

TECHNOLOGY

ACOUSTICA MIXCRAFT 5

ACOUSTICA.COM

\$74.95 (DOWNLOAD)/\$85.95 (BOXED),
EDUCATIONAL OFFERS AVAILABLE

An inspiring and ideal introduction to recording “99”



Mixcraft 5 is a user-friendly multi-track recording system equipped with a generous selection of on-board instruments and loops as well as effects. While it is designed to be very quick and easy to use, with an attractive and uncluttered interface, it is surprisingly powerful and fully compatible with VST instruments and effects. There is a generous selection of instruments included with a general MIDI synthesiser, extra banks of sampled sounds, a polyphonic subtractive analogue synthesiser called ‘Impulse’, MinimogueVA (recreating the famous MiniMoog synthesiser) and VB3 Organ, an emulation of the famous Hammond B3. This means that students immediately have a wide range of really good-quality sounds without requiring additional tools. There is also a

wide selection of audio loop clips included, ranging from drum, guitar and synth loops to film score-style atmospheric sound effects – all clearly categorised into styles and tempo settings. Recording either audio or MIDI is very simple and there is a straightforward piano roll-style MIDI editing window available, complete with all the expected quantising features. Notation tools within the program allow you to create, edit and print your MIDI data in familiar notation format. There are also excellent loop and audio editing facilities including cross-fading and automating the volume or pan. Mixcraft 5 is equipped with 18 high-quality effects including reverb, chorus, delay, distortion and EQ. The program is well documented and extremely easy to understand

with copious help files and once your song is complete you can quickly mix-down to a WAV or MP3 file or even burn directly to a CD.

This program is inspiring and ideal as an introduction to recording in schools. Mixcraft 5 is an absolute bargain at this price and I highly recommend it. (There is a new deluxe edition of the program called Mixcraft Pro Studio 5 with an increased range of on-board instruments and effects, available for \$149.99.)

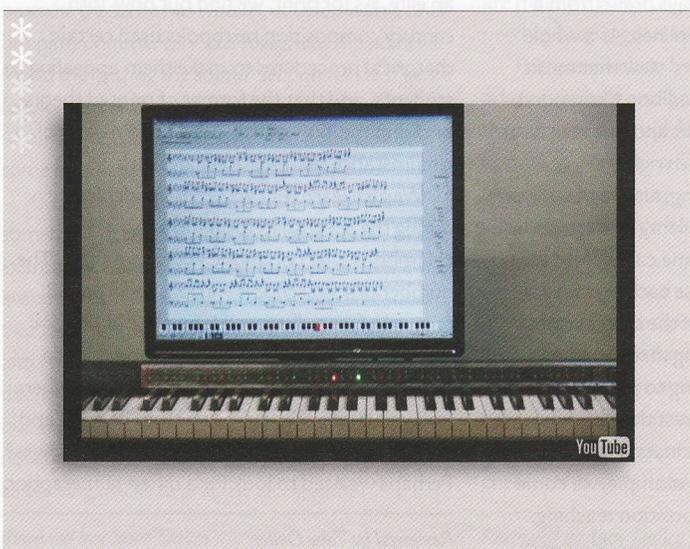
Reviewed by Tony Cliff

PIANOMAESTRO

THEPIANOMAESTRO.COM

\$169

Unlikely to have an impact on the self-help market “99”



On the plus side, the PianoMaestro does what it says on the tin. It is a slim strip of plastic, which you rest on top of the keys; almost four octaves are named in a row, (C, D,

E, F etc.) with green lights beneath and red lights alongside for black notes. You set up your laptop (Windows only, not Mac) on top of the piano, install the program, plug in the device via USB and download a MIDI file (many are provided). The screen then displays music and a diagram of the keyboard with notes lighting up in red. The speed of play can be altered.

But there are many disadvantages. Investigating the website, I soon realised that, although assertively marketed, the product has not been produced by musicians. The notation is, I am sorry to say, a travesty of the original score, and is also devoid of fingering, dynamics, tempo markings etc. The device is billed as a practice aid, but however slowly it was set, trying to look in three

places at once (screen on top of piano, letters and lights on device, and the actual piano keys) proved an impossible task. When I decided to play Chopin’s ‘study on the black keys’ at speed, the plastic strip clattered noisily.

The self-help market is well served by relatively inexpensive portable electronic keyboards with keys that light up from within, correct beats of the bar, and fingering guidelines. I cannot see the PianoMaestro dislodging their supremacy.

Reviewed by Nancy Litten