TECH REVIEWS

BAND-IN-A-BOX 2014

An outstanding and 'hands-on' tool ❝❞

PG Music's *Band-in-a-Box* is a program designed to produce full band backings in a wide variety of styles by simply typing in the required chords for your song. The program has been consistently developed over many years and has grown into a very powerful tool.

In the early days it was entirely reliant on MIDI for playback but with the development of RealTracks, the level of realism attained new heights. These newer 'Real' instruments can be controlled like MIDI but are full recordings from professional musicians that can be combined to fit song chords and tempo
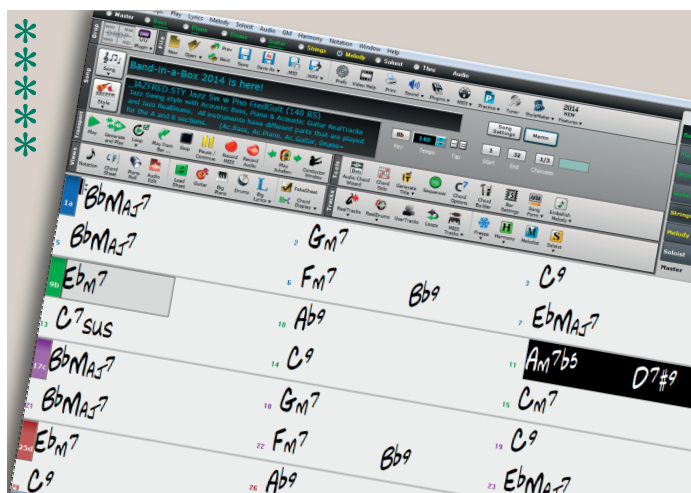
precisely. The instruments include an array of brass, woodwind and strings; acoustic and electric guitars, basses and pianos; and even a blues harmonica.

The 2014 edition of *Band-in-a-Box* has added many more RealTracks and with the full edition there are now over 1,500 RealTracks, over 250 RealDrums,

over 150 MIDI Supertracks and over 1,500 MIDI styles. The fuller editions are available on a small external hard drive, making installation very simple.

There is also a completely redesigned user interface with all the tools conveniently grouped for quicker access, and the option of an instant preview of all

styles, greatly speeding up your decision making.

'Plug-in' mode makes it very simple to drag and drop freshly generated files into any DAW program and while *Band-in-a-Box* is not itself a DAW program it does however also include *RealBand*. This is a flexible and powerful arranging, sequencing and digital recording program that makes an ideal partner for *Band-in-a-Box*.

It will be particularly useful in an educational setting if you need high-quality backing tracks for students, and will help to develop a real knowledge of chords, song structures and instrumentation. It's also simply great fun to use and outstanding 'hands-on' tool, ranging from easy-to-use basic functions to more elaborate hidden depths for 'powerhouse' users.

Reviewed by Tony Cliff

MOBILE MUSIC TRAINER

Unfortunately not one of the leaders in its field ❝❞

There is an abundance of apps that claim to improve your musical ability by listening to you play or sing and then giving you instant feedback on your performance. Mobile Music Trainer (MMT) is one of these apps, though unfortunately not one of the leaders in its field.

The interface, though not without a certain simplistic charm, provides little to no information as to what each button does. You have to click the tiny question mark icon to

ascertain the function of any of the icons on screen. It only runs in portrait mode, a hangover from the pre-iPad days (in 2014 I really think one should be able to turn an iPad on its side).

Once you have selected your instrument (orchestral instruments only, no piano or keyboard, though it does transpose for you when

appropriate), you choose your piece from a somewhat limited range, though in-app purchases unlock more options.

The app allows you to play with a metronome, beat the rhythm on its own, or play each note in turn, moving on as you play a note correctly. These apps stand or fall on whether their pitch recognition software works. It thought my rendition of *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* on the flute voice of my piano was exquisite. The same tune on the piano sound? Dreadful. My wonderful trumpet-playing wife (dipABRSM) performed the traditional Spanish song *El Señor don Gato* to MMT. Her two identical, and

accurate, performances scored one and three stars out of five respectively. Tested on an iPad 2 with the built-in mic, the software failed miserably.

On the plus side, the app features a tuner and the ability to import your own MusicXML files from DropBox or iTunes. This potentially allows you to perform to any track of your choice. You do, however, need to pay £5.99 for this functionality. Aside from all that is wrong with this app, you have to also question the value of aiming for robotic precision to get five stars. Where is the musicality in that?

Reviewed by David Guinane