

# Magix Samplitude V8.2 Professional

Ten years ago, native multitrack workstations were more than a little hit and miss. Most began life as MIDI sequencers. Audio was gradually bolted on as computer technology and user expectations advanced. Then along came Samplitude, one of the few to begin life as an audio application and have MIDI added later.

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**I**N 1998 I REVIEWED Samplitude 2496 and was sufficiently impressed by it to have used it as my default multitrack native DAW for several years. It had some eccentricities but it was pretty solid and, most importantly, it sounded good. Many other native workstations have come and gone but Samplitude has survived, albeit better known in continental Europe than elsewhere. Recently, I had rather lost track of it, so I welcomed the opportunity to see how it has developed.

The Samplitude story goes back to the dawn of the audio workstation age. Its original developers were two graduate engineers, Tilman Herberger and Titus Tost, who began experimenting with digital audio processing in 1983. They released their first audio application, a sample editor for the Amiga, in 1988.

Unusually for the time, this was capable of processing in 24-bit resolution. Soon after, the first multitrack version of Samplitude for the Amiga was released. The successful Red Roaster CD mastering package shares the same heritage. In 1993, Samplitude was ported to Windows in an 8-track multitrack version and has been continuously improved since.

Now marketed under the Magix banner, Samplitude Version 8.2 has just arrived with yet further enhancements and 8.3 has already been announced.

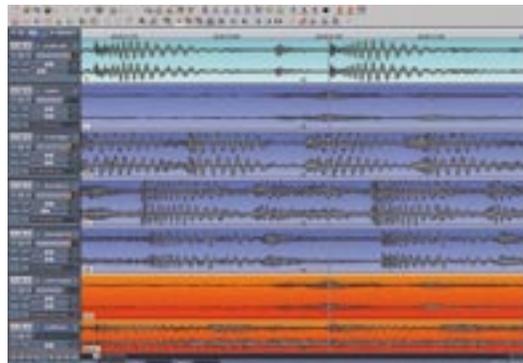
Installation is, as it should be, a doddle. Copy protection is a USB dongle plus a challenge/response registration requirement or the license expires after 90 days grace. The first hint of continuing eccentricity is the WIBU CodeMeter dongle, which appears as a mass storage device although you cannot actually use it as such. The PC I installed Samplitude on fits the upper end of the recommended specifications perfectly. A 2.4GHz P4 with 1Gb of RAM and an RME Hammerfall DSP soundcard. Any properly set up more modern machine should perform better still.

With most native DAW software, the first few(!) minutes are usually spent in simply attempting to get audio in and out (*60 to 120 minutes you mean. Ed*). With this set-up it wasn't even necessary to patch I-O from Samplitude to the RME Hammerfall. I simply loaded a demo project and voila, instant gratification.

ASIO, MME and WDM drivers are supported, but ASIO is preferable if the soundcard can cope. Given sufficient CPU power and disk bandwidth, up to 999 tracks are theoretically possible with up to 64 submix buses and 64 aux buses. More realistically, the high track count allows things to be laid out logically and methodically.

The Samplitude premise is virtual audio objects with real-time effects. Object manipulation is a very powerful Samplitude feature and goes a lot further than the now familiar paradigm of editing non-destructive 'clips' pointing to the underlying audio files. Audio Objects can be panned, equalised and have effects added independently of subsequent processing in the mixer. Automation curves can be tied to tracks or linked to objects. So-called Wave Projects allow destructive editing and processing of the original media files, albeit with plenty of safety dialogs and options to save copies of the original files.

Over the years, the developers have obviously paid considerable attention to real-world workflows. This has resulted in the addition of a set of Manager windows for



File Archive, Object, Track, Range and Markers. A new Take Manager and Take Composer make life easier for those working with multiple takes of the same material, comping and ADR, for example. Multichannel recordings are catered for. Workspaces are a further aid to the adoption of disciplined working practices. Workspaces do not, as you might suppose, store different screen

layouts, but in fact allow the user to customise menus, toolbars and other interface parameters. The result can be saved and recalled at will.

Recall is fast and it is perfectly possible to design a skeleton interface for repetitive tasks, secure in the knowledge that the full range of options is only a mouse click away. The preprogrammed Recording Workspace illustrates the point. When you click on the Recording Workspace, the arrangement of toolbars changes and irrelevant buttons are hidden. If you do want to store screen layout, zoom level, mute and solo states, etc. this can be achieved with the Setup buttons at bottom left of the track display.

There are two types of project — Wave and Virtual. The VIP (Virtual Project) window, where you spend most of your time, is a conventional track display with floating, dockable toolbars and familiar Windows drop down menus. Supplementary windows for transport control, time display, mixer and track visualisation (meters, analysers, scopes, etc.) may be overlaid and positioned as desired. Samplitude is unusual in that tracks are fundamentally stereo. Each track has buttons that give access to track properties, mute, solo, lock, volume and pan curve display/hide. Beneath these are stereo 'LED' bargraphs and volume and pan sliders, routing, etc.

The timeline display has numerous options for zoom level and the amount and type of detail. The tracks can be set to scroll, but this is not especially smooth by current standards, or to jump a page at a time when the play cursor hits the screen edge. Alternatively, for minimum processor overhead, the cursor is allowed to move off screen without updating the tracks. There are a number of cursor modes of which the most useful is Universal although the Pitchshift/Timestretch mode is noteworthy. This gives direct access to the real-time object Timestretching and Pitchshifting by simply grabbing handles to lengthen or shorten or shift the pitch by up to six semitones.

In Universal Mode, placing the cursor in the lower half of a track gives access to 'object handling'; in the upper half 'marker and range manipulation'. Once an object is selected, five 'handles' appear that allow the object to be moved and/or fades to be created. This can be achieved even while the project is playing. If multiple objects are selected, a fade, for example, may be created across multiple tracks in one operation.

Crossfades are also catered for across tracks and within the same track. If two objects are overlapped the Crossfade Editor window can be selected. This relatively simple yet powerful tool allows many parameters of the crossfade to be set.

At UK£566 (plus VAT) Samplitude Professional has some unique features that really set it apart from the rest. Comparisons Colors is the most obvious and, to my knowledge, no other DAW currently offers this feature. This mode uses an algorithm patented by Comparisons to depict the audio objects waveform in different colours. Dependent on the pitch (and additional parameters), a specific colour (hue) is computed and displayed for each time segment of audio. Low frequencies show up in shades of blue while higher frequencies go through green and yellow to red. Tonal sounds are shaded in colour, while noise and

atonal sounds are grey. With experience this enables the operator to consistently recognise characteristics of the audio that would be undetectable using a normal waveform display. Audio analysis segment size is user-definable with a recommended minimum of 50ms, to ensure accurate computation of colour.

Despite the fact that the colour to frequency relationship seems completely back to front when compared with the colour spectrum to frequency relationship and all my previous experience, I really value the extra information Comparisons imparts. For Hard Disk Wave projects there is an innovative audio search technique, based on the Comparisons colours. This allows for quick and convenient location of points of identical, or similar, audio material. Markers are automatically placed to enable rapid location of the points identified.

In contrast to the Technicolor Comparisons waveform display, the rest of the user interface graphics are clean and simple and none the worse for it.

Competent performance in mono and stereo can be taken as a given in any of the current native workstation packages. Surround is a different matter. Samplitude was early into surround, part of the initial attraction for me. Now in V8.x, the surround sound implementation has been completely revamped to include a new 5.1 panning model with some unusual modes, a multichannel equaliser and multichannel linkable dynamics processing tools. The real-time room simulator based on convolution technology comes with 490Mb of impulse samples and has been upgraded to surround. The object model holds good and each audio object can be individually positioned within the surround sound field. I liked the surround panner Angle Mode, which allows stereo sources to be panned around the room, for passing cars, for example.

Samplitude tracks can contain audio or MIDI objects. Folder tracks can contain several ordinary tracks for visual tidiness and grouping of certain functions and folders can be nested. When collapsed, a folder track can display any of the tracks it contains. An 8-voice virtual-analogue drum synthesiser with integrated Robota Pro step sequencer adds to the appeal. The new Remix agent can be a great help by AutoCutting and Autolooping beat-based audio and there is support for ReWire. If you do not need or use MIDI it can be turned off and the MIDI controls hidden.

Magix Elastic Audio brings flexible pitch-shifting and time stretching with automatic pitch recognition and



correction routines along with a variety of algorithms including resampling. The brand new Vintage Effects Suite Pro brings together Corvex, a Chorus Flanger, Ecox, echo/delay and Filttox, a stereo multimode filter based on an analogue model. FFT analysis and filtering can be inserted into many Samplitude locations. The implementation is such that this can be used for correcting technical deficiencies in recordings or creatively. A further innovation can be found in the Sound Cloner functions, which aim to analyse the characteristics of one recording and impose these on another — for example you can use the sound of a 60s recording to transform a current recording. The renowned POW-r dithering is included.

Video support has been improved with the adoption of DirectShow. Compatibility with the plethora of codecs is enhanced and any DirectShow compatible graphics card can be used.

Despite all the additions there will always be a wish list. Having grown used to an overview of the entire project in other DAWs I miss it here and, although effects are automatically delay compensated when applied to objects there is no automatic time alignment in the mixer and come on guys, where's the reverse play button? No doubt other users will add their own pet omissions to the list.

I'm glad to be re-acquainted with Samplitude. There is still room for improvement but this has more to do with increasing expectations over time than any real inadequacies in the current version. A lot depends on

what you want to achieve and what you are used to. I would now be very reluctant to part with it because of some of the unique features, such as Comparisons. It still sounds good and although many of the new toys need time and practice to extract the maximum benefit, this is only to be expected.

It is still intuitive — or is that just muscle memory from learning it years ago? Truth is, I don't believe any one DAW will give you everything you need or want and neither should it. This is nicely analogous to the good old days of tracking on an SSL and mixing on a Neve (or vice-versa) and a very healthy state of affairs. The day one workstation can genuinely give you everything you desire is probably the day you should retire.

Samplitude Professional is one of the few remaining wild cards in the native workstation market. Well specified, it has most of the features we've come to expect including CD-R and DVD-A production and hardware controller support for an extensive list of devices. Native effects, DirectX plug-ins and a VST wrapper, MIDI, MTC, MMC and virtual instruments are all present. Samplitude also has unique virtues, not least the ability to produce sounds you will not hear anywhere else and visualisation aids such as Comparisons. It has been around long enough to have real pedigree and is likely to appeal to anyone feeling dissatisfied with the usual 'safe' choices.

Magix also offers Samplitude on a rental basis for a mere UK£22.13 plus VAT per month. Although there is a minimum period of 25 months, there is also a three-month trial offer at a higher monthly rental with full credit if you purchase. This is a great way to check out the full product properly. Any unfamiliar workstation package takes a lot of time and effort to evaluate and learn in depth. If you appreciate what it has to offer, Samplitude will repay the investment with interest. ■

**PROS**

Crossfade Editor; Comparisons; tools you won't find elsewhere.

**CONS**

No overview; no auto latency compensation for mixer plug-ins; no reverse play.

**Contact**

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Website: [www.samplitude.com](http://www.samplitude.com)