user bank section of SBWIN.ini, noting its filename and path. Having completed a song, you can copy the ini file (located in the Windows directory) and paste its contents to the notepad within your sequencer. Returning to that song later will enable you to quickly reload any samples you have used.

The Sbwin.ini file provides you with a reference to all the samples you've used on a particular song

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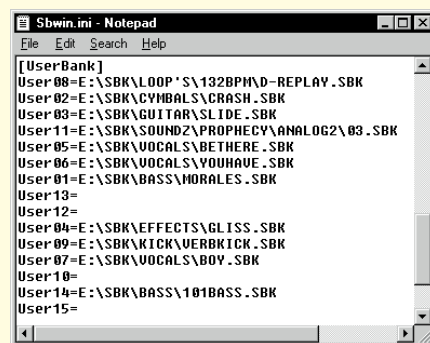
The people at D-Zone have been knocking out sampling CDs at quite a rate over the past few months. DanceZone is the latest product and one of its best so far — assuming dance-orientated CDs are your cup of tea. As usual with the Loopisms series, you get 25 pre-looped loops (if you see what I mean), and a load of "one-shot" samples. This time, the samples are courtesy of the Korg Prophecy and all are recorded at middle C. There are 125 samples in total, ranging from analogue sequences to slap bass timbres.

From now on, all of D-Zone's CDs, including this one, will be mixed mode, which means all the samples will be provided in audio and Windows .wav format. On the CD-ROM partition you will also find each sample in SBK format ready to be downloaded to the AWE-32 sound card — a nice touch.

The loops are predominantly house/garage orientated, although there are several jungle-esque loops to be found. Inclusion of the loop from Todd Terry's mix of Everything But The Girl's "Missing" (one of the best-selling singles, ever) was a bit cheeky, I thought — you couldn't possibly use it and get away with it!

For just £12.95, this is another "must have" for your collection. Owners of AWE-32 cards shouldn't hesitate. There's even a playable demo of Rise of the Triads on the CD for when you need a break, and a demo of Cool, the Windows sound editor.

● *Loopism's DanceZone is distributed by Time + Space (see "Contacts", page 317)*

● Save time with templates

How many times have you recorded a "four on the floor" kick drum pattern? And how many times have you tapped in 16s on the hi-hats? Because most sequences start life with a rhythm track, why not create a folder for frequently used sequences?

The tracks can be saved as complete arrangements (kick, snare, hi-hats, tambourine) or, for more flexibility, as individual parts which can be imported into any sequence. You can customise templates to name tracks, or set up drum maps, to free up more time for you to be creative.

● Change for the better

If your MIDI setup is limited to a 16-part multitimbral synth such as a sound card, it doesn't mean you are limited to using just 16 instruments within a song. By using program change messages, you can alter sounds during a sequence.

For instance, if on channel 1 you have a violin that plays only at the start of the track, you can switch to any other instrument once it has stopped playing by inserting a program change message.

Bear in mind, though, that most synthesisers take a fraction of a second to

Here's news of an update for Cubase Score 2.0*. Anybody running version 2.0 under Windows 95 will have experienced several problems, the most annoying of which is that the activity display doesn't work. This has now been fixed, and there are several new features — one of which is a new "virtual" MIDI port which allows you to output via the Windows MIDI mapper.

Most of the problems associated with printing and editing scores have been eliminated, and there's improved text handling. Keyboard commands which make use of the Alt Gr key proved to be a problem for many users since not all keyboards have the key. This can now be simulated using Control and Alt.

* The current version is 2.03. Updates can be obtained from Harman Audio (see page 317).

Chord of the Month

This month's mega-chord is G minor with a ninth. The notes in the chord are: G, B flat, D, F and A — the ninth gives the chord a jazz flavour.

change sounds. Any program change messages should therefore be made, say, a whole bar before the new instrument is required to play, to avoid any glitches.

● Mapping events

Panning an instrument, or effect, within a song can give a track greater stereo presence. However, inserting pan messages (continuous controller no10) is time con-

copies to transmit on a separate channel. Subtly panning the individual instruments will create a wide sound.

● Creating chorus effects

Playing two identical parts on the same MIDI channel causes a flanging, or chorus, effect. You can alter the effect by changing the velocities of each part.

● Create delays

If you don't have delay, or echo, built in to your synthesiser, you can create your own by copying parts to several other tracks. By offsetting the copied tracks, a delay effect is created. Delayed tracks can be reduced in volume or velocity and panned to create stereo effects.
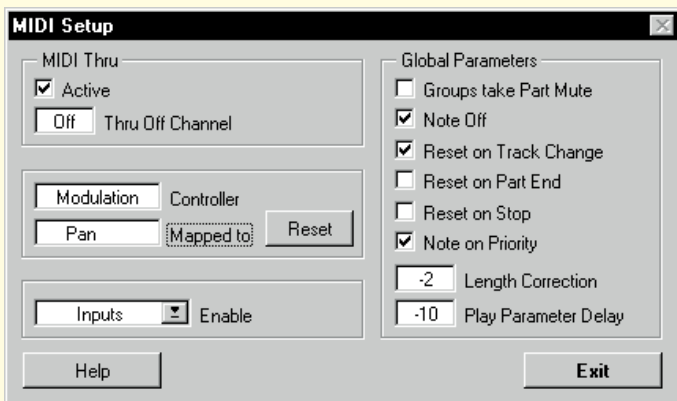
● Storing cue points locator positions in Cubase

You can store cue points in Cubase in two ways: as song position, and as left and right locator positions. To store your current song position (for example, the start of a chorus), hold shift and press 0-9. To recall cue points,

Mapping controllers in Cubase can save you hours of inputting CCs manually

suming and incredibly dull. Mapping a controller, such as modulation, to pan or other CC will allow you to record data in real time from your MIDI keyboard. In Cubase this can be done from the MIDI setup dialogue box. Going back to templates, you can save tracks or parts containing just the pan information for later use in other tracks.

● Massive string pads

By layering sounds you can create a bigger sound. Layering works particularly well with strings and pianos, although you can experiment with other timbres.

There are two ways to layer sounds. The first is to set several instruments to receive on the same MIDI channel when connected to the same MIDI port. If channels are fixed, as they are on sound cards, you can alternatively copy whole tracks within your sequencer and set the "ghost"

simply press the location at which it was stored.

The same procedure is used to store locator positions, only these are saved and recalled using function keys. If a part is highlighted in the arrange window, pressing Alt Gr (or Control and Alt) and P will position the left and right locators around it.

PCW Contacts

Readers' contributions to the Sound column are music to our ears. If you have any hints or tips, any MIDI-related items or general comments, send them in to the usual *PCW* address, or to **steven_helstrip@pcw.ccmail. compuserve.com**

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