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NEW GEAR

UJAM BRAAASS, CHERRY AUDIO CHROMA & W.A. PRODUCTION DERES

BY JACK D. ELLIOT

UJAM BRAAASS

UJAM is well known for their instrument plug-ins for guitars, drums, and bass. But now we have BRAAASS, a plug-in that puts Hans Zimmer's personal collection of brass section phrases at your fingertips. BRAAASS is a new addition to UJAM's Symphonic Elements series. Zimmer, one of UJAM's co-founders, states that these recordings in the plug-in will give you realistic brass parts that are typically costly and time-consuming, all in an easy-to-use interface for fast composition. The UJAM engine provides ready-made sequences and creative macro controls that sync to your DAW tempo. This plug-in is a lot of fun to work with and makes adding more brass parts a breeze.

BRAAASS is not just for cinematic or symphonic music. It includes phrases for contemporary rap, hip-hop, trap, and techno. BRAAASS features 78 styles with six ready-made phrases each, totaling 468 unique phrases. Additionally, each Style includes four custom-tailored one-shot Additions, allowing you to further

customize the phrasing of the Style in real time. Besides real-time riffs, you can also play standard brass lines.

A fun feature in the UJAM engine is crossfade, made up of two independent low and high sections. You can seamlessly blend between them or add subtle variations by automating. Also included is their Finisher FX, which will transform the character of your BRAAASS track to match any genre or mood with just one knob. There are many included effects, such as delays, chorus, and telephone effects, allowing you to spice up your sound. The internal plug-in effects are excellent if you prefer to use those instead of additional plug-ins that may hog CPU. I applaud UJAM for having separate effects for the low brass and high brass, which allow for a cleaner mix.

At the bottom of the plug-in, you can see the keyboard layout for ultimate control. Starting with lower notes from C1-C2, you have your phrasing section. From C2-C3, you have your bass notes section, and from C3 upwards is your play range



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section. To simplify, you hold down a phrase you like and can change the chords based on the notes you play in the play range selection zone. As with these types of libraries, it is beneficial to use an SSD drive for faster loading times. You also need a minimum of 8 GB of RAM and 6.31 GB of free disk space. The sound quality is very good, with a nice, simple interface to whip up some cool ideas. I give this a 9/10.



CHERRY AUDIO CHROMA

Chroma synthesizer is a virtual instrument by the makers of Cherry Audio that brings back the spirit and sounds of the iconic Rhodes Chroma polyphonic analog synthesizer from the 1980s. It is an authentic emulation of the Rhodes Chroma (ARP Chroma) Synthesizer. I wish I could have bought one of these synths back in the day, but now it is available in a plug-in format. In 1979, the pioneers at ARP Instruments began researching and developing the Chroma synthesizer, but unfortunately, they went bankrupt.

UJAM BRAAASS

Luckily, Rhodes believed in the synth and developed it into the mid-'80s. Only 3,000 units were made, and they also produced a keyboard-less expander version that sold 150 units. Either way, it was a famous synth in the world of synthesizers back then and is still popular today. The Chroma was famously used by musicians including Herbie Hancock, Joe Zawinul, Jethro Tull, and Oscar Peterson. It was used for the iconic “wah-wah” chords heard throughout Spandau Ballet’s hit “True.”

Chroma gives you 16 oscillators, filters, VCAs, LFOs, and 32 envelope generators. You can configure 16 pre-designed signal paths, from classic VCO-VCF-VCA to complex sounds with sync, ring mode, filter FM, serial filter paths, and much more. The plug-in has two advanced envelope generators that can modulate the filter, amp, as well as the pitch. Cherry Audio also cleverly included the Chroma Expander in the plug-in. Chroma Expander adds a second Chroma synthesizer to the mix, allowing you to run it in layer or split modes. It’s like getting two synths for the price of one. Like most virtual synths these days, Chroma comes with its own built-in FXs, including delay, reverb, distortion, phaser, flanger, and chorus. If you happen to be one of the lucky ones who owns a hardware version of the Rhodes Chroma, you can load SysEx files with the hardware patches, allowing you to transfer your banks and individual patches from your hardware to the software. The plug-in version offers plenty of sounds to play with, including 700 presets from professional sound designers like James Dyson, INHALT, Drew Schlesinger, and many more.

Playing around with the synth in Ableton Live 12 was a joy. I am a huge fan of vintage synths, and Chroma did not disappoint me. I can’t compare it to the hardware version since I don’t own one, but it does not matter. I trust Cherry Audio to work their magic in replicating such a beast. It sounds fantastic to my ears. It runs as a VST, VST3, AU, and AAX plug-in, as well as a standalone format on macOS (native Apple Silicon + Intel) and Windows. There is a trial if you would like to test it. I see it going for \$69 online, which is a great price for a powerful virtual synth. I give this a 9/10.



W.A. PRODUCTION DERES

Deres [pronounced “DEE-Res”] is a plug-in from W.A. Production, touted as your “resonance-killing foot soldier,” designed to obliterate muddy sounds and pesky overtones that invade your productions. I own several W.A. Production plug-ins; they are very cost-effective, easy to use, and sound great for the price. I like to support smaller companies like these that have the guts to compete against giants like Waves or IK Multimedia.

Deres is a cool plug-in for a very specific type of processing. It removes problem resonance from any type of audio. It has controls to tame unruly harmonics, and to identify annoying resonance issues and buildups that could ruin or muddy a mix. You can reduce the resonance and bring back brightness into a mix or track you are cleaning up. The cool aspect of the plug-in is that it can find resonances that you wouldn’t even know were affecting your mixes. These hidden resonances become a major problem when you start to layer synths, vocals, or other sounds. Any buildup of frequencies in a mix will be an issue, but annoying resonances can destroy a mix.

Let’s look at how to use the plug-in. First, use the Listen button to isolate the annoying resonance by sweeping the frequency from 1kHz–8kHz. Look for the loudest, most annoying resonance sound—it will be obvious! Once you find the tone, you can drag the

middle of the plug-in down a few dBs, and the resonance will be gone. It might sound a little duller now, depending on the source. Don’t freak out—there is a built-in exciter and a compensation knob to fix the track or mix. By adjusting the Excite or Compensate knob, or a blend of both, you can restore the magic you had at the start of your mix. Excite adds air and presence to the sound, while Compensate adds EQ around the resonance to offset some loss in level and tone from the reduction of the pesky resonances.

I am impressed with how well it reduces the resonances and its extra features that bring life back into a track or mix. This is a must-have, easy-to-use tool for cleaning up your mix. You could achieve the same results with EQ and a bunch of other plug-ins, but everything is in one nice, easy-to-use plug-in that works great. I give this a 10/10.

W.A. PRODUCTION DERES

