Sample Modeling
MR SAX T

MusicTech INNOVATION

MusicTech EXCELLENCE ★★★★★★★★★★

If you don't have the budget to hire a real sax player, Mr Sax T might be your next best bet. **Keith Gemmell** gets acquainted.

KEY FEATURES

- Synchronous Wave Triggering technology
- Standalone or plug-in operation (VST, RTAS, AU)
- Full expression capabilities
- Works with dedicated breath controller

MR SAX T

Manufacturer **Sample Modeling**

Price **€149 plus local taxes (download)**

Contact **Via website**

Web **www.samplemodeling.com**

Minimum system requirements
**PC 2GHz processor, Windows XP, 2GB RAM
Mac G5 dual 1GHz, Mac OSX 10.4.9, 2GB RAM**

We reviewed Sample Modeling's The Trumpet in Issue 62, hailing it as a truly remarkable virtual instrument that offers a fascinating playing experience and an incredibly realistic trumpet emulation that's as close to the real thing as technology currently allows – a considerable achievement, because the trumpet is a tall order to emulate.

But on hearing the news that Giorgio Tommosini and Peter Siedlaczek had created another virtual instrument – this time the tenor sax – we couldn't help but feel slightly sceptical. After all, many consider the tenor sax to be the hardest instrument of all to realistically emulate with samples, not least because, in the right hands, it's capable of such emotive power. So has the duo pulled it off again with Mr Sax T?

Sampling sax

Installing Mr Sax T doesn't take long. It's not a sample library with hundreds of different articulations. Like The Trumpet, it was developed using sample modulation and sophisticated MIDI processing techniques. It ships with NI's Kontakt Player 2 but can also be used with the Kontakt 2 and 3 samplers.

We are not told the make or model of tenor saxophone that was sampled here and the performer also remains anonymous. However, the musician responsible produces a superb full-bodied tone. So often with virtual saxophones, the basic samples sound harsh and overblown, with the inevitable consequence that they cannot be softened. That's not the case with Mr Sax T, which, at its heart, has a classic vintage tenor sax sound that is very responsive to real-time performance across a wide dynamic range.

Again, like The Trumpet this is first and foremost a performance instrument, and a full-size master keyboard with pitch wheel, mod wheel and an expression pedal (or breath controller) is strongly recommended for real-time playing. Optional CCs are used to control sub-harmonics, growls and flutter tonguing. You can, of course, use fewer MIDI controllers and edit the performance afterwards in a sequencer. However, apart from a lack of musical spontaneity, you'll be missing out on a lot of fun.

Sax machine

Mr Sax T also works beautifully with a wind controller. We hooked it up to an AKAI EWI 4000s and achieved quite spectacular results, but Sample Modeling says that virtually any flavour of wind controller can be used to play this instrument.

Although comprehensively featured, the Kontakt Player interface is very easy to use. Three MIDI input methods are available: keyboard, keyboard and breath controller, and wind controller. Selecting either of the keyboard options enables portamento to be controlled by the velocity of the overlapped notes. Select the wind controller option and the portamento is controlled by CC5. You can also vary the amount of random expressiveness, pitch response to dynamic changes, intensity of key noise, overall resonance of the pipe, sub-harmonic intensity on transitions and pitchbend sensitivity to cope with different types of wind controllers.

Interestingly, pitchbend is asymmetrical, which means that the upward pitch bending is very limited. If you're unfamiliar with single-reed instruments that may seem strange at first, but there's method in the madness because that's exactly how it works with a real saxophone (the player can bend notes down and sometimes start notes below pitch and slide them up, but notes can't really be raised very much at all) and helps towards creating a realistic performance.

Time for T?

Of all the sampled saxophones we've encountered over the years this is, to our ears, the best we've heard and certainly the best-implemented and most intuitive to play, particularly with a wind controller. Of course, with such a 'personal' instrument as the tenor saxophone, the numerous small nuances that make up a great performance cannot be captured and experienced ears will inevitably hear the difference between a real saxophone and Mr Sax T. But that said, with a little work and in the hands of a good player/programmer, it's the next best thing to hiring a real saxophonist. **MTM**

MEASURING UP

Always a tough call to emulate, there are only a few virtual tenor saxophones to choose from. Garritan's Jazz & Big Band collection (£123) includes the full range of saxophones and they all respond well to real-time performance. Also with a full complement of saxophones is LinPlug's SaxLab 2 (€149), which is proving popular.

SUMMARY

WHY BUY
- Intuitive, enjoyable playing experience
- Very realistic tenor saxophone emulation
- Very well-implemented technology

WALK ON BY
- Needs a full-size master keyboard (or wind controller) with expression pedal (or breath controller) for real-time playing

VERDICT

If you're looking for a virtual tenor saxophone, Mr Sax T is the closest you'll get to the real thing.

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