

**WIDE OPEN SPACES** > The new Acid Pro 6 interface is spacious and full of exciting new features such as the simultaneous recording and monitoring of multiple audio and MIDI tracks.

**FREEZE FRAME** > In this version, you have the ability to conduct frame-accurate video scoring on the timeline, as well as placement of multiple media types on a single track, inline VSTi parameter automation, support for hardware controllers and Acid Project Sections that you can drag-and-drop to different parts of the composition.

# SONY MEDIA SOFTWARE ACID PRO 6

## LOOP-MUSIC PIONEER TRANSFORMS INTO FORMIDABLE DAW

BY JASON SCOTT ALEXANDER

> Since its launch almost ten years ago, Acid software has largely defined the way in which electronic music is composed and produced. The pioneering tool has given birth to a culture of loop music in which almost anyone handy with a mouse can assemble disparate pieces of audio into complete arrangements, matching tempo and pitch on the fly.

Oddly enough, though, most of the program's greatest shortcomings have come as indirect results of its core strengths. It's always been a go-to program, but not a complete package. With Acid's inability to record more than one audio track at a time and its limit of a single audio file per track, users were forced to transfer Acidized arrangements to their main digital audio workstations (DAWs) when sessions called for duties such as recording live drums, creating composite vocal and guitar tracks, intricate MIDI editing and so on.

### COMING OF AGE

Its most significant upgrade, Acid Pro 6 marks a crucial turning point for this classic. No longer simply a loop-based production tool, the program has received a complete functional overhaul that now supports simultaneous multitrack recording and comprehensive MIDI capabilities, transforming it into a full-featured professional digital audio, loop-music and MIDI workstation. Add to that a staggering array of great new productivity tools, highly desirable editing and mixing features, long-overdue workflow and automation enhancements, integrated support for hardware control surfaces, ability to import video along the timeline and an impressive soundware bundle, and you have something sure to rock the block.

### SONY MEDIA SOFTWARE

**ACID PRO 6** > \$499.95

**Pros:** Significant upgrade to a classic. Full-featured multitrack audio and MIDI recording. Multiple media file types per track. Inline MIDI editing and automation. Ability to break projects up into manageable sections. Flexible drum-map editing and VSTi automation. Film-style 5.1 panning mode. External control surface support. Much improved CPU performance and graphic interface. Dual/multicore support.

**Cons:** Could do with a better featured multichannel mixer section. No waveform editor. PC only.

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### SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

**PC:** 1 GHz CPU (1.2 GHz for video); 256 MB RAM; Windows 2000 (SP4).

Starting with a new high-performance multithreaded audio engine, Sony has reengineered Acid to perform faster and more efficiently not only on dual-core and multiprocessor systems, but also on single-CPU machines, providing more efficient track buffering for higher performance at lower latencies. On multicore systems, a new dynamic playback optimization scheme lets you distribute duties evenly across the processors, increasing playback performance.

Appropos of Acid's added multicore support, I tested it on a new dual-core 3.2GHz Intel 840 equipped with 2 GB of RAM and Windows XP Pro. Sony posts much more modest minimum system requirements. Of note, Microsoft .Net Framework 1.1 (included) must be running on your system in order to launch the Acid installer. Also suggested for installation is the Sony Media Software Preset Manager, which allows you to save and share Acid effects presets with other Sony Media Software programs and even on multiple machines. I don't typically like to pollute my streamlined audio system with add-ons, but both programs appeared fairly innocuous and didn't seem to interfere with the performance of other software.

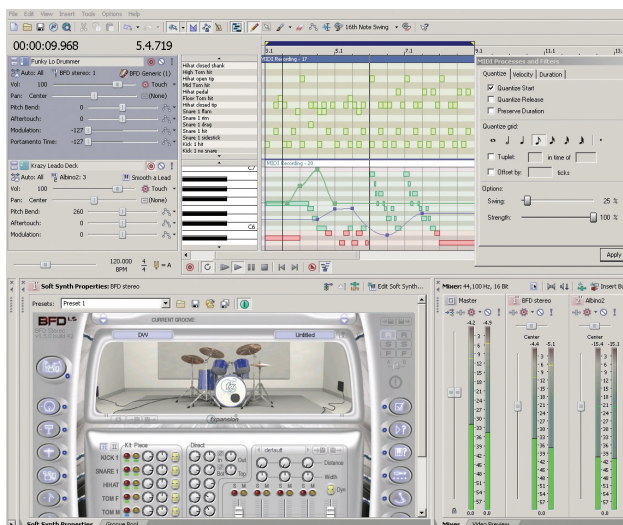
Available in boxed and downloadable versions, Acid Pro 6 comes with more than 1,000 select Acidized loops from Sony's own Sound Series libraries to get you cruising. Also included is a custom edition of Native Instruments Kompakt sampler bundled with 120 multi-sampled instruments (2 GB)—a \$200 value.

**ARMED AND READY**

Acid Pro 6 has the previous version's unlimited audio and MIDI tracks, real-time pitch and tempo matching and full support for 24-bit/192kHz audio. And it adds heavy-hitting audio and MIDI recording provisions. Recording multiple audio tracks into Acid is refreshing in the sense that you've never been able to do it before and that it behaves in Acid's typical real-time flexible fashion that could teach other DAWs a thing or two.

Acid Pro 6 provides a variety of methods for laying down audio, including punch-in/out and continuous loop record. The new punch function works on the fly across multiple tracks simultaneously and offers fantastic possibilities live and in the studio. For example, I used it to capture random momentary snippets from several synchronized outboard beatboxes as I tweaked them for a live, cut-up feel in the studio. A band's lap-top-toting mixologist could do something similar during a gig by punch-recording the drummer or turntable outputs and constructing a cool new break in real time. Because of Acid's malleable nature, you can seamlessly process and manipulate punched clips, paint them into loops down the timeline and improvise the break as it occurs—all without missing a beat. Even with dozens of tracks recording and playing simultaneously, I never once experienced an audio glitch or timing hiccup while shuffling stuff around.

Continuous looping mode has a cool feature that catalogs each looped pass as a clip rather than stacking or overwriting them; just set your loop regions, hit record, riff away and later select among the best takes from a pull-down clip list in a track's parameters menu. You can alternatively choose to save clips to a pool for calling up later.



**'BOUT DAW GONE TIME >**

Inline MIDI editing allows you to manipulate data in piano-roll fashion directly on the Acid Pro 6 timeline, including note position, quantization, Velocity levels, event duration, MIDI filtering and more. Program changes and continuous-controller data such as pitch bend, Aftertouch and modulation can be fine-tuned using track envelopes and keyframes. The new Drum Grid mode, along with hundreds of included drum maps, makes it easy to create and edit drum patterns for just about any piece of gear or VSTi drum module.

It is also now possible to arm multiple audio and MIDI tracks simultaneously, and Acid finally supports record-input monitoring for sending monitor mixes to the band while tracking. Good news for live performers: Insertion and removal of VST instrument and effect plug-ins is an audibly transparent process, void of any clicks or pauses. More than 20 Sony DirectX audio effects ship with Acid Pro 6, including the tempo-based favorites such as flange, amplitude modulation and simple delay, all of which automatically adjust to project-based tempo changes.

**TRACK STAR**

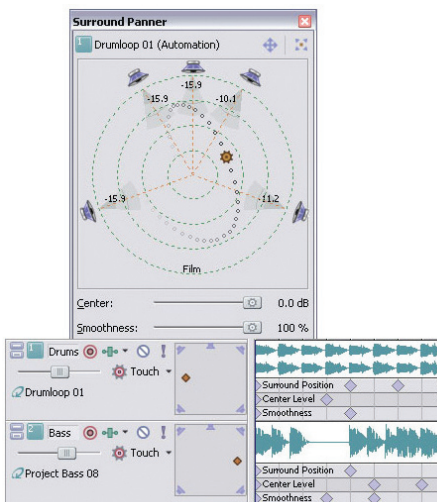
By far the biggest news at the audio track level has to be the ability to place multiple media types onto a single track. While not a big deal to non-Acid users, anyone who's worked under the previous one-loop-per-track scenario and seen their track count skyrocket will certainly rejoice. Now you can record or add any combination of one-shots, Beatmapped clips, loops and any number of regions from disk-based files along the timeline of a single track. As you do so, an option for automatic

crossfades can provide seamless transitions between overlapping files. That beats the heck out of grouping a dozen or so tracks containing sporadically placed loops within a folder track as before. But it gets even better.

While folder tracks still exist for grouping samples, micro-arrangement editing and auditioning across multiple tracks, Acid Pro 6 also features Project sections for easily shifting or rearranging tracks en masse located beneath a specified region along the timeline. Project sections can be set to any length and renamed; once you declare regional left and right markers, it's simply a matter of dragging-and-dropping the varying-color section bars along the timeline. You can copy, move, delete or jump-to sections with the click of a mouse for quick auditioning. The jump-to feature quickly became my new best friend because I could effortlessly test quirky part placements—a previously time-consuming task—and shuttle around experimental arrangements without having to construct and redo an entire new project file.

MIDI tracks also received an enormous shot in the arm through the introduction of Inline MIDI Editing, which allows you to manipulate MIDI data directly on the Acid timeline with either a piano-roll or a drum-grid interface. That makes so much more sense because you can see your MIDI parts in direct relation to the audio and loop tracks, rather than in separate edit windows as before. Notes can be entered freehand using the paint tool and may be edited for length, position, velocity and pitch using the draw tool. Clicking on the down arrow next to the paint tool in the submenu sets the length of events (from whole notes to 64th note triplets) that will be created when you drag the brush along the timeline grid. Snap-to-grid can be useful for exact placement of one-shots or continuously painting rhythmic notes such as kicks on every beat.

Under the main Edit menu, there is a new option called MIDI Processing and Filters, which displays a pop-up dialog box for applying destructive edits to MIDI notes on the timeline. With batch-process-style options, you can quantize data in events (including setting values for grid offsets, swing amounts and quantize strength), edit Velocity values, change the duration of an event or transpose MIDI data. Lasso the selections you want to



**GOT YOU SURROUNDED >** A film-style panning mode allows you to optimize surround Acid projects for 5.1 speaker placement by panning between pairs of adjacent speakers.

process, click on Apply and the processes will be performed. Use Undo if you aren't happy with the results; as always, Acid has unlimited levels of undo.

To assist in programming MIDI drum parts, a new Drum Map Editor in the Tools menu provides access to hundreds of built-in maps for virtually every known hardware or VSTi drum module and synth in existence, or you can easily program your own and save and share it with other Acid Pro 6 users. Similarly, a new Program Map Editor allows you to create or edit program maps for external MIDI devices, so user-friendly program names will appear in the tracklist instead of program-change numbers.

### CONTROLLED RESPONSE

Acid Pro 6 is all about control. The new Envelope Automation allows you to record audio track automation in real time using familiar touch- and latch-mode techniques via mouse or external hardware controllers. You can automate mix moves on all the usual suspects: volume/mute, panning, effects parameters, assignable effect and bus sends and so on. For VSTi channels, you can also record automation envelopes for each of the controls in the Soft Synth Properties window.

New MIDI track envelopes and keyframes allow for continuous controller, MIDI SysEx and program-change automation to occur dynamically over the duration of a track. In the MIDI track headers, there are sliders to provide control over MIDI volume, panning, pitch bend, Aftertouch and modulation envelopes. Clicking on the

Insert/Hide Envelope button next to the controller's slider in the track header toggles the color-coded MIDI track envelopes, while clicking on the adjacent down arrow calls up a submenu with options for deleting or resetting envelopes. Again, snap-to-grid functionality makes rigid time-synchronized automation moves a breeze. Those kinds of advanced automation tools work perfectly in tandem with the new inline MIDI editing process, making Acid Pro an extremely powerful and well-rounded MIDI workstation that can stand up to the very best of them. Sony really did its homework.

For those who work in surround environments, setting up a project in the new Film-Style Panning mode features track headers with a square Surround Panner that graphically represents a 5.1 speaker setup and allows you to pan using a constant power model. Though the virtual Mixer window has been improved over recent updates, it still confines you to working with master, group and effects busses and leaves all audio-channel operations to the tracklist parameter controls. While functional, and perhaps done for simplicity's sake in earlier loop-only versions, that is not a practical way to mix anymore in Acid Pro 6.

Partially for that reason, I was excited to note that this version adds support for hardware control surfaces. I hooked up a Mackie Control Universal and Frontier Design Group TranzPort (the only two hardware devices currently supported with profiles in Acid Pro 6), and my mixing gripes were quelled. I'm hoping that more surfaces, such as the Mackie C4, receive native profiles.

### WHAT A TRIP

It says a lot about a new program or an update when it makes you seriously reevaluate your current DAW situation. After an incredibly short breaking-in period to get used to the new features, I began wondering why I should go back to my main production application when making music is just so much more fun in Acid Pro 6. It's pure brilliance that full-featured DAW and MIDI functions are finally side-by-side with elastic loop audio in the familiar "pick, paint and play" Acid work environment. You no longer need to choose between working on loops, composing new MIDI lines, recording overdubs or mixing. It's all instantly accessible in front of you, which does wonders for your creative flow.

The overhauled audio engine is rock solid and never choked or crashed once. Efficient isn't a strong enough word; my dual-core barely scraped ten percent load with 24 tracks running using Sony's built-in effects. I'd like to see the mixing facilities mature, no question. Acid's tracklist channel mixing and condensed bus-mixer facilities leave lovers of top-down insert, EQ and bus topology wanting much more. And I wish Sony would port a line or two of code from Sound Forge to incorporate a decent waveform editor into Acid Pro.

Sony has done a splendid job of maintaining Acid's uniqueness and simplicity while adding the features necessary to become an optimal platform for all aspects of music creation. Acid Pro 6 is proof that loop music can play with the big boys, and that all DAWs are no longer created equal. 