



required for tracking and mixing are there, along with a few esoteric ones such as the new Pultronic Tube EQ by G-Sonique, a detailed re-creation of the original which was renowned for its tube-based analogue warmth.

Picture frames

A new video track has been added and video files can be dragged from Windows onto the track directly. Only AVI and WMV formats are officially supported, but, depending on your computer's configuration, other types such as MPEG or MP4 may prove loadable. Advice about this is included in the online help. MIDI, audio and video clips can be linked so that when you move a video clip, the associated audio moves with it.

For a budget-price program, Mixcraft 5's automation facilities are excellent. Envelopes can be created for every parameter of every effect and virtual instrument, as well as sends and the usual track parameters, volume and pan. Intriguingly, automation of high- and low-pass filters and resonance settings can be applied directly in a sound clip with the aid of a dropdown menu found in the toolbar. This is a particularly useful feature for dance music producers, who tend to make numerous frequency changes.

Automation also extends to the master track, where you can create volume fade-outs and so on. It's a pity, though, that tempo changes cannot be automated in the same easy way. As it stands, tempo changes are entered one-by-one into 'markers' along with key and signature changes. That's fine for basic tempo ramps, but for fine

Acoustica

MIXCRAFT 5



A 'studio for a song' is how Acoustica describes its budget music-making package. Keith Gemmell gets in the mix.

KEY FEATURES

- Record unlimited audio and MIDI tracks
- Arrange and score video, music, sound FX and voiceovers
- More than 3,000 music loops and sound effects supplied with the software
- 8 virtual instruments supplied
- 20 effects built-in, such as reverb, chorus, EQ and vintage tube EQs

MIXCRAFT 5

Manufacturer **Acoustica**
 Price **£69**
 Contact **Et Cetera 01706 285650**
 Web **www.acoustica.com**
 Minimum system requirements
PC 1GHz processor, Windows XP, 2GB RAM

Not so long ago, if you wanted a budget-priced DAW your only option was a cut-down version of an industry heavyweight such as Cubase or Logic. That changed in 2004 when Apple launched GarageBand. In the same year, Mixcraft appeared on the PC platform. Like GarageBand, it was easy to understand and didn't require a manual. No wonder, then, that it soon gained a following.

Since then, the software has steadily evolved and Mixcraft 5 now features a new video track, effects automation, a mixer, new instruments and sound effects plus a huge loop library.

Friendly face

With a similar layout and graphics, Mixcraft 5 looks a lot like GarageBand. It's just as easy to use and includes online help that explains what you need to know in a concise, friendly fashion.

Audio, virtual instrument, send, video and master track types are available, but there are no dedicated MIDI tracks for controlling hardware synthesizers and sound modules – you're limited to virtual instruments as far as MIDI is concerned. That's no big deal for much of the target market, though. And if you don't already have any virtual instruments, Mixcraft 5 comes with five of its own: Acoustica Instruments (a very good General MIDI

IT'S DIFFICULT TO FIND FAULT WITH A PROGRAM AS FEATURE-PACKED AS MIXCRAFT 5.

soundset with additional sampled sounds), Impulse (analogue synth), Minimogue VA (MiniMoog emulation) and VB3 Organ (a Hammond organ clone). In addition there are three third-party instruments – Lounge Lizard (modelled Rhodes and Wurlitzer electric pianos), Messiah (Prophet 5 emulation) and a bass synthesizer called Alien 303 – no prizes for guessing what that one sounds like!

Several effects from Acoustica are included by default along with a decent smattering from third-party developers as well. All of the basic plug-ins

adjustments you have to create and edit numerous markers. Perhaps a tempo track will be added in version 6.

New bypass

Anyone who's experienced problems with hardware driver compatibility on the PC/Windows platform in the past will be pleased to hear that Mixcraft can now communicate directly with your audio hardware, bypassing the operating system completely. You will need to have Windows 7 installed, though, which now provides very low latency and solid audio performance



MEASURING UP

Mackie's Tracttion 3 Project (£97) has similar features to Mixcraft and comes bundled with Mackie's mixing and mastering tools. If you don't need a notation editor, Reaper (\$60 discounted license) offers 64-bit audio processing, sample-accurate MIDI processing and convolution reverb.

with WaveRT Exclusive Mode. You may also need to buy a low-latency soundcard to replace your computer's built-in one.

In previous versions of Mixcraft, mixing was achieved using the controls to left of the timeline, but a new mixer has been added to the program. It's a modest affair, but it provides the basic recognisable features that all musicians will be familiar with, including a simple three-band EQ on every track. There's a button for accessing inserted effects and once you have set up a 'send track', a send knob appears in the channel strip.

Likewise, if you have created a virtual instrument track, a corresponding button appears that can be used to quickly change instruments and access presets. Volume fader levels are simply represented as percentage values, which is fine and very beginner-friendly.

Other new features include a notation editor and musical typing, for playing and entering notes using your computer's QWERTY keyboard. As expected, the notation facilities are basic. That said, there is enough there to write parts for personal and educational use and print them out. Recording directly to compressed OGG files is a great idea too, because they're around ten per cent smaller than WAV files and can easily be shared among students, laptop users and anyone who might need to record at conferences.

It's difficult to find fault with a program as feature-packed as Mixcraft 5, particularly at this price point.



Mixcraft 5 comes with some high-quality virtual instruments and sound-processing tools.

User-friendliness is obviously uppermost in the developers' minds, and all the basic tools for recording and mixing are present. There are also a good many advanced audio features, such as timestretching, pitch-shifting, beat detection and noise reduction.

In many respects, Mixcraft 5 is reasonably advanced and flexible software. But it's also very accommodating, and anyone new to recording will find themselves up and running in minutes. **MTM**

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- Easy to use
- Good selection of virtual instruments
- Excellent automation facilities
- Can record directly to OGG file format

WALK ON BY

- Basic audio/MIDI/notation editing
- No tempo track
- Lacks dedicated MIDI tracks for controlling external synths

VERDICT

A very impressive low-cost recording package that performs well and is packed with a staggering array of features.



It's in the detail

GIL NORTON

FOO FIGHTERS, PIXIES, GOMEZ

TONY PLATT

BOB MARLEY, ACID THIN LIZZY

STEVIE WONDER

SNOOP DOG, WILLIE NELSON

SVEN LENS

GOTSA, A PERFECT CIRCLE, SMETHEAD

TROY VAN LEEUWEN

ADRIAN BUSHBY

JACKNIFE LEE

REM, SNOW PATROL, GREEN DAY

DOM MORLEY

AMY WINEHOUSE, MARK RONSON

ENDA WALSH

US, SHANE MACGOWAN, CORRIE

DON WAS

BOB DYLAN, THE ROLLING STONES

JOHN MERCHANT

DEE DEE, BARBRA STREISAND

CHRIS PORTER

PET SHOP BOYS, TINA TURNER

BT - BRIAN TRANSEALI

BT, DAVID BOWIE, TIGER AMOS

BRENDAN BENSON

RACONTREURS, BRENDAN BENSON

PAUL BARRETT

SUNO, JONES, US, FRANK SINATRA

GUY CHAMBERS

ROBBIE WILLIAMS, JAMES BLUNT

GEOFF DUGMORE

JEFF BECK, JAMES BLUNT

ROGER LYONS

NEW ORDER, BEE GEES, OLIVE

STEVE LEVINE

THE BEACH BOYS, THE CREATURES

PAUL HERMAN

FAITHLESS, NATASHA BEDINGFIELD

ALAN BRANCH

BLUR, PRIMAL SCREAM, US

STUART CRICHTON

PET SHOP BOYS, BONO, KYLIE MINOGUE

PAUL MERTENS

BEACH BOYS, PET SOUNDS, STEREO LAB

NICK FRANGLIN

LIMPINCOLN, PRIMAL SCREAM, JAY-Z

ROB HARRIS

JAMIROQUAI, KYLIE MINOGUE

JAMES MURPHY

LCD SOUND SYSTEM

ALAIN JOHANNES

ELEVEN, GOTSA, SPINNERETTE

ERIC VALENTINE

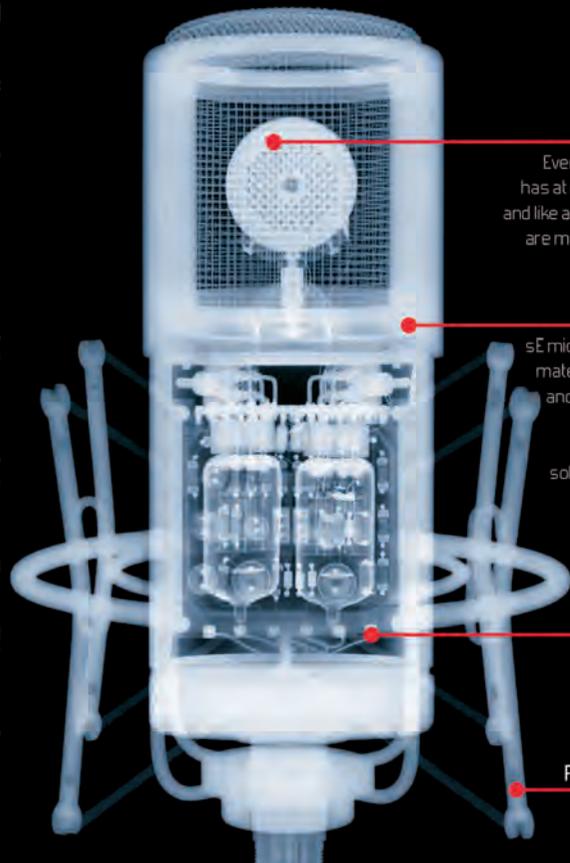
ALL AMERICAN REJECTS, GOTSA

JAMIE CULLUM

GRAHAM PATTISON

SPIRITUALIZED, KULA SHAKER, GOMEZ

COURTNEY PINE



Hand-Made Capsules

Every sE Electronics microphone has at its heart a hand-built capsule and like any great instrument, the best are made by hand not by machines

Solid Brass Chassis

sE microphones use the finest raw materials for the best build quality and tone. sE mics are built to last

Hand crafted chassis from solid brass give much improved performance and are built to last longer than traditional cheaper moulded chassis

Discrete Class A Circuits

Hand stuffed circuit boards make high end mics it's that simple

Full Range of Accessories

We offer a full range of accessories including stands, pop shields and acoustic products