

ADOBE AUDITION 3

The program formerly known as Cool Edit Pro has taken another substantial stride forward.

Text: Graeme Hague

► Poor old Adobe Audition. You can't blame it for suffering a bit of an identity crisis. For years it put up with a Prince-like nametag – “The software formerly known as Cool Edit Pro”. With the release of version 2 in early 2006 the CEP history was just about shaken off (I'm even a little loath to mention it here). Now the question is whether or not Audition is a stand-alone DAW competing in a fierce marketplace or if it should meekly accept its role as part of the Adobe family of creative applications – Photoshop, Illustrator, etc, etc.

Adobe really loves its workflow approach to multimedia production. Similar to the Apple 'suites' of programs, Adobe has the right software for particular tasks and they all interconnect, interact, communicate, update each other's content, swap wives on Saturday nights... you name it, it's one big happy family of number-crunchers. Audition was originally nabbed from Syntrillium to fill an audio role at Adobe and lately seems to have been plundered to create Soundbooth; the included audio software in their collections now. Audition is left to pull its pants back up, wipe its nose and wade back into the DAW fray alone and win back some respectability.

AUDIO SPECIALIST

Audition is (and always has been) an excellent multi-track audio recording and editing program. Not only is the quality of the recordings very high, but the stability of this Windows-only software has for years made it the go-to application for reliable tracking when many of its competitors were melting down in ASIO driver chaos. Today, the audio side of things is still very good and Adobe has added some tasty new features to the editing, mixing and mastering workspaces.

Where the program deliberately stayed off the pace was in MIDI facilities. It just didn't 'do' MIDI and included only rudimentary capabilities with each release. But that attitude couldn't last, and like other programs, Adobe has finally bowed to the demands of a VST instrument-hungry public. Audition 3 supports MIDI tracks with sequencer functions such as quantise and transpose, and the usual tools like Draw, Delete and Move, plus routing to any VST synths you own. It comes with its own bass synth, polysynth and soundfont player. Nothing to get excited about, but they work.

Of course when it comes to MIDI, Cubase or Sonar it ain't. Still, the ability to record and playback VST instruments is a huge leap forward for Audition and a welcome one, even if it isn't a highly featured MIDI setup. One annoying thing that has to be mentioned is that MIDI tracks don't display any data at all in the Multi-track window (version 3's Arrange window). Double-click a MIDI track and a floating window with a standard Piano Roll configuration appears, but otherwise, if you're working with other audio tracks, the MIDI channels are just empty, coloured lanes. They don't even show clips.

Let's get all the complaints out of the way: Audition still has no method of deleting unwanted audio takes from your hard drive. You can 'Destroy' bad recordings, which removes them entirely from the session, but they remain on your drive. You have to go searching with Windows Explorer later to ferret the little buggers out. Fortunately, a very clever chap and long-time user of Audition called Edward Hamlin has written the Audio File Cleanup program. Three cheers for Edward... in fact, make that four, since he thought about things a bit harder than Adobe. [See the box item for more details.]

THE GOOD NEWS

More good news: Audition has brought in a host of editing functions in the multi-track window that will save a lot of time. You can Group clips and then edit things like position, size and fades collectively. Fade out all the guitar tracks with one mouse action, for instance. Crossfades are applied automatically when clips overlap and 'handles' are provided to adjust them.



NEED TO KNOW

Price

\$485 or \$135 Upgrade

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www.adobe.com.au

Pros

Very stable audio DAW. Comprehensive editing functions.

Cons

MIDI tracks are blank. Still can't delete a wave file from the hard drive.

Summary

Adobe Audition getting better all the time. But why oh why haven't they got a permanent delete function for bad takes? Apart from that, Audition 3 has grown quietly in stature once more.

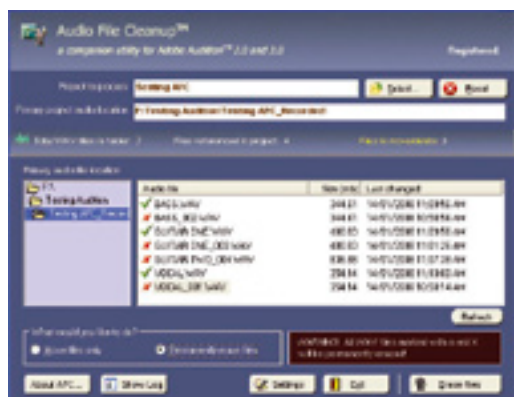


Note the small arrows in the corners of each area. Audition gives you 'frames' for these sections allowing you to undock and resize or shift everything around to your heart's content. The floating Piano Roll window is what you get when opening the MIDI sequencer track at the bottom. Otherwise, regardless of how much data is in the track, that's what you get – absolutely nothing. The red 'L' means 'Listen' for hearing your MIDI input. MIDI tracks have to be armed inside the sequencer window (which can hold more than one track, by the way)... Okay, let's give 'em a break, they're kind of new to this MIDI business.

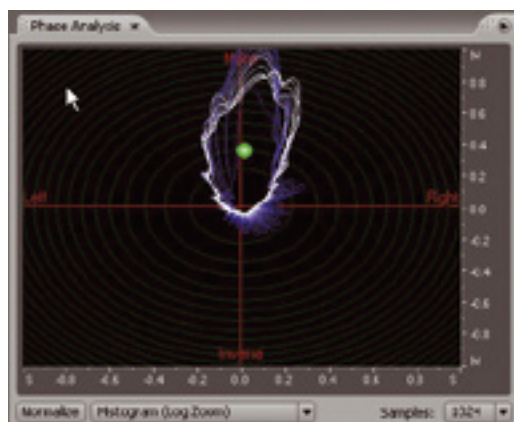


The Mix Window is very business-like. Large, clear faders and all the numeric parameters can be opened as graphic interfaces, too. An 'engineer's' mixing window?

! Edward Hamlin works for a 'Northern Irish software company' (but lives in the USA), so it wasn't such a chore 'apparently' to write a program that deleted unwanted files created by Audition 2. Originally he offered it as a free download to A2 owners via a users forum, but quickly got so swamped with (grateful) requests for tweaks and suggested improved versions that he now asks for a US\$20 registration to pay for his time – and it's money well spent. You can listen to Edward's music and try the AFC (Audio File Cleanup) Version 3 for a 15 day trial from www.edwardhamlin.com.



Edward Hamlin's excellent Audio File Clean Up program. Folks at Adobe take note – or put this guy on your payroll!



Audition 3's Phase Analysis tool. If you can't figure out how it works try it on any Pink Floyd track. At least you can just sit and watch it all day...

For serious audio editors, Audition excels in specialty functions like phase alignment tools and noise reduction. The noise reduction always worked well, but they've taken it further with 'Adaptive Noise Reduction', which is a VST-based real-time effect. You don't have to apply it permanently offline and it can achieve reasonable results with variable noises like wind roar and traffic rumble (or you can just shift your studio away from Pitt Street mall).

An honorable mention goes to the new Guitar Suite Effect, a modelling effect that is very usable indeed. Again: not fancy, but it sounds nice.

AUDITION GETS THE ROLE

Audition continues the tradition of providing a rock-solid and effective platform for working with audio. The GUI is no-nonsense with most of the plug-ins offering precise numerical values for settings (with sliders too) rather than shiny virtual knobs. It strikes you as a professional working environment for engineers and musicians who know what they're doing. And now, if you want to chuck in a bit of VST synth or drums under the mix, you can.

Audition 3 can definitely stand on its own in the DAW marketplace – a little taller with every version release. ■