

Drum Rehab

Drum manipulation and replacement is now an integral part of music production, be it as a corrective or creative measure, and whether you agree with the sentiments or not.

GEORGE SHILLING is in rehab but he's still hearing those drums.



IN THE 1980S, the introduction of the AMS dmx-1580s with sample triggering undoubtedly influenced 80s pop records and resulted in all those huge-sounding, often late-triggering snare sounds. Later, devices like the Akai ME-35T allowed audio sources to trigger MIDI samplers and then Pro Tools spawned SoundReplacer, a plug-in to make the job achievable within the computer. Still in the Digidesign catalogue, SoundReplacer has recently been, umm, replaced in many a plug-in folder by Wavemachine Labs' Drumagog, which rather upped the game by providing libraries of drum sounds and a whole raft of advanced features. However, the now Digidesign-owned Trillium Lane Labs has (after much delay since its announcement) hit back with Drum Rehab.

Unlike SoundReplacer, which is an offline AudioSuite plug-in, Drum Rehab (UK£290) is an RTAS insert. Disappointingly, it is mono-only — certainly, many users would want to use stereo samples. The neat-looking plug-in window is reminiscent of SoundReplacer, with a waveform display taking up much of the window. The main window actually comprises four different alternative control panels named Trigger, Expert, Sample and Preferences, although some global slider controls appear on multiple pages, so adjustments to these are reflected in all panels. On the right is the Library Browser where samples are selected and auditioned. Files use a proprietary format with the .drp suffix. Samples can be auditioned automatically when clicked in the browser, and double clicking instantly loads the set, whichever main page is selected. Configured from the Sample page, these collections of samples can each contain up to 16 Zones (with variable crossfade borders), two positions A and B, for blending, say, edge and centre samples of the drum, and four clips per position, for random sample selection.

There is a supplied library of different hits and kits. However, while some tastes will be satisfied, these are in the main rather disappointing. For example, most snare drums seem to have far too

much underneath mic blended in. The differently named snare drums in the Purrfect Drums collection all sound remarkably similar and overly-compressed, Toms also sound rather compressed, while Kicks mostly sound artificially low in pitch. The Rock Drums snares all sound as if they are being tapped very lightly, while Kicks from that collection are all rather woolly. Unfortunately, you cannot even tune the samples in pitch to help improve them. This is something of a missed opportunity, but undoubtedly other libraries will appear in due course. Of course you can load user samples: SD2, AIF and WAV files can be loaded into a .drp, but that is a time-consuming business if you want to make use of multiple Zones and Clips.

To set up triggering, four different detector modes are available via a pop-up menu, which presumably use preset filtering and hold-off settings to better detect different types of drum tracks. There are modes for Kick, Toms, and two different Snare modes, one more sensitive for busier parts and flams, the other more for general purpose triggering and cymbals. These worked well, and it was often the case that accurate triggering was achieved with minimal tweaking, with no need to leave the Trigger page for successful operation. On playing through the track with Listen enabled, Drum Rehab 'learns' the trigger points. If after adjusting the minimum trigger level (a rather fiddly numerical adjustment — why no slider?) things still aren't quite right, the expert page allows triggers to be individually or globally 'Committed', Uncommitted or individually ignored.

Committed Triggers can be edited and moved, and only these will play back when Listen is disabled. Alternatively, they can be toggled to be ignored. Without Delay Compensation activated, there can be large latencies with the recommended buffer of 2048 samples when bouncing triggers to audio in Listen mode, but 'No Latency' mode plays back Committed triggers at a sample accurate position comparable precisely with the original source — even when Delay Compensation is off.

A useful Voicing setting determines whether re-triggering silences previously triggered hits. The waveform display shows detected levels of trigger hits, and minimum and maximum levels can be set for trigger detection, mainly to stop spill causing triggers. I couldn't see any zoom controls at first, but vertical zoom can be achieved by clicking and dragging up or down. Horizontal zoom is achieved automatically in the Expert page — clicking and holding the mouse on a trigger point zooms right in, then you can drag the trigger left or right. Releasing the mouse then zooms out, but with no calibrated timeline it can then be difficult to know which trigger you have edited! Amplitude control is possible by Command-Clicking and dragging to increase or decrease the level of a particular trigger, and Dynamics can be controlled with a slider.

There are separate levels for Input and Samples, allowing blending of the original track with the replacement sound, which is remarkably satisfying with the No Latency mode activated as the two sounds are absolutely spot-on in time. Additionally, a ducking slider allows the underlying track to dip upon triggers, so if you want authentic hi-hat spill or background noise without hearing the original hits blended in, this easily achieves that!

Drum Rehab also includes a quantise function from 1/2 to 1/64 note values, variable from 0 to 100%, although there are no triplet settings. This saves subsequent faffing with Beat Detective or Region Quantize, but perhaps suggests a missing feature that could be useful — generated MIDI trigger parts or saveable templates, anyone?

Drum Rehab is presently let down by a lack of stereo triggering, and a disappointing library. Although the exceptionally accurate triggering makes this a worthwhile purchase, more enhancements are certainly possible and are hopefully in development.

Drum Rehab has a much more professional look and feel compared to its main rival and triggers more accurately. Some manual reading is required to fully understand the functions (there is also Balloon Help) but this is soon rewarded with reliable triggering using an elegant and professional interface. ■

PROS Very accurate triggering; no Latency mode; smart interface; random sample selection; up to 16 multisample layers.

CONS Mono only; disappointing library; no sample pitching.

EXTRAS The TL Aggro plug-in claims to bring the personality of vintage analogue FET compression to the Pro Tools environment. Features include a tube drive module and a bass compensation section with controls accessible from a vintage interface.



Contact

DIGIDESIGN/TRILLIUM LABS, US:
Website: www.digidesign.com