

# NATIVE INSTRUMENTS BATTERY 3

NI has recharged its Battery.

**Text:** Graeme Hague

► I like to make my own beer. I've got this cupboard in the laundry so full of brewed stubbies that when you open the door a blinding, white light shines out and a thunderous rendition of the theme to *2001: A Space Odyssey* strikes up. Actually, think of the refrigerator scene in *Ghostbusters* here. Despite the fact that a hundred beer companies offer all kinds of boutique, micro-brewery ales, stouts, lagers, pilseners – you name it – I still prefer my own brew. Mind you, any brewery salesmen out there who wish to send me samples...

It might explain why I still program my own drumming. Even though there are plenty of excellent drum sample applications that offer thousands of pre-written Midi grooves and fills to choose from, I never seem to find anything that *quite* matches the rhythm in my head. Reaching for the keyboard is always going to be quicker than searching an enormous library of Midi samples. At the same time, writing fills and accents to add that elusive authenticity into drum programming can be time-consuming and tedious. Programs like FXpansion's BFD are sorely tempting after I've spent an hour quantising a half-bar snare roll at 1/64 triplet timing.

Native Instruments' release of Battery 3 has come to the rescue with plenty of new features including preset articulations and a way of 'humanising' your programming. Plus it's revamped the interface and expanded the library – 14GB of it – all the while still resisting the inclusion of Midi samples. But that's okay, because it isn't what Battery is about. This is a serious drum programmer's tool.

## BATTERY RAM

Battery has been around a while, so let's quickly review how the program works. It uses a grid-style interface known as the Matrix. You can determine how many squares are displayed to a maximum of 16 by 8. Squares in the matrix are called a Cell containing the samples for each drum, such as a snare, kick and so on. A cell can have up to 128 samples for velocity layering and requires parameters settings like Midi trigger notes, volume and panning. The matrix means you arrange the drum cells into relevant rows or columns that can be edited as a group. For example, all the tom drums might be in a row of their own and can be muted together. Most of the functions in Battery 3 can be applied to multiple cells at the same time and the matrix layout speeds this process up considerably.

The main interface has been given a facelift with clearer fonts on the labels and a slightly 3-D appearance. The layout is much more visible in higher screen resolution and, well... it just *looks* like a great piece of software. Separate tabs reveal that Battery isn't a drum synth that can double as a sampler, but a rather fully-featured sampler that focuses on drums. Windows for looping, wave editing and sample mapping will let you load almost any kind of

instrument. Time-stretching is available with a choice of playback quality. When you remember that Battery comes from the same stable as Kontakt it's a safe bet there's some decent algorithms lurking somewhere! Note that many functions, like reverse or pitch changes, are applied at a cell level, so even if you have a full 128 samples in that cell, they're all edited.

Battery 3 is, in many ways, just like a lot of other drum programming software. The sample quality is excellent, the libraries are extensive and you can create very realistic drumming. That's a given with any reputable drum sampler now. So rather than go over familiar ground, let's concentrate on some of the more outstanding things Battery 3 can do.

## NEW SETUP FEATURES

The Setup Tab is where many of the new goodies are located. Important for programmers who emulate drummers with six arms and four feet, there's a choice of Steal mode, which determines what notes are cut off when you run out of polyphony.

**Groups** – Next in Setup, Battery 3 provides two layers of voice 'grouping', the parameter that prevents unrealistic drumming such as different hi-hat sounds playing simultaneously. There are Groups and Choke Groups. Choke Groups let you segregate the cells even further. Using a combination of the two you can have an open hi-hat re-triggering without each hit chopping off the previous note, giving you natural-sounding cymbal decay, but still have it grouped to mute with a closed hat.

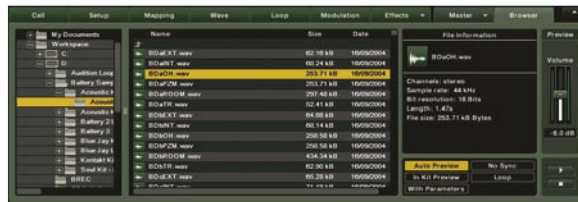
**The Articulation menu** – hurray! Okay, so there's no four-bar Cozy Powell drum fills here. What *is* provided are the kind of subtle nuances that can make all the difference, yet take forever to program. The flams, buzzes and three-stroke ruffs are well done. Alternative Strokes slightly alters every second hit to create a 'weaker left hand' type of effect. The rolls are okay, but need a little tweaking. All the articulations can be edited for speed and dynamics. The tricky thing is that each articulation is applied to the cells, so rather than programming automation to turn the effect on or off at the right moment, it's better to create a new cell for just that articulation – no big deal, really. A disappointment is that articulations aren't translated into Midi programming in your sequencer. In other words, a flam appears as a single event, not two hits. Aside from this, the Articulation menu is going to be a great time-saver.

**Humanise** – The new Humanise section introduces a random value to all your programming which can be very subtle or as unpredictable as your best drunken drummer. If you've already programmed dynamics, then a random factor can actually undo all your hard work, but it's very handy for fixed-velocity sequencing that needs some variety.

The Matrix can be scaled down to fit only the cells in use. The Master Tab below provides some great new effects over the output bus.



The Browser Tab now works like standard sampler interfaces. Note the preview 'play' button on the bottom right.



The Setup tab with the new Articulations section to add accents and fills. The Geiger Counter effect creates a Geiger counter-type of random pattern good for... well, it's great for... I don't know.



## MORE TABS

Beyond the Setup are the various wave editing Tabs mentioned before. There's Mapping, Wave and Modulation which give you a full range of tools to create custom sounds and place them inside Battery. The file import capability is extensive, but still only a simple drag 'n' drop operation. Battery immediately recognises all it needs to know.

In the new Effects tab, alongside the existing EQ and compressor, Battery has finally added a reverb and delay effect. These work in a traditional sense with two sends on each cell, the same as you might find two sends on a mixer channel, returned into the master section of Battery. The quality of the effects are good, but fixed – meaning one send is unalterably a reverb and the other a delay. But, still, the Phil Collins snare slap is back! Now, if I can just find the lyrics to *One More Night*... hang on, those *are* the lyrics.

Lo-Fi, Saturation and Phase Inversion menus are also here to crunch pristine samples into something more 'urban'.

The master section has its own EQ and compressor, plus a limiter – very handy indeed. The reverb and delays returns are here, too. The reverb is available in a 'digital' or CPU-friendly mode, or as a convolution reverb – whatever your system can handle. The main output bus has a standard volume and pan slider.

## THINGS OF NOTE

Battery 2 users will be *very* glad to know you can now right-click any cell and get direct access to the sample library to swap drum sounds. Fantastic! Previously, it was quite a process to re-configure any kit with different drums. Another neat improvement is called Sample Purge. Some of the included kits are huge. The African Percussion, for example, has dozens of congas, djembes and all sorts of things you'd be forced to play after Robert Mugabe confiscated your Brady kit for the greater benefit

of the Zimbabwe nation – but you may only use a few in your programming. Battery 3 'marks' the cells you need and then, by selecting Purge Samples, drops all the unwanted samples out of your RAM. A kit that initially loads as 200MB can shrink to almost nothing.

Lastly, installation was almost easy, except you have to load either none or *all* of the 14GB of sample libraries, then delete stuff manually later. The other hiccup was Native Instruments' registration system. The software includes a Service Centre that gives you access to a challenge-and-response type of product authorisation (and there's no 30-day grace period anymore either), which actually works okay. The trouble was, I had to download a Service Centre update first and that was about 7MB – no fun on a dial-up service!

## BATTERY ASSAULT

What does it all mean? Well, with drum samplers it's too easy to create a favourite drum kit and never change. You get lazy. The solution isn't just to load some Trash Electronic kit into the sampler instead. Battery 3 gives you all the tools to subtly edit your existing kits with real effects into something unique and fresh for each project. The degree to which Battery 3 allows you to shape each drum sound is very impressive or you can take a more global approach over the entire kit with plug-ins like compression and EQ. It might take a little time and experimenting, but how does it compare to the hours spent setting up a real drum kit at the beginning of the day? The challenge, when you have software as capable as Battery 3 at your disposal, is to break out of comfort zones and see what you can do. Either that, or hire a real drummer...

Battery has always been a drum sampler for dedicated programmers and version 3 is no exception.

There – I've earned myself a cold beer. I'll just grab the sunglasses and the earmuffs. ■



## NEED TO KNOW

**Price**  
\$399

**Contact**  
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**Pros**  
Apart from being excellent drumming software, it's a well featured sampler in its own right.

**Cons**  
Mildly disappointed the articulations and fills don't translate into exact Midi notes for further editing.

**Summary**  
Battery 3 is a serious drum sampler for people who want full, creative control over setups and sounds.