NoteAbilityPro ™ II
## music notation software for Mac OS X

There is a good selection of music notation software available for the Macintosh these days, from the simple to the comprehensive. This review looks at NoteAbility Pro which is described by the maker as easy to use, yet the most powerful music software available:

"NoteAbility Pro is a professional music notation package for the Macintosh OS-X operating system. Developed by Dr. Keith Hamel at the University of British Columbia, it is easily the most sophisticated music notation software available on any platform. NoteAbility combines both musical intelligence and graphical flexibility in a direct and intuitive graphical user interface. Notate anything from simple melodies to complex avant garde orchestral music."
<http://debussy.music.ubc.ca/NoteAbility/index.html.>

A big claim indeed, so let's see how it stacks up.

Installation was straight forward with no special fonts to add to the system. A listing of which files were installed where is given at the start of the Help file.
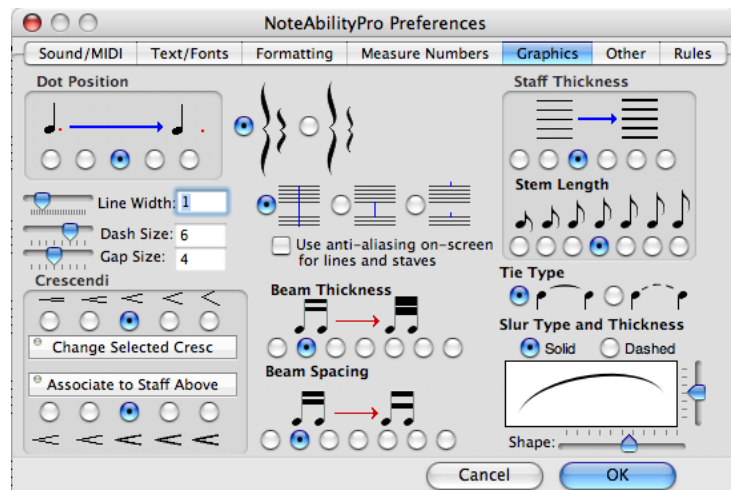
The preferences windows allow for a large amount of user selection. Here are two examples: graphics preferences, and MIDI velocities preferences.

fig. 1 Preferences
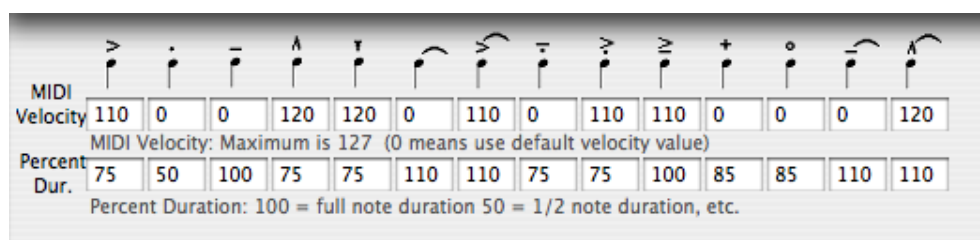
MIDI velocities can be custom set to many accent types.

MIDI Velocity	110	0	0	120	120	0	110	0	110	110	0	0	0	120
Percent Dur.	75	50	100	75	75	110	110	75	75	100	85	85	110	110

MIDI Velocity: Maximum is 127 (0 means use default velocity value)

Percent Duration: 100 = full note duration 50 = 1/2 note duration, etc.
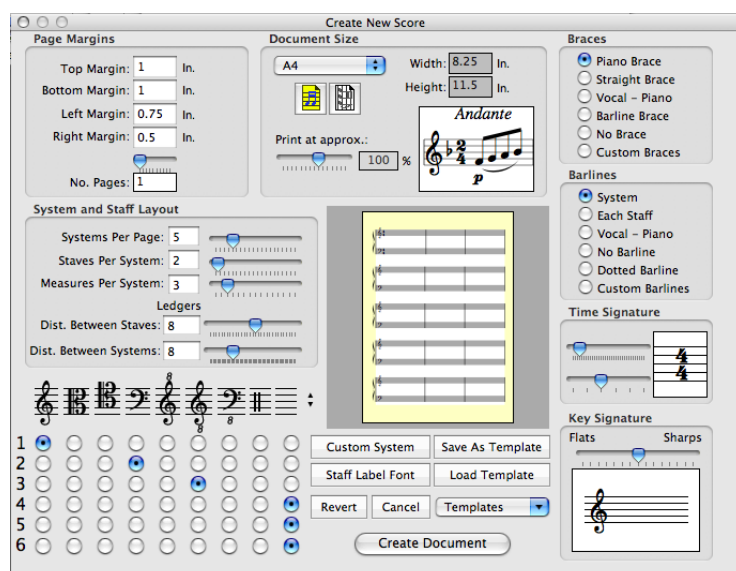
fig. 2 Custom Velocities

fig. 3 New Score Options

On startup it comes up with a comprehensive set of options for creating a new score. The nice thing here is that everything is available from the one window.

The two menu bars at the top of the page give an easy way to access the most used items. The top row of buttons (from left) are: the Insertion tool, Place Cursor tool, Selection tool, Select Score tool, and Text tool. After this there are various tools for adding graphics and text to the score, some 20 in all. One useful button is the Graphic Beam tool, which allows manual drawing of beams. The Select Score tool is used to (you guessed it) select a portion of notes on one or more staves in system. This is different to other notation programmes I have used where on click selects one bar, two clicks selects one system, and three clicks selects the staff for the entire piece of music. To the right of the top menu bar there are arrows for page scrolling or moving the cursor by bar or by beat.
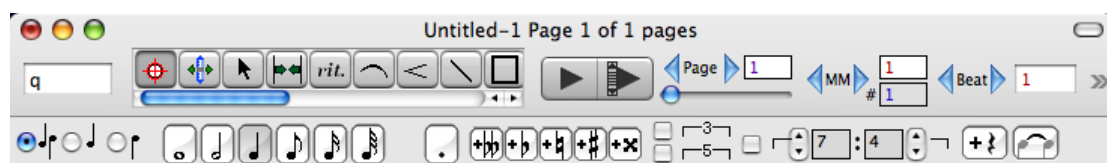

fig. 4 Tool Bars

The lower menu bar is to do with notes. On the left are the voice buttons (up to three parts per staff). Dotted notes can be entered by clicking on the dot button. A second click gives double-dotted. Accidentals are all accessible with *bb* and x given equal status with the others. Next to them are select boxes for triplets, quintuplets, and other tuplets.
The lower menu changes if the Select tool or the Select Score tool is enabled. It then mimics the Modify Menu (and sub-menus). This puts the most used features at a place that is just above the score – a real time saver.

fig. 5

During playback the lower menu bar changers again to become the transport window, showing time in hours, minutes, seconds and 1/10ths as well as bars, beats, and 1/10ths.

fig. 6

Note entry is either through a MIDI keyboard, mouse, an on-screen keyboard or indirectly via the MIDI Recorder (more on this later). There is also guitar entry window (Lute and Dulcimer too, in fact) that allows for easy TAB entry.

Writing notes using the mouse is straightforward, thanks to an advanced cursor, which acts a bit like a stencil at each beat. It also has ledger lines to speed up note entry off the staff, and it can be click/dragged to any position on a stave.

There are arrows provided (which can be hidden) to allow pulling beats, bars, staves, systems, or complete pages of notes into line. It is very handy to have all these right on the page instead of having to go to various menus.
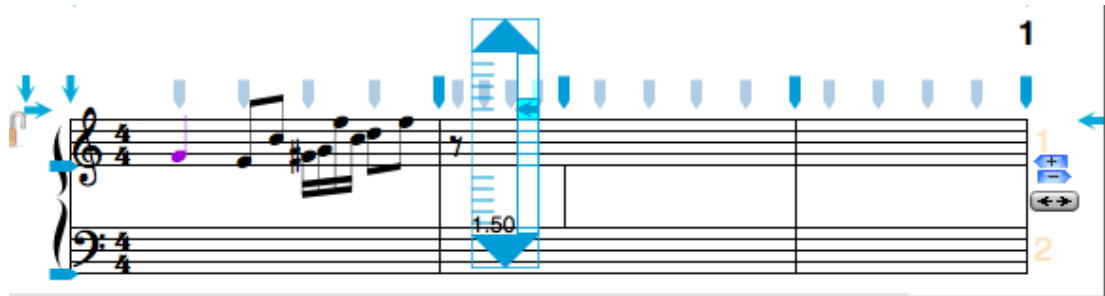

fig. 7

Now about the MIDI Recorder that I mentioned earlier – NoteAbility is unusual in that real-time MIDI input is a two-stage process. First, MIDI is recorded into the separate MIDI Reorder window then it is converted to standard music notation. In practice I got used to this very quickly, and the whole process is quite rapid. The benefit of this method is that extra quantising can be done here to avoid extra editing of the score.
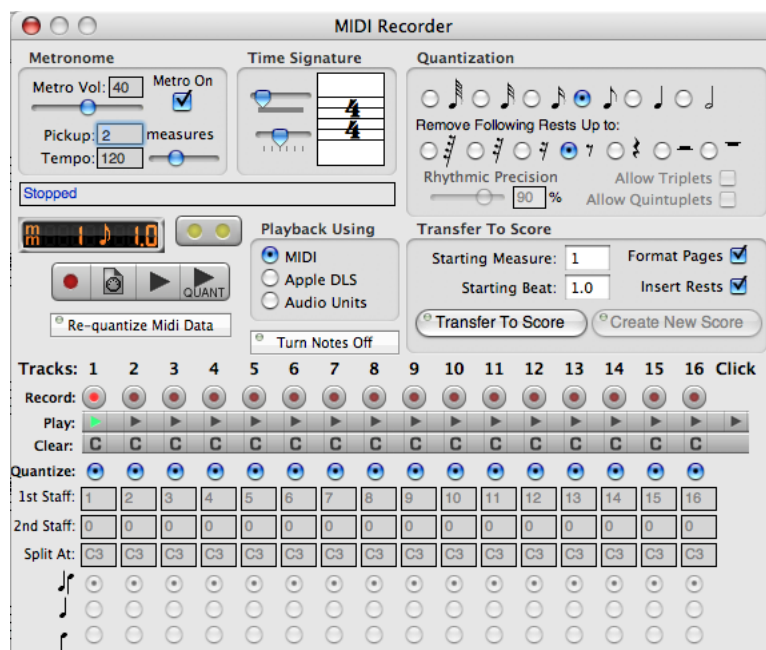

fig. 8 The MIDI recorder accepts up to 16 tracks of realtime performance.

To the right side of the score window a Score Structure window appears. This 'cabinet' contains tabs that select no less than 28 panes of set-up features. Working with these is very intuitive - click a tab to open the pane, re-click to close the pane. Panes are grouped (see fig. 9), and one pane per group can be opened simultaneously. As always, big scores will require a large screen.
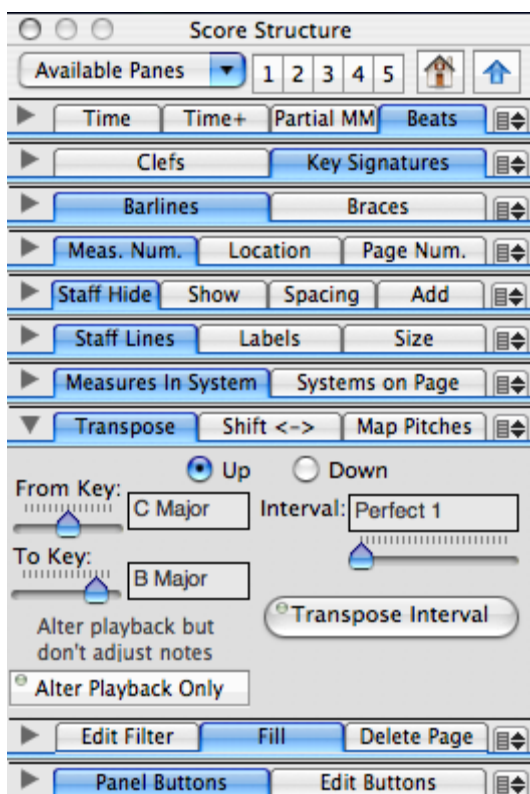
fig. 9 Score Structure window with the Transpose pane open.

System Requirements

- any Macintosh computer capable of running the OS-X operating system.

- Macintosh OS-X (version 10.2.0 or higher)

- at least 128 MBytes of RAM

- at least 100 Mbytes of free disk space.

- any Mac OS-X compatible printer

- any Mac OS-X compatible USB MIDI interface (optional)

If by now you are getting the idea that NoteAbility Pro is a BIG programme then you are right. As well as Score Structure cabinet there is also a Music Images cabinet with another 19 panes of notation things to adjust.
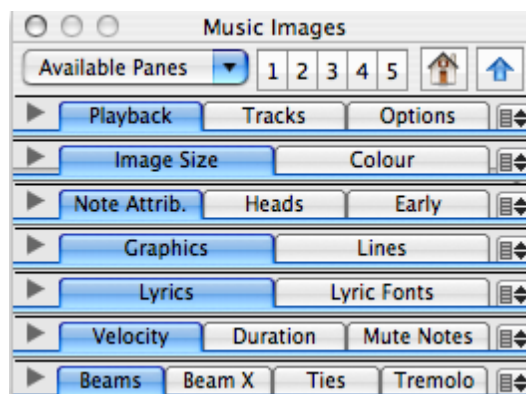
g. 10

fig. 11 The image list shows the one or two keystroke commands used to select notes, dynamic marks, accents, repeats, and so on.
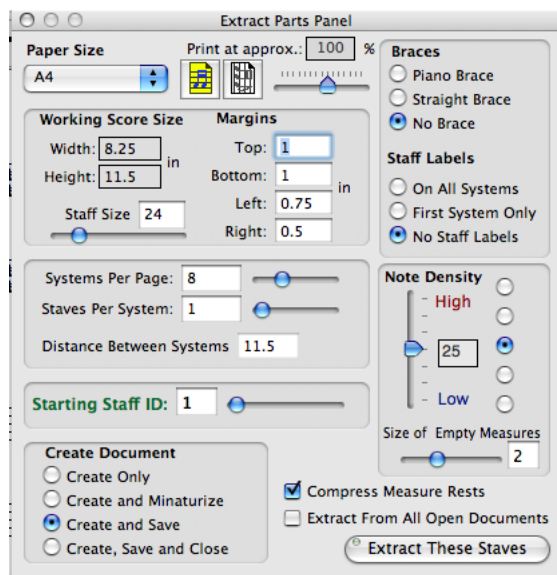
fig. 12 The Part Extraction window gives a lot of useful options grouped in one place.

The look: on the left is an excerpt from another notation programme. The example on the right is how it looks in NoteAbility Pro. You decide.
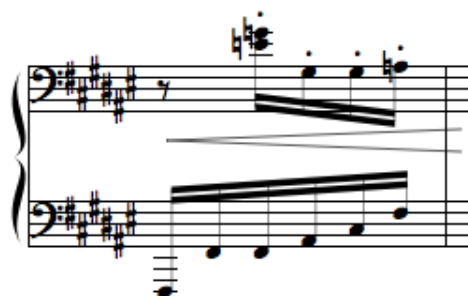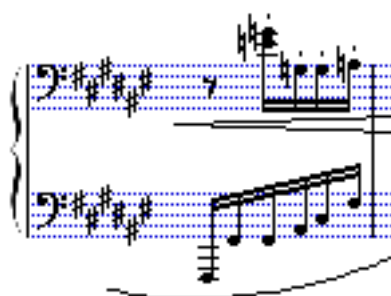

fig. 13 NoteAbility uses Apple's Quartz technology to create a professional look on screen.

Reliability is slightly down on what we have come to expect of commercial software these days. The programme bombed one time with a kernel panic. I re-ran it and there was no further trouble.
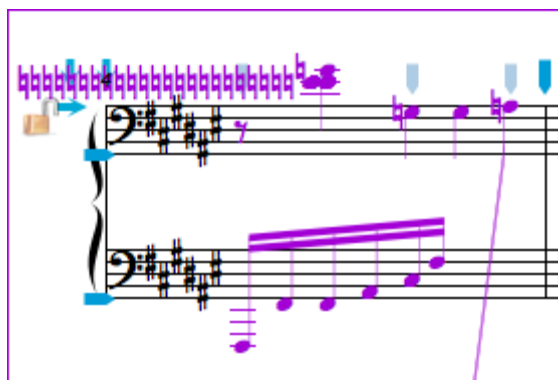

fig. 14 Huston, we have a problem.
These screen artefacts appeared once while trying to use the undo function.

So… a few bugs to sort. My guess is Keith Hamel is working on it already – he is obviously a real software notation enthusiast to develop such a great piece.

So what *can't* NoteAbility do? Not too much, I'd say. The website gives great examples of just how far-reaching it's scoring capabilities are. No doubt someone out there is writing some music that won't fit on it, but it does have the features to handle everything from avant-garde to coloured notes. Don't make that let you think that will limit its use for conventional orchestral scores, or for that matter a simple lead sheet. I must give this software the thumbs-up. It is laden with more features than a movie theatre, but is very intuitive to use, and makes good use of OS X features. The help file is good, letting you search by contents or index, and there are a couple of tutorials, and examples if you get stuck. Sibelius, Finale; be worried. Keith Hamel; take a bow.

Spec. Sheet

- Version: 2.310

- Up to 40 systems per page
- Up to 40 staves per system
- Up to 16 measures per system (expandable after setup)
- time signatures from 1/1 to 32/32
- 15 clefs available

- 16 track MIDI recording

- 20 line types

- Unlimited voices per staff

- Unlimited notes per chord

Verdict

Price: $US225

Availability: On-line purchase only

RATINGS (out of 10)

User Interface	10
Range of features	10
Musical Usability	9
Typesetting & Printing	9.5
Value for money	9.5
Reliability	8

OVERALL RATING   9.3