

PROPELLERHEAD RECORD

A Reason to Record Audio

by Jim Aikin

PROS

Seamless integration with Reason.
Excellent mixing and automation.
Superb time-stretching of audio. Don't have your dongle? Not a problem.

CONS

Doesn't host third-party plug-ins.
No audio pitch correction. No video features.

INFO

\$299 list/approx. \$250 street; \$149 for current Reason owners, propellerheads.se

Do you crave a tightly integrated and user-friendly music production environment, or do you need a program that will do everything? Unless you have an unlimited budget, it's a tough choice. If you prefer tight integration and ease of use, Propellerhead's new Record software is aiming right at you.

TWO KINDS OF USERS

For current Reason owners, Record is a powerful step forward. Record does audio multitracking, which eliminates the need to run Reason alongside a DAW via ReWire,

save separate files for the two programs, and so on. Reason and Record integrate seamlessly, all of Reason's virtual instruments becoming instantly available in the same rack as Record devices. Your Reason chops will get you up and running with Record in almost no time, and you'll be able to use Reason devices' virtual CV outputs to modulate Record's insert effects in all sorts of stimulating ways.

Record will also attract band musicians who aren't necessarily Reason users, but who want to lay down multitrack audio without getting lost in complexity. Record's mixer looks and feels exactly like a big hardware console (it was modeled closely on an SSL), audio recording is as easy as it ever was on a tape deck, the included effects are high-quality, and the full-featured audio track editing and automation are just what the doctor ordered.

On its own terms, Record succeeds brilliantly. However, a few functions musicians may want or need are absent. Like Reason, Record doesn't host third-party plug-ins. The synths included in Reason have

plenty of power, so Record-plus-Reason users won't miss anything unless they need a drawbar organ or a specialized, modeled synth such as Arturia Brass. Propellerhead and third-party ReFills (these aren't plug-ins; they're sound packs for Reason devices) provide hosts of sounds including synths, vintage keys, orchestral instruments, and loops, but nothing in the piano department competes with a program like Synthogy Ivory. Record's effects are more than good enough for sweetening your tracks, but you can't host third-party plugs for stuff you may care about – say, convolution reverb or pitch correction – though you can certainly ReWire Record into a DAW and host those plug-ins there.

All this said, I found Record a joy to use. Here's why:

LAYOUT

Record's main window is sensible and easy to get used to. There are three main work areas: mixer, rack, and sequencer. Your F5, F6, and F7 keys show or hide them in any

HANDS-ON

- 1 The mixer expands to the left as you add tracks.
- 2 The channel strips have so many features they're too tall to view completely.
- 3 Grab the blue rectangle in the mixer thumbnail to scroll up or down to the control sections.
- 4 Record's rack houses synthesizers, effects, and mixer channel access modules.
- 5 Standard editing tools (move, pencil, razor, etc.) are here.
- 6 Sequencer tracks have the usual mute, solo, and automation display controls.
- 7 Clips containing audio and MIDI data live side by side in the sequencer.
- 8 A thumbnail display lets you scroll and zoom horizontally in the sequencer.

combination. Usually you only need to look at one at a time, so screen space is not an issue. In place of scrollbars, Record uses navigation thumbnails, which take up a little more room but make it much easier to find devices and parts of tracks in a complex environment. The detach button for any section pops it into its own window, but unless you have two or more displays, using the F5, F6, and F7 keys is better. Reason's rear-panel graphical patch cords are retained, but in Record, you can also position several racks side by side.

The Mixer module from Reason is on hand for submixing, but it's now subservient to the all-new Record mixer. When you create a synth in the rack or record a new audio track, a mixer channel device is added to the rack. A difference from Reason is that here, no visible patch cords run from the rack to the mixer itself. Instead, instruments are patched into the channel devices that live in the rack. What's extremely cool about these devices is that they're based on Reason's Combinator module. Each has four rotary knobs with rear-panel CV inputs, space to add insert effects, and a programmer panel for assigning rotaries to insert parameters. They also have CV inputs for volume and pan control, plus a sidechain input to feed the corresponding mixer channel's compressor.

The mixer itself (see Figure 1 on page 60) has six sections: input, dynamics, EQ with four bands plus high- and lowpass filters, insert controls, aux sends, and a

NEED TO KNOW

What is it? A multitrack audio recorder that stands on its own or integrates seamlessly with Reason.

So I can use Reason's soft synths in it? If you have Reason installed, they'll show up right in Record's familiar-looking (but expanded) rack.

What effects are included? Reverb, distortion, guitar amp models, delay, chorus/flanger, EQ, compression, stereo imaging, and audio maximizing.

How easy is it to write automation? Go into record mode, grab a knob or slider, and move it. All automation data is fully editable.

Can I record multiple takes in loop mode? Yes. They'll show up in multiple sub-lanes for that track.

Can I track a whole band at once? Up to 64 simultaneous inputs can be recorded, if you have enough inputs on your hardware.

Maximum audio resolution: Up to 24-bit/192kHz, depending on your audio interface.

Does it export MP3 files? Nope. But you can export any audio clip or as a WAV file, which you could then convert to MP3 in another program.

Copy protection: An either-or system (hardware dongle or online password) makes life easier.

fader area. For a detailed overview of what's in each section, read this review at keyboardmag.com.

One of the coolest features in Record's mixer has to be the handy little buttons labeled SEQ and RACK. These bring up the sequencer track or rack device corresponding to the mixer channel, which smooths workflow considerably. Another nice extra is that the insert setup for a channel strip can be saved or loaded as a preset.

The mixer's master section has its own compressor – an homage to SSL's hallmark bus compressor – which can glue a mix together nicely. There's also a separate control room output, which you can patch to any physical output. As with any large board, the Record mixer is a bit intimidating at first glance, but it's nicely

MM Series Synthesizer

STREET SMART

The MM Series synthesizers combine sounds from the Motif, street smart grooves from around the world and a simple to use interface in a portable package. Whether you're just jamming with friends, making songs on board or with the bundled Cubase software, the MM Series lets you hit the streets in style.

The MM6 is the perfect choice for musicians on the go, while the Graded Hammer action on the 88-key MM8 delivers natural touch and expressive control over the complete piano range.

- Key sounds from the Motif line including piano, guitars, drums & more
- Real Time Knobs for controlling filter and EG
- Built-in grooves with drums, bass and complete backing tracks
- Performance Mode let's you play layers or split sounds along with grooves
- Cubase AI 48 track audio/ MIDI DAW software included



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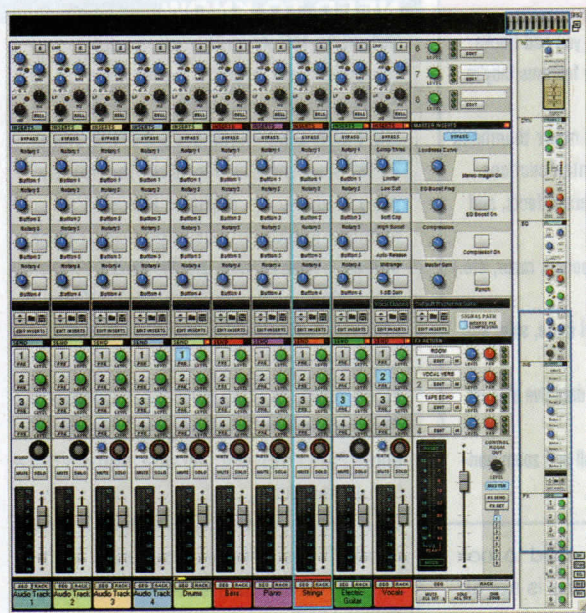


Fig. 1. More of Record's mixer can be seen when detached in a separate window. Top to bottom: part of the EQ, macro controls for the inserts, insert setup save/load buttons, sends, faders, and meters. You can show different areas by moving the blue rectangle, and show or hide each area.

laid out and has exactly the controls you need for precision mixing.

TRACKING

Tracking with Record is about as easy as can be. Create an audio track, choose an input, decide on mono or stereo, and click the big red button. You can turn the metronome and countoff clicks on or off as desired. No need to select a folder to record audio to – in fact, you can't. All of your tracks are stored in the same big file as the rest of the song. You can decide where this project file will live, e.g. on your audio drive as opposed to your system drive. The one-file approach greatly simplifies archiving and sharing songs with your friends.

If the transport is in loop mode, you can record a number of takes without stopping. Comping a keeper by slicing up takes is very nearly painless – just grab the razor blade tool. You can adjust the levels of individual takes so that they match, slide the audio forward or backward in time, and so on.

Record can change the tempo of recorded audio with amazing fidelity. After recording a cello solo, I soloed the

track and found I could boost or drop the master project tempo by as much as ten bpm without affecting the cello's tone or rhythm in any way. A few very quiet pings were added with this much tempo shift, but nothing that wouldn't be masked completely by the rest of the tracks. The fact that you can settle on a tempo after tracking is extremely convenient.

Since pitch correction involves code that's not too different from time-stretching, it's a good bet that Propellerhead is planning to add pitch correction in a future version of Record. At the moment, your only option in case of pitch problems in a vocal

or solo instrument track is to bounce the recorded track to disk as a separate file, correct it in another program, and re-import it. Fortunately, this is easy. To fix a few out-of-tune notes, I used the freeware audio editor Audacity, which can pitch-shift short regions within a file.

OTHER FEATURES

A couple of minor gripes I've had about the sequencer in Reason 4 are addressed in Record. When notes are dragged up or down in the edit view of a MIDI clip, they now send audible MIDI notes to the corresponding synth, which makes editing much easier. And if you click-hold on the zoom-in or zoom-out button, the zooming will continue – you no longer need to click again and again.

New effects include a pair of amp/cabinet simulators from Line 6, one for guitar and one for bass. Users who have a Line 6 USB audio interface (with its associated software) hooked up can load more simulations, but I found the included five each of amp and cabinet models to be inspiring. The guitar amp has inputs, which can be MIDI- or CV-controlled, for volume and wah-wah, and

the bass amp has a compressor.

Record's copy protection gives you two ways to work. Registering online will authorize the included USB dongle. If you lose or forget your dongle, you can enter your Propellerhead password online to get authorized on a one-off basis. In fact, you can record an entire multitrack session with Record in demo mode, with neither the dongle nor Internet access – but after saving the session, you can't open it again until your copy of Record is authorized.

If you don't own Reason and all the cool soft synths that come with it, Record's new ID8 preset synth (see Figure 2 above) is extremely useful. It's not programmable, other than via a pair of knobs that make various tweaks depending on the current preset. The 36 presets are in nine categories – piano, electric piano, bass, strings, percussion, and so on. They all sound plenty good enough for pro-quality songwriter demos. ID8 responds to pitchbend and mod wheel moves, but unlike Reason instruments, has no rear-panel CV input jacks.

RECORD ALONE

Without Reason, Record gives you more than half of the effects you may want. The RV7000 reverb is included, as are the Scream 4 distortion module and MClass mastering effects (EQ, stereo imager, compressor, and maximizer). However, you won't get the BV512 Vocoder or the phaser. The Matrix pattern sequencer and RPG-8 arpeggiator require a copy of Reason, but fortunately the ReGroove mixer is included in Record itself. Without Reason, Record is short of modules to generate CV (virtual "control voltage") signals, but Scream has an envelope follower output and the MClass compressor has a gain reduction CV out.

CONCLUSIONS

Too many times, I've had plug-in issues in



Fig. 2. Two of the new rack modules in Record: ID8 preset synth and Line 6 Guitar Amp. The Mix module at top connects the ID8 to the mixer using invisible patch cords.

my DAW. Most were minor and quickly resolved, but some glitches inevitably remain. So Propellerhead's decision to steer clear of third-party plug-ins makes sense: You use the program and it just works. Some plug-ins are also CPU hogs, but because Propellerhead is in control of *all* code that runs in Record, they can optimize theirs to let you pile up more instruments and effects. The trade-off, of course, is selection, and whether it's an acceptable one is a question each musician will answer for him- or herself.

If you don't own Reason, consider the combined Reason/Record package (\$629 list/approx. \$500 street). There's a lot in it to like. At this price point, though, Reason-plus-Record has some stiff competition: Logic Studio on Mac, FL Studio 9 on Windows, and Ableton Live 8 and Pro Tools M-Powered 8 on either. Record's lack of a video window, a feature found in many DAWs, will be a negative if you want to do a soundtrack or dub a recorded mix into your band's video. But if you want to track and mix songs quickly, with a minimum learning curve and a bunch of proprietary soft synths that have stood the test of time at your fingertips, the dual package is quite attractive.

If you already use Reason and don't have (or want) a DAW, Record adds the audio recording you've always wanted and will lift your musicmaking to a whole new level. You'll love the seamless integration, the visually impressive, handles-like-an-analog mixer, the Line 6 guitar amp models, and the assorted user interface improvements. Then there's the price for registered Reason users: \$149. That makes it a virtual no-brainer. **K**