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Stanton MIX! DJ software

Reviewer: Gizmo • **Date:** May 2011 • **Price:** €49 plus VAT projected • **Link:** [Stanton](#)

Introduction



Back in the olden days, we never had the luxury of computers. But somehow, we still managed to invent the mixtape and knock them out with monotonous regularity. What was even more staggering was that unless you were rich and could afford a Fostex or Tascam 4-track, they were done in one hit to good old fashioned cassette (in my case TDK AD-90s). Wow - sounds like the worst hell imaginable right? Well that's what we did, and in doing so, we were Gods amongst men, carried shoulder high with our next batch of cassettes to the record shop so that the waiting public could take in another 45 minutes of the latest tracks fresh off the boat from the US.

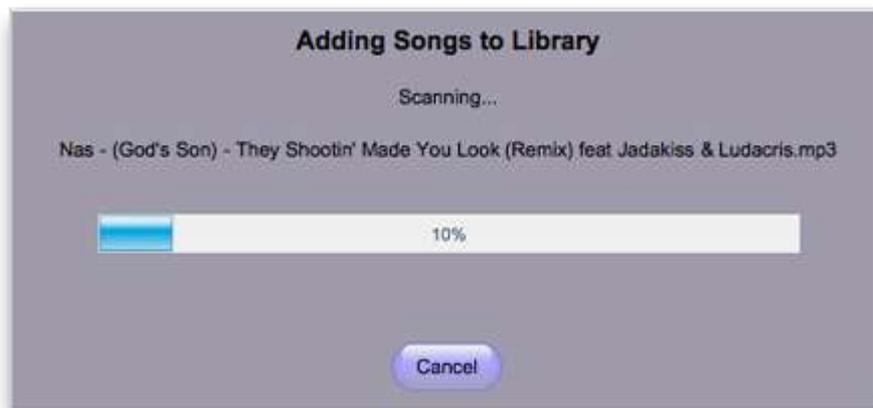
These days however, it seems you just throw a random folder of downloaded music at an app and it does the same thing, but better, in higher quality and without the linearity of tape, meaning you can edit your mix to hell and make it perfect. Even my Grandma could do this if she were still alive. Oh how the Gods have fallen to Earth and joined the ranks of mere mortals.

One such application is Stanton's new MIX! - software developed by the good people at the [Scratch DJ Academy](#). Ironically, it is much more about mixing that scratching, but that doesn't stop it doing a pretty good job of throwing mixes together.

In A Nutshell

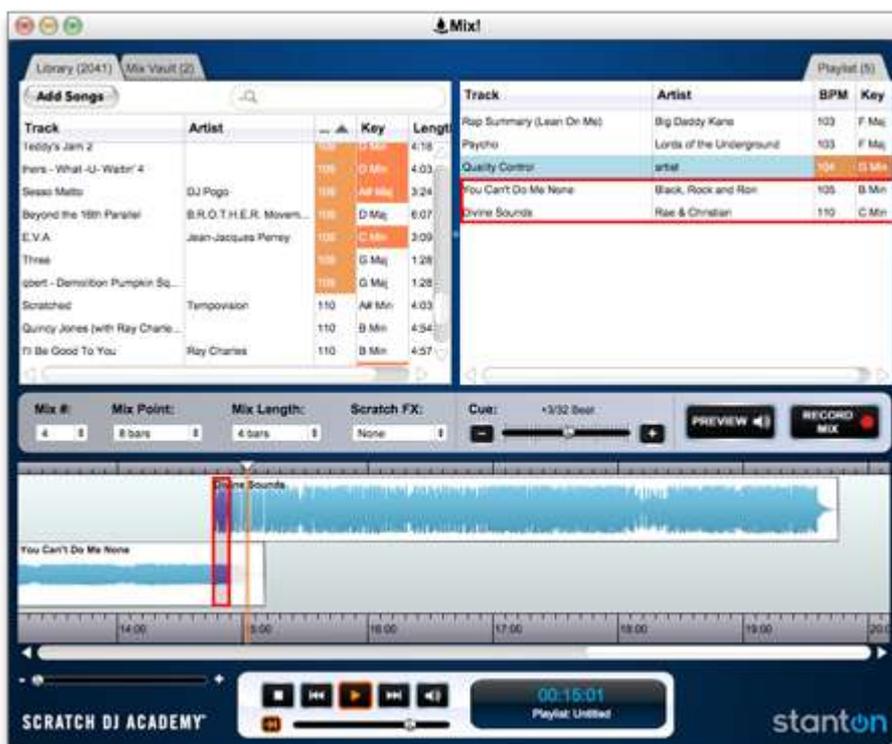
MIX! is a application that offers the ability to automatically mix tracks together from a library, and add a limited range of effects as well. It really is as simple as dragging files into the library, waiting for them to be analysed and then simply dragging them into the playlist window for MIX! to throw together a rough and ready mixtape. But the devil is in the detail.

How It Works



Success in the digital age depends on preparation, and MIX! positively depends on preparing your audio properly for use inside the program. This is done by analysis - add songs and they get scanned for tag data, but importantly defines the BPM, key and determines the beat grid. With these 3 factors, MIX! can do a pretty good job of auto-mixing tracks from a simple drag and drop arrangement.

The Interface



The first thing that hits you right between the eyes is that it's not a standard Mac application, and looks almost the same in Windows and OS X. This may put off some interface purists, but it still seems to work well, with only the odd system wide pause when starting up or adding a track into the mix.

The interface is split into 5 main windows:

Library (2034)

Add Songs

Track	Artist	BPM	Key	Length
If You Only Knew		90	G Min	3:51
In Da Club (Acapella)	50 Cent	116	G# Maj	2:57
In Da Ho	Shy FX vs Remarc	85	A Min	4:45
In Space	Réyksopp	119	D# Min	3:30
In The Name Of Love	Swan Lake	123	A Min	5:20
In the Hood	Wu Tang Clan	108	B Min	4:11
Inc.	Playing with knives	131	E Min	1:04
Incredible	General Levy & M. Beat	165	E Min	4:16
Infinity 1990's... Time for the g...	Guru Josh	125	G Min	7:32
Informer (jungle remix)	Snow	88	F# Min	3:39
Insane In the Brain	Cypress Hill	128	F Maj	4:07
Insomnia	YMO	120	C Min	4:59
Intelligent Woman	DJ Rap	84	A Maj	4:55
Interior Assassin's Car 3-35 AM...	Organized Konfusion	146	A Min	0:23
Interior Marisol's Apartment (Organized Konfusion ...	133	G# Min	0:57
Into the 90's	Photek	96	F Min	1:59

Library/Mix Vault

The library is where your tracks are stored. You can add files and folders through a regular dialog box, or drag them in directly. You get 8 tag based columns to view and sort by: Track, Length, Artist, Album, Genre, Comments, BPM and Key. Sadly, it's a flat view. While you can turn columns on and off, any folder structure you had is lost. It would be nice to have some sort of crate facility for a little more organisation.

The Mix Vault is just a list of saved to file mixes - the final mixdown once you've perfected everything. And being regular audio files, you can also use these in mixes too - like library items to make something bigger.

Playlist (8)

Track	Artist	BPM	Key
Can You Feel It	Mr. Reds With DJ Scribble Fe...	134	B Min
Play At Your Own Risk (Lil' Jon Remi...	Planet Patrol	135	C Min
Punjabi MC	P! Rock Remix)	135	A# Maj
Tell The Truth	Kevin Coyne	134	C# Min
138 Trek (Zed Bias Remix)	DJ Zinc	135	C Maj
like a mule	the bouncer	136	C# Min
Tibetan Jam	Chris the Glove Taylor	136	A Maj
Boool!	Sticky feat. MS Dynamite	139	D Min

Playlist

Drag files from the library into this window to get the mix rolling. You can drag them in one at a time, or as a great lump of multiple tracks. Either way, based on the analysis that MIX! has done, it'll do it's very best attempt at mixing them neatly. To be honest, it can be a bit hit and miss but there are tools to help you make it better. More on those later.

Control Bar

All the controls you need to manipulate the mix are here. Broken down:

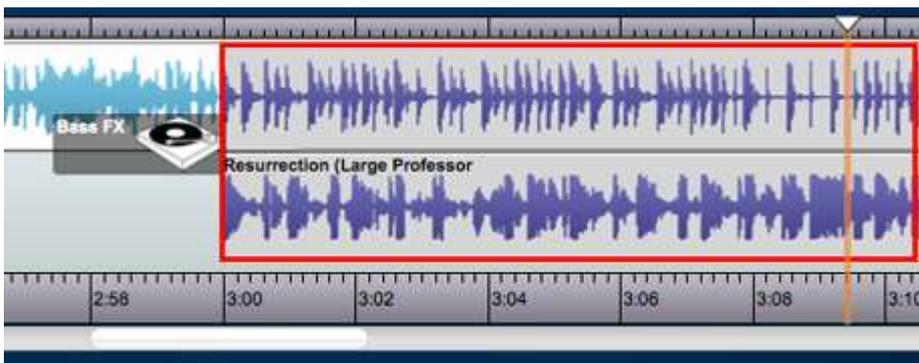


Mix #: As you mix from one track to another, each one is numbered sequentially, so if you drop a track in later, the mix numbers shift according. This is a simple jump menu to take you to a mix of your choice.

Mix Point: After analysis of your music, MIX! adds a beat grid, and from this, it can determine a point at which to start and finish a blend. That start point is predefined and stored with the file when analysed, but this can be altered later. The end point (which is what this Mix Point is about) is a measure in bars from the end of the track, from 0 to 16 bars in 4 bars measures.

Mix Length: From slam mix to 16 bars, this how you define the length of the mix.

On this subject - while these are defaults, you can drag the position and the length of the mix to just about wherever you want. MIX! is intelligent in that dragging towards the end of a track will reduce the mix length. There does seem to be a practical limitation when trying to do very short mixes - you can't move to less than 8 bars from the beginning of a track. Not really an issue for such a product though.



Scratch FX: This is where the Scratch DJ Academy heritage comes in. Instead of just having a mix transition, you can also add a little Hip Hop technique to your mixes. You get 3 sounds - Bass drum, the ubiquitous Fresh and a tone - and 5 ways to scratch them in. You can also define how many bars to scratch over, up to 4 bars in single beat increments.

This is clever stuff, and does take you beyond straight mixing, but with the narrow range of scratch effects, it could soon sound a little overused. Some more options would be good here. And for those wanting more EDM based mixing, these effects are unlikely to be used at all.



Cue: The equivalent of tapping or pushing the platter to bring a mix on beat. With the best will in the world, no software is perfect and the beat grid might be a little off. This allows you to fix that. You can nudge up to 2 beats either way in 1/32nd beat increments.

Preview: Clicking this will play the section of selected mix from 8 beats before the beginning.

Record Mix: This will render your mix to MP3 or WAV and save to a location of your choice. And

once saved, ends up in the mix vault tab, ready for you to include in another mix if you want.



Waveforms and Transport controls: As you build your mix, the tracks appear here. You can zoom in and out (but for some odd reason not the whole mix - this needs fixing). In this window, you'll be able to manually drag the mix locations and lengths. It's less accurate, but you can at least work in a more visual manner. It does also highlight the very liner one after another nature, rather than creative layering.

In Use



MIX! makes it very easy to throw together a really simple mix with almost no effort. But we're still some way from truly automatic human-free mixing, so there are features that allow you to fine tune the mix a little more.

Right from the start, MIX! gives you a head start in putting good mixes together. After you drag your first track into the playlist, MIX! will give you hints as to which tracks will work better. As mixing works best if you work within a suitable range, you can get MIX! to highlight tracks that have a BPM within a fixed range from the existing one. This will mean that your transitions will flow better and not sound too sped up or slowed down.

Key clashes are all too common, even with DJs experienced in beatmatching. So it's good to know that MIX! calculates the track key. That's all well and good, but unless you have some musical theory under your belt, it's a relatively meaningless thing to work with. So MIX! can make suggestions as to matching keys. While by default, it sticks to a very compatible range, you can extend the range in preferences, but results aren't guaranteed. Only your ears will tell you if it works, or your teeth will ache in pain.

Here's how it works - Mix! maintains pitch of first track, and adjusts the pitch of the next, and over the duration of the mix steadily fades out the first track. Importantly the key is locked (oh how I

wish I had this back in the day) and the pitch of the new track is reset over the next bars to get it to the right speed. On one mix from 94 to 134 bpm this was 8 bars. It's simple, but effective and when playing music that is more or less within a specific genre based pitch range.

The issue is with volumes. MIX! has no way of adjusting levels or EQs, so while you are technically mixing, there's no way to play with the subtleties of blends. You're really going to need to have a pretty level volume across all your music, or else there will be some unexpected semi-slam mixes happening.



You can also get more control of your tracks on an individual level. Double-clicking a track in the waveform window opens up more detail. But essentially I found this best for defining the mix-in point. It's also a useful screen for seeing song structure, as well as beat and bar counting. In this respect, MIX! is a very educational tool and very much what the Scratch DJ Academy is about.

I found that MIX! worked best with 4 to the floor beats like House. Song structures in modern dance music usually means that throwing together an accurate mix is pretty easy, and only needs a tiny bit of tweaking. My experiences with Hip Hop and RnB were less successful, and often needed quite a bit of work to tidy up.

An idea for the future is a mix point at the end of the track. If you know your music, you'll probably have a point at which you tend to do your mixing. Being able to define that point and have MIX! mix out from that point automatically would save a lot of tweaking.

It's worth pointing out that MIX! is not a live tool. You could technically use it for a performance, but this is very much about creating a tweaking mixes for a final mixdown.

But aside from the basics, MIX! is a solid tool for BPM and especially key calculation. Indeed, when tested against the most popular application of its kind - Mixed In Key - MIX! returned the same values, showing that in this respect alone, MIX! is no slouch, but adds a lot more functionality that Mixed In Key doesn't have. MIX! will also write ID3 tags for BPM and key. Not all audio apps read the key tag, so you have the option to write the key to the beginning of the comments tag too.

Summing Up



Now those in the know will be reading this thinking "isn't that an awful lot like Numark's MixMeister Express?". Well yes it is, more or less, but lacking some of the features I'd like, but gaining others. It's quite a cut down experience in comparison, and certainly lacks the polish of the more mature MixMeister. But using side by side, it's a different experience, and for me, MIX! does align itself more with the teaching principles of the Scratch DJ Academy. I would say that beginners serious about learning without the distractions of extras should look at MIX! If you're more skilled and want a tool to throw together mixes with more control - MixMeister is for you.

It used to take me ages to perfect a mix and record it in one shot. And now, MIX! does that arduous task with ease. I should be annoyed and mutter things like "real DJs" etc. But I see MIX! as a solid but basic tool that will give beginners a solid starting point to get to grips with the roots of mixing.

While it will semi-automatically engineer a mix for you, it doesn't do it well enough that you could just throw tracks at it and expect a decent result. You'll need to go in and adjust mix points and lengths, and these are the finer points of better mixing - the building blocks that will take you onto bigger and better things.

So while it's not perfect, it does achieve the aim of making fledgling DJs into better ones by teaching them, through trial and error, the basics of mixing. It'll teach you when to drop the next track in and for how long to ride the mix. And importantly it'll teach you about song keys and importantly what works and what doesn't. It just needs a few extras like control over the in and out volume to be more useful, but for the project priced of 49 euros, it's hard to knock, especially with accurate key creation thrown in too.

Ratings

Sound Quality

MIX! makes a solid attempt at timestretching for those extreme mixes and puts out a mix commensurate with the input audio.

Features and Implementation

It's basic in the extreme, but does just enough to get you into the core foundations of mixing.

Value For Money

Even if you put aside the mixing elements, the key measuring part alone is worth the price. But for beginners, it's hard to fault it at all.

Bottom Line

Even an old time served DJ like me can appreciate the fun and usefulness of MIX! - and I think beginners will too.

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