



Acoustica Mixcraft Pro Studio 7 \$165 PC

This lesser-known DAW for Windows gets a major update that puts it on more of an even footing with the big boys

> Acoustica's Mixcraft (version 6 reviewed in **cm**184, 9/10) is a 'budget' Windows DAW with a sizeable collection of bundled instruments and effects, and version 7 adds a slew of new features that should see it taken considerably more seriously. Perhaps the most significant upgrade is that the software is now 64-bit (with a 32-bit version still included). Mixcraft 7 comes in two versions - Mixcraft 7 and Mixcraft Pro Studio 7 - differing only in that the latter includes more plugins.

The new Performance Panel opens just to the left of the track lanes. Here, clips and loops can be dragged or pasted into a grid from Windows Explorer or Mixcraft's own project tracks, where they can be triggered individually or as vertically aligned 'sets'. This is great fun for live jamming, and you can record your triggering performances to the project tracks. It's obviously inspired by Ableton Live and, like that program, is fast, intuitive and inspirational.

MIDI controller support has been expanded significantly, with newly-added support for a range of non-standard units including the Frontier Design Tranzport, Novation Launchpad and anything using the Mackie Control protocol. Related to that, Mixcraft now allows viewing of multiple automation lanes at once.

Again (and like pretty much every other DAW on the market over the last few years) taking a lead from Live, Mixcraft 7 sees the introduction

of Audio Warping and Audio Quantization. Both work well, as do the new and improved Time-Stretching and Pitch-Shifting algorithms.

As for MIDI programming, the Piano Roll's new Step Editor enables beats and patterns to be constructed on a grid, with drums or notes listed down the left-hand side, and each 'lane' assignable to any MIDI note. Patterns can be sent as clips to the Performance Panel or any position on the host track. Intuitive and familiar.

'Crafty business

Mixcraft's roster of bundled instruments and effects keeps on growing, with new additions headlined by two new samplers and the wicked ME80 V2 from Memory Moo - an emulation of the mighty Yamaha CS-80 synth, now with 64-bit support, a new look and improved sound. There's also Glass Viper, a nifty digital synth that enters DX7 and D-50 territory with its crystalline, atmospheric sound. Also worthy of mention is the playback-only Journeys, powered by Applied Acoustics Systems' modelling technology, which delivers plucked strings and winds, and excellent percussion sounds.

Mixcraft's effects have been given a boost, too, with the addition of Studio Devil's slick Virtual Bass Amp, Fusion Field convolution reverb, SideKick6 sidechain compressor and a dozen more, bringing the Pro version's total up to 20 instruments (15 in the standard version),

and 52 effects (25 in standard). It's a solid enough package, but do be aware that some of them can be had for free or cheap elsewhere.

Through its six major updates, Mixcraft has evolved from a basic starter app to a genuinely impressive DAW, taking on features normally associated with costlier alternatives - and this latest version represents a particularly big step forward. If you're already a Mixcraft user, upgrading is a no-brainer. If you're not, you really ought to give the demo a try. **cm**

Web www.acoustica.com

Mixcraft Pro Studio 7 Upgrade from PS6, \$55;

Mixcraft 7 \$90 (or \$20/m for six months);

Upgrade from Mixcraft 6, \$29.95

Alternatively

Cockos Reaper 4
cm170 » 9/10 » \$60

If you're in the market for a low-cost DAW, this one's a must-see

Cakewalk Sonar Artist
N/A » N/A » \$99

Get started with the big-name DAW and its suite of instruments/effects

Verdict

For 64-bit, at last

Performance Pads are a blast

Step sequencer for easier beats

Multiple automation lanes

Useful, high-quality instruments & effects

Audio warping

Against Samplers are very basic

Some plugins are available as freeware

The included plugins may be a mixed bag, but Mixcraft 7 is a capable DAW that gives the pricier competition a run for its money

9/10

Ample sampling?

Acoustica are trumpeting Mixcraft 7's two new samplers as a selling point, but in reality, they're not up to serious production work.

Alpha Sampler is built for pitched playback via a keyboard. An A/R envelope, low-pass filter, mod wheel-controlled LFO and pitch controls are included. You can reverse the single loaded sample, set the root key, sync the LFO and engage a bitcrusher effect. Looping is possible, as are both monophonic and polyphonic playback. It's no 'advanced

sampler', but it's OK for quick results.

Omni Sampler is a drum sampler with 128 pads, each holding one sample, of which 16 can be viewed at a time. Each pad has play, mute and solo buttons, and the right-hand side of the interface contains a set of obvious parameters that can be applied globally or to individual samples: loop and reverse, Lo-Fi processing, pitch, filter and AR envelopes, and LFO control via mod wheel. It's no Battery, but again, it'll do in a pinch.