

CyberSound VS

Reviewed by Norman Weinberg

CYBERSOUND VS IS A SOFTWARE-based "virtual synthesizer" that resides on the hard drive of your Macintosh computer (see the System Requirements for recommended and supported hardware needs). It consists of "CyberSynth," the program that turns your Mac into a sound module, and "CyberPlayer," a convenient 16-track MIDI sequencer.

By connecting the stereo output from your computer to headphones, speakers or a sound system, a PowerPC Mac becomes a MIDI sound module with over 50 megs of 16-bit sounds that make use of a wide variety of synthesis technologies. CyberSynth includes analog, digital, wavetable and even physical modeling sounds. The CyberSynth program operates as a control panel, and for this reason, it is available all of the time. It's perfectly possible to use CyberSynth in the background while you work in another music program or even a word processor. Access to CyberSynth is provided by the control panels menu.

Once called up, the main window of CyberSynth is divided into two halves (see Illustration 1). The left side contains on-and-off switches for both the program itself and the effects (effects are automatically turned off for non-PowerPC Macs). The right half of the window contains pull-down menus for both the desired sound bank and the specific program. Below the on/off switches are four buttons: one is used to set the effects; one accesses the options menu for optimizing the software for best performance; one is the play button; and one is an info button. Farther down the screen are the load and save buttons so that you can save your settings and re-

call them for later use. Let's look at each one of these sections and see how they operate.

SOUNDS

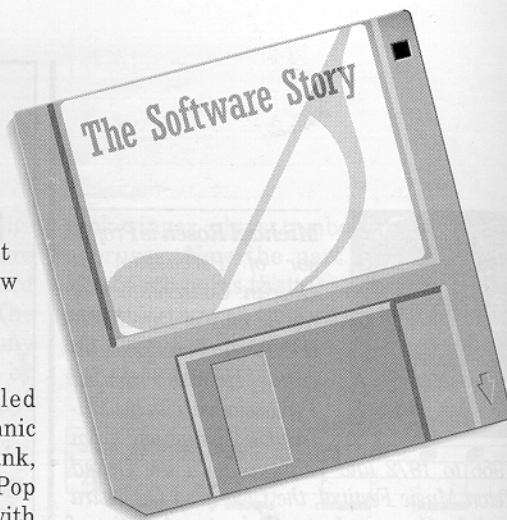
CyberSynth contains banks called CyberSynth Bank, Drum Bank, Ethnic Bank, General MIDI Bank, Loop Bank, Orchestra Bank, Piano Bank and Pop Bank. Once you register your software with InVision, you'll receive six new sounds by mail. The review package came with a floppy disk called "Pro Banks." This particular bank of sounds is optimized for better "live play" response. It would take too much space to list every sound contained in all the banks, but here's a taste.

The Piano bank is the most massive, with 105 different programs including acoustic grands, vintage Rhodes, Clavinet and electric grands. The Orchestral Bank includes 83 different programs that cover nearly all of the instruments found in the modern symphony orchestra. The most interesting sounds are found in the CyberSynth Bank, with 29 programs of new and exotic electronic creations such as Dijeri-Hachi, Struck String, Long Bamboo and Pulso Electro that cross tonal boundaries.

The General MIDI banks contain all the sounds you would expect and come in two versions, one for the PowerPC and one with smaller memory and processor requirements for 040 Macs. The drum sounds contained in the General MIDI banks are very complete, with a variety of sounds located in eight maps including Jazz Set, Room Set, TR-808 Set and Orchestra Set, to name a few.

EFFECTS

While the effects programs are fairly



simple, it is a welcome addition to have them included in the program. As shown in Illustration 2, the chorus setting can be adjusted in terms of its length (source signal delay time), feedback (how much of the signal is being reprocessed), speed (LFO pitch modulation), depth (amount of detuning) and amount (master chorus output level). CyberSynth offers three different reverb settings: Chamber, Small Hall and Large Hall. Adjustable controls include predelay (time before the reverb begins), brightness (high-frequency content), decay (time until the reverb dies out) and amount (master reverb output level).

OPTIONS

The option menu (Illustration 3) is the place to arrange the CyberSynth control panel for optimum performance on your particular Macintosh. Here, you select stereo or monophonic sound output, assign the source controllers to use for modulation, and set the maximum number of possible voices and the master output volume control. In addition, you can control the percentage of CPU processing horsepower reserved for CyberSynth, and set the size of the sound cache setting. By fiddling with these adjustments, you can set the program to perform the maximum number of voices without delay or performance loss.

Illustration 1

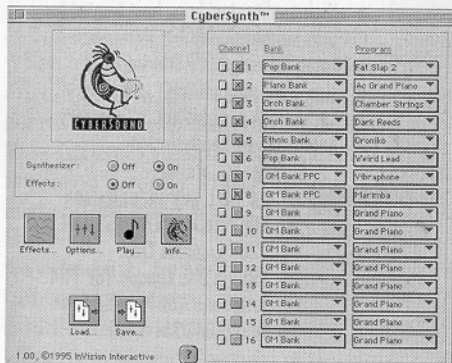


Illustration 2

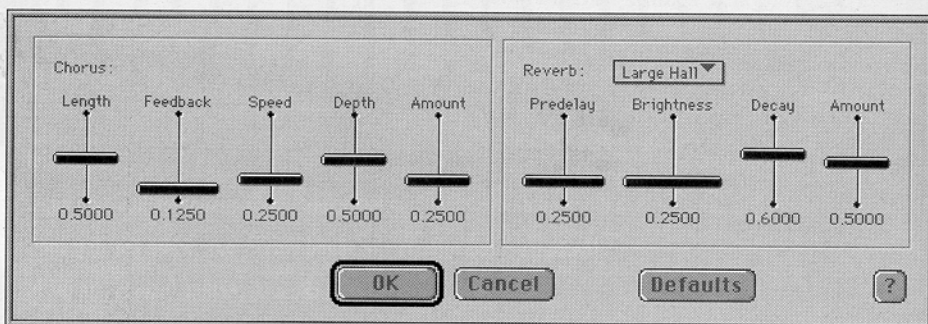


Illustration 3

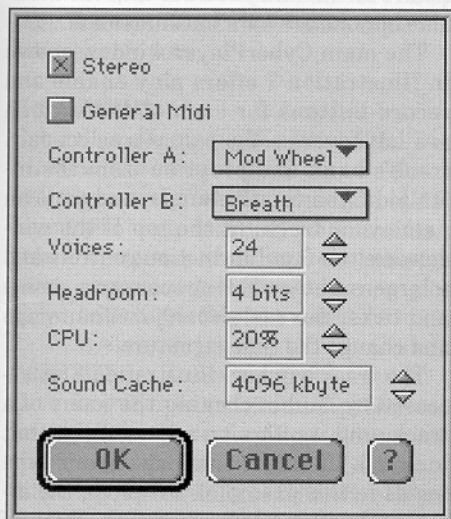
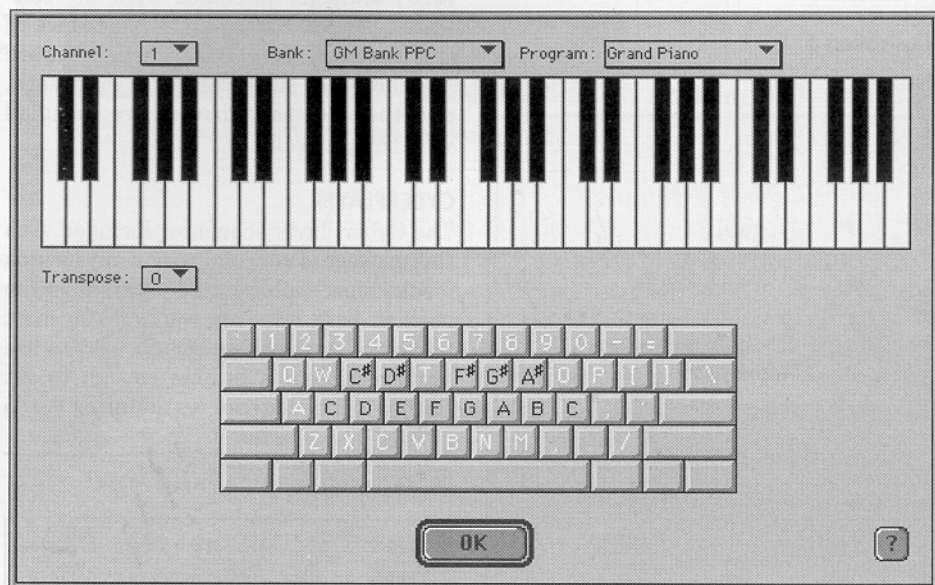


Illustration 4



AUDITIONING SOUNDS

A simple click of the "play" button on the main screen brings you to the audition screen (see Illustration 4). While in this screen, you can select the MIDI channel to audition, the bank and the program. Using the on-screen keyboard or the

Macintosh keyboard (notice the one-octave keymapping in the illustration), you can hear how the different programs are going to sound before you assign them to a particular MIDI channel.

PLAYING CYBERSYNTH

If all you plan to do with CyberSynth is play MIDI files with the accompanying CyberPlayer Program, you won't need any other MIDI gear or software. If, however,

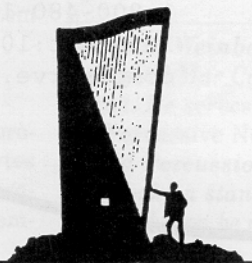
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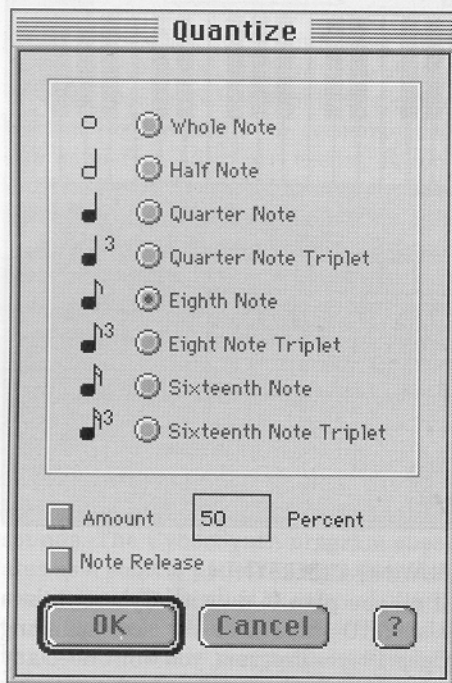
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you wish to record tracks with CyberPlayer or play the sounds in

Illustration 5



CyberSynth from a MIDI keyboard or electronic drumset, you'll need to use Apple's MIDI Manager (included with the software), Opcode Systems' OMS, or Mark of the Unicorn's FreeMIDI. These software "patches" are supported by CyberSynth, and the necessary drivers are included with the program.

CYBERPLAYER

The CyberPlayer sequencer included with this package is not going to win any awards for the most sophisticated program on the market. It is, however, workable for most folks who are looking for an easy-to-use sequencer that is flexible enough to get the job done, but not so daunting as to

scare you with options. Take a look at the quantize and transpose windows (Illustrations 5 and 6) and you'll see that the available options are bare but functional.

The main CyberPlayer window shown in Illustration 7 offers play enable and record buttons for each of the sixteen available tracks. You can also select each track's bank and program from the installed CyberSynth sounds, and you can name your track. At the top of the window are the familiar motion controls and a large counter offering measures, beats and ticks. You can also adjust the tempo and change the time signature.

The track window (Illustration 8) is accessed by double-clicking the name of a track, and it offers up an event list that includes the start time, the event type (notes in this example), the pitch, the attack velocity and the duration. Each of these values can be edited on a note-by-note basis or by selecting a region of events. While the editing features of CyberPlayer are not all that sophisticated, they do include most of the necessary processes that are used for 95% of all sequencing. You'll also find a few very

Illustration 6



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cool features: quantized input, an overdub recording feature that is non-destructive, and a multi-track record option. You can also scale or offset controller and velocity data.

THE MANUAL

CyberSound's manual is one of the best produced that I've seen. In its wire-bound 114 pages are a table of contents, installation and setup instructions, tutorials, a reference section that covers all the features in great detail, appendixes, a glossary and a very complete index.

WISH LIST

Let's face it, this program is pretty cool just as it is. It performs as stated, and offers a great deal of value for its price. Since the review copy of CyberSynth was version 1.0, here are a few comments that would make great additions for future updates. I would like to determine which sounds used the chorus and reverb settings. As listed in the appendixes, some sounds use the reverb, some use the chorus, and some use nothing. As far as I can figure out, it's not possible to alter a sound's routing to the effects. Sure, you can turn the effects off for the entire program, but you can't have one MIDI channel play a program dry while another channel plays the same program with effects.

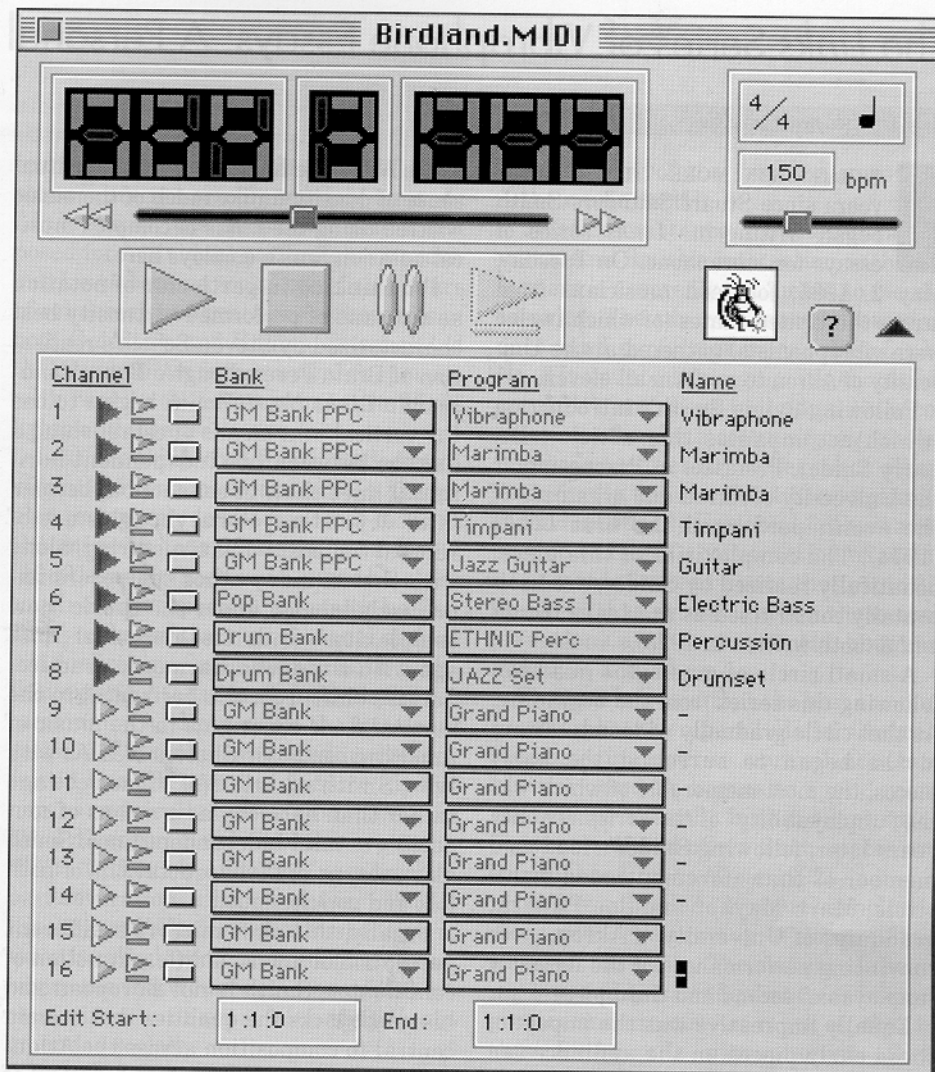
It would be a wonderful addition to be able to tweak some of the sounds included in the software. This may require a major change to the interface and the code that drives the program, but all but the most elementary electronic keyboards offer the user some flexibility in terms of programming.

THUMBS UP

CyberSound VS is a great addition to the MIDI musician's toolbox. It's much less expensive than a new sound module, it sounds good, and could offer some people the dream system: a sequencer and a sound module that reside on your computer—talk about portability! Using a PowerPC Powerbook, you've got a complete studio on your lap! Add a notation program that can save compositions as MIDI files, and you've got a completely portable system with lots of power and great sounds.

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Recommended: Macintosh PowerPC processor, System 7.1 or higher, 16 megabytes RAM, 55 MB hard disk space (for complete install of all sounds), Macintosh com-



patible CD-ROM drive, Sound Manager 3.1 (included).

Supports with drastically reduced performance: Macintosh 68040 processor, 8 megabytes RAM, 6 MB hard disk space (for GM sound set).

Suggested Retail Price: \$249.00

For more information:

CyberSound

InVision Interactive, Inc.

2445 Faber Place, Suite 102

Palo Alto, CA 94303

(800) 468-5530

email: dennym@cybersound.com

web site: <http://www.cybersound.com>

PN

Norman Weinberg is a Professor of Music at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas. He serves as an Associate Editor for Percussive Notes and as Chair of the World Percussion Network Committee. His book on standardized drumset notation will soon be published by PAS.

Illustration 8

