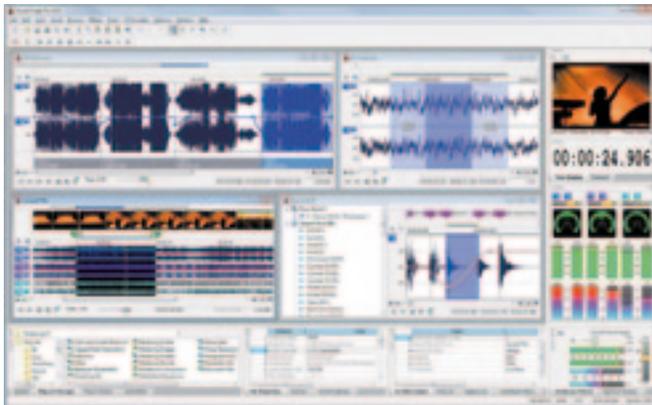# Sony Sound Forge Pro 10

ROB JAMES forges ahead with the latest enhancements and updates to Sony Creative Software's stalwart professional digital audio production suite.

Sound Forge has always been a little difficult to categorise. In some ways it's easier to define in terms of what it isn't. It's not a sequencer or a timeline-centric multitrack recorder/editor/mixer. However, any software application surviving to a major version 10 must have something pretty good going for it, and Sound Forge has grown more impressive with each successive release.

It's a couple of years since I last examined a new version of Sound Forge and, most obviously, this time it has had Pro added to its title. The suffix is new yet superfluous to everybody except the marketing department. Despite the current UK£308.95 (downloadable)/£329.95 (packaged) price tag, Sound Forge has always been a 'Pro' application from its earliest incarnations.

Sound Forge majors on processing individual files. The Event Mode enables a file to be split into individual events, which can be processed and treated individually, but if you want multitrack timeline editing then you need Vegas or Acid. Multichannel files are, of course, supported, but there are no panners or recognisable mixer. You can also create multichannel files from mono or stereo and rearrange channels in an existing multichannel file or perform a downmix.

The purchase price includes not only Sound Forge 10, but also Noise Reduction 2 plug-ins while the estimable Mastering Effects Bundle 2 powered by iZotope is now accompanied by iZotope's 64-bit SRC (sample rate conversion) and MBIT+ Dither (bit-depth conversion). Also included is the Zplane élastique Pro time stretch and pitch shift DirectX plug-in, which offers an interesting alternative to the Sony version. For speed shifts upwards the quality is excellent. Downshifts are more of a challenge, and, on speech at least, I preferred the results I obtained from the original Sony Time Shift module — provided that the increments were modest. Sony's Acoustic Mirror convolution reverb is still a part of the act, together with a good number of convolution samples with more downloadable from Sony Creative Software's website.

Although CD Architect 5.2 is still included with Sound Forge 10, one big change is that full Red Book DAO (Disk-At-Once) CD mastering from a single sound file is now integrated into the main Sound Forge application along with TAO (Track-At-Once). You can also combine files from multiple data windows into a new data window to assemble a CD.

The user interface has been spruced up with tabbed browsing of maximised data windows; floating window docks; customisable window layouts and workspaces, which can be recalled at will; plus the addition of custom selection grid lines in the loop editor. Those of us using Broadcast WAV (BWF) files regularly will be at least dimly aware that they offer metadata capabilities. A brand new metadata window enables the user to view and edit this data with ease. For good measure, Sony has integrated Sound Forge's own Metadata, Track List, Regions List, Playlist, CD Info, Sampler Loops, Acid Properties, and Summary Information under the same menu entry, while a Show All option gathers all the Metadata panes into tabs in a single window.

Although I don't propose to list every feature in the extensive Sound Forge repertoire, it is worth rehearsing some of the highlights. Multichannel files can be recorded, edited, and manipulated but — although AC-3 encoding is included — the parameters are fixed. If you need more control you have to buy the Dolby Digital AC-3 Pro version.

I love the JKL keyboard transport control; though common in video editing software, this is rare in an audio editor. It follows the usual convention in that a single press on of J and L keys plays forwards and backwards, respectively; K stops; multiple presses on J or L increases the play speed to 2x, 4x, or 8x nominal on the medium setting, or up to 20x on high.

Sound Forge metering improved dramatically in V9 with Phase Scope and mono compatibility meters added to the main meters window. In particular, I find the Polar Linear Plot and Polar Circular Plot options in the Phase Scope to be an excellent way of visualising distribution.

Noise reduction processes are middle of the road, as you might expect from the price point, but Sound Forge also offers useful repair options, including interpolate for fixing sub-2ms glitches; Repair > Replace can deal with problems up to half a second in length.

Sound Forge has always supported a plethora of formats, the number of file types increasing with each successive version. Pro 10 is no exception, adding support for instrument file formats (.DLS, .SF2, and .GIG).

Performance has not been ignored with a new Global Media Cache option, where the user can specify the amount of RAM Sound Forge Pro will reserve for media recently read from — or written to — disk.

On the workflow front, docking windows help to reduce the inherent clutter from multiple open files and processes. For saving and loading, workspace management makes it much easier to switch between jobs since a workspace retains settings, remembers which files were open and where they were, cursor positions, and so on, and also stores any views you may have created for the different data windows. Multiple window layouts can also be saved and recalled at will, and it is now possible to set parameters for a default crossfade.

Scripts have long been a powerful element of Sound Forge and they have been further enhanced in Pro 10. At the simplest level, scripts can be used for repetitive batch tasks, and — for those with the skill and knowledge — can be developed to automate highly complex tasks, including running external programs; accessing the internet — for example, to upload or download files via FTP; write and delete files; and more besides. A number of sample scripts are included for common tasks.

Sound Forge Pro remains a slightly enigmatic program. Although it now has a raft of production functions, I still find it most useful for the difficult and often annoying mundane conversion tasks. That said, I'm now much more tempted to use it for CD mastering and production, and also for cleaning up and fixing sub-standard material. If it was more tightly integrated with Sony Vegas Pro the combination would be formidable. Indeed, if I had had it a couple of weeks ago, it would have saved me many hours of boring and repetitive one-thing-at-a-time-style manual conversion work. This is one of those programs that has something for everyone. Exactly which bits you use is going to depend on what you are doing and your usual workflow. At the asking price, Sound Forge Pro 10 is an obvious 'must-have' in the audio and video professional's toolkit. ■

PROS	Remains a 'must-have' weapon in the audio armoury; good improvements to workflow, including direct disk authoring from within; a lot of tools for the money.
CONS	Still more of an adjunct for many purposes; lack of real integration with Sony Vegas Pro; writing scripts requires serious programming skills.