



Short and sweet

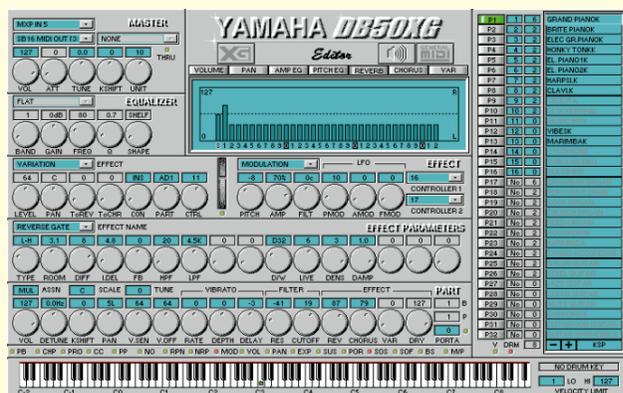
Steven Helstrip rounds up a batch of simple yet essential sound and MIDI utilities.

This month, we'll be taking a look at a wide range of essential sound and MIDI utilities which I have rounded up over the years. Many of the utilities covered here have been placed on this month's free, cover-mounted CD-ROM — so give them a whirl. They can be found in the soundutils folder. First, though, I thought I'd let you know about a new, low cost digital sequencer from Voyetra.

Digital Orchestrator Plus

Orchestrator is the latest MIDI sequencer to be kitted out with audio. In addition to over 1,000 MIDI tracks, you can now record, edit and playback any number of audio tracks, limited only by your PC's processing power and disc space. I spent a few hours with it and was surprised at how quick it is to learn. The on-line help is excellent and you also get video tutorials provided on CD-ROM.

In the MIDI department, Orchestrator Plus offers all the usual editing facilities including score, piano role and grid edit pages. There are stacks of useful high-end features, too, including humanise quantise, track offsets and a larger than large SMPTE display for when your monitor has



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to be shoved to the back of the studio.

On the audio side, Orchestrator has many professional features, from built-in effects to normalise and automated fading. Effects include digital delays, choruses, flanging, limiters and compressors. To help you on your way, the CD-ROM contains 50 MIDI drum files covering styles from swing to techno, and dozens of audio samples to use in your compositions. Digital Orchestrator Plus is available from Turnkey, price £149 (incl. VAT).



XGedit

Last year, Yamaha released the DB50XG WaveTable daughter-board based on its MU80 synthesiser. At around £140, it is without doubt the best value synth, providing you

Digital Orchestrator Plus has many professional audio features

already have a PC and sound card. What makes the board so special are its effects and real-time control of sound parameters using NRPNs — that's non-registered parameter numbers to you and me.

The preset patches, or instruments, are not particularly special, but once you start to tweak them, you can create some excellent effects. As you can imagine, you need to be a MIDI wizard to program instruments from within the edit pages of a sequencer. That's where XGedit comes in.

XGedit provides a user-friendly interface to the XG chipset, enabling you to access every parameter using knobs and sliders, rather than seemingly endless rows of numbers. Edits are performed and heard in real-time. You can gradually

apply a filter to a bassline and slowly increase the chorus depth without hearing any glitches as the changes kick in.

Edits can be saved as standard MIDI or system exclusive files and later imported to a sequencer. Where XGedit becomes really useful, though, is when using it alongside a sequencer with a multi-client MIDI driver, such as Multimid. The registration price is £25 and you can make contact on 100270.2603@compuserve.com.

Multimid

Multimid allows up to eight MIDI applications to access a device at the

Chord of the Month

This month's triad is G aug5 (i.e. G with an augmented fifth). It's a great chord to slip in when playing 12-bar blues in the key of C, before returning to the tonic chord.

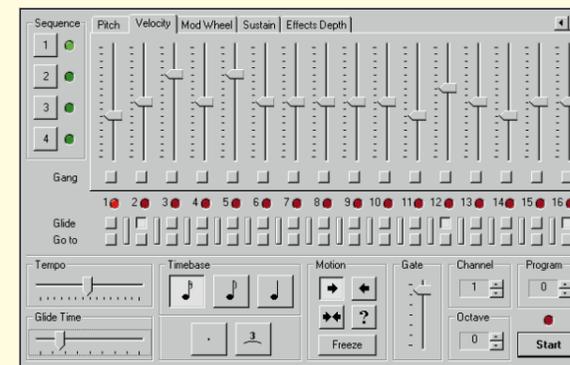


The DOS-based NoteWorthy 2

same time — rather like having a toilet with eight seats. Without a multi-client driver, it is not possible to access a MIDI port simultaneously from two pieces of software. Neither is it possible to route the data output from one application to the input of another. Multimid enables you to do both of these.

The best example of Multimid doing its stuff is when you want to record the output

and record your movements. Another task Multimid can take care of is routing MTC, or MIDI Time Code, between applications, enabling them to be synchronised. The current version, 1.04, is written in 16-bit code and therefore only works with Windows 3.1 MIDI drivers. Until a 32-bit version is written, Windows 95 users may find it worthwhile re-installing their old sound card drivers. Registration price is \$39.95 (contact: seib@t0.or.at).



NoteWorthy 2

NoteWorthy is a low cost, easy to use DOS-based notation package. With more substantial features than

Seq-303 is an analogue-style sequencer for Windows 95

your average utility, it's more of an application, really. However, from the amount of letters I receive regarding budget notation software, I thought I'd include it here.

Noteworthy is best described as a DTP package for music notation since there is no support for MIDI. Don't be put off, though. The way you enter notes on a staff is very intuitive. If you want a G, for example, you press G on the keyboard. It's that easy. There's a full range of symbols, from grace-notes to *dal segno* signs, and all marks are free formatting so you can place them wherever you like. The layout tools are very comprehensive and quick to learn. Registration charge is £45 from Braeburn Software (01750 721854).

Chord Factory

This is a simple but useful utility to play and display the notes within chords on a piano keyboard. There are 20 chord extensions from which to choose (minor sixth, major seventh, and so on) and a staff to show accidentals within each key. Chords can be played through any MIDI port or sound card. The charge for registration is £25. Call Openfeature on 0181 518 6245.

Tempo-Delay Calculator

Another extremely simple, yet useful utility. It works out six different delay settings in milliseconds, given any tempo. This enables you to quickly program your digital delay unit or synthesiser to repeat (echo) at regular intervals in sync with the tempo, or speed, of the track. Registration costs \$5.

PC Dance Tools

You can probably recall being told never to judge a book by its cover. Well, I am about to amend this old maxim to include sampling CDs as well. PC Dance Tools isn't going to win any prizes for its cover design, neither will it win any prizes for its content because there aren't any up for grabs. If there were, however, this CD might just be nominated for the best all-round PC sample collection in the dance category.

There are no less than 1,200 samples practically filling this CD. Whether it's kick drums, breakbeats, vocals, bass sounds or synths, they're all on here. What's more, they are also available in various formats ready to download to whichever sound card or sampler you use. These include Digidesign's SampleCell II, AWE-32 and standard wave files for Turtle Beach cards.

All samples are arranged into categories and banked together for easy finding. Many of the instruments are also multi-sampled across different regions of the keyboard and pre-looped. As a result, the sound banks are quite large — over 1Mb in most cases. Drumkits, which include Roland's TR808 and 909 sets, are fully mapped out across the keyboard and, where possible, conform to the General MIDI layout.

At £49.95, this CD is a touch overpriced when compared to D-Zone's compilations but it may be worth the investment if you're hoping to expand your sample collection and cannot find the time to arrange and layer patches. PC Dance Tools is distributed by Time and Space (see the *Contacts* panel, below).



The MIDIKeys on-screen keyboard

Seq-303

This is an analogue-style sequencer for Windows 95 inspired, presumably, by Roland's TB-303. It allows you to create excellent sequences by setting sliders for 16 stages, or notes. You can apply *portamento*, or glide, between individual notes and set the velocity for each. All you need to use it is a sound card and a little imagination. It can be synchronised to other MIDI applications and output MIDI to any port. Seq-303 is freeware. Contact Jim Johnson at 70461.10@compuserve.com.

Dumper

Here is another short, but useful utility. It takes any Windows wave file recorded at 44KHz 16-bit mono and "dumps" it to any sampler that supports Sample MIDI Dump Standard, including most Akai, Roland and E-MU samplers. Dumper is freeware: contact 70662.1252@compuserve.com.

MIDIKeys

This is an on-screen piano keyboard that lets you play instruments from any sound source using just your mouse. It's great for checking out sounds when you can't be bothered to switch on a MIDI keyboard. MIDIKeys also plays chords. Simply select the chord type and click the root note on the keyboard. Registration will cost you the price of a postage stamp for a completed and mailed registration form: 76702.1603@compuserve.com.



Competition

As I was compiling this column, I received some email offering 50 CD-ROMs packed with AWE-32 utilities and sound banks in return for a blatant plug. So here goes. This excellent CD from High Wings Media Services contains over 100 sound banks and samples along with a sound bank editor, a demo of Cubase and a list of utilities as long as my arm.

You'll also find a handy program to digitally extract audio from CDs and a demo of Software Audio Workshop. All you have to do to win a copy is send a postcard to the address shown below. The first 50 to arrive will receive a copy absolutely free. (If you're not so lucky you can buy a copy for only £12.95).

● **Send your post cards to: PCW Sound Utilities Competition, High Wings Media Services, Denver House, Acton Burnell, Shrewsbury, SY5 7PQ.**

PCW Contacts

If you have any MIDI-related items or general comments, send them in to the usual PCW address, or to steven_helstrip@pcw.ccmil.compuserve.com

Turnkey 0171 379 5148 (Digital Orchestrator Plus)

Time + Space 01442 870681 (PC Dance Tools)

