

Notion 5

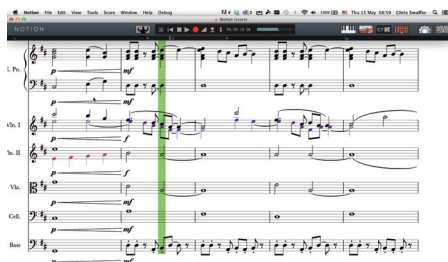
CONTACT: WWW.PRESONUS.COM/PRODUCTS/NOTION-5 **REVIEWED BY:** STEVE LEA



Music teachers will agree with me or at least recognise that we are now at a point in time where any music composition work, arrangement or presentation has to be submitted as a printed score or audio file. The days of writing music out by hand on manuscript are past, the ability to manipulate music on a screen whether to change notes, copy and paste, or be able to hear work played back is now the norm. Realistic playback with sampled instruments, so the sounds the pupils hear match the notation on the screen, is a must when teaching composition in an effective way which encourages pupils to write pieces that sound musical and convincing.

Investment in music writing software is not an easy task. If a school opts for the excellent Finale or Sibelius with a site license then this costs a considerable chunk of the annual budget, but both contain far more functions than all but the most advanced GCSE or A level pupils will need. Whilst the wider world sees these programs as standard, are there alternatives that are more accessible to pupils, easier on the budget? More importantly, is there software which helps the process of composition develop quicker rather than spending too much time learning how to work the software?

Notion 5 from Presonus may be the answer. If other reviews are anything to go by, it is making a lot of friends in the music education world as it is very user friendly, and anyone can get on with writing a score in a short space of time. At a cost of just £129 for the boxed product it compares with the educational version of Sibelius, (which can swap files with the full version of Sibelius if



needed), however I like the user friendly screen of Notion 5 and the fact that pupils with limited experience in notation can start writing music quickly without fuss. The on-screen keyboard will allow input through 'playing' the keys as well as clicking and dropping each note. Moreover, a site licence allows you to download Notion 5 on up to 100 machines without having to buy a separate box each time. Priced at just £40.00 per seat, this offers the best value solution for any music educator.

Taking notes

The audio is very clear using samples taken from players from the London Symphony Orchestra ensuring the instrument sounds are very realistic. There is a guitar amp simulator, and the software links with Presonus Studio 1 virtual studio to include EQ control, a limiter and compressor. There is an integrated video window for scoring to pictures and for media students wanting to synchronise music to video there is a timecode display above the score and the software supports a variety of newer video formats. This takes the package towards the direction of a Digital Audio Workstation from its starting point of a notation oriented work tool.

The version 5 now incorporates Finale and Sibelius keyboard shortcuts for pupils who are used to other software. There is a real-time MIDI record facility, and a useful movable split point for notating keyboard parts between two staves. There is a sequencer staff which overlays the normal notes with coloured lines to show the exact length of the notes which means notes can be manipulated for velocity and timing as for sequencing software, which then is changed on the staff notation.

The software requirements are either a MAC OS X 10.7 or higher, or Windows 7 or 8 (32 or 64 bit) with a minimum of 2GB RAM and 8GB free hard-drive space. But this software has the advantage that it has a version that can be used standalone on an iPad, which for schools who use these in the classroom may make it a no-brainer if they want pupils to keep their work on their personal tablets. (Although check your syllabus requirements as sometimes this may lead to issues with monitoring exam coursework if pupils are working outside directed time in the class.) To start a discussion about your school's needs, email sales@halleonardmgb.co.uk, or call 020 7395 0382.

VERDICT

Perfect score

Notion 5 is an ideal package for anyone wanting easy-to-use notation software on a budget. If you are using primarily for teaching score-writing or producing exam coursework then it has more than enough for your needs. And if you don't need the full functions of the bigger market leaders, then it is a real winner!