APPLE LOGIC STUDIO AND LOGIC EXPRESS 8

Ever since Apple (www.apple.com) acquired Emagic in 2003, it has outdone itself with each new release of its flagship digital audio sequencer. The latest version, Logic Pro 8, is part of a software suite called Logic Studio (Mac, $499; $449 for students; $149 for institutions; volume pricing available). For half the price of Logic Pro 7 alone, you also get the multitrack audio editor Soundtrack Pro 2, 40 software instruments, 80 effects plug-ins, thousands of new sounds, all the loops and instruments from the first five GarageBand Jam Packs, and a new live-performance application called MainStage.

Logic Pro 8 lets you do all your sequencing, editing, and arranging in a unified, single-window workspace. You can record and overdub, audition loops, create lead sheets, and make sample-accurate audio edits, all without ever leaving the Arrange window. The program supplies production-ready templates and a streamlined track-setup window to get you up and running quickly. Recording multiple takes is easier than ever, and Quick Swipe Comping allows you to link and crossfade the best portions of each take. Best of all, Logic Pro 8 no longer requires a USB dongle.

MainStage, in combination with software instruments and effects, turns your computer into a live-performance workstation. Its three-dimensional interface lets you set up customized virtual racks and stack and layer your instruments. Easily integrate USB and MIDI hardware such as keyboards and control surfaces, and use your pedalboard to control guitar gear onscreen.

In addition to newly enhanced software instruments such as EXS24, Ultrabeat, and Sculpture, Logic Studio includes Apple Loops Utility (for creating and metatagging your own loops), Impulse Response Utility (for re-creating acoustic spaces), WaveBurner (for authoring and mastering audio CDs), and Compressor (for encoding audio and video in numerous formats). If you don't need all the bonus software and soundware that comes with Logic Studio, Logic Express 8 (Mac, $199; $179 for students) features the same digital audio sequencer—Logic Pro 8—bundled with 36 software instruments and 70 effects plug-ins.

MAGIX MUSIC STUDIO 12 DELUXE

Magix (www.magix.com), maker of pro studio applications Sequoia and Samplitude, is shipping Music Studio 12 Deluxe (Win, $79.99), an affordable digital audio sequencer suite. Magix says that version 12 is the first to seamlessly combine audio and MIDI recording, editing, mixdown, and mastering in an integrated user interface. Built on the Samplitude platform, the software now supports 64-bit audio and is fully compatible with Windows Vista. Its new Track Editor provides easy access to plug-ins and to parameters such as volume, pan, EQ, monitoring status, and aux sends. The included Music Manager lets you archive your songs and burn them to CD, and Photo Manager organizes and optimizes your photo collection.

Furthermore, you can easily create and publish Podcasts for free on the Magix Online Album. Vita is a new sample player that gives you hands-on access to an assortment of user parameters and serves as the control center for the bundled collection of Vital Instruments, which range from drums and bass to acoustic guitar and grand piano. Another new instrument is Revolta, a soft synth specializing in lead and bass sounds. Atmos generates mood-enhancing sound effects such as traffic, rain, and animal noises. In addition to all-new software instruments and capabilities, Music Studio 12 Deluxe offers numerous enhancements to its editing functions, restoration and sound-design effects, and the Magix Mastering Suite. Previously introduced features include a parametric 4-band equalizer, VariVerb stereo reverb, Task Assistant, and JamSession mode.
RHYTHM SOURCE METRONOME

Throughout most of musical history, metronomes were mechanical boxes that clicked at constant user-adjustable tempos. In the late 20th century, they evolved into pocket-size electronic devices and simple software utilities, but they didn’t change much in terms of functionality. RhythmSource (www.rhythmsource.com) recently introduced the Metronome ($179), a new tool for performers, students, and teachers. It aurally and visually indicates rhythms of almost any complexity using innovative techniques developed by educator and percussionist A. C. Lewis.

Instead of simply beating out a regular tick-tock to indicate tempo, the RhythmSource Metronome can play virtually any rhythmic pattern, from simple beats to advanced polyrhythms. It plays nine sounds and uses eight LEDs arranged in a circle to demonstrate the cyclical nature of meter. A small LCD shows parameters you adjust using buttons on the front panel. You can control each beat’s volume, sound, and subdivision to apply rests or accents at any point in the rhythmic cycle, even adding crescendos, decrescendos, and dynamic phrasing.

The Metronome provides an assortment of preset rhythms, and its onboard memory allows you to store and recall rhythms you create. Powered by two AA batteries or the included AC adapter, the Metronome plays and displays 7 meters, 6 polymeters, and 25 subdivision patterns, and it has a tempo range from 6 to 360 beats per minute. RhythmSource’s goal is to give musicians an intrinsic understanding of rhythm that extends far beyond mere tempo.

GARRITAN CONCERT & MARCHING BAND

Concert & Marching Band (Mac/Win, $239), the long-awaited music software from Garritan (www.garritan.com), is now available. It combines Native Instruments Kontakt Player 2 with a 2 GB collection of sampled brass, woodwind, and percussion instruments from the makers of Garritan Personal Orchestra. Featuring a comprehensive selection of baritone horns, cornets, euphoniums, mellophones, saxes, sousaphones, trombones, trumpet, marching drums, and mallet percussion, and more, Concert & Marching Band provides educators, composers, and students with valuable feedback while composing and arranging. It also serves as an indispensable aid for designing drill routines for marching bands, especially in combination with software such as Pyware 3D. Concert & Marching Band is fully compatible with Sibelius 5 for playback directly from a score, and it runs standalone and as an AU, DXi, RTAS, or VST plug-in in all major sequencers.

With the release of the Fretlight FG-401 ($399.95), Optek Music Systems (www.fretlight.com) promises to accelerate the process of learning to play the guitar. The only fully acoustic model among Optek’s line of technology-enhanced guitars, the compact FG-401 is shaped like a hollow-body Fender Telecaster with mahogany sides, a spruce top, and a glossy finish. What makes any Fretlight guitar unique, however, are the LEDs embedded in its bolt-on neck, positioned on the nut and just above every fret, and a USB port that connects to your computer. The Fretlight Interactive Learning System illuminates the correct fingering for chords, scales, and songs in response to signals from companion software, allowing beginner, intermediate, and advanced guitarists to improve their performance skills.

The FG-401 comes with Fretlight Lesson Player for Windows XP, which supplies 30 lessons and a library of more than 2,000 chords and scales. It also includes Guitar Power (Win), a software-based reference from Jana Software that teaches the basics of playing guitar. You can choose from optional software such as M-Player (Win, $39.95), which shows you note for note how to play popular songs; Guitarz (Win, $59.95), which translates downloadable tab files into data that lights up your fretboard; and GarageBand Plug-In (Mac, $29.95), which illuminates a series of chords and scales you specify in Apple GarageBand. You can order additional Lesson Paks ($49.95 each) and Style Paks ($39.95 each) to expand Lesson Player, and choose from a selection of individual songs ($4.99 each) or song bundles ($14.99 to $25.99) for M-Player in a variety of styles.