

ACOUSTICA Mixcraft 6

BY CRAIG ANDERTON



MIXCRAFT HAS GONE FROM “PRETTY GOOD FOR THE PRICE” TO “it really does all *that*?” Each version has added capabilities, but without losing the ease of use and low cost that make it appealing. The original Mixcraft was clearly aimed at the “catch the inspiration while it’s hot” crowd, so let’s see what Mixcraft 6 has done to build on that premise.



Overview

Superficially, Mixcraft resembles other DAWs. However, digging deeper reveals the differences. For instance, there’s no structural distinction between MIDI, instrument, and video tracks, as they’re treated similarly. Inserting an instrument is easy; aside from the very usable preset sounds, you can load VST plug-ins or ReWire in instruments. If you want a MIDI-only track to drive an external synth, just de-select the associated instrument.

Mixcraft also lets you specify a synth’s volume, pan, keyboard range, transposition, velocity range, and outputs when you insert it, so it’s easy to create splits and layers. This is one of several “why doesn’t every program do this?” features.

Looping and Comping

Although Mixcraft isn’t a “looping program” per se, it excels in that role. The boxed version includes a library of over 6,000 loops; if you

downloaded Mixcraft, selecting a loop downloads it on demand. These loops aren’t filler, and Mixcraft makes it easy to put them together into a quickie music bed. When you drag the first loop into a project, you’re asked if you want to conform the loop to the project, or the project to the loop—nice. Zplane’s stretching algorithm (used in several DAWs) does an excellent job with tempo and pitch, and there are various loop editing options, including noise reduction. As with audio, it’s easy to create and “roll out” MIDI loops.

Mixcraft does comping right, placing each part in its own lane, and making it easy to edit multiple takes into a cohesive keeper track. Play or mute any clip from within the clip itself, as well as add loop iterations by clicking the “+1 loop” button.

Video

This is a shocker, and I’m surprised Mixcraft hasn’t billed itself as the “direct-to-YouTube”

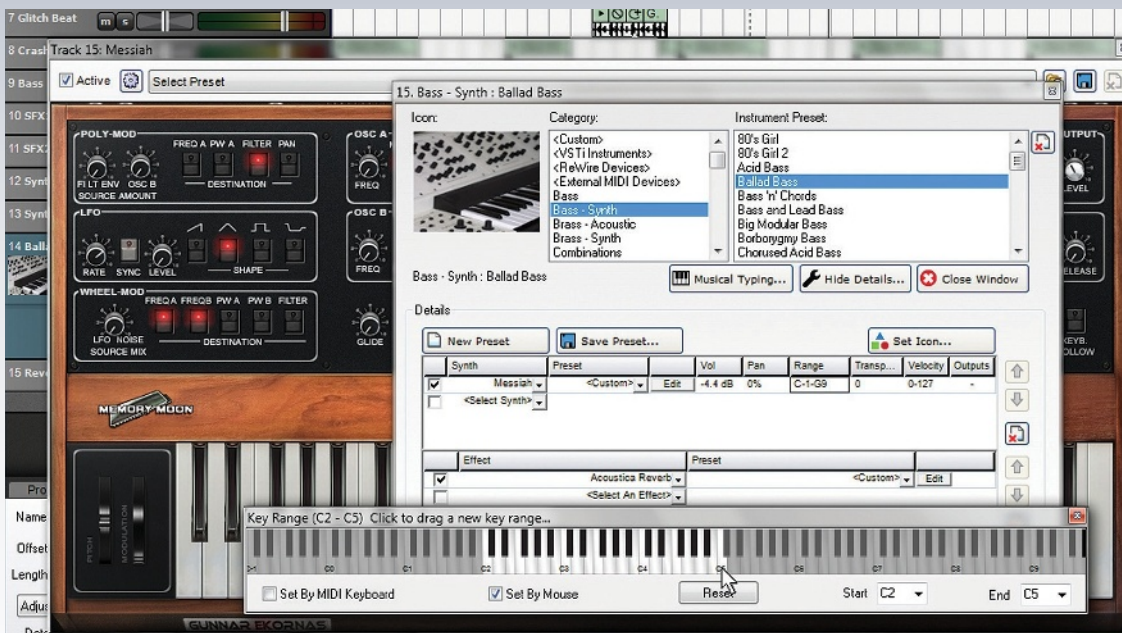
Snap Judgment



PROS Nimble, efficient workflow. CPU-efficient. Comprehensive loop library and solid instrument sounds. Excellent stretching/looping support. Can define splits, layers, and effects when inserting a synth. Well-implemented comping. Shockingly good video capabilities.



CONS No mixer automation. No VST3 or REX support. Adequate, but not great, selection of plug-ins in base version. Limited mixer EQ. No Mac version.



When inserting an instrument, you can specify split and velocity ranges as well as other parameters, and include effects—then save and recall everything as a preset.

DAW. You can load multiple video clips (with their associated audio) into a single video track, mix WMV and AVI formats (sorry, no MP4), and even do some editing: You can change video and audio stream lengths independently, and crossfade clips.

You can also insert still images and crossfade between them, which is ideal for “slide show” videos. These are on the same track as the video so you can mix and match. You can insert text (and even scrolling text) into multiple text lanes, and add text fades, background colors, and basic intro and outro text animations.

Not impressed yet? Try the 25 bundled video effects including brightness, posterize, color channel strength and inversion, emboss, and more. These are added to the video track just like adding automation lanes to audio, and you can automate the video effect parameters. I’ve never seen this kind of video flexibility in any other DAW.

What’s Missing?

Well, there’s no mixer automation. You can create automation envelopes in automation lanes, but you can’t record fader movements. Fortunately, you can record MIDI controller data from a control surface to automate virtual instrument plug-ins, as well as do remote control of functions like track arming, transport control, loop toggle, and so on. This helps speed workflow, but hands-on mix automation is a *big* part of how I mix.

Many omissions are “vocal minority” features like MIDI plug-ins, audio quantizing, graphical pitch correction (although there is a pitch correction plug-in), and the like. While there’s no VST3 or REX file support, you could insert a third-party instrument that plays REX files. A music staff view allows editing and printing, but it’s primitive, as is the mixer’s three-band EQ. Insert an EQ plug-in if you need more frequency-sculpting control.

The bundled plug-ins are generally useful. You’ll find virtual instruments and plenty of effects, but there’s no sampler or drum instrument other than the preset sample player versions. What’s included will likely accommodate many users; if not, I’d recommend ReWiring Reason Essentials into Mixcraft. You could also get Mixcraft’s Pro Studio 6 version, which adds 18 plug-ins that aren’t in the base version. These include Yamaha CS-80 and Memorymoog soft synths, iZotope’s Mastering Essentials, upgraded reverb, vintage and modern parametric EQs, and much more.

Conclusions

There are many “lite” versions of flagship programs. But Mixcraft doesn’t deliberately leave out features to encourage upgrading, and is easy enough for novices yet deep enough to satisfy even jaded DAW jockeys. It’s also a stellar way to ease into video: conceptually, video is treated like audio so there’s no culture shock for musicians—nor will you feel limited when starting

out. And yes, online music with videos gets a lot more views than the audio-only kind.

Many little touches show that serious thought went into Mixcraft. Hover over a track’s FX button to see a list of inserted effects; right-click on it, and the GUIs for all effects open up. Every track has a built-in tuner, MIDI editing (including drum maps) is greatly expanded from previous versions, and every time you save a file, Mixcraft generates a backup. Why doesn’t every program do this?

Mixcraft’s fans got me interested in this program in the first place, and I can see why. You really can’t get any more for any less, and you get much more than you’d expect—making this a no-brainer of a Key Buy. 🎵

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Bottom Line

Far more DAW than you’d expect at this price, and extremely user-friendly at that.

Base version: 84.95 boxed | \$74.95 download | Pro Studio version: \$149.95 download
acoustica.com

Watch Craig Anderton’s Mixcraft 6 instructional video.

keyboardmag.com/december2012

