

Maybe, but the comparison is not so cut and dried. Lots of times, the way a piano sounds has at least as much to do with the acoustical properties of the room you're in as it does the piano. Usually a combination of the two will give you great inspiration. For instance, I used to stay at Bruce Springsteen's guest house in L.A. when he lived out there. He had a piano, and it was a great live room. I don't know if it was a particularly great piano he had, but the sound was incredible in this large, high-ceiling room. I wrote several songs on that piano.

#### How about electric pianos?

I love Wurliizers. I made a record about four years ago called *Big Swing Face* that I love. It was a very different record. It had virtually no acoustic piano. It was all Wurliizer.

#### Synthesizers?

I like one sound on the synthesizer, and it turns out that when I became friends with Springsteen years ago, we discovered that we both like this same one sound (*laughs*). It's called "Overture" on an old Korg M-1.

#### It's the 20-year anniversary of "The Way It Is," the song that started it all for you. How did it come about?

I wrote it in my garage in Van Nuys, California. It was inspired by growing up in a small town with provincial attitudes about race, narrow-mindedness. I wrote it with a drum machine and a keyboard. The finished record sounds very much like the demo I made at my house, because we could never beat it. Everybody thought the song was a B-side. Typical story. I just knew I liked the song. I thought it was different, but I never would have thought it would become a big hit. There are a lot of flukes like that. [Dire Straits'] "Sultans of Swing," [Tracy Chapman's] "Fast Car," "Sunny Came Home" by Shawn Colvin. They don't sound anything like your standard radio song of the time. Hardly formulaic. But that's probably what makes them really big hits when they happen to break through.

#### I saw you perform in 1994 and remember being kind of disappointed that you didn't play that song in your set. Did your other radio hits become an albatross for a period of time?

No, not at all. I've always loved playing them. Here's the deal: I never liked the audience that you acquired from having hits on the radio. I always thought it was a soft-core audience. It wasn't a real music-loving audience. I was doing so many other things after that. Playing with the Grateful Dead, playing on other people's records—Bob Seger, Bob Dylan, Bonnie Raitt, on and on. Around 1994, I decided that if people were

there to hear just the hits, they were there for the wrong reason, and I didn't want them to come. I wanted to have my audience be there for what I considered the right reasons. I was not going to be the vehicle for your nostalgia trip. So consequently, at this point in 2006, 16 years after my last Top 20 song, I have a great audience who don't give a rat's ass whether we play the hits or not. Had I gone down the other way, I would surely have been relegated to the oldies crowd at this point. What we do now is so far beyond what we used to do, and we have an audience that really wants to hear that. I was pretty intense about it, pretty unswerving, and it really has worked out for me.

#### It seems like a good strategy for longevity as an artist.

## VirtuosoWorks: NOTION

Music Composition and Performance Software

BY DAVE JONES

OVER THE YEARS I'VE TRIED all the pricey notation software and have seen countless pieces go unwritten, would-be composers throwing their arms up in disgust from trying to change key signatures, classrooms full of college students yawning through an unbearably dull clinic on entering quarter notes, and learned musicians giving up on arranging because of the steep learning curve. After all, you spend time studying music to become good at music, not to wrestle with esoteric software. VirtuosoWorks' NOTION is a notation and performance application that offers the freedom to focus on what brought you to composition in the first place: the music.

First, NOTION has finally made notes and instruction entry an easy process. To enter information onto the score you have your choice of keystrokes, live performance via MIDI input, or an elaborate (but very accessible) menu of notes and marks to drag and drop with the cursor. Unlike some other notation programs, the interface is very easy to comprehend and within minutes of installation, you'll be entering notes, rests, accents and dynamic and tempo markings with ease. Drop-down menus on the right side of the screen cover everything from appoggiatura to whole rest—and frankly, give you so many choices of dynamics and tempo that fine-tuning your score might actually inspire you to experiment with a few things (another first for me and scoring software). The product designers were even kind enough to throw in helpful introductory tips that you can browse during installation (on Mac or PC) and every time you start the program.

For all the elegant simplicity of writing with NOTION, I've said nothing of its amazing

Most songwriters perform their songs with what I consider to be the museum piece approach. You write the song, you work it up and record it, and you play it like that forever. Frankly, most of the crowd wants to hear that. They're there for a nostalgic reason. They're not there for music in the present tense, to hear something creatively new. That is a real creative prison. My approach to performing my songs is that I want them to be living beings that can evolve and grow and change through the years. I'm well aware that 90 percent of the listening audience doesn't want to hear music that way. But I can't be bothered with that. I'm too restless to do it the other way. It would just feel like I was shackled in a Ramada Inn lounge, playing Top 40. ■

playback. Imagine your woodwind quintet, big-band arrangement or piano concerto performed by members of the London Symphony Orchestra recorded at Abbey Road Studios. Sounds pretty nice, eh? Now stop imagining and press play because they're all in there! Switch NOTION into playback mode and "conduct" the top-shelf samples using the Ntempo feature. You can use mouse buttons or any button of the keyboard's home row to tap out a personalized and perfected rubato tempo to the performance. Now you're not only the composer/arranger, but the conductor as well—in real time! NOTION also features independent pan and volume controls for each instrument, and reverb control (from recordings of actual live decay) to balance your ensemble any way you like.

**IN A NUTSHELL:** Now here's a piece of software that really handles notation, scoring, and mixing—all in one box! Forget everything you ever found daunting about music composition applications and get NOTION. Trust us, you won't be disappointed.

**LIST PRICE:** \$599 (regular), \$399 (academic).

