

Rhythm demon

Steven Helstrip moves to that toe-tapping, hip-swinging beat as he advises on the best way to include drum sounds in your work. Plus, some tasty multimedia titles, and something exotic to get all you ravers, er, raving.

Drums and percussion have never been as important in music as they are in today's dance-orientated market. They set the pace, determine the groove and generally drive a track along, providing it's done carefully. Later we'll be looking at ways to beef up

created on. I don't want to rant on too much about the M word but I thought I should let you know about a new title I recently came across, called Discovering Keyboards, from Voyetra.

If you're not content with just playing them, and are interested in what makes

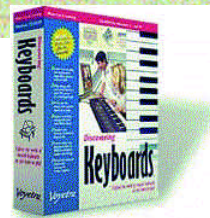
them tick, how they evolved, or just want to improve your playing, Discovering Keyboards could help out. The package comprises five categories, including a detailed tour of keyboards right back to early spinets, a section on understanding MIDI and synthesis, keyboard lessons, a songbook, and, for when you just can't take any more, three arcade-style games to test your knowledge and playing abilities.

The keyboard lessons make use of video footage and varied exercises to introduce music notation, theory and playing technique. With a MIDI keyboard connected to your PC, your progress can be monitored as you work your way through three courses. In the songbook you'll find tunes that range from classical, through to folk music. If there's nothing to your liking there, you can import your own or someone else's MIDI files. Songs can be viewed as traditional notation and later printed as

sheet music.

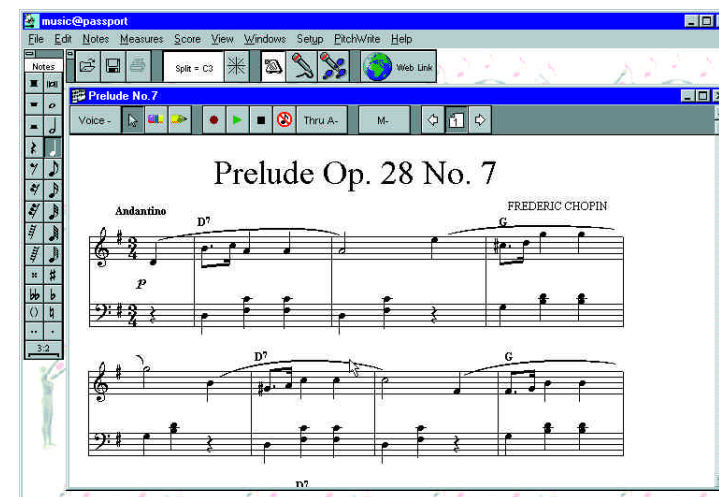
At a shade under 80 quid, Discovering Keyboards might strike you as an expensive hobby. But it's great fun and works out cheaper than paying for five hours' worth of private lessons. I wish it had been around 15

Left Here's how your PC makes music, allegedly
Below Left That's the box it comes in
Below Enter the land of keyboards, from early spinets to the latest synth technologies

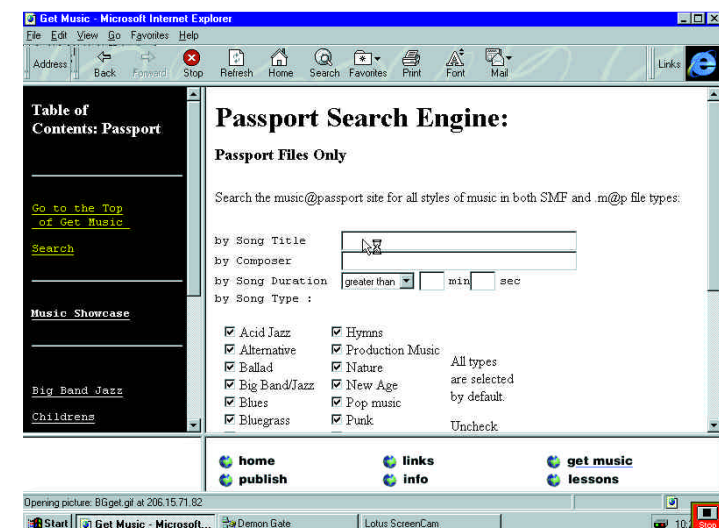


kick drums and add interest to hi-hat patterns. First, though, news of two new software packages.

Unlike the internet, which I consider to be still in its infancy, multimedia has finally reached the stage where it can be used to get results, quickly. I say this because it is only now that rock solid titles are surfacing, and the hardware needed to run them is no longer confined to the workstations they are



Have your music published on the net within minutes with Music@Passport



Passport's internet search engine doing its stuff

years ago when I was just getting started. **Discovering Keyboards** £79.95 (incl VAT) **Contact** Turnkey (see "PCW Details" box, page 294)

Music@PassPort

One of my biggest hopes for the internet is that one day it will be able to cope with sufficient chunks of data so that music of CD quality can be transmitted in real time. It might just be another 15 years, though, before this comes along. Until then, we'll have to make do with noisy 8-bit files, which take an eternity to download.

An alternative way to get hold of music on the net is to download MIDI files. They're not difficult to find, and files exist even for tracks that haven't been written yet. Passport Designs has launched a new site to coincide with the release of its new notation package, Music@Passport. The idea is that, at the click of a button, you can have your music published on the net as soon as you've finished it. The site contains

a detailed MIDI file search engine, so if you're looking for a particular song, it shouldn't take long to come up with the goods.

Music@Passport is essentially an upgrade to Music Time, and in addition to its internet links, has some neat new features, the best of which is PitchWrite. This enables practically anyone to record and sequence music, since it converts any incoming audio signal (someone singing, playing guitar, etc) into MIDI data. I haven't had a chance to check it out yet, but I'm assured it works well, assuming you can sing in tune. Music@Passport comes with its own microphone and a copy of Microsoft Internet Explorer, all for just £99.95 (incl VAT).

Contact Turnkey

Creating better rhythm tracks

Simple, uncluttered rhythms tend to work best in dance music. Listen to Robert Myles' Children: it's the perfect example. At the busiest times, all that comes through is a four-on-the-floor kick drum, an off-beat

hi-hat pattern and a hand clap. The best place to start when programming rhythm tracks is with the kick drum. Don't simply opt for the one featured on your last track, though: go out and find or create a new one. Fresh sounds inspire new ideas.

The 909 kick drum has dominated dance music for the past decade. However, it is seldom used without being treated. Try doubling it up with a sub-bass note, tuned to the key of the track — this will add considerable depth. Be careful, though, not to have the sub-bass too high in the mix. For more punch, combine it with, say, a kick drum tuned to two or three octaves above. Again, spend time getting the balance right between each element.

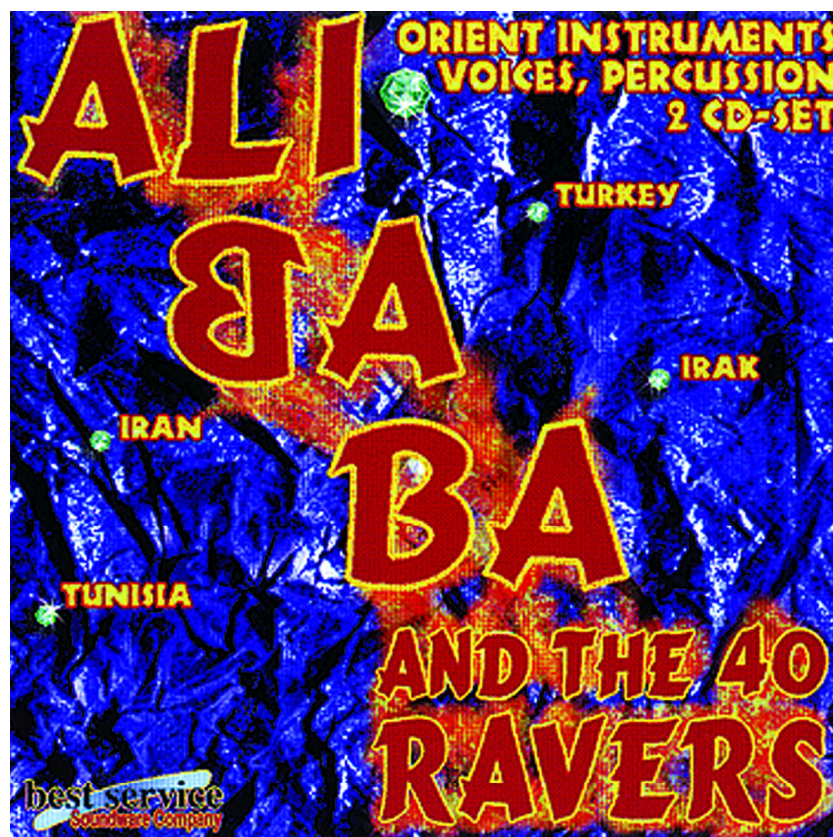
Only when you're happy with the sound should you think about EQing. To give the sound a hard edge, try boosting at around 1kHz. If you have a compressor in your setup, give your kick drum (and bass) priority. Compression tightens up low frequencies to provide "professional" studio results.

There's always a danger with hi-hats to just simply play in a semi-quaver (16ths) pattern. Try to avoid this; it's been heard a million and one times before. Give the listener something interesting to listen to: for example, choose two, or three closed hat sounds (it could even be the same sound with different filters, or pitch) and alternate between them. Play around with their velocities to create a groove, and even offset the odd note so that the pattern isn't too metronomic. At the end of an eight-bar pattern, trip the listener up by introducing a skip in the pattern, or by accenting a particular note. Hi-hats cut through better when positioned slightly off-centre in the stereo field. If you have two hi-hat patterns going, it is sometimes effective to have them panning in opposite directions.

Next month we'll be carrying on with drum production tips and looking at ways to extract individual hits from drum loops. Until then, happy sequencing.

Sounds on the net

- Several issues back I mentioned some of my favourite audio utilities that I have collected over the years; the one I still use most frequently is a simple tempo/delay calculator. Since then, I have discovered an even better version that calculates delay settings in dotted and triplet note values. It can be downloaded from www2.cybernex.net/~jonwitte/ddtc.html



Alibaba and The 40 Ravers

Instruments from the orient abound on this two-CD set from the Best Service Soundware Company. Having recovered from the giggles induced by the title and made some sense of the poorly-translated introduction in the booklet, I sat myself down for over two hours of intense foot tapping, fingers poised by the sampler.

On track one there's a demo of what's to come, followed by another 197 tracks, grouped into a myriad of unpronounceable musical genres based on geographical location. Many of the instruments, likewise, don't roll too naturally off the western tongue.

The quality of playing and the recordings of instruments on this CD is highly impressive, most of which are stereo. You might have difficulty making use of tunes played on some of the more obscure instruments, but on the whole the standard is high. I do feel that the CD could be more flexible in providing single-shot samples of individual instrument samples. Although there is a huge range of authentic melodies and percussive grooves, it never hurts to have a go yourself at creating loops.

Whether it's Turkish Orchestras, ethnic choirs or just some good old bongo samples, you won't go far wrong with this CD which promises to add a touch of Eastern spice to your tracks.

Alibaba and The 40 Ravers

Price £59.95 (incl VAT)

Contact Time + Space (see "PCWDetails")

- Another site worth visiting, providing you're an AWE-32 owner, is hanna.lysator.liu:7576/awe32/wav. There you will find stacks of samples ready to download to the card.
- If you're running low on effects units, you can now use your PC to produce real-time effects such as reverb, choruses, etc. You do need, of course, a sound card and a copy of Realtime. This can be downloaded from www.glue.umd.edu/~bmarinar/realtime.html. Realtime also has a 64-band

graphic EQ and the ability to save samples (post-effect) to disc.

•PCW Details

If you have any hints or tips, MIDI-related items or general comments, send them to **Steven Helstrip** at the usual PCW address or at sound@pcw.vnu.co.uk

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