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Spectrasonics Omnisphere 2



By Norman Weinberg

A few years ago, we took a look at Omnisphere as one of the up-and-coming synths of that time. Well, guess what? Omnisphere 2 is out and ready to play! If you experienced the original version of Omnisphere, the opening screen will look familiar. But under the hood, there are plenty of updates.

The Spectrasonics website claims 400 new DSP waveforms, and each can act as a morphing wavetable. The site also highlights 8 new filter types, 25 new effects units, deeper FM and ring modulator capabilities, unison drift models, expanded modulation sources and destinations, and more. Spectrasonics also states that there are 4,500 new patches (for a total of over 12,000 sounds), with new

arpeggiator features. That's not to say that the interface hasn't been upgraded, too. In several respects, Omnisphere is easier to use, offers more information at a glance, and sounds every bit as good as it did before. And that's very, very good.

Omnisphere 2 is my "desert island" plug-in: killer sounds of every character, deep and powerful programming possibilities, and to top it all off, ease of use. While I didn't have time to audition each and every one of the new patches, the hundreds I played were extremely cool:

alive, dark, brooding, powerful, deep, organic, provocative, evocative. If you aren't inspired by the sounds in Omnisphere 2, you have no soul.

With so many sounds in the factory library, you'd think that it would be difficult to find the sounds you're looking for. Omni 2 offers

several different ways to access the library and several different ways to search for the perfect patch. Each sound is assigned a category, and one or more (usually several) attribute types. If you're searching for a playable texture that is joyful, and has a simple yet ambient character, you'll have four to choose from. Each sound comes with a short description, such as

the source materials or how the mod wheel might affect the patch. You can easily edit or change the attributes for factory sounds, as

PRICE \$499



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well as any sounds you might create from scratch or from editing.

Omnisphere can have eight independent patches loaded into a "multi." Of special note is "Live Mode," where you can jump from patch to patch, or layer parts on the fly. When you do this, Omni 2 won't cut off the sound of the previous patch. You switch parts by clicking with the mouse or by using the up/down arrows on the screen, which can alternately be controlled via MIDI using any switch on your controller. You can also use MIDI continuous controllers, program change messages, and key switches (particular MIDI note numbers), making it really easy to jump from patch to patch or layer patches together. This is an essential feature for playing complex textures or switching among parts in a live performance.

As heavy as Omni 2 is in terms of audio horsepower, all the major editing is done on a single page. You can create a patch by mixing together two different oscillator sources. Omni 2 offers complete editing control of each oscillator individually along with common elements.

Each oscillator can be either a synth waveform or a sample. In the synth mode, you'll find controls to adjust the wave's shape and its hard sync, along with phase. There are also controls to incorporate FM, ring modulation, wave

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shaping, or voice multiplier — imagine a normal chorus feature on steroids! When the oscillator is set to sample, the voice multiplier becomes even more powerful by adding in a granular synthesis engine to the sampled sound.

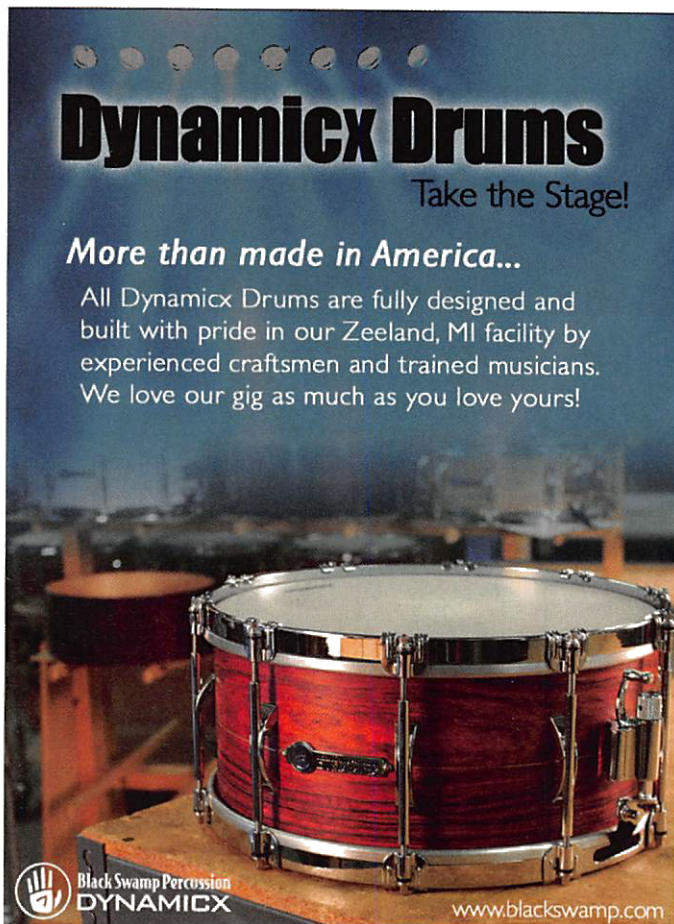
Another feature that makes Omnisphere 2 unique is the filter module. Omni 2 offers up a large number of factory filter presets, but by clicking a "filter zoom" button, you arrive at a new page dedicated to Omni 2's dual-filter controls. Other editing features also use the zoom control to go behind the scenes and edit beyond the presets. The zoom feature also works for the envelope controls, as well as the modulation routings.

Omnisphere's arpeggiator has all the bells and whistles you might need. While there are a large number of great factory presets, it's easy to modify as needed or create your own from scratch: 32 steps, 11 different modes, 3 trigger

types, clocks from whole-notes to sixty-fourth-notes with triplet and dotted values, two octaves of pitch transpositions, duration and dynamic of each step, and more.

In addition to single samples, a huge number of musical phrases can be used to serve as original sound source materials for all Omnisphere 2 features, and can be useful for granular synthesis. And new to Omni 2 is the ability to import your own audio. Create your own drum loop, drop it into Omni 2, and see where it takes you.


The original sample sources provided with Omnisphere 2 are unique on their own (stalactites, newly created instruments, bowed instruments, instruments set on fire, and so on). And the editing options, effects, modulation routings, and other features sound so good that the combination is something you have to hear and experience yourself to fully appreciate the power of this plug-in. 



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