# Back to the Future

***Rich Tozzoli takes a neuvo-retro trip in his* Continuing Adventures in Software.**

**The GForce Virtual Vintage Keyboard Instruments M-Tron emulates classic Mellotron performance, complete with virtual coffee stains.**

This month, let's start out by taking a step back in time. GForce's Future Retro Pack is a wicked cool collection of four Virtual Vintage Keyboard Instruments (available individually) that can add a classic yet modern element to almost any production.

The Minimonsta:Melohman is a polyphonic Minimoog emulation; impOSCar reproduces the classic Oxford OSCar synth; The Oddity emulates the Odyssey synth; and last but not least is my personal favorite—the M-Tron. Note that each will operate in standalone mode, or with VST 2.0/ RTAS on the PC platform, and VST 2.0, AU or RTAS on Macs.

For the sake of this article, I'm going to focus on the M-Tron, which is a killer model of a classic Mellotron. The original actually played real segments of tape with each key press, up to a maximum of 8 seconds. Once played, the tape would be released and rewound. Each tape, be they flutes (Beatles "Strawberry Fields," Led Zep's "Stairway to Heaven"), full orchestras or ensembles, were actual recordings of real musicians (yes, people played back then). You could either buy prepared tapes or have your own custom versions recorded.

M-Tron ships with more than 100 samples of these tapes, coming in at over 2.5 GB of data. The sounds come from a few different models of Mellotron, but also include samples from a Chamberlin, Birotron and Roland VP330 Plus.

The plug-in (complete with coffee cup stains) is loosely based upon the classic M400, released around 1970. The layout couldn't be easier, with Pitch, Tone, Volume and Function knobs. The Function knob has three switchable positions—A, B and C. "A" simply plays the default sound with the panel lid closed. "B" opens the lid and displays Attack and Release sliders. "C" opens the Tape Bank Selection window allowing you to choose a sampled tape. That's where the fun begins.

While there are many great synths, samplers and keyboards out there, *nothing* sounds quite like this, regardless of its meager $129 MSRP. I call it my "vibe monster," as the quirkiness of these sampled tapes add instant character to any song. While it obviously doesn't work in every tune, I've found many occasions where it's just what the doctor ordered.

Some of my favorites are the rare 15-piece male/female choir, "Accordion Chords," "MKII Violin Orchestra," "Viola Et Cello," "Wine Glass" and "Yes Strings," which was especially recorded for Pat Moraz of Yes. Trust me, if you want something truly different, check out M-Tron.

When it comes time to play these samples,

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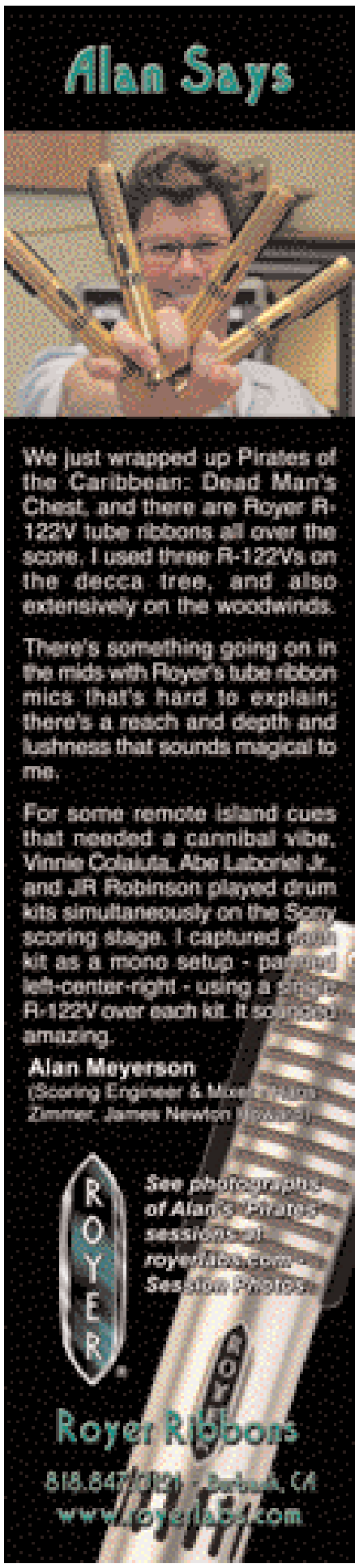


Craig Anderton

# softwaretech

## Boot Camp: Cool Curiosity, or Seismic Shift?

When Apple decided to put "Intel Inside," hardcore Mac fanatics acted as if the company had made a deal with the devil. Windows partisans recalled how Apple had said that RISC was the future; apparently it wasn't. Still others wondered why Apple didn't go with AMD, a more "anti-establishment" chip company.

But the bottom line was that Apple's laptops could finally break free of the PowerPC constraints that had put the PowerBook's originator behind the curve, and overall, developers saw this as a positive move that would temporarily cause the problem of having to support multiple operating systems, but eventually streamline development.

Then the other shoe dropped: Apple announced Boot Camp, a utility that allows booting an Intel-based Mac into Windows XP Service Pack 2, installed in a separate partition, essentially turning your Mac into a PC. But before getting into what this means for audio, remember that as of this writing we're still dealing with beta software, so all the results aren't in yet.

There are some minor annoyances, like Windows can't read and write to the Mac partition without third-party software. Also, unlike using an emulator to run Windows on a Mac, with Boot Camp the two systems can't operate concurrently so you must boot (or reboot) into one or the other. And although part of installing Boot Camp is creating a set of drivers for Apple hardware you can load into Windows, some Apple hardware simply isn't supported under Windows. Another "fine print" issue is that you have to install a version of Windows XP (Professional or Home) that includes Service Pack 2; you can't install an earlier version, then upgrade to SP2.

Still, we're in the early stages of this technology, and operation will doubtless become smoother. And the more I think about it, the more it seems the ability to turn a Mac into a Windows machine has big implications for the audio community.

For starters, the Mac has a much larger market share of the music biz than it does of the overall computer market, and a large number of studios are "bi-platform." As someone who uses both Mac and Windows, the process of maintaining and upgrading two (or more) computers is tedious and inefficient. Having one machine do the work of two is immensely appealing. And think of all the Windows fans who used Logic and didn't want to switch to a Mac: Now they can buy a Mac to run Logic, and use it for their Windows programs as well.

Granted, the limitation of having to live in the Windows or Mac world for a specific project is an issue. However, again because of the prevalence of Macs in the music biz, there are a lot of cross-platform plug-ins and programs. As long as a piece of software allows two installs, it should be possible to create a familiar environment under both operating systems. But more importantly, if a Mac user wants to run Acid, Sonar, Wavelab or other Windows-specific programs, no problem. Meanwhile, Windows fans can use the Mac side not just for music programs, but also to take advantage of the Mac's famed resistance to viruses.

But questions remain. Some people wonder whether Microsoft will figure out some way to put a stop to this, but why would they? Microsoft sells operating systems, and if a bunch of Mac fanatics want to buy Windows, I can't see Microsoft objecting. Meanwhile, Apple makes its bucks from hardware more than software, so if they can seduce Dell, eMachine, etc. owners to buy a Mac for the promise of bi-platform operation, Apple comes out ahead, too. It's in the best interests of both companies for Boot Camp to succeed.

> **The ability to turn a Mac into a Windows machine has big implications for the audio community.**

And what about the impact on the consumer market? Will it increase Apple's minuscule market share? Very likely. Apple, mostly through the iPod, has been promoting brand cachet effectively for some time now. But few people can afford two computers, so Windows advocates may appreciate, and be willing to pay for, the sleek industrial design that Apple brings to the table. There are still valid arguments to be made that Apple sacrifices functionality for style (seriously, how could any company design a laptop where the keyboard keys dented the LCD screen because there wasn't enough space between the two when the lid was closed?), but a lot of people like style.

If enough Windows users start thinking, "You know, it's worth paying a bit more for a Mac, because I'll be able to run all my essential Windows apps but also check out the Mac stuff," the Mac's market share will start to inch back up, and that can only be good news for studios and artists who depend on the Mac to power their business or implement their vision.

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# Tozzoli

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you might want to try M-Audio's cool, little Axiom 25, a 25-key, semi-weighted USB MIDI controller. This sturdily built little monster is based around a metal sub-frame and packs quite a punch in a compact package.

Basic features include the aforementioned velocity-sensitive semi-weighted keys, six assignable transport buttons, eight MIDI-assignable endless rotary encoder knobs, backlit LED screen, sustain and expression pedal jacks, MIDI I/O, pitch bend/mod wheels and eight MIDI assignable trigger pads.

There are many small but noticeable touches with the Axiom. When booting the included Keyboard Controller Series CD, you are offered the option of picking your product and then learning about it from either the Users or Quick Start Guide—which I highly recommend reading. You're also given a version of Live Lite 4 with an authorization card, along with the expected offer of a discount to upgrade to the full version. There are 49- and 61-note models available that have more functionality, but won't fit on my desktop.

Since it's class-compliant with Windows XP and Mac OS X, I simply unplugged my Oxygen 8 and hot-swapped the Axiom 25. No muss, no fuss. However, make sure you plug it into either a powered hub or directly into your computer. It was throwing my Command 8 offline until I realized it was plugged into a non-powered hub. Once I made the switch, the problem disappeared.

With any external device (drum machine, etc.) hooked up to the included MIDI I/O, you simply select the second Axiom input port as your MIDI input device. If using the Axiom alone with a computer, just choose the first Axiom input. You can even stream data to the MIDI Out port on this unit—making this an effective USB to MIDI interface. Cool.

While it is a plug-and-play unit, you can go quite deep with it, as evidenced by the 50-page User Guide PDF. These functions can range from sending fixed velocities (great for drum programming) and adjusting preferred velocity curves to transposing the pitch of your MIDI messages using the Octave up/down keys. You can even limit the range of the rotary encoders and use the Pads to trigger samples or loops. No matter how far you dive into it, all functions are quickly accessible using the sizeable screen. Most importantly, it's comfortable to use and assists in the all-important flow of creativity.

Overall, the Axiom 25 is a well-built, highly evolved controller. It's one of those products that instantly makes itself at home in the studio. Package this with the GForce M-Tron, and it's an inexpensive yet powerful "win-win" combination.

# Retail

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taxability, nexus and applicable sourcing rules. You completely remove the need to research or maintain a rate, or to worry about getting it right. Remittance is significantly simpler, and costs are literally just pennies per transaction.

This system is ideally suited for music industry retailers, as well as others with potential sales tax obligations. I know—from personal experience.

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*Jared Vogt is CEO of Avalara and founder of Trillium Lane Labs.*

# Kleeman

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have done the job just as nicely."

The mixing process was equally streamlined, he reports. "I followed a minimalist approach when mixing, compensating for the distance between the mics, some volume changes, and a small bit of linear phase EQ to get rid of faint city noises in the distance, as well as to tame one note of the instrument that sounded boomy. I also added a tail of IR reverb for some spaciousness. Other than that, there was no processing, no compressor or limiter, no nothing."

Before sending the master to be duplicated, Kleemann consulted with mastering engineer Bob Katz to confirm that his approach made real-world sense. "His hints and suggestions were vital for turning the mix into the final version," says Kleeman, "chiefly because he supported my assumption that there is no reason to make-up, fake-up a pure, natural recording. I found the recording to sound so clear, natural and alive that I knew it would not need any mastering processing—just assembly and not even leveling, since the recording was made at the same gain with the calibrated Metric Halo preamps."

**Metric Halo**
**www.mhlabs.com**

# DTS Reduces Prices for Surround Music Titles

AGOURA HILLS, CA—DTS has reduced prices of all of its catalog of surround music titles, which are produced and distributed under the DTS Entertainment label. DTS is offering all retailers significant product discounts to support the increase in proliferation of surround sound equipment in the home and car.

Based upon the success of a trial discount promotion this spring, the price reductions of up to 60 percent off of current retail prices will be ongoing.

In addition to the price reductions, DTS will support the new pricing with a targeted ad and marketing campaign to introduce the catalog to new listeners, and to encourage current consumers of surround music to take advantage of the discounts. "With the increase in sales of home theater in-a-box systems, OEM-installed automotive surround sound systems, and PCs with multichannel audio capabilities, DTS sees that surround music has become mainstream," said Molly Kronberg, vice president, worldwide strategic business development, content at DTS. "We believe that music lovers who appreciate the quality audio experience they get with DTS surround music titles will be very excited by this offer."

There are currently more than 100 DTS-encoded surround music titles available through DTS Entertainment, including Sting's *Brand New Day*, Sheryl Crow's *Globe Sessions* and The Eagles' *Hell Freezes Over*. DTS Entertainment titles are also available at many e-tailers and retailers that sell DVDs. DTS releases are compatible with all standard DVD players.

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