

Introduction to Electronic Music Production.

Basics.

So you want to make electronic music? Getting started in electronic music is surprisingly easy, however, with so much to choose from nowadays in terms of instrumentation, effects, software, it can be a daunting process. First, we will explain the basic terms you will need to know;

- MIDI

MIDI stands for Musical Instrument Digital Interface. It describes a connection between instruments which send data, note data, velocity data and note length. There are three common MIDI ports you will find on most hardware electronic instruments, In, Out and Thru. These connections pretty much speak for themselves. MIDI In receives MIDI data, MIDI Out send MIDI data and MIDI Thru is another Out port, for allowing you to chain up multiple instruments.

It is more common that you will start without any hardware synthesisers or drum machines, and simply with a MIDI controller. Now, a MIDI controller is a keyboard (or guitar/bass – many instruments are now available as MIDI controllers) with no sounds, just a MIDI port. These days, most MIDI controllers are equipped with USB for transferring MIDI data to a computer. With your controller you can play VST'S (see below) on your computer, and if you ever do get hardware synths, you can also play those using your MIDI port.

- VST'S

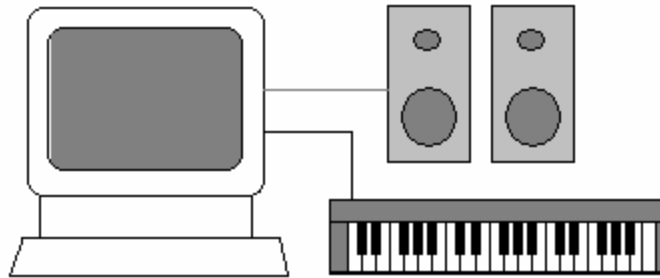
VST (Virtual Studio Technology) also known as 'Soft Synths' and plugins are computer instruments and effects. Pieces of software on your PC that you can control using a MIDI controller. These days, there are literally millions of VST's available, from fully fledged modular Moog systems to small free ones. You can pay as much for a VST as you would for a real hardware instrument. You can also pick up hundreds of fantastic ones for free from the internet. You can operate VST's from inside your host (see below)

- Host

Hosts, also known as DAW'S (Digital Audio Workstation) are your main sequencing software. This is the software that is likely to cost you money. The big names, Cubase, Logic, Reason, Ableton Live, Pro Tools can cost anything from £100 to £700. Within your host you can add audio tracks, MIDI tracks, (which you can edit on screen to change notes, length, velocity, pitch, modulation and other data) add effects to them such as reverb, compression, overdrive, gating, and any other effect that features in a VST (thousands upon thousands).

All of them will offer demo versions on their sites, so it's best to play around with them all to find out which one works best for you.

A Basic Setup and its Cost.



- PC or Mac – Macs are considered more reliable and powerful, but can cost three times the amount. A good PC suitable for music making will set you back anything from £350 upwards, a suitable machine will probably have a 2ghz processor and upwards, and a minimum of 512mb of RAM, plus an improved soundcard.
- Controller Keyboard – They come in all shapes, sizes and quality. Pick up a small one octave keyboard for around £60.
- HI-FI – Connect your HI-FI to your audio output on your PC for monitoring. Not ideal, but I'm assuming you haven't got a few hundred pounds to spend on purpose designed monitoring speakers?
- Software – One host. Free VST's. £400

That sounds expensive, but try buying a used copy of software. If you have got to this site the chances are you have a PC. It could be cheaper than you think. Ofcourse, this is just a guide, if you like you can do a Squarepusher and just use a four track, a bass guitar and some drum machines.

Now this is the absolute basics. There are so many things you can learn, audio manipulation software such as MAX/MSP, Audiomulch and Bidule, synthesis techniques, hardware, sampling, mastering, music theory, composition, arranging etc. Please look at our other tutorials for help.

Useful Links

<http://www.kvraudio.com> – VST'S

<http://www.tweakbench.com> – VST'S

<http://www.em411.com> – Electronic Music Community and Forum

<http://www.dolphinmusic.co.uk> – Excellent Suppliers of musical equipment.

