Surprisingly simple, and surprisingly effective, says SIMON ALLEN of SPL's drum replacement tool.

SPL has a history of bringing out interesting and unique pieces of hardware, and has recently been busy applying that pioneering spirit to designing and building software for DAW users, such as its new Vitalizer plug-in – a software version of the famous hardware unit. Now, the company's new DrumXchanger plug-in looks to be another in that adventurous tradition, and with the promise of both creative and time-saving advantages, I was keen to have a go.

the attack of a hit or 'transient' that is a main factor in deciding whether or not to use samples in your mix. With these transient designers, you can do an amazing amount to change the character of your drums completely.

One of the first things that impressed me about this plug-in were the samples that ship with it. They're perfect. It's always interesting choosing samples to use alongside real drums, as you often find the sample is too obvious or it needs a lot of post production, but with these samples,

SPL DRUMXCHANGER

RTAS, VST, AU Plug-in

Overview
Available for Mac and PC, the native version of DrumXchanger includes RTAS, VST, and AU plug-in formats. It's a real time plug-in that will replace drum sounds in a multi-track session irrespective of their level. Not only can it perform a straight swap, but you can use it to mix between the original signal and the sample.

The plug-in window is intuitively laid out into five sections: Input, Original, External Trigger, Sample, and Output. Typically for an SPL product, there are enough controls to get results, without being overly complicated. Parameters such as attack and release times on internal dynamics are already set to the optimum for the job.

There are high pass and low pass sweepable filters for the track, the trigger signal, the sample, and the output stage. The output stage also has a Dry/Wet mix control between the original sound and the sample.

The plug-in also features two of SPL's transient designers, which allows you to be very creative with both the original signal and the sample sounds. In the Original section there is also a ducking feature, so it will eliminate the original hit but retain the ambience from the live drums for mixing.

In the Trigger section you can set the thresholds at which the samples will play. The process, according to SPL, uses the transient Designer technology for drum hit recognition and can recognise "even the faintest of ghost notes." You are able to set a second level to trigger a different sample, such as a rim shot for example. It will also accept an external key chain input.

The sample section is where you can choose and load any sample you like either from SPL's own sample library, any WAV or AIF file, or your own DrumXchanger file, which you can create using your own samples with the DrumXchanger's editor. This provides up to three variations, eight velocity layers, and a secondary layer for a rim shot or similar. SPL is currently shipping the plug-in with just three kits with kick, snare, and tom samples, but there are plans to build this library up and it's very easy to make your own sample files. All samples can also be pitched up or down, and a dynamics control is provided to set how the sample mirrors the original dynamics. A delay function allows you to make sure the attacks of the sample and original hits are together.

In Use
I already really enjoy SPL's transient designer, and having two inside this plug-in is what sets it aside from the other drum replacement tools on the market. Initially, it's often

it's like SPL knew what was missing each time. There aren't many samples that ship with the plug-in at the moment, but there are plans to create more and you can always build your own.

I also really like the ducking feature. This gives you the opportunity to use a mostly great sounding sample, while retaining the ambience from the live drums to keep it real. It works very well, with great preset attack and release times.

It's impressively easy to create your own DrumXchanger files, and once you have loaded your samples into the editor, it allows you to export this to a file for use any time, anywhere. This is a really nice feature that lets you take the plug-in's abilities further and personalise your sound, so we don't all end up using the SPL bass drum for every pop hit for the next 10 years.

Conclusion
I found the SPL DrumXchanger had all the right controls, in a very good looking layout, without getting complicated. I think this is key to a solution like this. There is a lot of processing behind the scenes that works well and sounds great without getting in the way.

Even though this plug-in does cause significant track latency, it is amazing how much it can do in real time. As long as your delay compensation is up to speed, it will improve your drum sound much more easily and quickly than you might first imagine. I really like this plug-in for its ease of use and sound quality. This is a great tool to take mixes to a new level within about five minutes. ◭

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THE REVIEWER

SIMON ALLEN is a full time sound engineer and record producer. Previously studio manager at High Barn Studios in Essex, he is now based at City Studios in Cyprus where he is Senior Engineer and heads up the new music studio.