

With digital sampling becoming more affordable, the use of samplers has crossed into the DJ-ing and mixing world.

In the first of a new series, *Russ Hurley* investigates sampling on a budget.

For many professional DJs and producers, the choice of sampler is relatively straight forward. The Akai S1000 (and its big brother the S1100) have established themselves as the standard in the world of studio sampling. In May 1993 Akai introduced their S3000 and S2800 samplers (based around the S1000 format) which will ensure that Akai remain the standard in the future too. The samplers mentioned above cost between £1800 and £3000, so what about those who can't afford that sort of money? There must be some sort of alternative available without the need for a second mortgage!

Yet again, Akai have come up with an answer. Enter the S01. The S01 is similar in appearance to the other samplers in the range, retaining the familiar family colour of Akai grey - a colour more suited to an early seventies radiogramme. The difference is that the S01 retails for £799 (after a brief introductory price of £699). At just over 1/3 of the price of the an S1000, this sounds like a convincing bargain.

So what do you get?

Like many other samplers, a useful feature for DJ's and mixers is the ability to set up different sounds across the keyboard. The S01 is 8 note polyphonic - it can play a maximum of eight different notes at one time. It is also 8 note multitimbral - 8 different sounds can be stored at one time and can be assigned to various keys. For example, various drum loops or instruments can be assigned to the bottom half of the keyboard, while vocal phrases such as (dare I say it...) 'Pump up the Volume' and 'Everybody dance now' can be assigned to the top half of the keyboard. Naturally I hope you can be more imaginative than this!

Alternatively, and of special importance to nightclub use where room in the console is limited (they never think of the DJ do they?) is the ability for the sampler to be operated without the need for a keyboard. All you need do is press the appropriate button on the front panel corresponding to each of the 8 memory banks to hear the desired sample/s. Phrases and drum breaks can be sampled at home, looped and BPM'd and can later be mixed live with relative ease. In effect, this is a both a very powerful and creative tool for the DJ. Even for DJs who do not normally mix records, the S01 can be used to provide surprise phrases and sound effects which will no doubt add to the atmosphere and success of a night out DJing.

Without doubt, the main selling point of the S01 is the fact that it is capable of reading the

AKAI S01 MIDI DIGITAL SAMPLER



Akai 16 bit sample standard. In other words, although the S01 is new, there are already thousands of disks in circulation ready for it to munch on. From numerous software suppliers in the UK and abroad, it is possible to purchase almost every drum kit (including the TR808 and TR909 of course!), in addition to most synthesiser sounds and sound effects ever created. However, note that I used the word capable - and not compatible. It should be pointed out that the S01 is not capable of recording at 44.1kHz, so any samples that are loaded in from an S1000 format disk will have to be transposed back to their correct pitch. One other point worth mentioning is that the S01 does not feature as many edit parameters as the S1000, so some important original edits to the sample may be ignored completely (loop or envelope information perhaps), possibly resulting in a totally unusable sample.

'No cheap S1000'

"So what am I missing?" I hear you cry. There must be some compromises on a sampler with such a ground breaking price. Not so long ago samplers were not multitimbral at all - the ability to play more than one different sample at once was a rarity. Although the S01 is 8 note multitimbral and 8 note polyphonic this may still be a little restricting if it is used as the primary sound source in applications such as composing your own tracks. For example, in the layout of a dance track the S01 first has to accommodate the percussive parts, consisting of say a bass drum, 2 hi-hats, a snare and a clap. Already five of the S01's eight sample 'voices' have been used up. What about the lead synth, melody, vocals, sound effects and chords?

As you can see, there simply is not room for all of these, so creating worthy tunes using an S01 alone is more or less out of the question. However, if you already have a drum machine, then your percussion can be eliminated from the equation. If you have other MIDI synths or expanders that you can use as your sound source, then you have even more scope for sample creativity. This is where the S01 comes into its own because it can then be used exclusively for vocal snatches, drop-ins, sound effects, breakbeats etc. One other point to consider is that the S01 only supports one main stereo output. This eliminates the possibility of processing separate sections of the output without affecting the whole mix (such as EQ-ing different parts, gating the drums, or delaying

the vocals). As a comparison, the more expensive S1000 range feature eight different outputs and 16 note polyphony which ease (but not solve) this limitation problem. In the example of live DJ-ing, the stereo output would be sufficient, and would simply be attached to the turntable mixer as a line input.

The S01 comes with 1 megabyte of memory as standard, which provides a total of 15.6 seconds of sampling time at 32kHz (approaching CD quality). Unlike its older brothers there is no alternative sampling rate. However to boost recording time, one extra megabyte can be added. This upgrade is moderately priced at £80 and doubles the recording time to 32 seconds. Editing functions include 'Start Point' and 'End Point' which can be fine tuned, and the unwanted bits discarded. The 'loop' facility allows breaks to be edited and looped seamlessly. Editing is done with the front panel buttons and the familiar chunky Akai knob, with the settings displayed on an LED screen. Samples can be saved or loaded via the 3.5" disk drive.

At a tad under £800, the S01 is indeed a genuine bargain as far as high quality sampling is concerned. The most important thing to do is assess your needs, bearing in mind your future plans. If you intend to use the sampler exclusively for live DJ-ing or for mixing use (or if you intend to use it in addition to other equipment) then the S01 could be just what you're looking for.

Sequencers

For live DJ-ing and simple mixing purposes, the S01 is ideal - it's front panel buttons make triggering the samples a doddle. However, for megamixing and remixing purposes, to get the very best out the S01 you should be looking at driving it with a MIDI-compatible keyboard or better still a 'sequencer'. Sequencers allow you to program and store 'sequences' of notes which can be edited and later played back at the touch of a button, leaving your hands free for other things. Sequencers are available as separate 'black boxes' or more popularly as computer software. There are many sequencer packages available for almost any computer on the market, and we'll take a closer look at these in a later issue. Next month, Russ takes a look at the popular Roland W30 sample 'workstation' which combines the features of a sampler, sequencer and keyboard all in one unit.