



Review: Beta Monkey Drum Loops
by Rick Paul - *9th February 2004* -



There are three basic techniques for using audio drum loops. The first is to construct a beat based around the loops, then base any song or instrumental composition around that. At the other end of the spectrum, a user starting with a song and a basic feel in mind may search through a loop library (or multiple libraries) looking for something that matches his or her notion of how the beat should sound. Somewhere in between is the notion of recognizing that neither of these approaches are perfect, getting as close as possible with loop selection, then doing audio surgery to customize the loops to the project at hand.

While any given loop user may employ all three techniques at various times, odds are there is one approach he or she will favor a large percentage of the time. For me personally, and I'd venture for many songwriters and producers who start with a fairly clear concept of what they want to achieve, that favored approach is trying to find loops that match what I'm hearing in my head. In the perfect world, those of us who fit this description would probably prefer just being able to play the parts ourselves, or hiring the perfect drummer whose fantastic playing skills are augmented by highly accurate mind-reading skills. However, the world isn't perfect, and circumstances, and/or our own set of talents, may not make either approach practical. While we could conceivably turn to the alternative of painstakingly creating drum parts via MIDI, the notion of using recordings of a real drummer's playing real drums, and being recorded in a real studio, can make dealing with the compromises that inevitably arise when using audio loops worthwhile. Not to mention that using audio loops generally takes significantly less time than MIDI programming.

For those of us with this temperament, the biggest bane to our ultimate satisfaction is the lack of flexibility that audio loops provide. What is recorded is basically what we get -- there is no sliding of individual notes, replacing a snare with a tom on an otherwise perfect beat, etc. While

loop surgery may be possible, the results are seldom as convincing as the original loop was due to, for example, reverb tails from one hit's still playing when the hit that needs to be tweaked starts. The best we can do is hope there are lots of choices in our loop collections, both to get us in the ballpark of what we have in mind, and to satisfy our specific choices at each step of the way when we're getting down to details.

Loop developers, on the other hand, generally have to look at whether their customers would prefer to have a large number of different basic beats on a loop CD, or lots of variations of each basic beat, because a single CD will only fit so many loops. Of course, loop customers tend to like to have their cake and eat it, too. Still, most of us aren't working on big budget productions, so buying every loop CD out there isn't likely to be in the cards, either. We will often need to decide whether we'd prefer a CD with lots of basic beats or lots of flexibility within a smaller number of basic beats because, let's face it, \$50 to \$200 for each loop collection can add up pretty quickly.

This is where Connecticut-based Beta Monkey Music comes in, offering several drum loops collections that, at least on paper (or on a video screen for us on-line types), seem to answer the budget-strapped songwriter's or producer's prayers for help in building a wider, deeper acoustic drums loop library. We'll get to more details on individual products below, but to give a basic flavor of what I'm talking about here, Beta Monkey's home page advertises a "Funky Monkey Three-Pack", consisting of three of their most popular loop CDs, including three of the four products reviewed here, for \$39.99. Noting that the typical ACIDized loop collection starts at around \$50, we're talking better than three-for-one savings. It's easy to see how this could translate to being able to build a bigger loop library much more quickly, even on an almost non-existent budget.

Of course, the widest, deepest collection of loops wouldn't be of much use if the playing and recording weren't solid. One concern that immediately pops to mind is whether the old saying, "you get what you pay for," will hold true here. I hope you won't mind if I cut to the chase right now by saying the drumming and recording quality are both excellent, though there are a few caveats, not related to playing or recording quality, which may cause relatively minor concerns for some uses. Without spilling any more beans, let's dive in.

As is the usual case for CakewalkNet product reviews, this review will be addressed primarily to SONAR users, and some of the usage examples will be based on SONAR (I am using SONAR 3.1.1, but notes should be similar for SONAR 2 onwards). However, it should also be applicable to users of Project5, ACID, and other ACID-compatible applications.

Basics

Beta Monkey sent us four loop collections for review:

Drum Werks Vol. I: Rock Drums

Drum Werks Volume IV

Alt and Modern Rock Drum Grooves

Alt and Modern Rock Drums II

We'll get to the details of each of these CDs below, but all four loop collections are 100% acoustic drums. In fact, Beta Monkey's web site proudly proclaims the real acoustic drums element, with one particularly entertaining comment reading, "for goodness sake, don't settle for midi drums or (worse yet) v-drums."

Each CD contains a collection of 16-bit, 44.1 kHz ACIDized loops and one shot samples. Though there are some promotional materials on each of the CDs, three of the four CDs are packed with at least 600 MB of loop and one shot sample content. The sole exception is Alt and Modern Rock Drum Grooves, which only contains about 360 MB of samples from the collection itself, but does add approximately 160 MB of sample loops to promote the first four volumes of the Drum Werks series. While those preview loops would also be usable, they would be redundant for users of the respective Drum Werks CDs. The Drum Werks Vol. I CD also contains a significant number of preview loops, but uses MP3 files to keep the size of those way down, thus leaving more room for loops that are part of that particular collection.

All the Beta Monkey loops are very budget-friendly, but figuring out the best costs when purchasing multiple CDs can be a bit challenging. The list prices of each of the individual CDs is \$29.99, but the Beta Monkey site sell them for the following individual CD prices:

Drum Werks Vol I: Rock Drums: \$17.96
Drum Werks Volume IV: \$19.96
Alt and Modern Rock Drum Grooves: \$19.96
Alt and Modern Rock Drums II: \$19.96

To get even better pricing, though, various bundles are available. For example, the above mentioned "Funky Monkey Three-Pack" sells for \$39.99 and includes the two Drum Werks volumes reviewed here plus the first Alt and Modern Rock volume. There is also a package that includes both Alt and Modern Rock volumes for \$29.96. If you specifically want the four volumes reviewed here, your best price would be to add the Alt and Modern Rock Drums II collection at \$19.96 to the \$39.99 Funky Monkey package, for a total of \$59.95. When you consider that price will be roughly 30% of typical low-end pricing for ACID loops collections for four loop CDs at \$50 a pop, and is, in fact, only slightly more than a single loop CD would typically cost, the budget benefits become obvious.

I hate to dwell on price, though, because the greatest price in the world wouldn't be much use if the content were not worthwhile. Thus, without further ado, let's take a look at the individual CDs.

Drum Werks Vol. I: Rock Drums

Drum Werks Vol. I contains over 600 MB of loops and one shot samples. It also contains a bit over 65 MB worth of promotional materials such as MP3 demos of loops from other Beta Monkey collections, sample songs recorded with Beta Monkey loops, and a "for fun" drum solo MP3 from the Drum Werks Vol. I recording sessions. The style of this collection is oriented toward rock -- think guitar-driven music -- with tempo groupings ranging from 80 BPM to upwards of 175 BPM.

The loops are organized into 12 directories of loops based on a single tempo or close grouping of tempos, one directory of mixed tempo grooves, a directory tellingly called "just fills", and another for single instrument hits and other one shot (i.e. non-looped) samples. Included in the one shots area is a fairly good selection of cymbals, and pretty much all the loops are devoid of crash and splash cymbal hits to allow for maximum flexibility in arranging patterns within a song's structure. The directories are meaningfully named (e.g. "92 BPM Laid Back Rock Grooves", "110 BPM Hard Rocking Grooves and Fills", etc.).

The samples themselves vary in the meaningfulness of their names, but most do at least include the tempo, the type of loop (e.g. groove, groove with fill, etc.) and any specially characteristics such as if the pattern features a ride cymbal ("RC") or hi-hat ("HH"). For example, the sample loop named "HH_Groove_Loop_53_110_BPM_fill.wav" is a hi-hat-based groove loop at 110 BPM with a fill in it. If you're wondering about the "53" in the name, that loop happens to be the fifty-third hi-hat-based groove loop in the "110 BPM Hard Rocking Grooves and Fills" directory (there are fifty-four hi-hat based groove loops in that category). In that same category, there are also ride cymbal-based groove loops with names like "RC_Groove_Loop_31_110_BPM_fill.wav" (i.e. the thirty-first ride cymbal-based groove loop, which contains a fill).

If the loop names give you the idea that there are lots of variations on a theme in some of these tempo-based groupings, you've got the right idea. The 110 BPM category used as an example above happens to be the second most populated set of loop groupings, but even the smallest grouping, which happens to be "106 BPM Mid-Tempo Rock Grooves") has 24 samples. Interestingly, the 106 BPM grouping also happens to be an exception to the rule on meaningful loop naming, with names such as "loop_24 106 BPM.wav" (i.e. no indication of ride cymbal versus hi-hat, fill versus groove, etc.). There is also a "Mixed Groove Sampler" directory with base tempos that are all over the place, and which have interesting names -- e.g. "aldrige ripoff beat FIX (ny).wav", "beat weird! (ny) tweaked.wav", "heavyassgroove kicking (ny).wav", etc. -- but ones which aren't very helpful for figuring out whether they will be in the right vicinity for the tempo of your project.

I do have one wish list item for Beta Monkey's loop naming, and that is for the number of bars in a loop (or number of beats if the loop is a partial measure) to be reflected in the loop's name. This information becomes readily apparent once you insert a loop into a project (i.e. by virtue of how many measures the loop takes up before stretching it). However, with the large numbers of loops in some categories, it would be helpful to be able to quickly eliminate ones that have the wrong number of bars to fill a particular spot without having to drag the loop into a project's track. Since even auditioning a loop doesn't always make it readily apparent how many measures are in that loop (i.e. since sometimes the variations between measures of a multi-measure loop may be subtle), having this information readily available in the loop's name could save some time.

While most loops in all four of the Beta Monkey collections reviewed here are ACIDized, of all the loops I inspected closely, not only in Drum Werks Vol. I, but also in the other three Beta Monkey collections being reviewed here, none had beat slicing markers defined to tell SONAR, ACID, Project5, or other ACID-compatible looping programs the optimal points to slice up the

loops when matching a higher or lower project tempo. While various looping programs will get different results when this occurs, a basic rule of thumb is that loops without beat slice markers are less likely to stretch as far as loops with well-placed beat slice markers before issues such as artifacts or less accurate tempo matching occur. If your project keeps pretty close to the base tempo of the loops you are using, this may not be noticeable. However, those who tend to stretch the boundaries of ACID-style tempo matching may want to be aware that the Beta Monkey loops may not stretch quite as far as some other collections. Alternately, if you want them to stretch further, you may need to add your own beat slice markers. In SONAR, even using SONAR's Loop Construction View's to turn off the default note division-based slicing and just opting for 100% transient detection-based slicing, can yield an improvement in this area. Manually sliding any markers that are slightly off, and adding markers for undetected notes, can improve things further. This is not terribly hard to do, but can be time consuming, and is something we generally take for granted as being done by loop developers.

In the Drum Werks Vol. I collection, there were also a number of loops that were not ACIDized at all. For example, in the "80 BPM 16th Note Grooves" directory, of the first 55 loops in the directory, only 10 are ACIDized. This problem does seem to be confined to a few loop directories, and was not noticed in the other three collections. This issue is a bit tougher to deal with because, unless the project is at the exact base tempo of the loop in question, the loop will not precisely fit to measure boundaries, and will not repeat with stretching in SONAR. Since SONAR thinks the clip is not a groove loop, it thinks you are just slip editing an audio clip, and stretching the clip only adds silence since there is nothing beyond the loop's boundary. Perhaps more significantly, if the tempo of your project is not at the same tempo as the base tempo of the loops, then previewing the loops (e.g. with SONAR's Loop Explorer) while playing the project will result in the loops' playing out of sync with your project. The workaround is to use SONAR's Loop Construction View to change the attributes of the clip to "Enable Looping", then make sure the number of beats in the clip is specified correctly. SONAR will automatically detect the loop's tempo once the number of beats is known, so you won't have to worry about fractional tempos. However, to use this workaround, you must first insert the loops in the project, then change the attributes with the Loop Construction View. Thus, this won't help for loop previewing unless you make a one time effort to edit the loop attributes then resave the loops on your hard disk for future use with Loop Explorer.

Mostly minor issues aside, if you are using these loops as they are intended, which is to say with a project tempo somewhere in the general vicinity of the base tempo of the loops, this is a very useful, and good sounding, collection of loops. The loops aren't dry, but neither are they buried in reverb. There are lots of variations of most basic feels, thus providing a good possibility of constructing believable, human-sounding drum parts that have a good chance of matching the feel you are seeking, as long as you have a bit of patience for previewing lots of loops.

Perhaps most importantly, we are talking about generally tasteful playing, not showing off on drums to try and make individual loops impress on their own (i.e. without the music you'll be using them to support). While I wouldn't go so far as to call many of these loops understated -- after all, we're talking a collection that is aimed squarely at guitar-centric rock, from mid-tempo on up to hyperventilation speeds -- neither do I get the feeling that I'm listening to mini drum solos in the making. In practice, I've found the loops fairly easy to slot into real projects.

If there is a challenge in slotting the loops into projects, perhaps the key one is sifting through upwards of 30 similarly named loops for a given tempo. This really doesn't say anything negative about the Drum Werks loops, though, as most any loop collection I've seen with a large number of loops suffers from this same issue. It is just the nature of the beast. In fact, it is the relative bounty of the Drum Werks collection that makes it a bit more challenging here than on less adventurous collections. Maybe someday, though, someone will invent some kind of naming, or other indexing, scheme to give us more clues. I'm wishing for a naming scheme that will let us quickly find all patterns that have a ghost snare hit on two and a solid hit on four with a pushed hi-hat on ... well, you get the picture of how challenging this type of thing could be.

The bottom line on Drum Werks Vol. I? This is a very useful collection if you're looking for rock drums. The few areas of concern are more than made up for by the tastefulness of the playing and the wide, deep variety of loops. And let's not forget the budget price!

Drum Werks Volume IV

In listening to the groove loops on Drum Werks Volume IV, after having listened to those on Drum Werks Vol. I, the first thing I noticed was a decidedly different character in the actual sound of the drums. Perhaps this is due to a combination of the tuning of the kit, how the drums were recorded, the recording room itself, and so on. The description that comes to mind is "tighter" or "crisper". This is neither good nor bad in and of itself, but rather just a different character, where which is preferable in a given situation will be dependent upon the needs of that situation.

There are 616 MB of loops and one shots, plus an additional 27 MB of preview loops from two other Beta Monkey collections which may themselves be usable on projects. Loop base tempos range from 63 BPM up to 175 BPM, but there seems to be a greater concentration in the under 100 BPM area than with Vol. I. Beta Monkey indicates that all the loops and one shots in this collection were recorded in a single session, with the intent of providing strong mix and match possibilities amongst all the loops on the CD. Indeed, there does seem to be a higher level of cohesiveness in the sounds between the various tempo-based groupings, though there is also plenty of mix and match potential in Vol. I.

There are 17 tempo-based directories of loops, plus a "leftover loops" collection and a set of single hits and one shots from the same session. There are also assorted one shot samples included in many of the tempo-based loop groupings. Naming of the directories is similar to Vol. I, including the tempo in the directory name. A minor grip is that Beta Monkey sometimes starts the directory name with the tempo (e.g. "77 BPM Mellow Groove") and sometimes ends with the tempo (e.g. "Swingy Grooves at 82 BPM"). Consistently starting with the tempo would be preferable for directory sorting and quick browsing purposes. File naming in Volume IV is slightly less helpful, on average, than in Vol. I, with many loop names simply having the word "loop" in the name followed by a number and the tempo (e.g. "loop_24 82 BPM.wav"). There generally are ride cymbal and fill designations, though (e.g. "loop_19 (RC) 93 BPM.wav", "loop_21 (with fill) 160 BPM.wav") as well as some designations for some other special cases (e.g. "loop_30 (Toms) 160 BPM.wav"). I suppose, if the rule of thumb is that loops that are not ride cymbal-based are hi-hat based, adding the "HH" designation to each loop name, as in Vol. I,

might be considered redundant. However, that this designation, or the "RC" designation for ride cymbal-based loops, was at the front of the file names in Vol. I was a nice touch for loop sorting purposes since it automatically grouped all hi-hat loops together and ride cymbal loops together. While the ride cymbal loops are still likely to be grouped together in Volume IV, that grouping may be in the middle of a hi-hat-based grouping, and this can represent a slight slowdown in browsing loop names.

It might be noted that the "leftover loops" are named pretty arbitrarily, without even so much as a tempo designation in the loop name. A "ReadMe" file in the main directory for these, though, notes that these loops did not make the tempo-based groupings, and are provided essentially as bonus materials to fill up the extra space the CD would have otherwise had, and in case someone might find something they like here. Given that these "leftovers" represent 184MB of loops, however, I do wish they at least included a tempo designation as previewing a loop at a grossly different tempo can result in some pretty ugly sounding drums.

In general, there tend to be more groups of loops in Volume IV, but less loops per group. Of course, some of the groupings in Vol. I had a huge number of loops in them, and there is still plenty of variety in most groups here.

The loops in Volume IV are also lacking explicit beat slicing markers in the ACIDization information. However, all loops I checked were ACIDized

I find it somewhat hard to characterize Drum Werks Volume IV versus Drum Werks Vol. I, as both are well-recorded acoustic drums, and I could imagine either being used in similar contexts. However, rather than cop out totally on trying to give some sense of the differences, I will suggest that Vol. I seems to me to lend itself more toward louder volume rock, perhaps with more of a "live" vibe, whereas Volume IV, while still oriented toward rock, may lean a bit more toward the funky side of it, and with more of a "studio" vibe. Both will be useful, and which is preferable for a given project will depend on the song, the arrangement, the instrumentation, and, of course, personal tastes.

Alt and Modern Rock Drum Grooves

Looking for some slow, relaxing beats to calm you down? Well, if you are, you won't find them here, but, if you're looking for edgy beats with a breakneck pace, with a few energetic mid-tempo beats thrown in for good measure, you just might want to take a look at this collection. While Beta Monkey's Alt and Modern Rock Drum Grooves collection has tempos that reach down as low as 93 BPM, roughly half the loops on this set are at tempos of 140 BPM or higher. In fact, there is a directory called "Very Fast and Random" where the slowest loop is called "281 BPM - Punk.wav", and the fastest, which is simply called "Very Fast BPM - Punk.wav" tops out at 305 BPM! Most of the beats do keep to the 200 BPM and under range, though.

Alt and Modern Rock Drum Grooves contains 13 directories of loops from the collection itself. Along with single hits and one shots from the same sessions, the total original sample content comes to 361 MB. While this is decidedly less than the other collections being reviewed, it may well be that the relatively high tempo ranges in this collection contribute to smaller file sizes. In

addition, there are 162 MB of promotional samples from the Drum Werks Volume 1 through IV collections -- one loops directory apiece -- which adds some content for users who don't already have those collections. Also on the CD are 111 MB of promotional and "for fun" materials such as sample songs recorded with the Beta Monkey loops, drum solos, and so on.

Directory names do include the tempo, but at the end of the directory name (e.g. "Fast and Bouncy at 200 BPM"). This isn't ideal for browsing since tempos don't get sorted numerically, but that's a minor gripe since a single project is likely to largely stick within a single sample directory for its loops. Loop file names vary in their helpfulness, from having notes similar to those made above for Drum Werks Volume IV to even more helpful than those for Drum Werks Vol. I, adding additional information such as "busy HH", "semi-open HH", and "half-time feel with rim clicks" to file names with otherwise similar conventions to the Drum Werks collections. ACIDization notes are the same as for Drum Werks Volume IV.

Besides focusing primarily on up-tempo and relatively high-energy mid-tempo beats, Alt and Modern Rock Drum Grooves gets more "in your face" than either of the two Drum Werks titles reviewed here. The recordings are drier, the beats are somewhat busier (though they still don't feel like attempts at drum solos), and the playing seems more creative. On that last count, one thing noticed was that the loops more frequently incorporate drum set elements beyond kick, snare, and hi-hat or ride cymbals into the grooves themselves (i.e. as opposed to just in fills). While I wouldn't want to suggest that the Drum Werks loops are run-of-the-mill, this collection adds an element of character beyond what the Drum Werks loops achieve, and which set it apart from most other drum loop collections I've heard to date. Still, I find them easy to fit into productions. It is simply that they add a degree of edge beyond what a more basic collection of loops would provide. This is a good thing, similar to what you might get having a band play on their own recording, rather than hiring session musicians to play the instrumental parts.

Alt and Modern Rock Drums II

The Alt and Modern Rock Drums II set is highly complementary to the Alt and Modern Rock Drum Grooves set. It concentrates a fair bit of its overall content on filling in the lower ends of the tempo spectrum, with loops ranging from 52 BPM to 160 BPM. In fact, while Alt and Modern Rock Drums II has a total of 656 MB of loops and one shot samples, its lack of crash and splash cymbals in its one shot component means you will need to get that element from somewhere else. Alt and Modern Rock Drum Grooves seems like the most logical place to fill that need.

On the organization front, this collection borrows from some of the other collections, expands upon some of them, and veers off in totally different directions in a few cases. There are 15 main directories of tempo-based grooves, all named with the tempo included, and with that tempo first in the directory name. Yeah!

While most of the main directories contain grooves directly underneath them, as is the case for most of the content in the other collections, several of the directories here have another layer of organization underneath. Those subdirectories organize the loops into, for example, closed hi-hat grooves, open hi-hat grooves, ride cymbal grooves, fills, and single shot samples from the same

session. In one case, there is even a loop construction kit, which separates out the kick and snare elements from the hi-hat or ride cymbal elements for mixing and matching purposes. There are pros and cons of this sub-organization. For example, on the plus side, when there are a large number of loops at a given tempo, sub-organizing them can cut down on the scrolling a user has to do when seeking out, for example, hi-hat based beats. On the minus side, there is even one subdirectory that contains only a single loop, and this can make for more directory switching than would be optimal.

File naming is similar to Alt and Modern Rock Drum Grooves, which is to say there is a hodgepodge of conventions. ACIDization notes are as for Drum Werks IV and Alt and Modern Rock Drum Grooves.

I don't really want to be redundant by saying things like "well-recorded, well-played, creative, character, etc." (Oops, I guess I just did.) Thus, in characterizing this set of loops, I will leave it at suggesting this is probably my favorite set of the whole bunch. In part, this is because its tempo range tends to better match the songs I write than does that of Alt and Modern Rock Drum Grooves, but the other notes on Alt and Modern Rock Drum Grooves largely apply, too. Of course, the cymbals from that disc are needed anyway, so I would lean toward considering these two sets to be one larger single set. Beta Monkey's under \$30 package price for the double set easily prices the entire collection lower than most single disc sets anyway.

Getting to Work

As with most of my product reviews, one of the first things I did with the Beta Monkey loops, after checking them out to get a general idea of where they might fit, was try to use them on a real life project. I already had a song in mind, chosen not for any potential fit with what these loops do, but rather because it was a project that needed doing. The timing just happened to be right to try and kill two birds with one stone (or, for you animal lovers, to "do double duty").

The song was a mid-tempo song at 80 BPM. I'd already tracked a scratch piano part and final vocal to a single drum loop from another vendor, with the intention of replacing it later on, then building the rest of the tracks for the project around the drums and vocal. While the song might nominally be called country, I was looking to do something a bit edgier than the typical country production. I suppose you could call it alternative country without the twang, but I was actually going for something between indie rock and pop/rock at the basic tracks level. My general idea was to allow adding additional instrumental overdubs later on, where those overdubs could take the recording in various stylistic directions depending on which specific instruments were added and what parts were played with them.

While my description of the song's genre might lead you to suspect I would start with one of the Drum Werks volumes, I decided I'd start with the Alt and Modern Rock volumes because my instincts were that I wanted something fairly edgy. The first volume from that series didn't have anything slow enough, but it didn't take long to find a good match in the second volume, using a 70 BPM set of loops that SONAR 3 Producer stretched up to the 80 BPM project tempo. The particular groove family I'd chosen ("70 BPM Grooves - Tiny Snare") had 89 different loops between hi-hat oriented loops, ride cymbal-oriented loops, fills, and some specialty loops (e.g.

"rim riding" -- a kind of snare-type beat utilizing the rim of the snare). This wide selection let me create a highly dynamic arrangement that evolved over the course of a song that had some definite emotional variety within its 3:26 structure. After getting the grooves and fills down, I made a second pass, adding single shot cymbal hits from the first *Alt and Modern Rock* volume on another track.

After adding some additional instrumental parts (rhythm acoustic and electric guitars from Steinberg's *Virtual Guitarist* and *Virtual Guitarist - Electric Edition*, respectively, and piano and bass samples played via Native Instruments' *KOMPAKT*), it was time to do a rough mix of the basic tracks plus vocal. The big question at that point was how well the Beta Monkey loops would fit in the mix since there was no ability to break out the separate drums, for example for drum-specific processing. I'm happy to say that, with only a minor bit of EQ (from *PSP MasterQ*) and a little ambience (from *PSP EasyVerb*), the Beta Monkey drum loops fit in my mix as well as anything I've used to date, and better than many of those alternatives.

While I've only actually used the Beta Monkey loops on the one real project, in the course of checking out the various loops from all four CDs, I experimented with muting the drums on several other projects and previewing the Beta Monkey loops with *SONAR's Loop Explorer*. I was more or less "playing the loops" in real time by switching loops at strategic point. In all cases, I was able to relatively easily find loops that fit the projects well and, in a number of cases, improved upon the drum parts I'd already had in those projects.

Complaints? I do have some. In a few cases, previewing of the loops was not as smooth as it could have been. This is likely due to the notes on *ACIDization* mentioned above (see the *Drum Werks Vol. I* section) in cases where the tempo of my project was not quite close enough to the base tempo for the individual loops. Also, in a few cases I'd get really ugly artifacts owing to not realizing from the name of a loop that it was at a tempo far faster than my project tempo. (This is really only a factor for the few directories of mixed tempo loops.)

I guess the biggest "complaint", though, would be of the mixed blessing form. I often had a hard time keeping track of which loop was which when there were a large number of loops in a particular directory and the only differences between names were in the sequence number portion. Many other loop collections suffer from this same issue, though. Of course, the fact that there are often many more loops at a given tempo in the Beta Monkey collections is a good thing, providing more flexibility in matching the loops to my mental notions of what beat I want at a given point in a song. Still, I wouldn't mind a few additional clues as part of the song name. Some quick thoughts would be to include the number of measures in the loop for any multi-measure loops, and also to add any additional clues that might fit to help distinguish one beat from another beyond "loop 1", "loop 2", etc.

In the end, these loops may not be the quickest ones to use for a quick song demo (e.g. *Drums On Demand's* loops structured by song structure component names such as "verse", "bridge", "chorus", etc. can be very helpful for quickly mapping out a rough demo). However, I found them to provide better flexibility than any I've tried to this point for matching the general feel I had in my head to what actually ended up in the project. That there were so many variations within each family of loops also allowed mixing up loops with similar feels to more closely

approximate what a human drummer might play. By contrast, a less deep collection might force a compromise between repeating the same pattern a number of measures in a row or more radically changing the feel between measures.

Closing Notes

At the price point of the Beta Monkey loops, they could be fairly average and still deliver a whole lot of value. With the quality and character of these loops, though, it's hard to imagine why anyone would not want a set. Oh, I suppose if you were just into hip-hop, or some other style that mainly used electronic drums, then the acoustic-only drumming here might not be so applicable. However, if you use drum loops at all, and your style is somewhere in the general vicinity of rock, pop/rock, modern rock, or even country, there really isn't anywhere I can think of where you will find more value for your money. Moreover, the breadth and depth of these collections is such that you may just get a lot closer to that feel you have in your head despite the general flexibility concerns that using audio loops brings to the table.

Okay, so the ACIDization quality here may not be the world's best, but straying too far from a loop's base tempo is never truly advisable anyway as the tone of the drum kit will change, and even the best ACIDization will lead to artifacts at some point. Besides, if you really need to, you can use SONAR's Loop Construction View to tweak the beat slicing yourself, so a solution is available.

The bottom line in my book is the character, sound quality, and overall usefulness of these loops are extremely good, and the pricing means it is possible to add these worthy loops to your collection at a steal. So what are you waiting for? Even if you already have a number of acoustic drum loops in your collection, the Alt and Modern Rock discs will almost certainly complement what you have. My inclination, though, would be to go with all four of these collections to get the best per-disc pricing up front because I suspect that, once you try even one of these you'll end up wanting more.

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