

# DIALED IN

# Zildjian

CRASHING  
THE CLOUD

## Gen 16 Digital Cymbal Vault

By Norman Weinberg

There's nothing new about sampled cymbals. Any good electronic kit, drum machine, or software sampler comes out of the box with a pretty good selection of rides, hi-hats, and crashes. What is new is the fact that Zildjian has lent its name and its instruments to an extremely high-quality digital product line.

Zildjian is serious about this project. They have started an entirely new division within the company called Gen 16. Making cymbals since 1623, these products represent the 16th generation of cymbal-smiths from this famous musical family. The first Gen 16 products are the Digital Vault Acoustic Cymbal Samples. Actually, the concept is pretty tried and true: start with

fantastic instruments, create a ton of beautiful samples, then play them through a "front-end" that is both easy to use and highly sophisticated. So, let's see how they rate.

### SOLID STARTING POINT

The Digital Vault series currently consists of three sample packs. According to the company, each plate was hand-selected from the reference vault by Paul Francis, Zildjian's director of research and design, and master cymbal tester. Keep in mind these aren't the cymbals that you or I can go out and buy from our local dealer. These instruments normally live the in Zildjian vault and serve as reference cymbals for all the other plates of a similar model. In other words, you could say that these are the "best of breed." In addition to these plates, the packages include some very rare, limited-edition cymbals that were never put into large-scale production.

The Digital Vault Z-Pack consists of 14 cymbals from the A line up. There are five rides including the 20" A Custom Medium, 20" A Ping, 21" Reso, 20" A Rock, and the 21" A Sweet. Three crashes are represented by the 16", 18", and 20" A Custom plates. There are good offerings in the hi-hat department with sets of 14" A Customs, 14" A Custom Mastersound, and 14" New Beats.

And to round out the series, there's a 10" A Custom Splash, an 18" A Custom China, and a 22" China Boy High.

After the Z-Pack, Gen 16 presents two volumes of "S-Pack" samples. Volume 1 is dedicated to the company's K Zildjian line. Many of these instruments date from 1982, when the first K instruments were made here in the USA. The package contains two rides: the 20" K Ride and the 21" K Custom Special Dark. The Crash library includes the 16" and 18" K Dark Crash Thin, along with a 20" K Crash/Ride. In the hi-hat department, there's a set of 13" KZs and 14" K Light plates. Also included are a 20" K Constantinople Pang prototype and a 19" K Custom Dark China.

The second volume of the S-Pack series is focused on 11 instruments that are more "special effect" in nature than others in the Gen 16 library. There are 8", 10", and 12" ZXT Trashformer cymbals; 17" and 19" Ultra Hammered Chinas; along with a pair of 14" Ultra Hammered Hi-Hats; and 8" and 10" Oriental China Trash cymbals. Also included is a 20" ZHT Ride, a 20" Oriental Crash Of Doom, and a 24" Gong Sheet for good measure.

### BEAUTIFUL SAMPLES

The Gen 16 recording and sampling sessions were honchoed by well-known player and digital percussion guru John Emrich.

Emrich has a great deal of experience recording a slew of drum and percussion libraries for FXpansion and its BFD software. This is a guy who knows what he's doing in the studio, and when you listen to these samples you'll hear the results that good equipment and good ears can produce.

According to Derek Zimmerman, Zildjian's Gen 16 business manager, "When we decided to create the Digital Vault we wanted to ensure that we captured the true essence of each cymbal. To do so we auditioned several sampling companies to determine who we would partner with. We sent several cymbals to each sampling house and asked them to sample the cymbals, come back to the factory, and play them for the master cymbal testers at Zildjian. We wanted to determine how many of the cymbal samples the master testers could identify, as these special people are truly the keepers of the Zildjian sound. In the case of John Emrich and the BFD platform, the master testers were able to identify 100 percent of the samples."

Of course, cymbals sound drastically different when they are played softly or loudly, played at the edge or bell, or played with the tip or shoulder of the stick. To cover all the bases, the samples in this library

### DETAILS

MODELS	LIST PRICE
Gen 16 Z-Pack Vol. 1	
A Series.....	\$249
Includes 14 instruments (18.1GB)	
and a copy of BFD Eco Digital Vault edition.	
Gen 16 S-Pack Vol. 1	
K Series.....	\$109
Includes 9 instruments (10.3GB)	
Gen 16 S-Pack Vol. 2	
FX Series.....	\$109
Includes 11 instruments (8.2GB)	



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include strikes with sticks, brushes, rods, mallets, and even a bow (on the Gong Sheet). While each cymbal doesn't include articulations with every possible combination, the choices are musically logical. Rides and hats include samples with sticks and brushes. Crashes include sticks, brushes, and mallets.

Even the best electronic kits and drum machines often have to manage their amount of RAM at the expense of sonic purity. It's not uncommon to hear cymbal samples that loop shortly after the initial attack, while the envelope controls are used to fade the loop over time. This technique, while memory-efficient, doesn't take into account the complex changes in tonal quality that take place as instruments decay. Crashes and rides in these collections can last for a full 11 seconds or more, while one long-decaying gong reportedly boasts a three-minute sample. This is one of the main reasons why these samples sound more "real" than others.

Speaking of reality, there are plenty of velocity layers. For example, the 14" New Beat Hi-Hats played with a stick contain 32 closed samples with the tip of the stick, 36 closed samples with the shaft, 19 open samples with tip, and 17 open samples with the shaft. And, there are similar layers for half open, three-quarters open, and pedal-closed notes. The 10" Trashformer from the SP2 library includes a grand total of 59 samples split between the bell, edge, and bow. The end result is that all the cymbals have a natural playability and the transitions between layers are as smooth as anything I've ever heard.

#### THE FRONT END

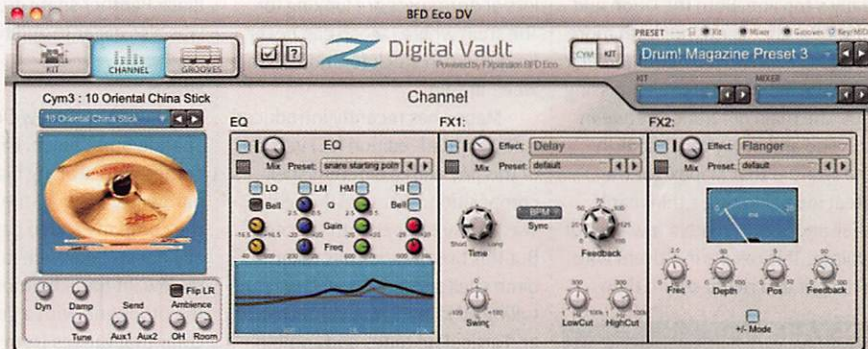
Gen 16's front end is the FXpansion's BFD Eco. This is a great choice for Zildjian, as the software is both plenty powerful and quite intuitive. Eco runs on Mac or PC, and doesn't require nearly as much computational muscle as FXpansion's flagship BFD2 package.

If you already own a copy

**FIG 1:**  
In cymbal mode, you can load up to 11 different plates at a time.



**FIG 2:**  
Along with EQ, each channel offers up to two different effects.




of BFD2, it will recognize these packages without a hitch. If you own a different drumming software program, you can still use these samples, as long as your software imports .wav files. However, you'll be dealing with raw samples, so creating your own presets may be time consuming at the outset.

The interface of BFD Eco is clean as a whistle, and in cymbal mode, can load up to 11 different plates into the mixer at once. In addition to the individual faders on the mixer that control the volume and stereo field of each instrument, you can control the level of overhead mikes and room mikes. These controls affect the entire preset and, like their real-life counterparts, adjust the character and spaciousness of the sound.

Each channel allows for two completely different fx settings in addition to a sophisticated EQ module. While the selection of effects is not the most expansive in the software world, most of the necessary tools are available. You can also adjust the tuning of each cymbal over a two-octave range, the amount of dampening, send levels, and the overhead and room levels. As you can see, this offers plenty of flexibility to create your own signature colors.

In stand-alone mode or as a plug-in, different MIDI note numbers will fire different articulations (bell, edge, bow) of the same cymbal. With this in mind, it's very easy to program your electronic kit or drum controller to trigger the sounds you want. If you want to

go further into the guts of the program, a simple click on the "learn" button will give your MIDI controller direct access to any of the parameters in the mixer or channel screens. 

#### VERDICT

Gen 16 is a new project for Zildjian, and based on these Digital Vault releases, the company is headed in the right direction. In my experience, this is the best collection of cymbal sounds currently available. There's a depth and breadth of offerings to satisfy just about any player, programmer, or composer. But, be warned, once you hear and play these sounds, you'll be spoiled.