

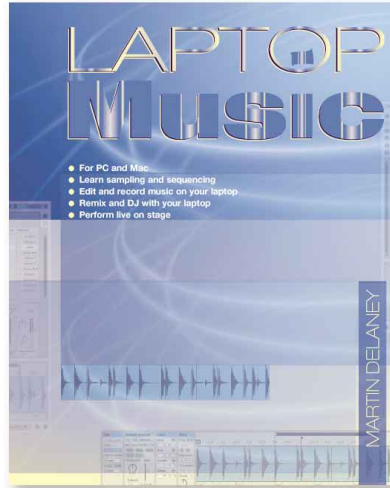
## Book Review: *Laptop Music*

Martin Walker

This book from PC Publishing is not just an academic exercise detailing the Mac and PC software and hardware you'll need to make music, although there's plenty of that as well. Martin regularly performs live laptop gigs, and his practical experience really shines through in the text. Even better, the text is liberally sprinkled with mini-interviews and quotes from other practising laptop musicians, including details of gear and techniques, which really bring it to life.

The book starts by discussing laptop hardware, and what you'll need in a new model. This includes a discussion of port options; the arguments for Windows, Mac OS, or Linux; and what you'll manage using elderly hardware or when buying secondhand. Following this, he moves on to give examples of the basic audio interface options, before providing advice about carrying cases, security, insurance, maintenance, and batteries.

Several concise but informative sections then discuss various specific audio interfaces, MIDI controllers, and accessories, before concentrating on available freeware, shareware, and commercial software —



audio editors, sequencers, soft synths, plug-ins, and so forth. Although the more obvious commercial candidates such as Ableton *Live*, Propellerhead *Reason*, and Celemony *Melodyne* are all covered, exploring opinions from various musicians using them in practice, this section also covers live jamming techniques using free software.

By the next chapter we're really in the thick of things, with an in-depth look at laptop gigging and jamming. There's loads

of practical advice on different ways of working with others, places to meet, and how to set up your gear. Then there's the visuals — ways to keep the audience interested when you're a lone musician hunched over a laptop. These include video capture and editing, VJ'ing with software like *Arkaos* (the visual equivalent of Ableton *Live*), and the use of webcams, projectors, and screens.

Freeware and commercial software for the laptop DJ is then touched on before the book finishes with a discussion of other portable but non-laptop gear; a look at future possibilities using wireless technology, tablets, touch screens, and more advanced controllers; and two pages of laptop music web links. Overall, I loved this book's streetwise approach — it's one of the most entertaining music technology reads I've ever had, and well worth the money! **5/5**

### information

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## DVD Review: *Surrounded By Drums*

Hugh Robjohns

Recording drum kits is always something of a challenge, and although no two engineers will ever approach the task in quite the same way, there is plenty to be learned from examining the techniques used and applying them to your own situations. That's why this DVD, produced by SPL, is so interesting.

The disc is intended to demonstrate 5.1 surround-sound techniques, with four world-class drummers providing the source material. The original impetus for the project was to record the first 5.1 drum sample library, with Chris Pfannschmidt of the *Real Mega Drums* and *Real Mega Rhythm* CD-ROM collections in the producer's chair. The four drummers involved were Simon Phillips, Kenny Aronoff, Dennis Chambers, and Mel Gaynor, and the recordings were

made at Galaxy Studios in Belgium using an AMS Neve Capricorn digital console, Digidesign Pro Tools 24 hard disk recorder, and Genelec 1035B and 1038A monitors. Each performance was recorded using SPL's Atmos 5.1 surround recording system, which provided the overall surround image and room sound, as well as with a multitude of close mics festooned all over each kit — the usual array of Shure, Neumann, and AKG models.

The 5.1 surround sound is presented from the drummer's own all-enveloping perspective, the justification being that, while it is straightforward to derive the traditional 'in front of the kit' perspective from an overhead surround recording, (simply by panning the rear speakers to the front and swapping the left and right channels), it is impossible to create an enveloping sound stage from a traditional frontal recording. A second argument is that

recording the kit the way the drummers actually hear it themselves allowed them to say whether the recordings were really capturing the sound properly or not — which was the goal, after all.

However, there is a teensy-weensy fly in the ointment. The video is shot from a fixed position in front of and above the drummer — an audience viewpoint if you will — resulting in a stark contradiction between the sound and picture perspectives. Seeing the drummer reach out to a crash cymbal on the right, but hearing it from the left is initially confusing and ultimately frustrating. The problem can be easily resolved by reorganising the audio outputs from your DVD player or your speaker cables, but I can't help feeling this really should have been addressed at the mastering stage! In addition to the surround mixes (presented in both Dolby Digital and DTS formats), there are also stereo downmixes, but these, rather

# Noren Acoustilock gCab Computer Cabinet

Paul White

Computer noise is a major problem in the computer-based studio, especially where instruments or vocals have to be recorded in the same room. This product is designed to tackle such noise, and is essentially a soundproof cabinet with in-built cooling system. It's designed to accommodate anything up to the height of a Mac G5. There's a little width to spare, but it's not much room for any external drives, unless you can stand them on edge next to the computer. A modern Firewire drive might also fit on top of a G5 at a pinch.

Noren's cooling technology uses rods with exceptional thermal conductivity. One end of the rod projects into the box with the heat source while the other is fan cooled in a separate chamber, which means that up to 800W of heat can be extracted without needing a direct air path.

Separate fans circulate air over both ends of the rods, and extract the warm air via an acoustically absorbent ducting system. Because of the width of the heat exchanger system and the thick foam cabinet linings, the cabinet ends up being a fairly bulky 26 x 24 x 32 inches, even though the computer section measures only 22.75 x 12 x 24

inches.

The cabinet is black (although Maple finish is also available at no extra cost) and built from laminated MDF. Doors to the front and rear, held closed by basic catches, are kept airtight with foam gaskets. The rear door's gasket is thick enough to allow cables to exit the box simply by being 'trapped' in the door. A sliding base allows the computer to be slid out if necessary.

Even without the castors supplied, the gCab was too tall to fit under my studio worksurface. However, having set it up to one side, its top provided useful extra workspace.

The specifications state that the noise level of a desktop G4 computer can be reduced from 61.5dBA to 37dBA in the gCab. Tested subjectively, I found the gCab to be virtually inaudible, even when listened to in a quiet room, which after all is what you need to know. Given the complexity of building and shipping a unit like this, the UK price seems pretty fair, though it still seems a lot to pay for keeping your computer quiet, as you could buy a halfway decent PC for the same price. Nevertheless, if you need a quiet



environment and you have space to accommodate the gCab, it could make the difference between being able to record in the same room and not. **SCS**

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perversely, are in the traditional frontal perspective and match the left-right orientation of the camera position!

As well as a pair of very impressive solos given by each of the four drummers, the disc also contains interviews with them talking about their expectations and

experiences of surround sound. There is additionally a *Making Of...* video which lasts 15 minutes and shows the studio and control-room setups, as well as the team working on the project. One of the most informative sections lists the components of each drum kit, along with which mics were used on which elements.

It's important to restate that this DVD doesn't contain drum workshops or clinics, or any explicit advice about drum miking techniques. However, it does provide some superb-sounding examples of 'state of the art' drum-miking techniques, and the pictures are sufficiently detailed to see what is being used and where the mics are placed. Apart from the small issue of contradictory sound and vision perspectives, the disc is excellent — entertainingly impressive, and educationally informative in equal parts. **SCS**

## information

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