

## METRO 6.3 - I take Sagan's top sequencer for a test drive in MIDI city.

MIDI sequencing has come a long way since it's humble beginnings in 1983. These days there are usually more lights and bells than on the bridge of the Starship Enterprise. For those new to the scene, a sequencer is a multitrack recorder for MIDI data (think notes). The sort of features MIDI software sequencers now have are an unlimited number of MIDI tracks, ease of editing notes, automation, virtual instrument plugins, as well as audio track capability. Let's see how METRO version 6 stacks up. Of course looking at all the features in detail would fill a book so I will be presenting an overview, looking at the big issues, such as is it user friendly?

Installation and configuration was a breeze. I put it on my iBook G4. The installer states that it will work on the new Macs with the Intel processor too. A quick look at the Read Me file revealed Metro can have either on-line or local help. If you have installed sequencer software on a Mac (OS X) before you should have no trouble getting up and running. I got it recording and playing without consulting the manual. If you do need help there is a step by step set-up on the first page of the help file. There is also a getting started guide (39 pages).

MIDI sequencers are now at a stage of mature software development and virtually all can trace their lineage back to Passport Software's excellent Master Tracks Pro (which, incidentally, has been re-released by G-Vox). The look of Metro is no exception, with clean graphical windows for notes and controllers.

The topology of Metro is as interesting as it is powerful. It starts off as a track-based sequencer (= one "section"). Up to 32 "sections" are possible (each up to 99 tracks). These can then be inserted back into a spare section, forming subsections. Now we are talking object-based sequencing.

Keep in mind this is still all within one file. If you are getting lost here, don't worry - the point is that there is a lot of flexibility and power available. Great for stem mixes.

Now for a quick look at the windows: the transport window has a good look and is floating. Time is displayed in bars, beats, and clicks as well as SMPTE timecode. The tempo, metronome and punch-in buttons have an extra 'sub-button', which opens a parameter window. Sync can be selected from no less than eight sources. Clicking the red button puts you straight into record. A pity that two keys are needed (option/R) - that's no shortcut. All the recording modes are possible (realtime, pencil tool, step input, loop, punch-in, merge, overdub).



fig. 1

The Section (track) window is straightforward. Before recording MIDI the number of bars must be entered which is undesirable. There are plenty of zoom levels, both vertically and horizontally. Double clicking on a 'section' opens the Graphic Editor window (this can be set to the event editor). Strangely (for a Mac), simply naming a track requires option/clicking. Any track can be assigned as either MIDI or audio.

### System Requirements

- Apple Macintosh PowerPC or Apple Macintosh Intel Processor.
- OS X, 10.2 or later is required.
- 64 MB RAM minimum.
- 10 MB available hard disk space.
- For recording/playback at greater than 16 bit and 44.1khz third party audio hardware required.
- CoreAudio support may require compatible hardware and/or drivers.
- Fast hard disk (7200 rpm) strongly recommended.

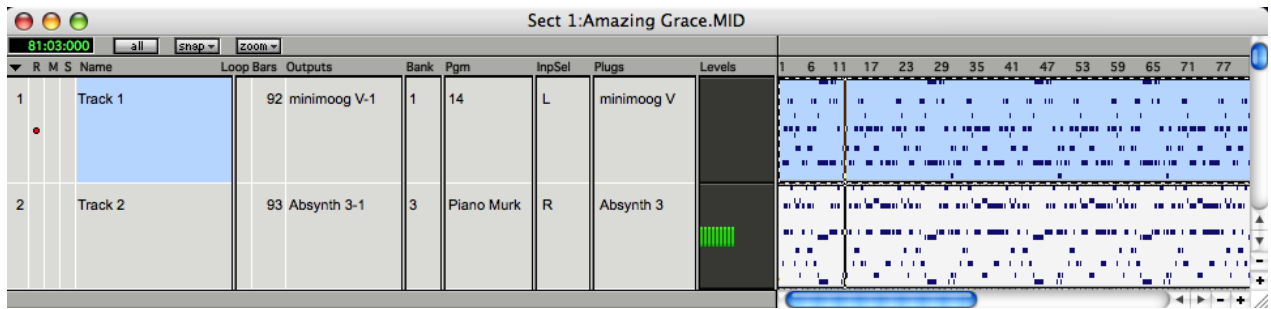


fig. 2

In the Graphic Editor window there is a hint of a PC (ie Windows) interface with the icons (eg the pitchbend icon). Also the fact that the words above the grid act as menus: any track can be selected by clicking on Track, and Notes reveals a menu for controllers etc. At the top of the window lies the step input selector (keyboard), zoom (horiz. only) and easy access to setting durations and velocities for mouse note input. One slick feature here is a move-bar tool for realigning tempo to an existing track.

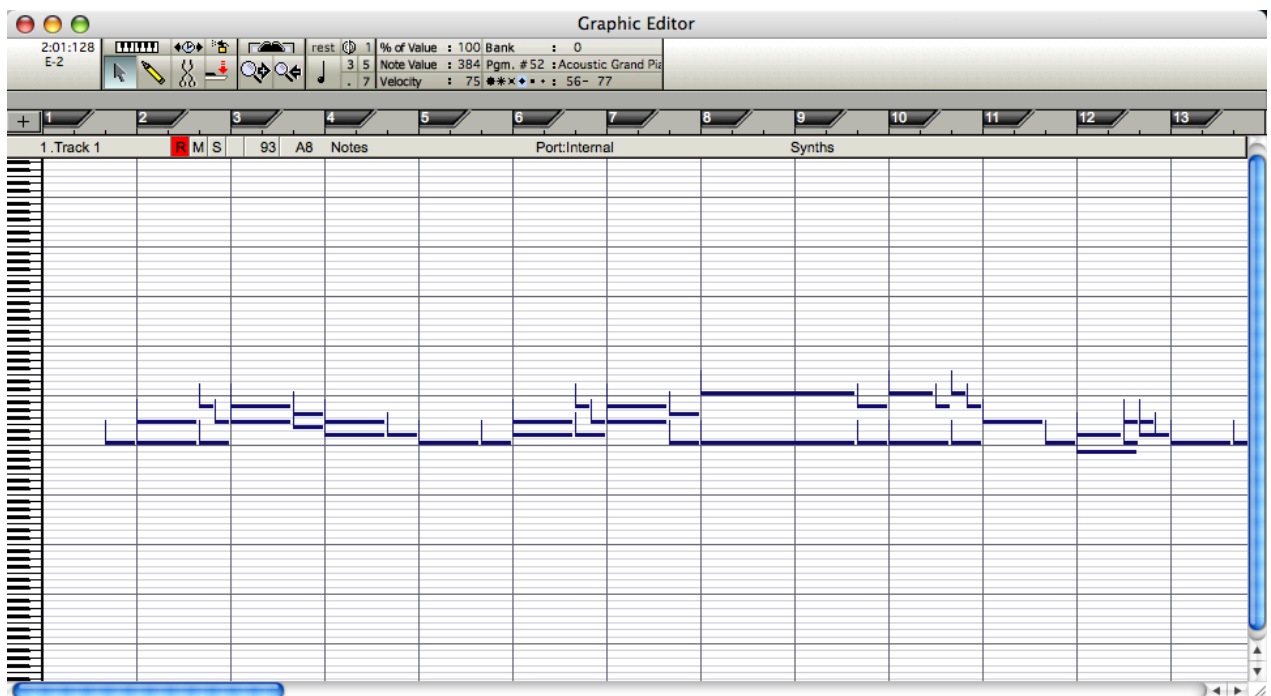


fig. 3

Editing notes is straightforward. Note pitch and position is shown in the top left box. There is no erase tool – clicking on a note with the pencil tool deletes the note. A region is selected by dragging across the desired time-range. The ‘forceps’ tool is used if only part of the note range is wanted. All this is clearly set out in the manual. Double clicking on a note brings up a note edit window (another feature from MTP).

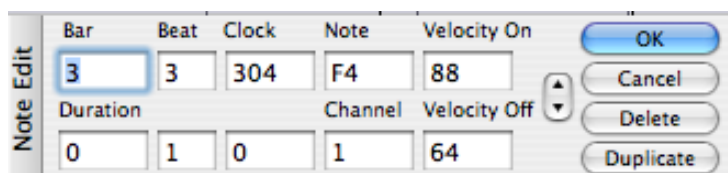


fig. 4

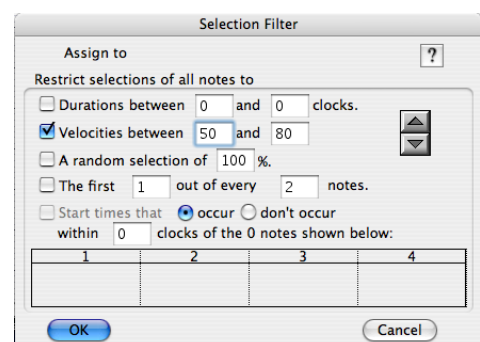


fig. 5 MIDI events can be selectively edited with this data filter:

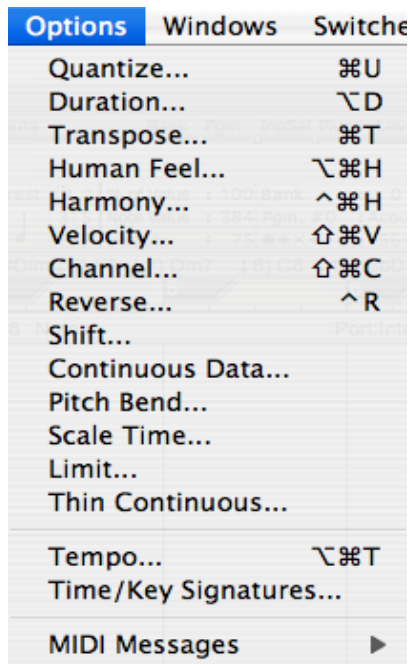


fig. 6 The MIDI edit features. Among the usual list is Harmony, where a chord can be generated from a single note.

**Spec. Sheet**

- Version 6.3.5.6
- Up to 99 Tracks (MIDI or Audio) per section.
- Up to 32 sections per song.
- Up to 64 sub-sections per track.
- Up to 254 outputs.
- Up to 64 stereo audio tracks.

Other main windows are the event editor, which is a lot easier to read than some, and a simple-look mixer window. There is also a Plug-ins window which list all the plugins installed with version number - very handy.

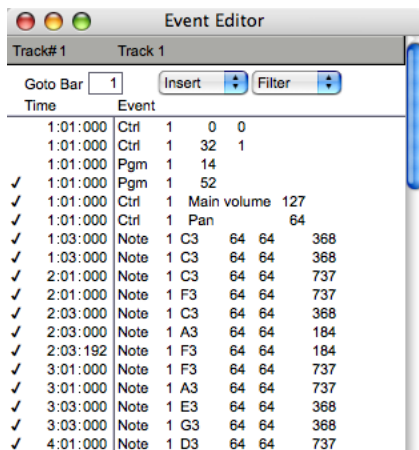


fig. 7



fig. 8

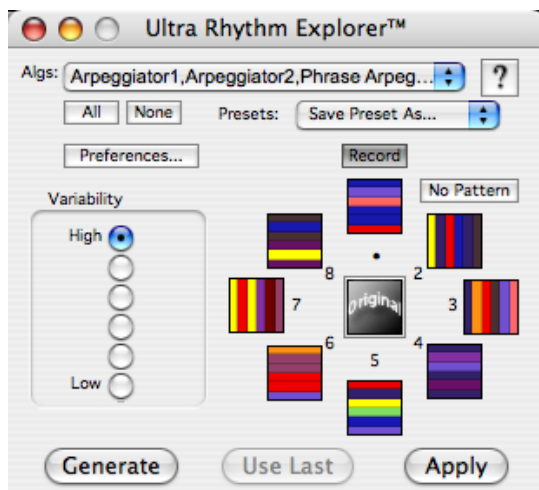


fig. 9

One of the most interesting features is the Ultra Rhythm Explorer window. This applies a variety of selectable rhythmic effects to selected notes. The possibilities include arpeggiation, trill, flam, and several types of quantize.

On the audio side of things, there are the usual edit functions (reverse, normalize, cross-fade etc) and the rest are supplied by whatever AU or VST plugins are loaded on your machine.

OK, let's talk about stability (ie how often does it crash?). I deliberately prodded and poked around before reading the instructions (just like real-world users do!) and I'm happy to say that Metro behaved perfectly during the trials- not one crash even with my virtual instrument plug-ins. Wow.

A notation window is provided. It is a stripped down version of Geniesoft's Scorewriter and has very limited editing – fine for getting a basic score printed from a well-quantised track or two. I tried importing a SMF and noticed that although playback was fine the notation was less than exact.

### Conclusion

At \$US330 Metro 6 is the same price as Logic Express 7 so can it give serious competition? Keep in mind that Logic Express is designed as entry level, and you'll need the Pro version to do the heavyweight stuff. Metro 6 is the deluxe model (there are two lighter versions).

Both programmes are mature and extremely stable. In the end it comes down to the look and feel of operation, and comparison of features. Since Apple took over eMagic Logic has improved in user-friendliness but I think Metro offers more in this area. Its on-line help is well laid out. In terms of latest features Metro 6 is not lacking – groove quantise, automation, freeze, selectable ppqn, time scaling, rewire... to name a few. Final verdict: an easy to use sequencer with probably all the features you'll ever need.

<b>Verdict</b>	
Price:	\$US330
Availability:	Web Buy
<b>RATINGS (out of 10)</b>	
User Interface	8.5
MIDI features	9.5
Audio features	9
Value for money	10
Reliability	10
<b>OVERALL RATING</b>	<b>9.4</b>