

MakeMusic Finale 2014

Improved Notation, Modern Architecture

With its introduction in 1988, Finale broke new ground and established itself as a leader in the rapidly expanding world of computer music notation software. Now, more than 25 years later, MakeMusic has released Finale 2014, a major overhaul of the popular package that not only adds a host of impressive features, but also contains a complete reworking of the product's underlying architecture, ensuring that Finale will continue to be a viable and productive tool for many years to come.

Early adopters of Finale are well aware that although its functionality was incredibly powerful, early versions of the software were rather difficult to use and required a steep learning curve to master. As a company, MakeMusic has always kept its ear to the ground, constantly soliciting feedback and addressing user concerns. A standard yearly update cycle provided consistent advancements to Finale in both its capabilities and interface.

With the 2014 release, the company has strayed from its annual cycle and invested two solid years in producing the latest iteration. Much of this is due to the complete rewriting of Finale's code, which has been updated from Carbon to the more modern Cocoa on Mac OSX. According to Beth Sorensen, vice president of products at



MakeMusic, "This is a real investment in the future of Finale, and the shift to modern architecture ensures the future growth of the product."

Some of the most significant changes in Finale 2014 are under the hood, and although they may not be immediately obvious to the user, they represent critical advancements. Finale now uses a completely new file format with increased stability. In addition, files can now be saved in the legacy .mus format, allowing users of previous versions to open them. This backwards compatibility is a first for Finale and represents its commitment to encouraging collaboration. As with previous versions, files can also be exported as MIDI, audio, or saved in the MusicXML open format. A new audio engine has been created to enhance playback performance and quality.

Experienced users will notice some interface changes with an overall streamlining of the on-screen tool pallets. Pallet size has been reduced to create more visible work space. Select toolbars have been removed, with access remaining available from the menus ("It's all about the notation, not the tools," Sorensen said of the less-obtrusive new interface). There are also some nice enhancements to the view modes, particularly the studio mode, which features a reworked on-screen mixer.

Despite these changes, seasoned users will have no trouble diving right in, and new users will benefit from Finale 2014's new online documentation and tutorials, which are extremely well orga-

nized and impressively thorough.

Responding to user feedback, Finale has added a finer level of control over score creation and increased functionality that simplifies the creation of your music and enhances the look of it. Layers, rests, smart shapes, scanning and parts linking have all been improved. Percussion has also been tweaked, with major advancements in the creating and playback of percussion staves. Another noteworthy addition is the simplification of "keyless" score creation, something that had been notoriously tedious in earlier versions.

Finale 2014 definitely takes a major step toward improving the creation of music, but it also makes a huge leap in its ability to play it back. Building on its 2011 acquisition of Garritan, MakeMusic has bundled an impressive array of new software instruments with Finale. Using the Aria player along with Finale's Human Playback controls allow for music to be played with a realistic feel that is not possible with standard MIDI. According to MakeMusic, Human Playback has been reworked in 2014 to pave the way for even tighter integration with Garritan in future releases.

With two years of hard work invested, MakeMusic has a lot riding on Finale 2014. Although not overflowing with glitzy new features, this upgrade delivers some solid advances and confirms Finale's commitment to the future. Well worth its \$600 price tag, and at only \$139.95 for upgrading users, it is simply a no-brainer. (Academic/theological pricing of \$350 is available as well.)

—Keith Baumann

Ordering info: finale.com

Gretsch Catalina Club Classic

Modernized Nod to Yesteryear

It has been a little more than a decade since Gretsch introduced the original Catalina Club drum sets. To celebrate 10 years of success, Gretsch has given the original Catalina Club series a modernization treatment in regards to hardware and some other sleek updates. While the series was originally inspired by the traditional Gretsch jazz drum sets, the company has worked hard to bring all the conveniences of modern design and production to the line.

The new Catalina Club Classic drum shell packs are still mahogany (seven-ply). Even though the original Gretsch drums used a maple-formula shell, mahogany was one of the widely used woods when Gretsch, Slingerland and Ludwig ruled the drum world, so these drums still deliver a sound reminiscent of that era. They still have no reinforcement hoops, in keeping with the Gretsch shell tradition.

Also giving the drums a sonic nod to yesteryear are the 30-degree bearing edges, which provide increased head contact with the drum—adding warmth and punch, and allowing more of the drum shell tone to resonate (as

