

Tracktion Horizen by TheSynthFactory

Multi-instrument synthesizer with ten voices

Author: Peter Kaminski

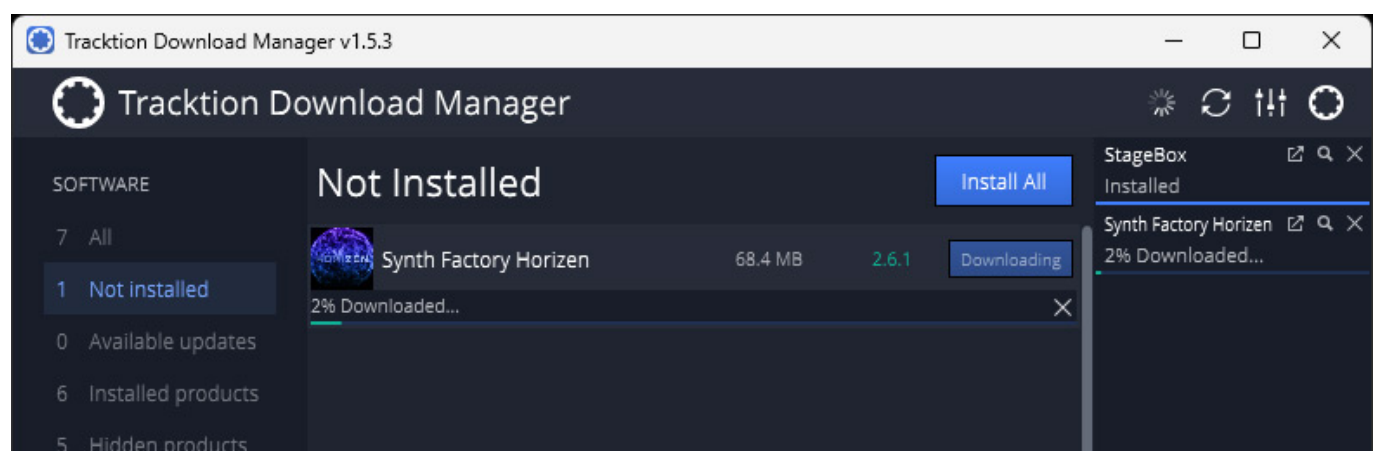


Tracktion offers a whole range of synthesizers from different manufacturers. While searching for a synthesizer for film scoring and ambient music, I came across Horizen by TheSynthFactory. TheSynthFactory is a duo consisting of producer and composer Andy Hodgson, who runs OrangeThreeStudios in Norfolk, and audio developer Lindon Mulcahy-Parker, who has his own audio software development company, Channel Robot, in East Yorkshire, UK. From his experience as a sound designer, Andy found that there were still large gaps in the synthesizer market and thought it was worth developing his own ideas. Many years ago, he was looking for a developer to implement his ideas, and by chance, Andy and Lindon met. Lindon also had something in the works, and they discovered they had a lot in common - so

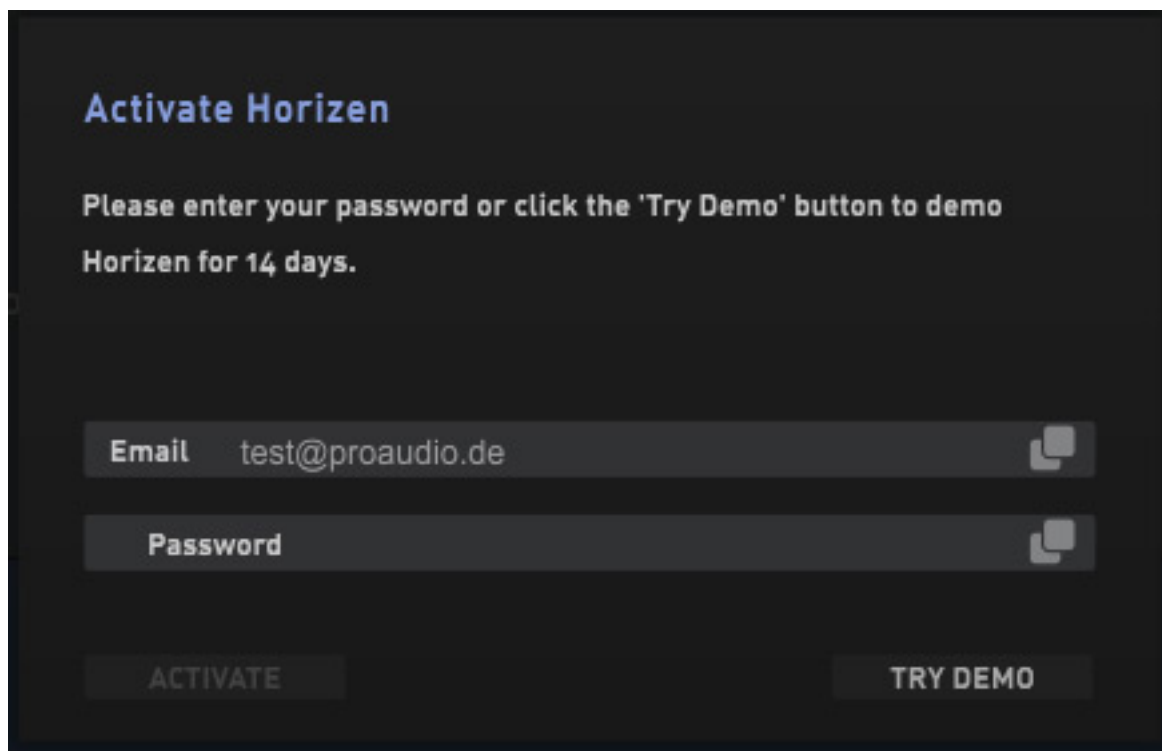
they joined forces under the label “TheSynthFactory.” Horizen 1.0 was the first prototype to find out what users would want. They initially approached a small circle and then looked for a distributor to reach more customers, which they found in Tracktion. Horizen 2.6 has now been released, and we want to take a detailed look at this virtual instrument.

Requirements and installation

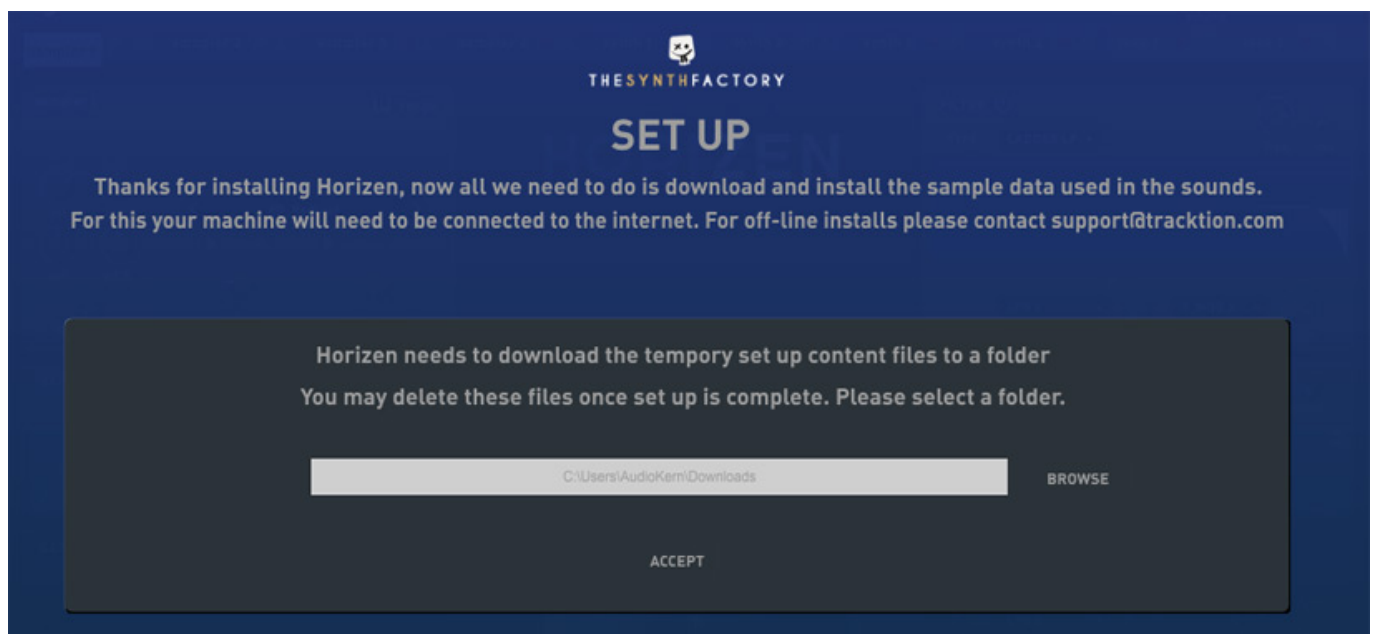
Horizen is available as a VST3 plug-in for macOS (10.9.5 or higher, 64-bit and Apple Silicon) and Windows operating systems (Windows 8 or higher, 64-bit). A plug-in in Audio Unit format is also available for macOS.



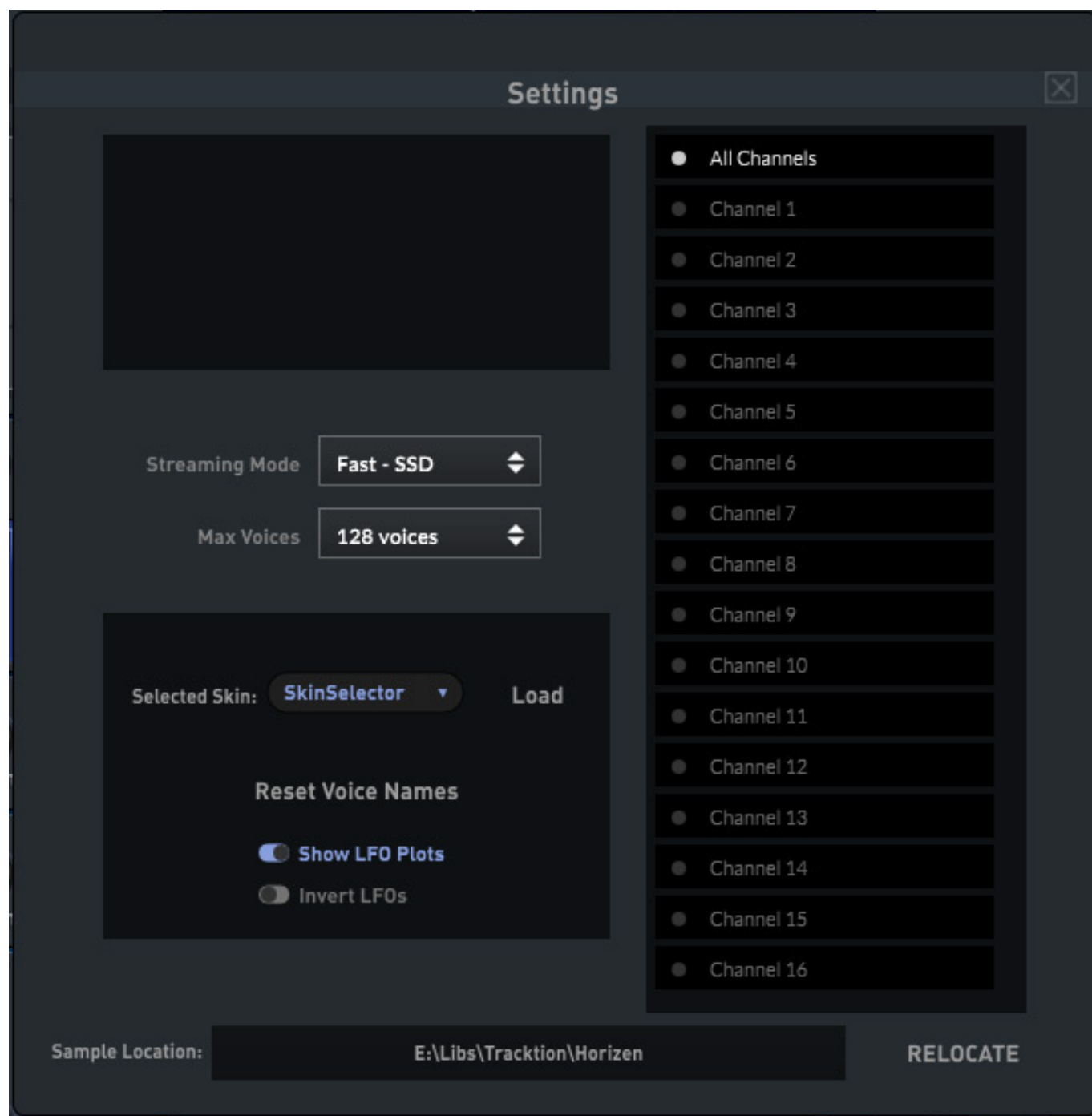
The plug-ins and expansion packs can be downloaded and installed using Tracktion Download Manager. This requires a user account with Tracktion.



Activation is done using the login details for your Tracktion user account (see image above).



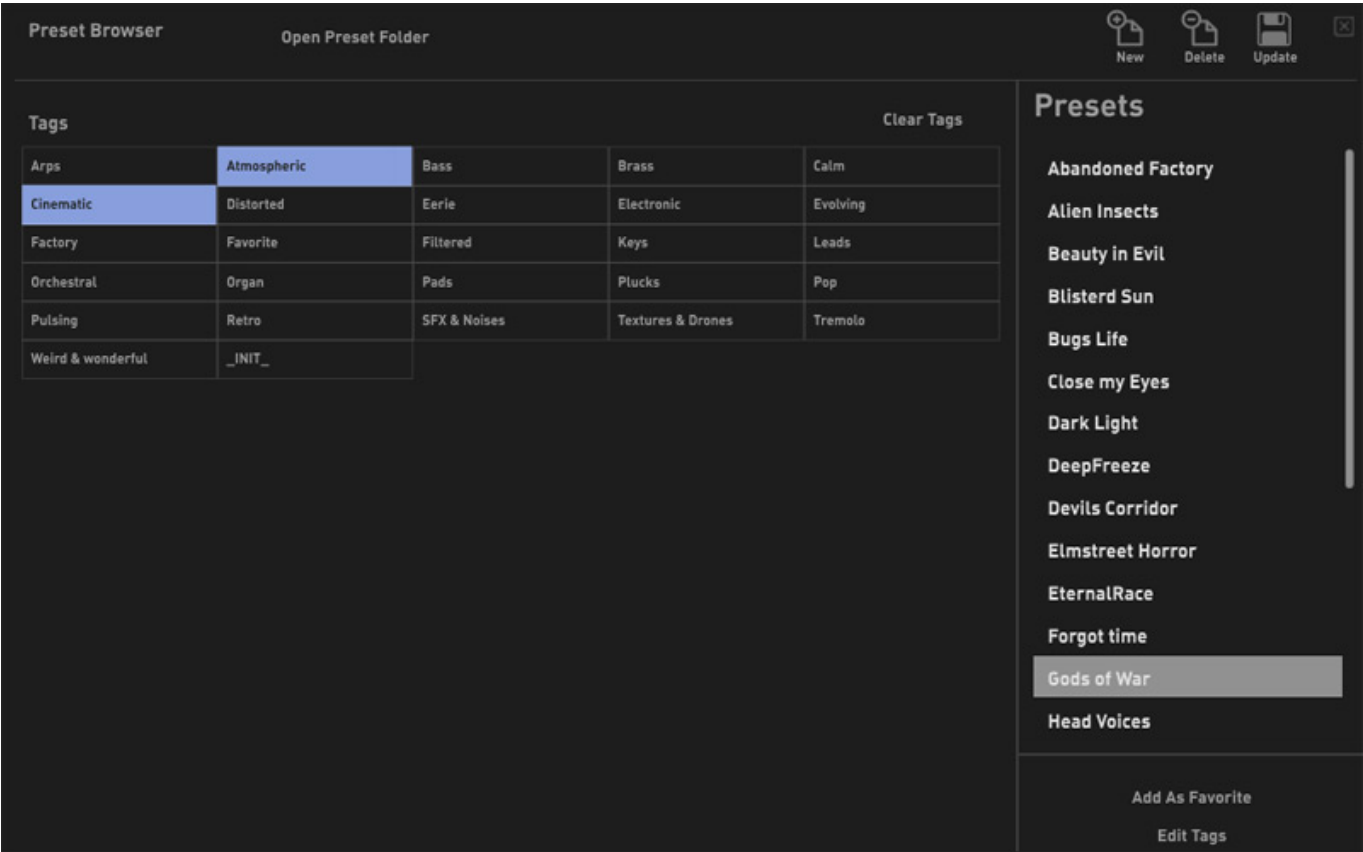
The sample files can be stored or moved to a folder specified by the user.



The source folder is specified in the Settings dialog at the bottom of the window (see figure above). The number of voices can also be limited here.

Operation

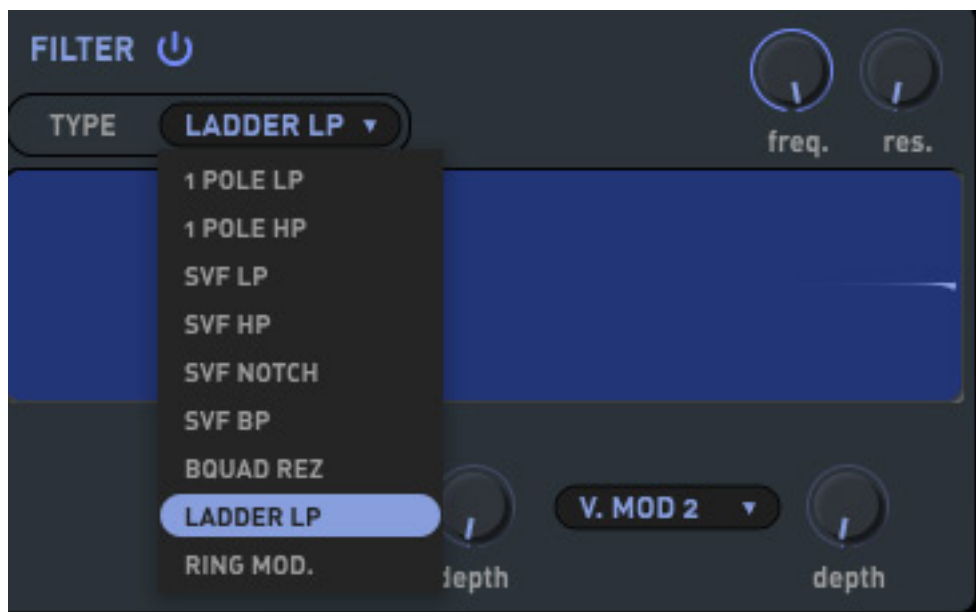
At the top of the header, you can use two buttons to switch to the next or previous preset in the preset name list, or click on the preset name to open the preset browser.



In the preset browser (see figure above), you can search for specific criteria, and a list will appear on the right-hand side. You can also select multiple criteria here. You can also create or edit tags and set favorites. After loading expansion packs, a tag is automatically created for the respective expansion packs.



The concept of Horizen is based on up to ten parallel voices: four voices with samples, four synthesizer voices, each with two oscillators with fixed waveforms or wavetables, and two loop players. This guarantees complex sounds.



Each of these voices has a downstream filter (eight different filter types and a ring modulator) with an envelope generator and an equalizer whose frequency response can be edited graphically (right side of the plug-in window). There is also a frequency modulation option in this section, which can be set individually for each voice. In the header below the preset selection, you can select one of the ten voices and then edit the corresponding parameters for that voice in the right and left sections of the plug-in window.

In the middle of the UI is another dialog box that is independent of the voices and can be toggled between five buttons. Here, you can switch between an X/Y pad for real-time control with the mouse or recorded modulation curves, various modulators, a play dialog, various effects, and the management of expansion packs.



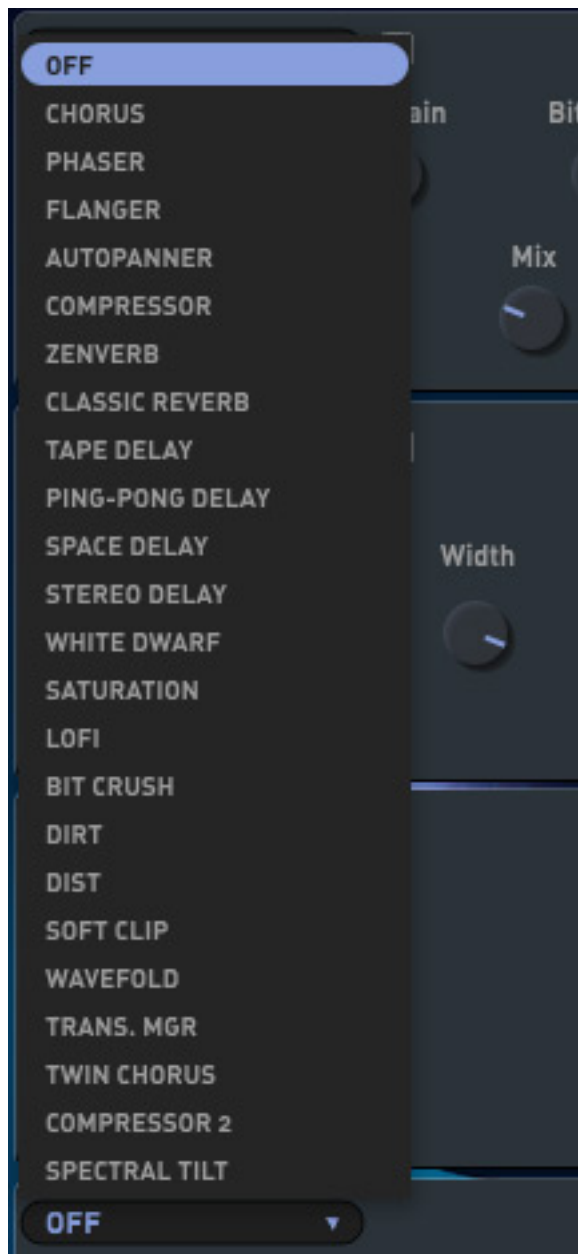
In the Modulation tab, in addition to six LFOs, there are two modulation options each for keyboard tracking, velocity, and MIDI CC (see image above).



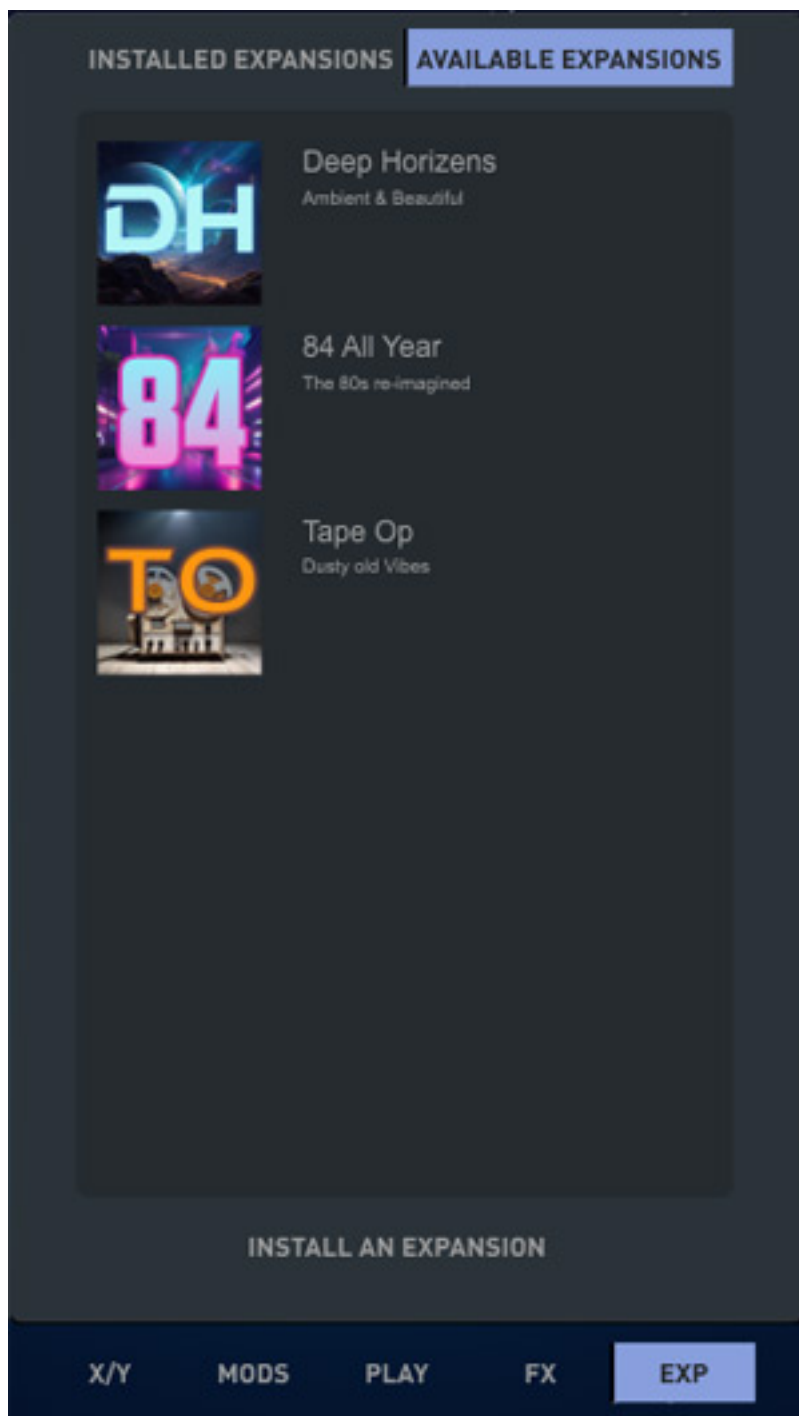
The Play dialog offers two complex arpeggiators and a chord player (see image above).



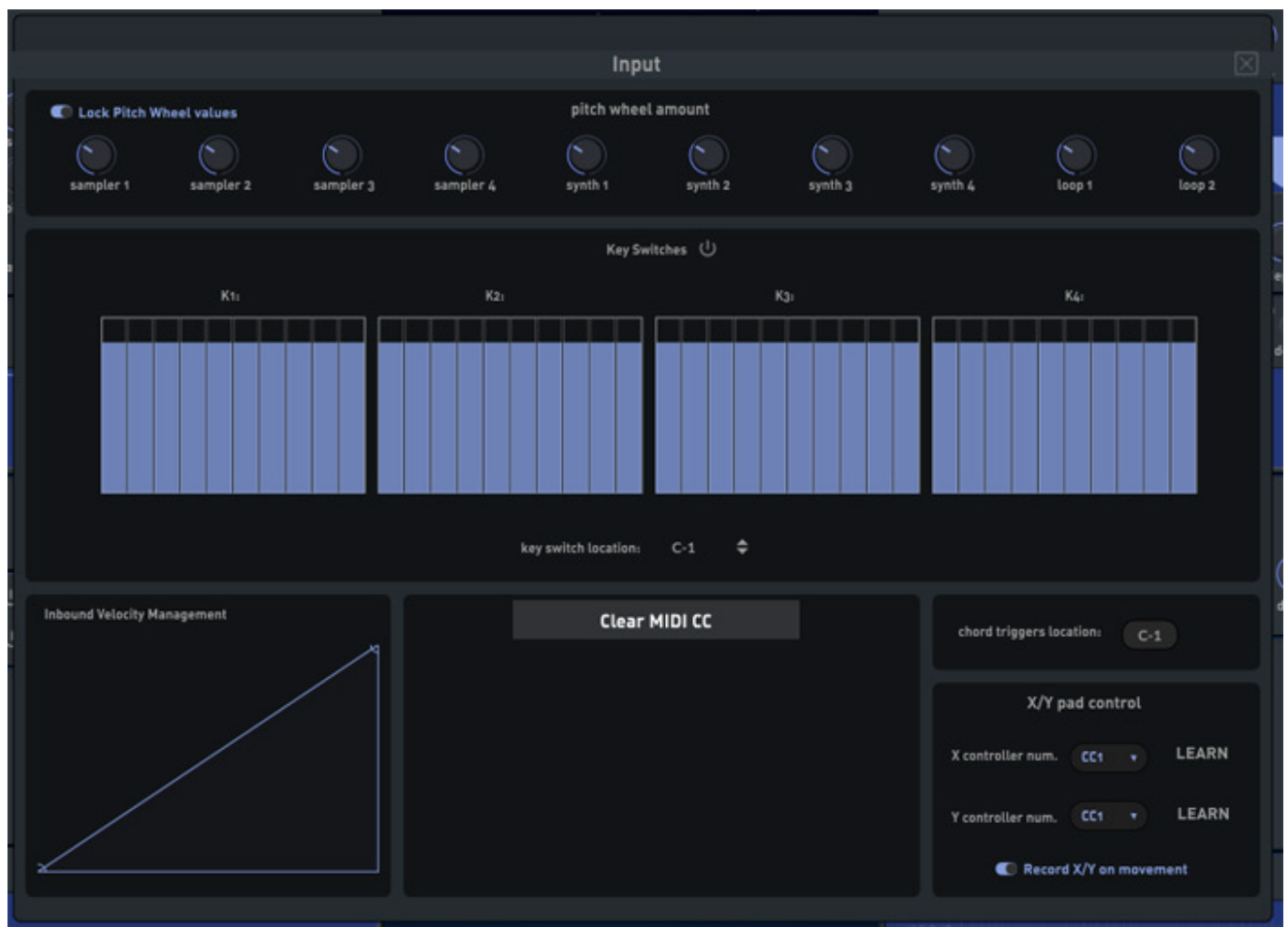
The effects section offers four effect slots with a whole range of different effects.



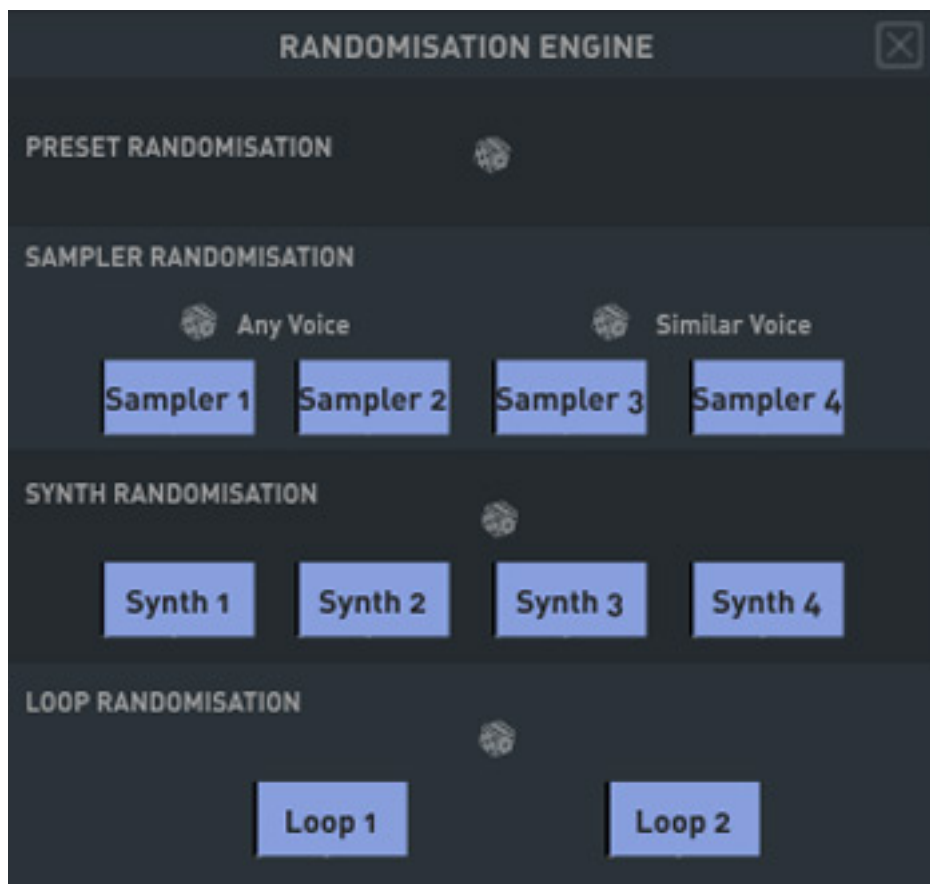
As you can see, there is a very wide range of 23 internal effects (see image above).



The last tab in the middle section shows which packs are being loaded - and it also allows you to load new packs. More on this in the practical section.



At the top of the header, there are additional dialogs that can be opened. To the left of the preset selection, there is an input dialog for keyboard velocity, keyboard range assignment, MIDI CC, and parameter assignment to the X/Y pad.



The "Randomization Engine" can be used to generate random presets (see image above).



The "Realism Engine" allows the user to simulate analog tolerances for various

parameters.



And on the far right, there is a button for calling up the output dialog, where you will also find a saturation effect with adjustable intensity, as well as switchable soft clippers, a transient manager, and a limiter (see image above). That concludes our brief overview of Horizen's features.

In practice

We tested version Horizen 2.6.1 on Windows 11 on an [AudioKern B14 DAW from Digital Audio Service](#) with Tracktion StageBox and [Steinberg Nuendo 14](#) as host software. Version 2.6 adds a whole host of new features to Horizen. It is astonishing that Horizen requires extremely few CPU resources despite its high complexity. Only slight changes in the performance meter were noticeable in Nuendo 14, which perhaps required five percent more performance at peak times. Even on computers with lower performance, no problems should arise.

The operation is relatively straightforward when adjusting presets. However, you do need to open the plug-in window large enough (half the screen), as some of the labels are quite small. It's worth mentioning that you can easily drag and drop your own samples into the corresponding voice. In version 2.6, it is also possible to set

loop points more accurately thanks to a larger screen display.

However, creating your own presets requires experience with synthesizers and, above all, a lot of patience. Horizen is really complex. We have therefore only been able to highlight the main features in our description here. But there are many really good sound packs available from Tracktion for Horizen.

Horizen comes with over 380 presets. A whole range of optional expansion packs for Horizen is available from Tracktion. Currently (September 2025), there are five: Empire Bass, 84 All Year, Underground, Deep Horizon, and Tape-OP. We were particularly impressed by Deep Horizon (70 presets) with its many cinema-ready sounds and Underground (47 presets) with its rather dark sounds. Tape-OP (73 presets) reminds me a bit of Mellotron-like sounds, partly intentional with background noise. Empire of Bass (59 presets) is a very impressive expansion pack with great, fat and, in some cases, very dynamically modulated basses, not only for cinema or video sound but also for many other musical applications. If you install all the available sound packs, you have almost 700 presets at your disposal. 84 All Year (62 presets) brings classic analog sounds to Horizen.

Personally, I find the installation of the sound packs a little complicated in terms of handling. You download a file to your computer using the software Tracktion Downloader. Then, you have to select this file in the plug-in via the EXP section. Only then does the actual download of the sound pack begin as several data-compressed files. Once these are stored on your computer, they are automatically unzipped, and the samples are stored in the previously defined folder (as defined in the plug-in's settings dialog). However, we always had to manually delete the unzipped files that were no longer needed after installation.

Conclusion

Tracktion Horizen is available for US\$129. Each of the expansion packs costs an additional \$30 and is well worth the money. Together with all the sound packs, the total cost is around \$280. For film and video soundtracks, as well as ambient music, Tracktion's Horizen delivers truly impressive sound thanks to its parallel sound engines. Very few virtual instruments offer anything comparable in this form. The optional sound packs round off the positive overall picture of Tracktion Horizen. Incidentally, there is also a trial version with unlimited functionality that you can try out for a week.

www.tracktion.com