THE SOUND BLASTER DIGEST

The Magazine for Sound Blaster Enthusiasts.

Published and Edited by Brad Barclay

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November & December 1992 Edition

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From the Editor's Desk:

No matter what you do with your computer, software makes the world go round. It comes in many flavours and many forms, from the commercial software you buy off of your local store's shelf, to the public domain, shareware, and freeware you can find on your local BBS system. No matter what you want to do, provided you have the hardware to match, you can almost always find the software you need quickly and easily, no matter where you are in the world.

The music card world is no exception to this great trove of software that is available at your fingertips. Today's game is, with few exceptions, always Sound Blaster or at least Ad Lib compatible. Utilities galore are available over various Bulletin Board Systems to do everything from edit and create your own instruments, to playing any type of music imaginable.

Music files themselves offer the greatest selection. You can find just about everything from old Classical period music, right up to today's top 30 hits. Thousands of files in scores of different file formats are available, and not very hard to find.

As to be expected, along with this great surge of music software that goes hand in hand with the great surge of music hardware that has hit the market recently, there are also various Music card magazines popping up around the country in just about as many different formats: from standard text to publications that require Windows, to others in even more odd formats!

Which leads me to the main thrust of this month's Editorial. Since our last issue, I have come across some new publications that concern themselves with various audio cards and MultiMedia itself. As to be expected, some of these are very good, and some will disappear in a short time, while others are riding the wave that we here at the **SOUND BLASTER DIGEST** caused in the industry the past 2 years.

The first of these new magazines is called The Pro Audio Spectrum & MultiMedia Digest. The author, a former **SOUND BLASTER DIGEST** reader himself, should be commended on his work. The magazine itself seems to have some good direction and writing in it, and has began it's own small following. I'm personally flattered that he publishes this digest of his own, in fact, as it would seem it was the **SBD** that started him on his way. But I have to think about the title: The Pro Audio Spectrum & MultiMedia Digest, **The MultiMedia Sound Blaster Digest?** Sounds pretty close to me. Plus the fact that both offer standard text and Windows editions, and the author even has a wife named

Karen. Well, I guess the latter can't really be considered plagiarism on his part (believe me, this comment is meant in all friendliness and best wishes to the author of the <u>PAS & MM Digest</u>, but if one can't make fun of his competition, then who can he make fun of?).

As a policy, **<u>The Sound Blaster Digest</u>** welcomes new competition. But just remember: no matter how shaky our parent company **WAFFER! MultiMedia Productions** may sometimes seem, we've lasted for two years now, and have seen numerous of other online magazine come and go. We plan on being here a very long time.

Hope you enjoy this issue of the **<u>Sound Blaster Digest</u>**! Happy second birthday to us!

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The PC Sound Card Buyers Guide.

By the America Online PC Music & Sound forum staff

Not long ago, buying a sound card meant deciding between the original AdLib Music Card or Creative Labs' Sound Blaster. The choice was simple: basic synthesized FM music, or FM music plus digital recording and playback.

But the competition is considerably stiffer these days! And though there are a number of new sound cards that are compatible with the original mono Sound Blaster, the most interesting new products are stereo. The Sound Blaster Pro (SB Pro) from Creative Labs, and MediaVision's Pro AudioSpectrum (PAS) have established stereo cards as a new minimum standard for most buyers.

Stereo FM music and stereo digital input/output are standard on all the new high-end cards. But extras like CD-ROM interfaces (SCSI or proprietary), different types of music synthesis, and software bundles can complicate the choice among competing products.

The sound card market has been flooded in the last several months with outstanding new hardware. Among the recent introductions (just to name a few): the new Gravis UltraSound; MediaVision's Pro AudioSpectrum series; Creative Labs' Sound Blaster Pro series; ATI's Stereo F/X; the on-again, off-again AdLib Gold series; and the high-end Turtle Beach Multisound.

So how do you decide? With all of these choices, how do you know which PC audio hardware is best for you?

First, consider your goals. For example, you wouldn't want to buy a VGA card that has a speed rating of "barely swifter than molasses" if you are a devout Windows user -- but a co-processed graphics card is a waste of money if you never use VGA graphics. So, when evaluating an audio card, you have to consider both its capabilities and your needs. Ask yourself a few questions, like:

- What do you want to use this card for?

If games are your bag, you will want to stay within the realm of Sound Blaster compatible music cards! But if you are more concerned with multimedia or MIDI sequencing, obviously you may want to shift your view more to the PAS-16 or Turtle Beach Multisound end of the scale.

- How important is compatibility?

Again, if you are interested in sequencing MIDI songs and playing other peoples' MIDI music, you are definitely going to take this into consideration when making your purchase. Game players may want to take a serious look at the SB Pro - which is currently the most widely supported stereo audio card.

- What about vendor support?

The Mondo AudioBuster sound card may be the hottest ticket in town, but if there are no companies supporting the product, you should cool your heels and watch the trends for a few months. If the major industry software and/or hardware vendors are not supporting the product you have your eyes on, you will probably have a difficult time finding any software for your new goody.

- Is multimedia a factor?

If you plan to use a sound card for developing or presenting multimedia, compatibility with your presentation software is of paramount concern. Since most multimedia software runs under Windows, make sure to choose a card with Windows 3.1 compatibility.

- Is MIDI an important feature?

Although all of the sound cards mentioned can be used to compose and play MIDI music, for serious MIDI sequencing you may want to consider the high-end Turtle Beach Multisound audio card or a dedicated MIDI interface/synth device like the Roland SCC-1.

When you've decided on your needs, it's time to start reading reviews, talking to computer hardware dealers, investigating all the nit-picking details, and asking LOTS of questions! Be patient -- chances are, you'll only be buying one sound card for the next two or three years, so you certainly aren't going to be happy if you rush out and buy a product that becomes obsolete before it is six months old.

Don't try to be the first person on your block to get the newest whiz-bang sound card or you may get stuck with hardware that garners no third party support. And remember the PC Music & Sound Forum's motto:

 ***"The best specs in the world don't mean diddly if the card won't
 work with your software!!!"***

Special Preview: New products from Creative Labs!

Creative Labs Unveils New Products:

Creative Labs, the maker of the world-famous Sound Blaster PC audio card, has just released 3 new sound peripherals. The Port Blaster (priced at $199), the MIDI Blaster (priced at $499), and the much awaited Sound Blaster 16 (notice it's not called the Sound Blaster Pro 16) (priced at $349). All prices are in US Funds, of course.

The Sound Blaster 16 is fully Sound Blaster Pro compatible. It features the OPL3 20-voice stereo FM chip, mixer, 4 watts per channel amplifier, MIDI port, microphone & stereo line-in jacks, and volume controls. None of this are earth-shaking changes. The only major change is that digital capabilities have been increased to full 16-bit 44.1 Khz stereo sampling & playback for optimal CD-quality sound. One mail-order store sells this card for a low $189. So many Creative Labs fans will like this card.

The MIDI Blaster is something entirely new that wasn't very well documented It's an external device that meets general MIDI specifications and provides PCM (pulse-code modulation) wave-sampled instruments sounds with 20 instrument polyphony and presets that feature 128 sounds, 33 effects, and 55 drums. Judging from the price, I suspect that this is module that was rumoured to have the Proteus EMU synthesizer.

The Port Blaster is a version of the Sound Blaster Pro that plugs in the parallel port. It has practically all the features that the regular SB Pro has. 8-bit stereo sound, OPL3 chip, mixer, everything that's significant. I'm not sure, but I don't think that it has the SCSI port because it plugs into the parallel port but it does have a MIDI port. At this price, I suspect that Creative Labs is offering a real deal.

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What is the Virtual Village?

Commercial Review:
Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective CD-ROM

Written by ICOM Simulations Inc.

Reviewed by Brad Barclay.

As the title implies, in *Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective* you play the part of the most famous fictional detective in the world. You have three different mysteries to solve: The Case of the Mummy's Curse, The Case of the Mystified Murderess, and The Case of the Tin Soldier.

This game is quite unique from all of the other MultiMedia CD-ROM games thus far reviewed in the **Sound Blaster Digest** in that it uses digitized audio and video as the main focus of the game itself.

Each mystery starts off with an introduction movie: a digitized video of Sherlock Holmes and Watson, along with a guest or two, talking amongst themselves, much like watching a television show or a movie at your local theatre. But the difference in this game is that you have full control over where Holmes and Watson go, and whom they speak with. Each selecting bring up another video, along with full audio. The player picks up clues as they speak with various suspects, and inspect various places and objects. Once enough clues have been picked up in order to solve the mystery, the player goes to the court of London in order to plead their case in front of a judge. The player is then asked various questions (assuming that there is enough evidence to warrant a trial) to show that they have interpreted the clues correctly in order to fully solve the case.

Each video is shown in a window in the middle of the computer screen. The game itself uses a resolution of 320 x 200, with 256 colours, and thus requires at least a standard VGA adaptor and monitor to display correctly. Although this resolution may seem to be quite low, the quality of the digital video along with the fast screen updates fools the eye into thinking that there is more detail than there really is.

The user interface is quite simple indeed. The game utilizes a Graphical User Interface with the minimal number of buttons or selections. The game is extremely simple to navigate using the mouse (which is required to play *Sherlock*), and even a novice computer user can begin to enjoy this game with a minimal amount of effort.

The acting itself is quite good. It is obvious that every effort was made by Icom to hire the best quality actors it could. The mysteries and scenes themselves are always quite believable.

In conclusion, this game is really a must for anyone who enjoys a good mystery, and especially those who enjoy reading about the adventures of Sherlock Holmes,

Official SBD Support BBS's:

You may notice that later on in this issue, we have included a special listing of **Official SBD Support BBS's.** What does this mean?

The **Official SBD Distribution BBS's** are a group of bulletin board systems around the world which receive a copy of the **SBD** on the day of it's official release, straight from **SBD Head Office.** These BBS systems are *guaranteed* to have the **SBD** on the day it's released, and these files are *guaranteed* to be the exact official **SBD** distribution files, guaranteeing you, the reader, with fast, free* copies of the **SBD**.

If you are the sysop of a BBS system and are interested in becoming an **Official SBD Distribution BBS,** fill out the form included in this edition of the **SBD** along with a cheque or money order for $100 CDN (Yes, we've reduced our rate from $120!), payable on a Canadian bank. In order to fully qualify for **Official SBD Distribution** status, you must be able to provide the **SBD** for free to all users, and the **SBD** must be available for download on a users first call. When you register your BBS system with the **SBD**, you'll be added to our list, and will receive the **SBD** 6 times a year, right on the official distribution date. You and your users will also receive special bonus files, and special discounts to special offers from the **SBD**. The staff of the **SBD** will also be available for your users to leave messages to and ask questions of. For more details on this special service, please contact the **SBD Head Office**. See **Contacting Us...** below for more information on how to contact our head office.

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* Calling users may have to absorb any charges incurred from long-distance calling. Contact your local telephone utility for information on long distance charges and calling.

Planning a MultiMedia Presentation

Part I: What do you wish to accomplish, and how?

Written by Brad Barclay.

MultiMedia has became quite the catch word these days. Everyone is wanting to get in on the act, and MultiMedia presentations is quickly becoming the advertising medium of the 90's. The ability for a company to produce full-featured presentations for training sessions, interactive tutorials, or self-running demonstrations for trade shows has became quite the interesting prospect indeed. Displays can be designed in-house by existing staff, who in many cases don't even need to know how to program a computer to design a presentation. All it takes is the right equipment, a little time, and knowledge of the product or service that you're trying to advertise. This is the first article of a multi-part series which will deal with how to design, implement and finally present a MultiMedia presentation of your own. In this first part we will begin with the concepts and ideas that you wish to convey, and how to go about organizing them into a coherent concept before begin actually designing the display.

The first thing one should establish before beginning to design a MultiMedia presentation is what it is that they wish to accomplish by designing the presentation. Do you wish to inform an audience of some fact or idea? Do you wish to advertise a product or service? Are your intentions to educate the viewers?

The second thing to identify in the design of your MultiMedia presentation is your target group. Are you targeting a small group, or a large group? Are you targeting business groups, educational groups, students, professionals, interest groups, or any other group of people? Or perhaps you will be targeting a varied group of people. Do you expect this group to know or understand the basics of the idea or concept that you wish to convey? What level of understanding will your audience have? This can be a big factor in your decisions on how to design your presentation. If you expect your audience to be perhaps of the professional sort that have a good understanding your the idea or concept that you wish to convey, you will probably wish to concentrate on expanding upon the basics of the concept or idea: by going over the basics which the group already knows, you can make a presentation uninteresting. On the other hand, if you expect your target group to be of a basic or unknown level of understanding on the concept or idea you're presenting, a preview of the basics may be a better idea, with a look into some of the more advanced aspects of your concept for those who catch on quickly. For example, if you're trying to sell a new computerized

stitching machine to a group of clothing manufacturers,

it is probably best to show them many of the technical aspects of your equipment. But doing a presentation of the same product with the same intentions (to sell your machine) to a group of people who enjoy sewing as a hobby, you would probably want to demonstrate how your product is useful, without going into the complexities of interfacing with a computer, or how the software was programmed.

Lastly, you must decide what sort of format your presentation will take on. Will the presentation be a self-running demonstration, or will it be interactive? Self-running displays are good when you wish to address a group of people at once, but an interactive display is better suited if you expect only one or two people to participate in your display at any one time.

When trying to answer these questions, always remember this one simple idea: to get people interested in what you wish to convey, you must catch their interest, and give them some way of participating in what your display has to offer. Your display should be able to answer many of your audiences questions, and to do this one must attempt to think like their audience when planning their display. Again, an accurate estimation of the knowledge of your audience is the key to success.

Next issue we'll deal with planning the actual display itself: how to segment it into scenes, how to convey your ideas within each scene, and how to maximize the use of audio and video to capture and keep your audience's attention.

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The **Sound Blaster Digest** is available in over 15 countries around the world, on many of the planet's best bulletin board systems. Sadly, in many areas the **SBD** is very difficult to find on a regular basis, if at all.   In addition to this, it sometimes occurs that the reader is just unable to find the issue or version (either Windows or Text) that they want.

For those readers who have problems in receiving the **SBD**, look no further. The **Sound Blaster Digest** offers a new and improved subscription service! Once every two months another new and wonderful edition of the **Sound Blaster Digest** is sent to your mailing address, including both the Text

and Windows issues on a single diskette in either 3.5" or 5.25" diskette format.

You will receive 6 issues in all, and if you wish to continue to subscribe after the year is over, you will be able to at a reduced rate.

Here is a listing of our Subscription rates as of September 1st, 1992:

Within Canada:	**$30**
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All prices are listed in Canadian dollars. Orders from outside of North America, please be sure to make all cheques or money orders payable on a Canadian or US bank. All other cheques and money orders will be returned to the sender. If you are unsure on how to send an international cheque or money order payable on a Canadian bank, please contact your local banking branch.

The Wonderful World of MIDI

Written by Cory Mistysyn.

(*Editor's Note: Valli Persad, our regular MIDI columnist will be back with another of his famous MIDI columns in our next issue. Until then, Valli has designated Cory to take over the reins for a month. This is Cory's first article with the **Sound Blaster Digest**).*

Ever since the PC was introduced to the world, its wonderful world of sound has grown and is now becoming so large, both as a concept and a global product, that one's household will soon be incomplete without it. This "world" I speak of was a miracle to the human ear when it could listen to beeps and high-to-low tones only a few short decades ago.

Today, who is going to sit down at their home computer to listen to beeps and other computerized sounds? There is no miracle in that anymore, as it has been replaced by Sound Blasters, CD-audio, MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), and the list of audio products go on and on. In the early 1980's, the first standard MIDI product was introduced. Ever since, its attractive functions and capabilities have resulted into a growing curiosity and time-eating hobby for MIDI users. MIDI products have swept the music industry. This is a wonderful thing to hear after realizing the IBM PC was originally designed to be a business machine.

Now, why add sound to your PC? Maybe you haven't had the privilege to play a game or two with Sound Blaster quality music and sound. Do you only have a PC speaker? No PC speaker's limited sound will ever come near to matching the Sound Blaster's sound capabilities, such as playing .VOC files. You get more static and/or pauses while the .VOC is loaded bit by bit in the middle of the audio playback. This does depend on your .VOC-playing program, but it still does not reach SB standards. The same applies to .MOD files; and, as far as I know, .ROL, .CMF, and many other file types will not run through PC Speaker.

Well, I guess I've babbled long enough.. I hope you enjoyed this article, and I also hope it has aided you in any possible decision concerning today's PC's numerous sound capabilities.

Shareware Review: Opl-2 Voice Editor

Software by Jesper Hanson

Reviewed by Brad Barclay

At last, a shareware program for editing and creating your own instruments for any Ad Lib or Sound Blaster compatible audio card! This excellent piece of software allows nearly anyone to design their own instruments quickly and easily.

The software is really quite easy to use, even if one doesn't know what all the different settings are for. Requiring at least VGA (and making full use of it's 640 x 480 resolution with 16 colours), an Ad Lib compatible audio card, and a mouse, this software is easy to use and quite informative too.

The screen is split into two sides: one for editing the carrier, and one for editing the modulator. Each side of the screen has a window showing a colourful graph of your audio information. Everything is manipulated by clicking on various buttons on turn a function on or off, along with increasing or decreasing the value of many other variables.

Both drum mode and instrument modes are supported, with two buttons on the screen allowing the user to playback a single note of their newly designed instrument, or to play the whole scale using their instrument. These two features help an instrument designer to fine-tune their creations. Also supported is a MIDI load option for loading in a simple MIDI song file in .TRK format (this is a

single track MIDI format file with an optional drum track on track 16, renamed with an extension of .TRK) for playing back a simple song while utilizing your new instrument. This feature is extremely helpful when you're trying to choose just the perfect instrument for your .ROL or .CMF song file creation: by listening to the song with a selected instrument, you can fine tune it until it fits into your song perfectly.

The included documentation does very well to go into the extreme complexities of FM synthesis, with examples and explanations as to how all the information contained in the instrument file is used to generate the final instrument. Also included is the actual file format for .INS files.

About my only complaints about this software is in it's lack of ability to work with Sound Blaster .SBI files, and it's lack of being able to read and write instruments to and from a .BNK instrument bank file. These two simple features would make the software even more useful for creating your own instruments. The documentation included with the software states that an OPL-3 version is in the works for the new Sound Blaster Pro series.

Overall, this is an excellent piece of software, and is a must for every serious music programmer. It's ease of use and well thought out interface make it more than a capable instrument editor.

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Contacting Us...

We enjoy hearing from our readers, and we are always willing to accept submissions by readers. If you wish to contact us at the **Sound Blaster Digest**, the following information should make it a whole lot easier.

By mail, print out the included envelope and attach sufficient postage. Or write to us at:

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You may also E-mail the **SBD** at the following InterNet address:

InterNet: sbdbrad@aol.com

You may also leave E-Mail to the **SBD** on any of our **Official Support BBS's.** Please address all messages to **Brad Barclay**. Please see the next article for our listing of **Official Support BBS's.**

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Official Sound Blaster Digest BBS's:

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The Toystore BBS	(408) 432-6061	San Jose, CA
The Virtual Village BBS	(416) 538-9999	Toronto, ON

[*] For a free America Online Starter Kit or more information, call (800) 827-6364

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Wrapping It Up:

Well, this December 1st marks the second anniversary of our first edition of the **Sound Blaster Digest**.   Many people have put in many hours and days of their time into producing the 20 issues we currently have available to the public, and I'd like it be know that without their efforts, we may have never made it to where we are today.

Upcoming **SBD** events to watch for: **Media Television**, a production of Toronto's hottest television station, **City TV** has expressed an interest in doing a report on the **SBD**. If this goes through to it's completion, we'll be sure to provide the time and date of the telecast on many BBS systems in the Toronto

area. Also, be watching next issue for our **SBD Demo Tape, Volume II**. Yes, we know it's been promised for a long time, but by next issue it will be available to the general public.

Also, before we sign-off for this issue of the **Digest**, I would like to welcome on a new addition to the **SBD** team: Mike Stafford, who will be in charge of disk duplication and distribution. Also, Karen O'Hearn will become a more active member of the **Digest** team, utilizing her free time to go towards Subscription distribution. Karen has been with the **SBD** since issue #3.

Thanks again for reading the **<u>Sound Blaster Digest</u>**. Deadline for submissions for issue #21 is Sunday, December 20th, 1992. Issue #21 will be released on Sunday, January 3rd, 1993. Hope to see you then!

Brad Barclay
Publisher of the SBD