



Serato Sample \$99 PC MAC

With Pitch 'n' Time under the hood and an MPC-inspired workflow, this streamlined plugin wants to take you back to the old school...

> Although generally thought of as a purveyor of top notch DJ software, New Zealand-based developer Serato's earliest success was actually in the studio arena, and their debut product, Pitch 'n Time, is still regarded by many as the best pitchshifting and timestretching plugin on the market. Now, the company are once again setting their sights on the producer dollar with Sample, a pad-based sample player.

Making absolutely no pretence at being a full-on sampler along the lines of Native Instruments' Kontakt or Steinberg's HALion, Sample (VST/AU) is instead tightly focused on making the process of extracting phrases and one-shot sounds out of full tracks and loops as fast and easy as possible. Its workflow centres on the creation of marker-defined "cues" - a concept that will be immediately recognisable to anyone familiar with Serato DJ, NI Traktor or any other digital DJing application - and the

various ways in which they can be created and played back.

Making waves

Dragging an audio file (the major compressed and uncompressed formats are supported) into Sample sees it analysed by the Pitch 'n Time algorithm to establish its key and tempo, and

"Sample is tightly focused on making the process of extracting phrases and one-shot sounds fast and easy"

rendered as a waveform in the main display, with a fully zoomed-out overview above. With the Sync button engaged, playback is locked to host tempo; with Sync disengaged, the detected tempo is used as a base, with PnT's incredibly high-quality timestretching enabling it to be incrementally raised all the way up to 999bpm or down to 1bpm (the latter extreme invariably yielding an awesome drone of some kind). Key detection is good, too, and up to 24 semitones and 50 cents of shift is available in either direction - although there's no way to rename the suggested key when the algorithm gets it wrong.

Once you've found a sound that you like within the source track or clip, zoom and scroll the waveform using the mouse and/or key commands (the mouse wheel is supported, apparently, but our 2016 MacBook Pro's trackpad didn't work) to position the playhead at the start of it, then click one of the

“Map, say, the kick, snare and hi-hats from a drum break to three pads and you have a drum kit”

16 pads or its assigned QWERTY/MIDI key to place a cue point and map it to that pad. Triggering the pad then initiates playback of the cue. Rinse and repeat, creating new cues and moving/copying existing ones between pads, to build a bank of up-to-16 pad-triggered sounds - and that, really, is the essence of Sample. Map, say, the kick, snare and hi-hats from a drum break to three pads and you have a drum kit; slice the notes of a bassline across the requisite number of pads to reconstruct it as you see fit; finely chop a vocal into slices for classic house cut-ups... you get the idea.

Right on cue

Having set the start of a cue, you can also specify an end point by dragging the bottom handle of the cue marker to the right (or left in Reverse mode). Playback can be gated (stopping when the triggering key is released) or latched (playing all the way to the end of the region no matter what), and entering Keyboard mode automatically maps the currently selected pad up and down the keyboard - ideal for instant melodics or quickly finding the optimal pitch for a pad. There is, however, no way to loop a region - a serious and lamentable omission that we sincerely hope gets addressed in a future update.

By default, regions are triggered monophonically (ie, cutting each other off as they overlap), but there's also a Polyphonic mode for playing chords and layering sounds. This proves particularly useful in conjunction with the aforementioned Keyboard mode, as you'd imagine.

When it comes to processing, each pad can be reversed, levelled, filtered (a simple combination low-pass/high-pass), faded in and out with Attack and Release parameters, and independently pitchshifted and timestretched by -75% to +300% and 24 semitones. Pitch 'n Time impresses once again here, but the general paucity of editing, sound shaping and transformative options is disappointing, letting



In Keyboard mode, the selected pad is pitchshifted up and down the keyboard for melodic play



Here we've used Set Slicer mode to create 16 evenly-spaced cues

Set and forget

Setting cue points in Sample by hand is easy, but you can let the software populate the 16 pads for you in one of four distinct Autaset modes.

In Key Shift Pad mode, the current pad is copied and pitched across all 16 pads, from -12st to +12st, for melodic play. Find Samples mode uses “an algorithm” (specifics aren't given) to find regions in the clip or track that are “suitable for sampling”, then randomly places cues on the timing grid within those regions. Set Random simply chooses 16 random cue points. And Set Slicer inserts 16 evenly-spaced cue points starting from the playhead position, then lets you collectively shift

them left and right, and set the spacing between them to a range of lengths from 1/16th to 16 beats.

If you don't like the results you get from Find Samples or Random mode, reapplying either invokes a new selection. Individual pads can be locked by setting them as Favorites, so you can hop around within and between modes on the hunt for cool sounds, locking off successful candidates as they appear.

Lastly, it's worth noting that there's no transient detection mode, and that cue end markers aren't placed in any of the four modes - they only create start points, not demarcated regions.

the plugin down somewhat. More filtering, panning and a few choice effects feel like the minimum that should be added.

A flawed gem

If our criticisms makes it appear that Sample has failed to float our boat, we really don't mean them to. This is a truly fantastic instrument on its own terms, with a wonderfully slick workflow and enormous fun factor, successfully bringing classic MPC-style samplism and the old-skool beat making ethos to the modern DAW. The overall concept - effortless, quick-'n'-dirty extraction, manipulation and triggering of disparate sounds from full tracks - is unarguably solid and beautifully realised.

That said, some onboard effects and more versatile filtering would top it off nicely (we'll stop short of hoping for any modulation), and we can't think of any good reason whatsoever for the lack of looping, which is a standard feature in any sampler.

So, ultimately, until those things are added - if they ever are - we have to consider Sample a little overpriced and underpowered, despite being an excellent, genuinely inspiring production tool at heart. **cm**

Web www.serato.com

Alternatively

New Sonic Arts Nuance
cm191 » 8/10 » €9

Streamlined plugin sampler with filtering, dynamics, distortion and unison voicing

Vengeance-Sound VPS Phalanx
cm196 » 9/10 » £135

Phenomenally powerful (and comparatively complicated!) pad-based sample player

Verdict

For Super fast and fun workflow
Peerless pitch shifting and timestretching
Autaset is handy

Against No looping or effects
No transient detection
Limited filter

There's a lot missing from Sample, but its basic flow is so enjoyable and productive that you can't help but fall for it

8/10