The Crow Hill Company BRACKISH PADS



Following hot on the heels of CRYSTAL PADS as a recently released entrant into its ever-expanding ORIGINS series seeing company co-founder and professional media composer Christian Henson effectively building from scratch the sounds that he uses as the tools of his trade, The Crow Hill Company announces the availability of its creatively crafted BRACKISH PADS library - letting users control the level of patina in what is surely the most original sound-set to come out of the Edinburgh-based enterprise stable so far, thanks to the microtonal, unpredictable nature of its stammering, stuttering, strangulated tones.

Indeed, it was while working on the CRYSTAL PADS sample-based virtual instrument plug-in - readily representing a new attitude towards controlling sound to fit anyone’s music rather than forcing them to fit their music around their sounds - that The Crow Hill Company stumbled across a novel new approach to motorising music. But by creating unpredictable note modulations, random arpeggiations that reeked of zeitgeist were found to be formed, warranting further investigation. In combination with creating what was collectively thought to be an essential up-to-the-minute set of unrefined cerebral and intimate pads and drones, the Edinburgh-based enterprise set about expanding this idea of randomness into a dedicated ‘partial’ called CRITTERS for use in what would become its most unique synth library so far.

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As a professional media composer of some serious standing - BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) award-nominated, no less, Christian Henson's background has helped in formulating many thoughts and ideas central to making BRACKISH PADS what it is. "A big part of music is helping to form a narrative, helping to tell stories, and that's absolutely what I see myself as - not as a storyteller, but as someone who helps people to tell stories," he begins. "But music isn't just about music. It's about sound, and I think sounds can carry an emotional message; the problem I have - and have had for nearly three decades now - with sounds is they have a refinement of perfection - a smoothness - that, to me, doesn't really reflect how narrative works - how our thought patterns work, how our speech patterns work - and what I love about my favourite sound [ALEAGGIATOR] in this new pack that I've made is that there's a hesitant, stuttering, umming and aahing, uncertain quality to it that I think is missing - certainly from my sonic palette. But the thing to bear in mind if you're going to grab this is that it's 48 different, unique sounds grouped into layered trios with independent control of each 'partial'."

Putting a name - and description - to those three so-called partials, BASIC is composed of fundamental heavy pads, COMPLEX comprises harmonically rich pads, and the aforesaid CRITTERS contains all sorts of nasty-sounding surprises, both good and bad. All analogue, all tube, and, arguably, all wrong, featuring 16 x 3 unique sculpted sounds, made by music-makers for music-makers with particular mindful consideration to those scoring to picture perhaps best describes BRACKISH PADS itself. Endless evolving textures that remain under user control and musical instruction are the order of the day here - no stray harmonies and a stemmed solution that enables users to control the richness and tonal bandwidth of each note they play in realtime.

Reality dictates, therefore, that the BRACKISH PADS' GUI (Graphical User Interface) should - like its other ORIGINS series siblings - not simply be about setting and forgetting, but rather interfacing its user with the possibilities of both live performance and/or detailed automation so that the sounds become sculpted around the music being created, without the need to obediently sculpt compositions around the sound-set. Says Christian Henson: "We've got these pump triggers [PUMP TRIGS]; they're basically sine waves of different shapes that you will never hear, because, instead of going to the main output, they actually go into a side-chain of the compressor and enable you to pump stuff depending on the amount of compression that you add as part of your performance or automation. They're just basically notes and they'll sit on your piano roll, like any other note, so you can actually move stuff around and get the pumping to work at a groove and in a style that you think is appropriate to your track. And a really handy new feature is the little 'snowflake' which adds some granular sparkles, but really at your request."

It is fair to say, then, that with four side-chain triggers, a sparkles trigger, LPF/HPF cutoff control (main encoder), expression (secondary encoder), and four effects macros - namely, CASSETTE (exclusive tape emulation), DELAY (syncs to host tempo), SPLOSH ('hugeverb' reverb with long tail), and PUMP (side-chained compression), there is more than might first meet the eye when it comes to the

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realtime sound sculpting that makes BRACKISH PADS sound so magical.

“Microtonality is something that we’re playing with on this library, which, maybe, is not to everyone's liking, but what it achieves is a sense of scale, and not just by adding a load of reverb to it,” clarifies Christian Henson. “In fact, by introducing some microtonal rubbing, it frees up the sound so that each partial occupies its own tonal centre; therefore, if you could hear more of each individual sound, it sounds like more. For those of you who aren’t big fans of the microtonal stuff, you can adjust the tuning of the individual partial by itsy-bitsy amounts if you want to bring it more together from a tonal point of view. And we’ve got a bunch of effects macros that I think are well worth playing with, because, again, they add to this sense of aperture, performance, and emotion, but what’s really surprising about this particular pack of stuff is that the use of reverb produces contrasts that are beyond what I was expecting.”

And anyone quite literally buying into the BRACKISH PADS concept can confidently expect this: an essential tool with which they can deliver ear-turning zeitgeist-rich material when required - music that will hold listeners attention without pulling sonic focus away from dialogue, sound design, and other methods of modern storytelling. Seems like it is, indeed, the most original sound-set to come out of The Crow Hill Company stable so far. For the benefit of any doubters out there, though, its creators collectively - and admirably - admit: this is not going to be everyone’s cup of tea.

Requiring a minimum of 3 GB of free disk space and 16 GB or more of RAM (Random Access Memory), BRACKISH PADS is available to buy for £29.00 GBP as a sample-based virtual instrument supporting AAX-, AU-, VST-, and VST3 plug-in formats for macOS 11 through to 15 (Apple Silicon and Intel compatible) and Windows 10 through to 11 directly from The Crow Hill Company. BRACKISH PADS installation and activation requires installation of The Crow Hill App - an easy-to-use app designed by the best in the business to provide seamless download, installation, integration, calibration, and organisation of The Crow Hill Company tools - available for free from the website below.

www.thecrowhillcompany.com

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