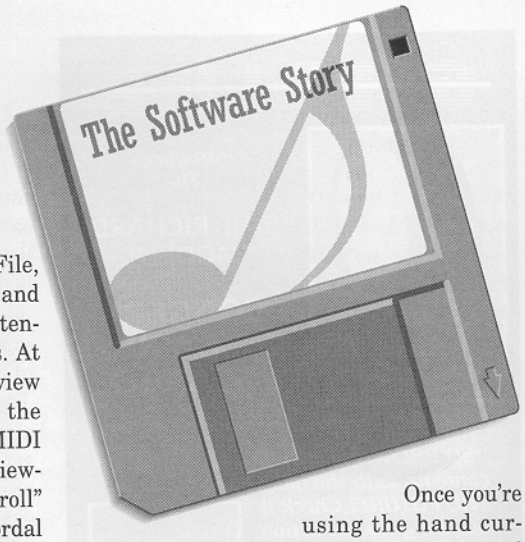
Overture: Macintosh Notation Software



Reviewed by Norman Weinberg

OPCODE SYSTEMS, INC.'S Overture is the newest computer-assisted notation package for the Macintosh. The Mac, being a great computer for graphics (and music notation is an intensely graphic process), has seen a number of music notation programs come and go. And in the last few years, many new products have reached the market.

Macintosh users may now choose between a host of high-end notation packages: Finale (the current leader), Mosaic, Nightingale, Encore, Cuebase Score, Lime and now—Overture. No program is perfect, as each one has its own strengths and weaknesses, and Overture is no exception. Depending on your requirements, however, Overture may be the perfect program for you. So let's see what makes Overture tick.

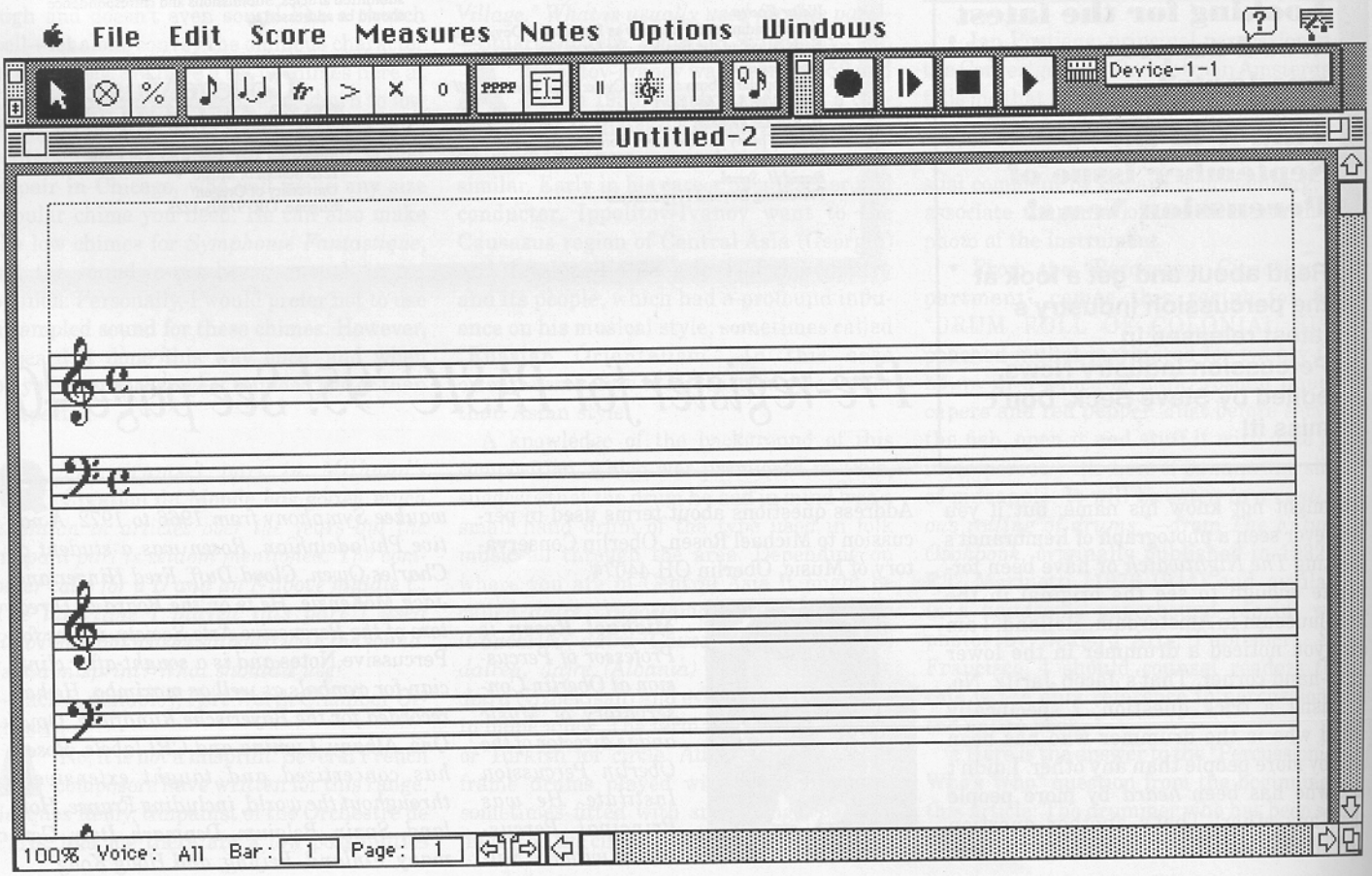
WINDOWS AND PALETTES

When first calling up a new file in Overture, you're presented with the score window in the main screen (see Example 1). At the top of the screen are the familiar menus (File, Edit, Score, Measures, Notes, Options and Windows). Below the menus are the extensive tool bar and the transport controls. At the bottom of the screen are the page view controls. Additional windows include the tracks window (for assigning staves to MIDI output), the graphic window (used for viewing and editing your music in "piano-roll" style), the chords window (for adding chordal indications in your score), the lyrics and the step input window.

One of the best features of Overture is the speed at which it can scroll to various areas of the page on screen. Overture's score window is WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) and it gains scroll speed by drawing the entire contents of the page in RAM memory. With this feature, the program doesn't have to redraw the page image when you scroll the window, it simply moves to the area already drawn in RAM. Along with using the traditional Macintosh scroll bars, you can access a hand cursor by holding down the option and shift keys. Once you're using the hand cursor you can simply click and drag the score in any direction.

The tool bar is shown in Example 2. The tools are divided into three different categories: the cursor buttons, the palette buttons and the transcription quantize amount button. The toolbar itself, and each palette, can be oriented in either the vertical or horizontal position with the click of the mouse. The cursor buttons include the arrow cursor, the eraser cursor and the scale cursor. The arrow is used for most of the editing operations and will be discussed at length later. To erase an entry, select the eraser tool and click the cross

EXAMPLE 1. Overture's main screen showing menus, toolbar, transport controls, score window,and page-view controls.



EXAMPLE 2. Overture's toolbar. Notice the logical groupings of various tools and palettes.

hairs on any musical symbol and its history.

The scale cursor is unique to Overture and a great help for creating cue notes, multiple grace notes, solo lines in piano scores, ossias, kick lines in drumset charts, or any type of musical notation that needs to be reduced (or enlarged). When you select the percentage tool and drag over the notes, you'll get a dialog box asking what percentage you wish to set. Try 60 to 75% and you've got it! In addition to notes, you can scale staves, multiple staves, clefs and dynamics.

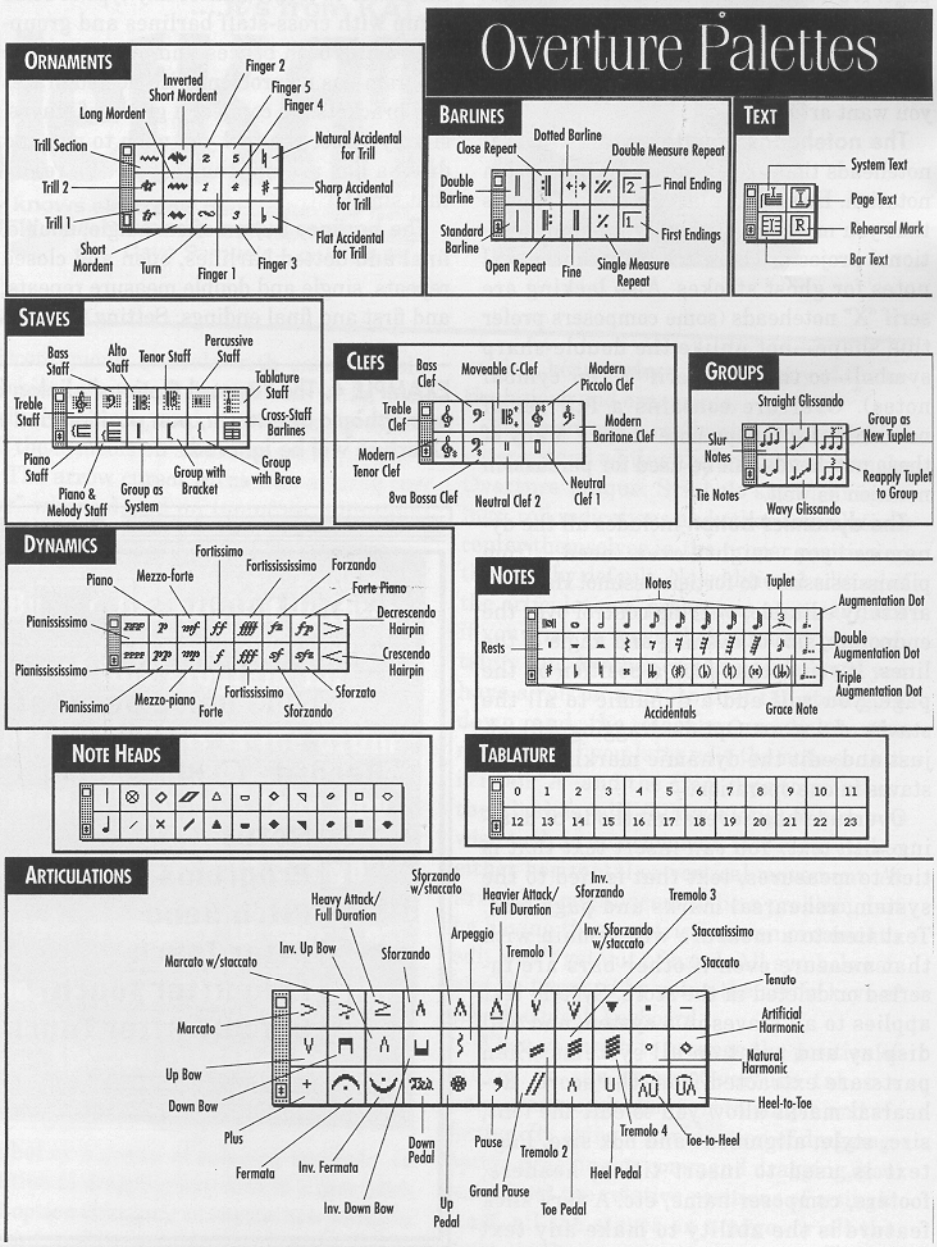
The palette buttons (See Example 3 for an illustration of all Overture palettes) contain pop-up menus of musical symbols, and each can be torn off the menu to create a floating palette. The notes palette contains the usual complement of values—from double-whole to 128th notes and their associated rests. You can also make a note a part of a triplet or select from single, double and triple augmentation dots. All the necessary accidentals are included in this palette, including parenthetical accidentals.

For simple note entry from the notes palette, you select the desired symbol and click anywhere on the score for insertion. If the "auto position" command is checked in the options menu, Overture will automatically justify the horizontal placement of the symbol in the measure according to the current allotment table and beat chart (see below). Without the auto position command in effect, notes and rests are inserted in the score exactly where you click the mouse.

Another method of using the note palette is to combine the use of the mouse with the Macintosh keyboard. Overture contains several keyboard shortcuts for selecting tools within the notes palette. For example, pressing 1, 2, 4, 8, etc. on the keyboard calls up whole, half, quarter and 8th notes respectively. There are also keyboard commands for toggling triplets, augmentation dots, rests and grace notes. All keyboard commands for this palette are logical and easy to memorize. To use this feature, strike the key that selects the tool and click the mouse on the score for instant entry. You can also enter notes in step-time with a MIDI keyboard, from real-time performances, and by transcribing a standard MIDI file.

The groups palette contains pop-up menus for slurs, tuplets, ties and glissandi. To use any of these features, simply select the appropriate command and then drag across the notes you wish to group. Ties and slurs can be easily edited with the arrow cursor (which turns into a drag cursor when

EXAMPLE 3. All the musical symbols and commands contained in Overture's palettes.



placed on top of one of the control points). Arc height, arc curvature and endpoints are fully adjustable, as is flipping the direction of the tie or slur. Tuplet adjustments are extensive, allowing for no beam, straight beam and curved beam indications.

The ornaments and the articulation palettes together contain a large group of the most often used note alterations. All symbols are placed into the score at their default position when the mouse is clicked over a note. However, if you click and hold down the mouse button, you can drag the symbol to position it manually. Of course, if you choose the default position and then later wish to make an adjustment, you can always drag the symbol anywhere on the page. It's a snap to add articulations to multiple notes in much the same manner as grouping notes. Just select the articulation you wish and draw a box around the notes you want articulated.

The noteheads palette contains several noteheads that are essential for percussion notation. However, it lacks a few noteheads that you may find necessary for your notational projects. There are no parenthetical notes for ghost strokes. Also lacking are serif "X" noteheads (some composers prefer this shape—not unlike the double-sharp symbol—to the sans serif "X" for cymbal notes). Overture contains a full set of noteheads for "shape note music." Many of these noteheads can be used for percussion notation as well.

The dynamics button includes all the dynamics you might ever need, from pianississississimo to fortisississimo! Hairpins are fully editable, offering control over the endpoints, size of opening and angle of the lines. If you option-click a position on the page, you will add a dynamic to all the staves of a score. Option-dragging will adjust and edit the dynamic marking in all staves in one operation.

Overture has several methods of dealing with text. You can insert text that is tied to measures, text that is tied to the system, rehearsal marks and page text. Text tied to a measure will remain with that measure even if other bars are inserted or deleted in the score. System text applies to all staves in a system and will display and print on all systems when parts are extracted from the score. Rehearsal marks allow you to edit the font, size, style, alignment and box size. Page text is used to insert titles, headers, footers, composer name, etc. A very slick feature is the ability to make any text block transparent or opaque. If transparent, musical symbols and other items on the page will show through behind the text. If made to be opaque, a white area will surround the text.

The clefs button contains both versions of the neutral clef that are commonly used for percussion notation: two vertical lines and the rectangle. Rather than have several different C-clefs in the palette, Overture contains a single C-clef that can be moved up or down on the staff. All the other necessary clefs are included in this palette.

The staves button is extremely easy to use. This palette is used for inserting staves of various types and grouping staves together into systems. These tools give you the power to create almost any type of score setup with cross-staff barlines and groupings using both braces and brackets. The program has no problem with nested braces and brackets. To connect a group of staves, simply select the tool you wish to use and draw a box around the staves. It's really that simple!

The barlines button offers single, double, final and dotted barlines, open and closed repeats, single and double measure repeats, and first and final endings. Setting first and multiple endings is a breeze, as all aspects of the repeat are editable. If desired, Overture will perform all repeats when the score is played through a MIDI sound module.

Finally, the toolbar ends with **the transcription quantize amount button.** Overture's smallest transcription note value is the tripleted version of the select note value. In other words, if you select the 16th note as the quantize value, Overture will correctly transcribe notes as short as 16th triplets.

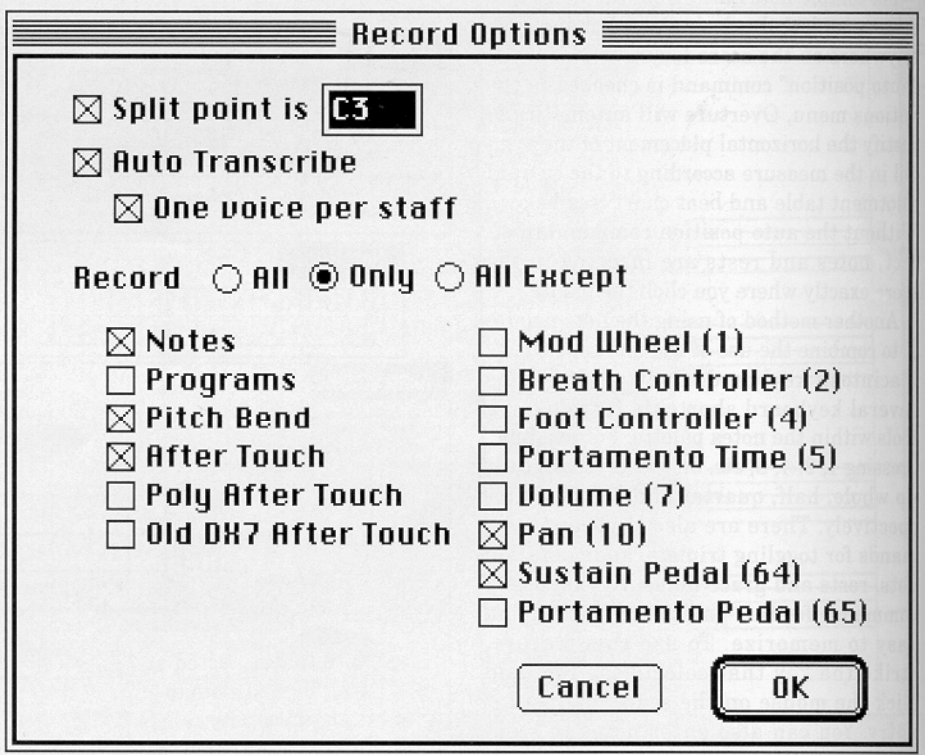
REAL-TIME TRANSCRIPTION

Overture's real-time transcription ability is quite good. You can set the metronome to click in record, click in play, click in the countoff bar only, and select a metronome sound through MIDI. The "record options" dialog box (see Example 4) offers a wide selection of control over your MIDI input.

PAGE VIEW CONTROLS

These controls contain a pop-up menu used to select a viewing scale from preselected choices of 50%, 70%, 100%, 150%, 200% and 250%. If these percentages don't fit your needs, you can enter any numerical percentage between 40% and 999%. As in all Opcode

EXAMPLE 4. The "Record Options" dialog box set to record only notes, pitch bend, monophonic aftertouch, pan position and the sustain pedal. All other MIDI data sent to Overture will be ignored.



programs, numericals can be typed into the dialog box, or you can scroll through available values with the mouse. In addition, you can perform selective zooming by using the arrow cursor and option-dragging a box around the part of the score you wish to zoom. This area of the score will then be automatically enlarged to fill the score window. This pop-up menu also lets you select commands for "fit in window," viewing a single page at a time, or viewing multiple pages in both horizontal (pages placed side by side) and vertical formats (pages placed down the score window).

The "Voice" area of the page view controls lets you select any one of eight voices for a single staff. The bar and page numericals along with the arrow selections for previous page and next page commands make navigation around the score easy and intuitive.

EDITING DATA

Editing score information in Overture is as easy as it can be! Any symbol can be moved left or right, up or down. When you select a score symbol for editing, the symbol will either show up as an outline (used mostly for notes and rests) or the adjustment handles will become visible (examples include beams and slurs). By using the arrow cursor, you can select individual symbols, contiguous and discontiguous symbols with ease. Double-clicking selects all the symbols in an individual measure, and triple-clicking selects all the symbols on an entire staff line.

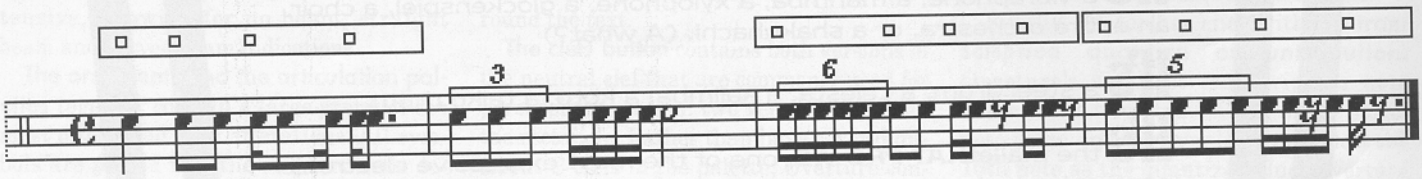
The arrow cursor turns into a "drag cursor" when placed on top of an individual symbol or a group of selected symbols. In addition to dragging any note to a new pitch and option-dragging to create new notes in a chord, you can adjust stem length and direction, beams, slurs, ties and any of the articulations and ornaments.

By far, the coolest feature of this program for percussionists is the drum map, which will take any MIDI input and assign note numbers to specific positions on the staff with specific noteheads.

There are some really nice features about entering and editing the notation that make Overture unique. Symbols such as fingerings, roll indications and other articulations center themselves in the proper position on the staff by default. No additional editing of the articulations' position is necessary, but if you wish to move them around, you certainly can. Another cool thing—let's say you have a roll on a "D" so that the stem goes down and the slashes are below the notehead. If you later edit the note so that it is an "A" and the stem flips to point up, the slashes will follow along! When you wish to drag an ornament, it is restricted to either horizontal or vertical movement. At first, this might seem to be a problem, but by having these restrictions, an ornament's edit won't get out of hand. All symbols can also be tweaked by using the arrow keys of the Macintosh keyboard.

When you wish to arrange the position of staves on the score, Overture takes a unique approach that is both simple and effective. By using a combination of dragging, option dragging or command dragging, you can adjust the relative positions of a single staff, all the staves on a page, or all the staves in the score.

EXAMPLE 5. Overture's beat chart allows the user to control the overall spacing of the notes within the measure. Each bar can have its own unique beat chart.



Staff widths are altered by grabbing any staff's left or right side selection handle and dragging to the desired position. Each measure's width can be adjusted by dragging the barline left or right. Overture will automatically respace the music contained within the measure.

One of the more important features of any notation program is the amount of flexibility offered in positioning the notes within the measure. Overture offers automatic positioning according to the measure's existing beat chart. The beat chart can be adjusted by dragging the beat boxes left or right (see Example 5).

MIDI IMPLEMENTATION

When editing note values in Overture (for example, changing a series of 8th notes to 8th-note triplets), the program intelligently decides how to affect the corresponding MIDI data. If the notes were recorded in real-time or imported from an existing MIDI file, Overture will not alter the MIDI data. If the notes were entered by another manner, then the program will change the corresponding MIDI data.

All trill marks affect the MIDI playback of the score if the "play trill/tremolos" command is selected in the preferences dialog box. Any other articulations, such as staccato dots, accents, fermati, tenutos, etc., are ignored in playback. While these score markings do not affect playback, dynamics do. In fact, you can alter the MIDI velocities of dynamics in a special "dynamics" window (see Example 6).

MORE FEATURES THAT MAKE OVERTURE UNIQUE

If you often use musical notation for exams, articles or books, you'll be especially pleased with Overture's ease in creating graphics that can be exported to other programs such as Pagemaker, Freehand or Microsoft Word. If you keep the mouse depressed over the arrow cursor, a pop-up menu appears that lets you select either PICT or EPS. You then draw a box around any portion of the score (the box can be edited to further refine your selection) and double-click inside the box. Presto! A PICT is instantly placed on the clipboard for instant pasting into another program, or an EPS file is saved to your hard disk. It really couldn't be easier!

There are a series of menu selections that help transcribe MIDI performances. The "notate notes as" command can instruct the program to notate any group of notes as arpeggio, staccato, swing 8ths, trill, tuplet or turn. This comes in handy if you wish to change a performed trill (for example) into a single symbol rather than a long string of short note values.

The fact that Overture will play back tremolos is very helpful for percussion notation. If you're writing a snare drum solo, indicating quarter note rolls by three slashes through the stems, the MIDI file will play a series of 32nd notes (perfect for those MIDI nine-stroke rolls!).

For percussionists, the coolest feature of this program by far is the drum map, which will take any MIDI input and assign note numbers to specific positions on the staff with specific noteheads. Think about this for a moment—you can now record your electronic drumset or drum machine performances in real-time and have the proper pitches and noteheads automatically placed on the staff! You can also notate your percussion parts as you wish and not have to worry about the MIDI playback. This is an extremely hip feature!

Creating a drum map is easy (see Example 7) but there are limitations. For example, there is no way to automatically notate "X" noteheads as diamonds when longer durations are performed, and you are limited to eight different voices or "instruments" on a single staff. If your percussion part contains more than eight instruments, you'll need to notate the part on two staves or add/edit additional notes after the fact.

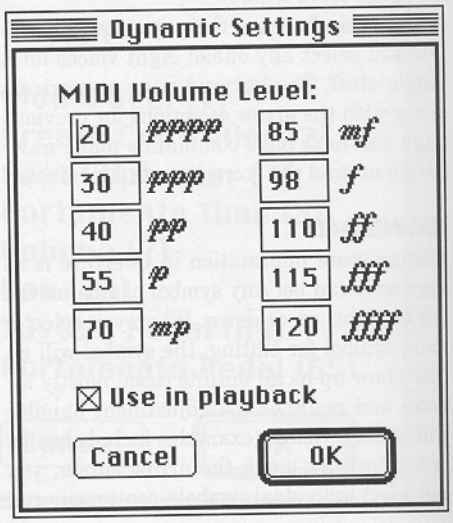
HELP IS ON THE WAY

To help get you started, Overture comes with score templates for full orchestra, string trio, string orchestra with piano, string orchestra and string quartet. Choral templates include SAB with piano; SATB with piano, bass and percussion; SSA with piano; vocal solo with piano; two part with piano; and SATB with piano. The brass/band/ensemble templates include woodwind choir, wind ensemble, concert band (22 lines), brass quintet and brass choir.

There are also some sample files that you can experiment with to gain more working knowledge of Overture. Included on the master disks are the "Sonata in E-flat" for Flute by Bach, a Prokofiev march, "Greensleeves," "Danse de la Fee-Dragee," "Blue Salsa" and "Amazing Grace."

The Overture package comes with several manuals that are well thought out and highly organized: *Getting Started Manual*—contains installation instructions and a series of step-by-step tutorials designed to introduce you to some basic

EXAMPLE 6. The dialog box used for setting MIDI velocities that correspond to various dynamic markings.



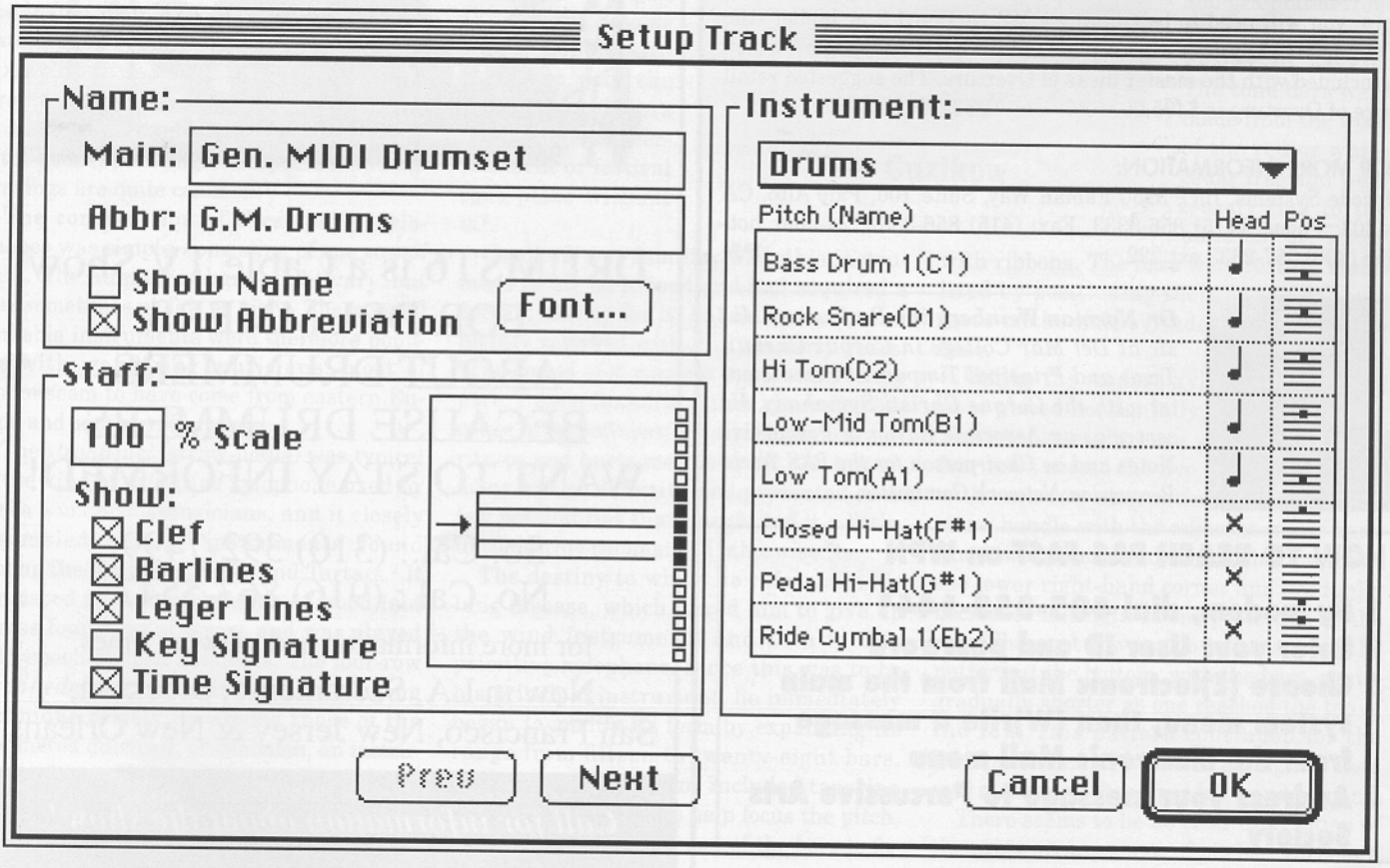
Overture features. *Overture Reference Manual*—contains detailed information about every window and menu item in Overture. *Overture Encyclopedia*—contains brief explanations of Overture's functions. Just look up the function you want to perform (using standard musical terminology) and read the description. Encyclopedia entries also point you to other areas that contain more detailed information. There is also a "read me" file included on the disk, which contains several chapters of additional helpful information.

LOOK AND FEEL

Overture's interface is a little odd at first, but very consistent. If you want to transpose a group of notes or add staccato dots to a group, the syntax is the same. Without reading the manual, you might try selecting a group of notes and then call up the "X" notehead. Well, if you do this, nothing is going to happen. The correct Overture syntax for this type of operation is to first select the "X" notehead and then tell the program which notes will be affected by selecting them. Shortly after making the selection, the noteheads will change like magic.

Most Macintosh programs work in the following syntax: here (indicated by making a selection) do this (indicated by calling up a command). This is, for example, how one changes fonts in a typical Mac word processor. But Overture works in the opposite manner: do this (by calling up a menu command) here (by clicking on a place in the score).

EXAMPLE 7. The Setup Track window—where you create a drum map for a staff. This drum map was made for a general MIDI sound module. Notice that certain notes can also have unique notehead shapes.



BOTTOM LINE

Overture is a very slick program that ran without problems on both my Powerbook 140 and PowerMac 7100. It is fast (no, make that very fast), intuitive, stable, clean and produces outstanding printed results. The ease of editing and the ability to edit large portions of the score with a single command make altering data a pleasure. Exporting PICT or EPS graphics is fast and painless.

There are a few limitations that may prevent you from using Overture as your main notational program: somewhat limited symbol set (lacking several specialized symbols for jazz notation), key signatures limited to traditional key centers (no mixing of sharps and flats), and no ability to import or create special graphic elements necessary for contemporary notation.

On the other hand, how many times do you need these extended features? And, how many times would you like to notate your drum performances without major transposition and editing nightmares?

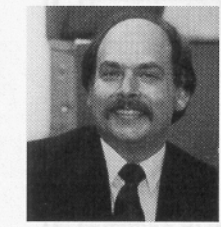
All in all, I feel that the good points of this program far outweigh the slightly less-good points. As Overture is still in its Version 1 state, the limitations outlined above may be addressed in future versions of the software. Even if they aren't, I'm going to be using Overture as my standard notational package for most of my everyday needs. If you're in the market for a new notation package, you could hardly go wrong with Overture.

REQUIREMENTS

Overture version 1.0.4 requires a Macintosh 68020 processor or better. This means that if you're still using an old Mac Plus, it's time to upgrade! The program also requires two megabytes of RAM, 2.5 megs of hard-disk space, and System 7.0 or later. If you plan to use MIDI devices for playback or real-time recording with Overture, you will need to be running OMS version 1.2 or higher (the "Opcode MIDI System" that replaces Apple's MIDI Manager), which is included with the master disks of Overture. The suggested retail price of Overture is $495.00.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Opcode Systems, Inc., 3950 Fabian Way, Suite 100, Palo Alto, CA 94303; Phone: (415) 856-3333, Fax: (415) 856-3332; 24-hour hotline (800) 557-2633 ext 222. **PN**



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