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Notion 2.0

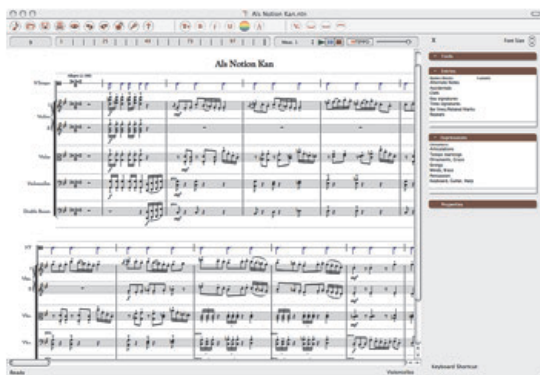
EDITORS'
RATING
7.8

PROS

Highly intuitive interface; mostly excellent sound quality; rapid, responsive customer support

CONS

Expensive; potentially limiting copy protection; sketchy Vista compatibility



EDITORS' TAKE

You'll need a proper music background to take full advantage of all the composition and playback capabilities of Notion 2.0. But for those who know their stuff, this is one of the best products of its kind.

Review

Reviewed by: Matthew Murray
Review Date: September 2007

You'll find fewer disciplines more alike—or more different—than computers and music. Logic, math, and reproducibility are crucial in both, but the similarities end there. Although the two fields merge often, it's hard to find software programs that take full advantage of art and technology. Some spectacular software is out there for musicians and others interested in creating, playing, and distributing songs, but it's hard to do better than Notion 2.0, which is the closest we've seen to a **Photoshop**-quality solution for musical notation and playback.

Notion, which you can run on a Mac or PC, was designed for those who require the ability to either enter music with the flexibility of an ink pen or play back compositions with the intricacy of Leonard Bernstein's baton. Composers can enter their creations and hear them played back with perfect accuracy and fidelity, and make major or minor adjustments with just a few clicks. Conductors can use it to "sweeten" their actual instruments and keep in time with live players merely by tapping keys on the (computer) keyboard, and even save tempos and performances for later use. Students, on the other hand, can use it for illustrating and exploring hundreds of musical concepts on dozens of instruments.

Creating new compositions is easy. You can use MIDI instruments, or the mouse and keyboard. Nearly every object and action has a handy shortcut; many—like Ctrl+C for copy or Ctrl+V for paste—you already know. The interface is clean and thoughtfully organized, and options are simple to find, thanks to uncluttered menus. You can output scores to a printer, convert them to MusicXML for use in other programs, or even record them as WAV files for electronic playback.

Notion is ideal for church, school, or community groups who need musical depth or experience that they might not have at their disposal. Instead of relying on sometimes questionable MIDI sounds, its playback sounds are culled from live samples of the London Symphony Orchestra, resulting in much better sound overall than apps like this usually provide. Note, though, that while some samples (especially piano and strings) are exemplary, others (particularly brass and woodwind) are only suitable for "beefing up" an underpopulated ensemble—they're not sufficient replacements for human players.

A vast library of hundreds of popular public-domain scores (including ballets, operas, and symphonies) already in Notion format is available for purchase on the Notion Web site, which could greatly expand some performing companies' repertoires.

Like the program, these scores don't come cheap—you pay for the high quality you get in every area. The software retails for \$499, and sound-expansion kits—for adding to or improving on the presets—range from \$39 to \$89. To fully outfit Notion with all of the sounds available as of this writing would require nearly \$1,000, and some of the missing sounds (saxophones, solo strings) seem like they should be part of the basic package. If your needs are more modest, you can opt for Protégé, the \$69.95 variant of the program that offers the same sample sounds and functionality but lacks the more elaborate bells and whistles—in Photoshop terms, consider it Notion Elements.

Aside from the steep price, Notion has other drawbacks. If you want to load the program on more than one PC, you'll need to use the iLok USB dongle (which ensures that only one copy is in use at a time), which can be a hassle. And though Vista has been out for almost nine months, Notion's compatibility with Business and Ultimate is still incomplete; we found some long delays in installation and experienced some cases of erratic playback we couldn't attribute to anything else.

Notion provides outstanding support, though. In addition to a 166-page printed user's manual included in the software box, the help staff usually responds with detailed, knowledgeable, and easy-to-understand responses in a day or less. The Web site's knowledge base is less immediately useful—it apparently hasn't been updated since 2005—but the site offers some downloadable tutorials to help you get acquainted with the software's myriad features.

None of this will make you a music expert if you aren't already fluent in the language; if all you see when you look at sheet music are random lines, dots, and Italian words, you'd be better off with GarageBand or a dedicated MIDI sequencer. But if you do have that background, there's practically nothing you can't create or recreate using Notion.

Discuss this product in our [software forum](#).

Direct Price: \$499.99

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