

Acoustica Mixcraft Pro Studio 6

£160 



The upstart DAW gets a makeover with new features, effects and instruments, but can it compete with the big boys?

> It may not be as well-known as Sonar, and it doesn't have the devout following of Reaper, but Acoustica's Mixcraft has been bothering the low/mid-budget PC DAW market for some years now. Version 5 was a big one, introducing a host of pro features, so we were intrigued when we heard that v6 was on the way. This time around, though, the changes have been applied with a lighter brush. We're reviewing the Pro Studio edition here, but the 'standard' edition - called simply Mixcraft 6 - can be had for £70.

Acoustica have always included plenty of sample content with Mixcraft, and v6 sees 3000 new loops added, in a broad range of styles, bringing the total to over 6000. There are also a few new instruments onboard, including a pair of transistor organs in the form of Combo-V(ox) and Combo-F(arfisa). They're decent enough, though as with many of Acoustica's bundled plug-ins, they can be found elsewhere for free. Beat makers, meanwhile, will be thrilled with the new Acoustica Studio Drums Collection - a massive ROMpler full of acoustic and electronic drum sounds. It sounds terrific.

Effects haven't been overlooked either, one standout new addition being the Broadcast Processor, a multiband compressor aimed at "winning the loudness war" or squashing the life out of your songs - whichever you prefer. It does the job and sounds pretty good. There's also the EZQ equaliser, which is essentially a tone control

with a vector pad labelled Dark, Tinny, Bright and Warm. You also get a 31-band EQ, iZotope Mastering Essentials (a basic but sonically impressive mastering suite) and some useful mid-side processors, among many, many others. Incidentally, the cheaper 'standard' version of Mixcraft doesn't include these or numerous other plug-ins that ship with Pro Studio 6.

World of Mixcraft

It's not all new sounds and effects, though. Mixcraft can now run as a ReWire host, while unlimited outputs are available to VST Instruments and MIDI control surface support is finally in place. Track lanes have also been implemented - particularly useful with that new drum kit - and recordings can now be made in loop mode, with each pass creating a new take. Punch-ins and punch-outs can also be performed - very useful for the solo recordist - and effects chains can be stored and retrieved. We also want to give Acoustica a big hug for integrating a guitar tuner into every audio track. All DAWs should have this!

Mixcraft started life as a very rudimentary DAW, but it has rapidly grown into a powerful music-making environment with the sorts of features you might expect from an application costing considerably more. Version 5 represented a particularly major step up, introducing a swathe of advanced features and

some exceptional bundled plug-ins. Maybe it's a bit unfair to expect the upgrade from v5 to v6 to be similarly vast, and indeed it isn't. Nevertheless, Acoustica continue to improve the software with powerful, professional features, and PC users looking for a refreshing change from cluttered, over-the-hill production environments might thrive in Mixcraft's tighter, tidier world. Acoustica's motto is that "software should be easy to use" and Mixcraft 6 fits that bill without sacrificing power and flexibility. **cm**

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Alternatively

Cockos Reaper
cm170 » 9/10 » \$60/\$225

With a powerful featureset and regular updates, Reaper is the budget DAW to beat

FL Studio 10 Producer Edition
cm165 » 8/10 » \$199

FL Studio has just about everything you could want from a DAW, and it's especially adept at electronic styles

Verdict

For Still dead easy to use

Effects chains

Now a ReWire host

Tuner on every audio channel!

Some basic DAW functions added at last

Solid collection of plug-ins...

Against ...even if you can get lots of those plug-ins elsewhere for free

Not as generational a leap as v5, but still a very powerful, well-equipped DAW

9/10

Addressing the obvious

Some of Mixcraft 6's new additions are long overdue, and their omission from earlier versions have left more than a few potential users out in the cold, and us, as reviewers, frustrated.

Take, for example, the ability to do something as obvious as reversing an audio clip. Now it's a right-click away, as it always should have been. Ditto for altering the phase of an audio clip. Not only can you now do that, but you can also

invert the left or right channels of a stereo file individually.

The ability to 'add time' to a project seems like a no-brainer - most DAWs let you do it. Now, so does Mixcraft 6. You can add a section of empty space anywhere you like within your project, and all of your song's markers, tempo changes and automation will jump into place accordingly. And yes, you can delete time, too, removing chunks of tuneage as you see fit.