

PG Music Band-in-a-Box 2015

By Paul Lau

Since 1988, Canadian company PG Music has constantly been refining one of the most unique and coolest pieces of musical software in the industry. Band-in-a-Box 2015 is the latest incarnation in this musical dynasty, and it does not fail to impress. For those that may be new to BIAB, hold on as we explore the product and the creativity it can inspire.

This intelligent software can automatically create just about any musical accompaniment in many styles and genres in a realistic and responsive way. The premise or method of operation of the software is based on a linear inputting/scoring of a chord/chart form. The software allows you to program (or input) a chord – of which there are many – by just typing it in.



Here, you can also set tempo, the number of bars, key, and other parameters. After doing this and selecting the style – rock, country, jazz, and the list goes on – and then hitting Play, it will load instruments appropriate to that style/genre and play an appropriate arrangement at whichever tempo and duration you set.

These background accompaniments can easily be enhanced with RealTracks. RealTracks are actual recordings of instruments being played – not just single sample hits. When you use RealTracks, either on their own or on top of the MIDI tracks, the entire accompaniment will sound more live and natural.

Drums and drum programming can be

a bit daunting for non-drummers when it comes to creating a “live-sounding” groove, but no worries. RealDrums can replace the MIDI programmed drums and in turn create that sound we all want – our very own live drummer playing in any tempo or style we choose, with drum fills exactly where we want them.

I don’t know how they do it, revamping the software with worthwhile upgrades year after year, but 2015 is no exception. There are over 50 new features in this version, and fortunately, there is a pull-down on the top middle of the program interface that actually says “2015 NEW Features.” It has the most significant ones readily available, and then you can go to PG Music’s site to explore the rest.

As far as highlights, I actually have to

start off with the installation, with big kudos. How many companies provide a pre-loaded USB “slim” hard drive so you can easily load the program and data? I love it – no DVDs and no long download waits. I was up and running very quickly.

The actual layout is very intuitive, with everything you can think of and more. I must say it is a very compact navigation in these windows, but it provides all the essential tools you need.

So let’s start with the addition of 101 RealTracks, the heart of the program. What really makes BIAB unique is who actually played and recorded these RealTracks. For example, in the jazz category, you have award-winning players like Eric Alexander,

Ron Carter, Kenny Barron, and the list goes on. It’s like having top session musicians playing for you, yet the production is yours to command. In the larger packages, there are over 2,200 hours of RealTracks and RealDrums to access from a wide variety of styles.

There are also 15 new MIDI SuperTracks. The main difference here is that you can customize the MIDI sounds by using your own sounds and edit the notes, too.

Another addition that intrigued me was two new style sets: Celtic Guitar and Banjo rhythms, which are both very realistic and unique. For EDM, BIAB has added 1,000 loops (and I love manipulating loops) based on drum and bass, top 40, modern, and techno.

Another key new feature is the Instrumental Studies, which help you learn rhythm or soloing. These studies can be slowed down and looped for simple practice. There are currently 18 studies, though I’m guessing more will be added in future editions. This is an awesome idea for the musician that wants to improve their playing.

To top it all off, BIAB is also tapping into the world of online video. There is a new Video Window that allows you to load in videos from YouTube or other sites. The audio track is extracted into BIAB, and here, you can slow down the audio and video, which stay in sync. You can slow the video down, so if you need to transcribe or really listen to a part, you can – and even loop it. You can also replace the audio in the video with your own, or upload a BIAB video back into YouTube.

Band-in-a-Box 2015 is the Swiss Army knife of instant accompaniment production, and as you explore and create with it, you will discover its power and what it can do to make you a better musician and creator.

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