



Music Sites for Web Surfers

Music resources abound on the Web - if you know where to look.

By Francis Preve

Whether you're already making music with your computer or just starting out, an Internet connection could be the best musical investment you make all year. The Net is a vast source of information, opinion, and software pertaining to music, as well as a great place to download sounds. During the three years that I've been building my Web site, I've unearthed quite a few online music resources. Here are some of my favorites.

The World Wide Web

With its massive collection of data and links, Harmony Central (www.harmony-central.com), is the mother of all musician-oriented Web sites. Of course, EM's Web site (www.emusician.com), which has an archive of past magazine articles, is another great resource. And be sure to check out the impressive Electronic Music Interactive Web site (nmc.uoregon.edu/emi), which was created by Professor Jeff Stolet in collaboration with the University of Oregon's New Media Center. This virtual online textbook covers a wide range of topics, from MIDI and digital audio to synthesis techniques and uses graphics extensively throughout.

You can often uncover hidden treasures in many commercial sites provided by manufacturers. E-mu Systems' Web site (www.emu.com), for example, offers an extensive glossary of technical terms in its Support area.

Many Web sites cater to specific musical interests, from hardware and software to tips and techniques. Here are a few.

MIDI. Sporting clean design and plenty of tips, tools, and downloadable files, MIDI Farm (www.midifarm.com) and MidiWeb (www.midiweb.com; see Fig. 1) are two standout MIDI sites. If you're looking for a well-organized and thorough examination of all things MIDI, be sure to stop by Northwestern University's Exploring MIDI site (nuinfo.nwu.edu/musicschool/links/projects/midi/expmidiindex.html), created by

Peter J. Raschke.

The MIDI Manufacturers Association (www.midi.org) is another important site. As guardian of the MIDI standard, the MMA has filled its Web site with copious technical information and details on upcoming conferences and events.

Synthesizers. The Big Three of synthesizer-related Web resources, Synth Site (www.synthsite.com), Synth Zone (www.synthzone.com; see Fig. 2), and Music Machines (www.hyperreal.org/music/machines) all feature areas organized by instrument and manufacturer. These sites also offer forums, FAQs (frequently asked questions), and areas where you can download files.

If you're just getting started in sound design, a great entry point is the Beginner's Synthesizer FAQ (tilt.largo.fl.us/faq/synthfaq.html). Its clear organization complements a remarkably well-written introduction to synthesizer programming.

Experienced programmers looking for the lowdown on analog techniques should check out *What Is Analogue Synthesis?* (www.warwick.ac.uk/%7Eesaag/analog.htm) and *The Art of Analog Modular Synthesis* by Voltage Control (ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/

the_analog_cottage/vcsynth.htm). Although the latter is geared a bit more toward the engineering side of music synthesis, propellerheads will relish its detailed technical descriptions. And don't forget to stop by the Web site of MIT's esteemed *Computer Music Journal* (mitpress.mit.edu/e-journals/Computer-Music-Journal/CMJ.html). It offers articles, examples, and information for research-oriented and advanced users.

Recording and pro audio. Pros and amateurs alike will find the *Recording Website* (recording.hostway.com) a handy resource that features reviews, FAQs, maintenance tips, and an online magazine. Advanced engineers should also visit *Pro Audio.net* (proaudio.net), *AudioWeb* (www.audioweb.com), and the *World Wide Pro Audio Directory* (www.audiodirectory.demon.nl).

Another great online place to find information on digital audio, mastering, and CD production is Bob Katz's *Digital Domain* (www.digido.com). The site, which is aimed mainly at recording engineers of all levels, includes numerous articles offering technical insights, how-to advice, a glossary, and links to related sites.

Shareware and freeware. If you're looking for an exotic sound-manipulation utility or the latest in software-synthesis tools, surf over to *Shareware Music Machine* (www.hitsquad.com/smm). Although its design is a bit homely, this site is an incredible source for music- and audio-related software. Remember that *Cool Edit*, *Sound Forge*, and *MetaSynth* all got their start as shareware, so this site is well worth checking out for cutting-edge toys.

If you like a program you've downloaded, send in your shareware fee! Most of these tools gain extra features when you register them. Besides, many shareware programmers work with little or no compensation, so show your support by paying what is often a negligible price for a very useful product. End of sermon.

Buying and selling. If you're shopping for instruments or recording equipment, you'll definitely want to check out the *Harmony Central Buyer's Guide* (www.harmony-central.com/MarketPlace/database.html), which lists retail prices

along with links to reviews. Buying used? The automated Internet Used Gear Price List (www.midiwall.com/cgi-bin/w3-mysql/usedgear/ug_mfg.shtml) has current high, low, and average prices for just about every synth or audio product ever made.

Once you've determined the market prices of the equipment that you've been lusting after, ProMusicFind.Com (www.promusicfind.com) and the Music Yellow Pages (www.musicyellowpages.com) are eager to help you find it. These sites catalog hundreds of wholesale, retail, and private sellers of everything from musical instruments to rare books, CDs, and videotapes.

If you're planning to purchase used equipment, you owe it to your conscience to double-check the serial numbers at the Hot List (www.empire.net/~wozmak/thelist.html), a resource for registering - and, one hopes, finding - stolen gear.

Electronica. Having been a remixer for many years, I have a soft spot for dance music and electronica. The two sites I turn to regularly for both technical data and the latest news are Dancetech (www.dancetech.com; see Fig. 3) and the pinnacle of rave information, Hyperreal Music Archive (www.hyperreal.org/music). Looper's Delight (www.annihilist.com/loop/loop.html) is another fine resource available to sampling musicians.

The rest of the band. An excellent starting point for guitarists is 1,000 Great Guitar Sites (avoca.vicnet.net.au/~guitar). Bassists should check out Bassically (www.bassically.odsys.net) and Bassmental (www.srowe.demon.co.uk/bassment). Drummers and percussionists will find lots to like online at sites such as CyberDrum (www.cyberdrum.com) and Drummer's Web (www.drummersweb.com).

Usenet

The real resource for musicians communicating on the Internet is Usenet. Every topic you can imagine is being (or has been) discussed in some Usenet newsgroup. The best way to get your feet wet with newsgroups is through Deja News (www.dejanews

.com). This impressive Web site collects Usenet postings and organizes them into searchable archives. Just type a few keywords into the Deja News search engine, and presto - every post containing those keywords appears. If the sheer number of matches overwhelms you, the Power Search page can help you to zero in on the information that you're looking for.

You can even create a Deja News-based e-mail account for posting and corresponding with others. This is a terrific way to protect yourself against the "spambots" that collect e-mail addresses from Usenet postings. It's always best, however, to follow a newsgroup for a little while before jumping in and posting your two cents' worth: frequently asked or inappropriate questions are sometimes met with impatience, outrage, or contempt.

Among the most relevant newsgroups for desktop music information are [alt.binaries.sounds.midi](#), [alt.music.4-track](#), [alt.music.midi](#), [comp.music](#),

comp.music.audio, comp.music.midi, rec.audio.pro, rec.music.makers, and rec.music.makers.synth. Readers on the more adventurous side might also enjoy alt.sci.physics.acoustics and rec.audio.tubes. Used equipment and other audio bargains can be found at rec.music.makers.marketplace.

If you want to follow particular newsgroups closely, you may find that a news client - such as those built into Netscape Communicator and Microsoft Outlook Express, or the stand-alone Forté Free Agent - gives you more flexibility than the Deja News site. Among other features, news clients let you sort messages by thread, a series of posts on a specific topic. Contact your Internet service provider for details on how to set up a news client.

Mailing Lists

If you enjoy having an e-mail inbox brimming with musical information, consider subscribing to a mailing list. These use a listserv (or similar mail-based system) to redirect subscribers' questions, answers, and announcements to all other subscribers. Because anything you send to the listserv will be broadcast to all subscribers, the "signal-to-noise ratio" is often much higher here than on Usenet - which means that the discussions will be more technical, while the tolerance for inappropriate questions may be lower. Mailing lists are definitely oriented toward more advanced users with a bit of newsgroup experience. Of course, you are always free to lurk in one and soak in the accumulated wisdom.

The usual method of subscribing to a mailing list is to send the server a message containing your e-mail address in either the subject line or the message body. For example, to subscribe to American University's mailing list for synthesists, send mail to listserv@auvm.american.edu or listserv@auvm.bitnet; in the message body, type SUBS SYNTH-L [your e-mail address].

To subscribe to DAW-Mac, type subscribe in the body of an e-mail message and send it to daw-mac-request@lists.best.com. You can join the PC-DAW list by typing the message subscribe pc-daw-digest and sending the e-mail to majordomo@missionrec.com.

Modular Digital Multitrack is a mailing list for users of ADATs, DA-88s, and similar equipment; to subscribe, send mail to MDM-request@psc.edu. Subscribe to Pro-Audio, another mailing list devoted to recording, by sending a message to pro-audio-request@pgm.com with the word subscribe typed in the body.

The Listserv Page (orpheus.ucsd.edu/music/lists.html) is a useful guide to other music-oriented mailing lists. You can also try Liszt (www.liszt.com), a directory of mailing lists on general music topics.

Forums

Similar to Usenet but privately owned and administered, forums are another resource for meeting like-minded musicians and recordists online. Like mailing lists, forums tend to offer a very high percentage of useful information and are often moderated by experts.

Searchable and well indexed, the Gas Station (www.sonicstate.com/BBsonic/topics.dbm) is Synth Site's forum area. Topics run the gamut from mixing to sequencing to specific synthesizer models. Harmony Central's MIDI Forum (tremolo.harmony-central.com/HyperNews/get/MIDI.html) is an experimental area with hundreds of threads on the topic of MIDI. Because its discussions can run toward topics that are technical and exotic, this forum is a great place to go with your more obscure questions.

With its superfriendly user interface, America Online (www.aol.com) also features a few interesting forums and message boards for musicians and recordists. Doing a keyword search on "musical performance," for instance, yields results ranging from a glossary of musical terms to specialized areas devoted to flute, marching bands, and 4-track recording.

Much of the information available at America Online is intended for novices, but I still found a lot of handy tidbits about microphones and enjoyed visiting the PC Music & Sound forum. There's also a useful area devoted to Digidesign products.

Log On, Tune Up

As new sites, forums, and newsgroups emerge daily on the Web, opportunities for musicians to collaborate and share information grow almost exponentially. In fact, you can now start a band whose members live on different continents: just cruise by the Res Rocket site (www.resrocket.com) and download the necessary software.

Someday we may even be able to troubleshoot our equipment online with a technician from a different time zone. For now, however, we'll have to be content in the knowledge that nearly all of our musical questions can be answered with an Internet connection, some good online resources, and a few mouse clicks.

Web designer/composer/remixer Francis Preve (FAP7) is now also a multimedia developer. You can download his free Newton-based drum-machine software from www.bga.com/~fap7/synthesis.

