

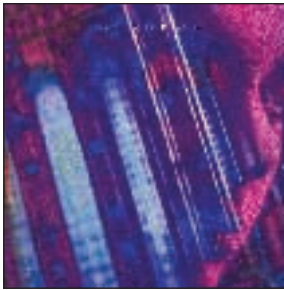
READER DEMOS

This month's selection of tunes takes in chilled-out dance, retro vibes, some great – and not-so-great – vocal performances and an aspiring (though he may not know it) soundtrack composer...

Avanson
Falling With The Rain
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The intro to *Falling With The Rain* sounds like a fitting piece for a backing interlude in Don Johnson vehicle *Nash Bridges* and then, by 1:50, moves toward something that sounds like it should be sung by Sade. Either way, the instrumentation and general feel of the track present an extremely retro, 80s-esque laid back vibe, and you can judge for yourself whether this a good thing.

From a mix perspective, the song is bang on the nail. There's very little to bemoan, even if a number of typical conventions have been ignored – for example, the left justified snare hit during the vocal section. We would take a careful look at the vocals themselves, which are extremely mid-heavy in places, in particular on the lowest notes. Some carefully selected EQ cuts around the mid-range frequencies would help to prevent the vocal from washing the instrumentation out. Despite this, it's well sung, although it would probably benefit from a female vocal in a higher register, as it sounds as if the vocalist is struggling in the lower ones. Overall,



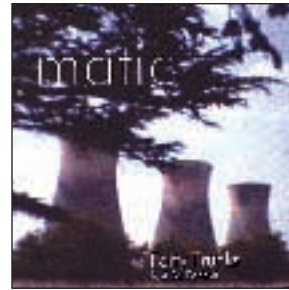
this is a good number, if a touch uninspiring.

What the artist says

"*Falling With The Rain* was originally inspired by an instrumental piece by Shakti and then radically overhauled at a later date and re-recorded. It now bears little resemblance to the original, except for the laid-back pace. I tend not to write my pieces with commerciality in mind; it's more a case of making music that I would buy. It was sequenced on an Atari 1040 using Cubase and then mixed down onto DAT and transferred to 8-track, where guitar and vocals were added. This can be a little trial and error; I sometimes have to go back and remix the sequenced parts and then start again with the 'audio' if things don't quite sound right during recording."

Equipment used

Tascam 8-track cassette, Atari STE,

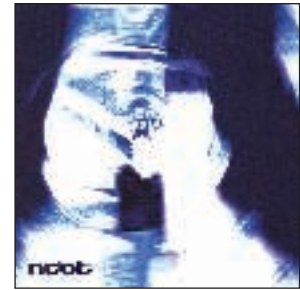


Korg Wavestation SR, E-mu Proteus 3 World, Yamaha SG1000, Quadraverb, Tandy PZM mic

Matic
Forty Trunks

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A chilled but moderately danceable number that offers up some interesting programming examples, especially in terms of the rhythm section, which is perforated by the occasional IDM-inspired triplet roll. Couple this with some entertaining synth sounds that seem to fit perfectly into the feel of the track and you have a well-rounded number with a certain appeal. Interestingly, these sounds have been produced solely using VST instruments, including the excellent but nonetheless very free Crystal



(www.greenoak.com/crystal/) and Big Tick's Cheeze Machine (<http://bigtick.pastnote.cut.org/index.php?action=PROD&pcode=110&lang=EN>).

While the instrumentation remains sparse, this track does hold together very well; each instrument complementing the others and maintaining, if not truly supporting, the main groove in a way that keeps the track moving along at a pleasing pace, despite the slightly apathetic bpm. There's a good balance over the soundstage, with the distorted 'bass' riff being pushed pleasingly forward, while the remainder of the instruments are spread both left and right and pushed back in the mix with a subtle reverb effect.

If there's once constructive criticism we would level at this track, it's that it's slightly, well... limp, in its approach. A few more swells and rhythmic variations could help to propel it to new heights. At the moment, it just seems somewhat sterile.

What the artist says

"*Forty Trunks* is a local name for a cedar tree near the soon-to-be-demolished Willington Power Station. It's an interesting place that I often drive past. "This tune is my first attempt at using only VSTi sound sources, with just a few additional drum samples. It was created in Cubase SX using mainly free virtual instruments to create a fairly sparse sound. I started with the drums, using Cyclick samples from a CM cover CD. The main chord sequence followed – using basic textures and sequences – then the simple melodies using Cheeze Machine and Crystal."

SEND US YOUR MUSIC

If you want the chance to be featured in *Reader Demos*, send us an original composition on CD, a description of your act, an image (sleeve art, photo or logo) and your equipment list. And – this is very important – make sure no illegal samples have been used. Please! The best tracks we receive each month will be reviewed and featured on our CD and/or website. Go on, then...

Fill in this form and send it, with your demo and any additional info you'd like to include, to:

Computer Music, Reader Demos,
 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW, UK

RULES: 1. Send no more than two tracks. 2. Please send the music on CD. 3. The music and any MIDI files used must all be original.

CM66

Band name _____

Equipment used _____

Contact name _____

Address _____

Phone/fax/email _____

Equipment used

Athlon XP 2000 PC, TerraTec DMX 6fire, M-Audio Studiophile SP-8B, Cubase SX, Green Oak Crystal, Steinberg/Waldorf A1, Steinberg/mda JX16, Big Tick Cheeze Machine, mda ePiano, neXoft LoopAZoid, PSP Vintage Warmer

ndot**Pain**

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A lovely intro leads into a track with a very wide and deep soundstage. Gentle and emotive synth swells and a beautiful vocal really send tickles down your spine, and there's a hell of a lot to be said for that. A few areas of the track can be abrasive at times, in particular the sibilance from some of the vocal sections. A gentle de-esser may help here, but go easy with the settings and don't overdo it. Or you could try a small cut at about 6-8kHz, but again, go careful or you run the risk of losing clarity in the vocal line – which the entire track hangs on. Some of the synth sections could do with a gentle EQ applied to smooth them out. Try to create a soft texture and reduce the cutting high frequencies, while making sure that the swells don't bleed into (and therefore drown out) the vocal. There's some excellent use of skittering rhythmic components, reversed audio and some unsynched but carefully laid gate effects that help to keep the track fluid throughout. At 3:33 the song comes to a crescendo and then quickly peters out, leaving the listener wanting more. Great stuff!

What the artist says

"We've been together for six years now – learning the ropes, doing live shows and meeting as many industry people as possible – so our fifth demo, *Pain*, has been a long time coming. The bassline was created on a portable Yamaha sequencer and then the track was built in Cubase VST. Mel did the vocals remotely into an old Evans analogue delay and supplied them on MiniDisc. Everything was then finalised using Waves plug-ins and a little bit of TC reverb. There are some more tracks to check out on our website."

Equipment used

G4, Cubase VST 5, Bias Peak, MOTU 2408, Korg Z1, Roland JP-8080, Nord Lead 2, Waves L2, Shure mic, Sony MiniDisc recorder **cm**

We also received...**Noodle Box
Tangerine Dream**

Interesting rhythmic sections, bongo beats and skipping syncopations give this track a tribal feel for the first half. This is then replaced with an atmospheric blend of sweeping synths before we drop back into the tribal beats. The song then drones on for about another three minutes. For a song so limited in terms of any kind of bassline, hook or pick-me-up, it runs the risk of boring the listener and could do with some chopping and a snappy arrangement.

**Morgan
Hughes
Honestly**

Great track, fantastic vocalist, but in terms of production it's a right mess! Everything is so cramped into the centre stage it could almost be mono. The bassline is sketchy and needs heavy EQing, as it's muddy and undefined. The octave synth line that joins in at 0:42 is lazy and unnecessary – something a touch more emotive would be better – and we suspect that Morgan needs to spend some cash sorting out his monitoring.

**Crazy 6
Falling Down**

A mid-heavy acoustic guitar slowly blends into a gentle strummed section with a nice beat. Not sure what's happening to the kick drum; it seems two have been layered and panned hard left and right. Interesting approach, but it sounds a bit odd – we would pan it back into the centre which is really the only place a kick drum should go. Great vocals have been captured perfectly. The piano is something special, sounding full and rich.

**Crazz
No Love
Conquers You**

Crazz freely admits he's no singer – we reckon he's done OK considering, but yes, you probably should get yourself up the local bar and find a vocalist. This is a nice track that's slightly let down by the weak drum kit. Crazz, get DS-404 out and go grab the Natural Studio drum kit from the **CM** website; it'll make a hell of a difference. Go easy with the quantise, too – your hats are too regimented. Great chorus, though!

**computer
music****WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY MIX?**

Pro engineer **Sean Vincent** offers some sage words of advice to **CM** reader and potential soundtrack composer **Paul Topham**...

**Paul Topham
Geshelt**

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Paul hasn't told us what kind of market he's trying to break into with this track, but I'd suggest that he should aim to get into soundtracks. This piece is nearly eight minutes long and doesn't fit into any contemporary genre that I know of. It's kind of a mix of dub, ambient house and lounge music.

The nondescript cover for the CD is perfect for this, because you can't see what it's supposed to be... in the same way that I can't hear what the music is supposed to be.

Arrangement

Things start with a droning atmospheric sample that just wobbles on all through the entire seven and three quarter minutes running time. It's an interesting sound, but after a couple of minutes, it really starts to get annoying. To alleviate the boredom, at around one minute an electric piano comes in. This doodles about for a while until, at about two minutes, the drum loop comes in. At this point it's joined by a nice dub bass riff that is understated enough not to make things too busy. Then the Rhodes kind of sound comes back, but this time higher up the scale, playing jazzy chords in a staccato style. The bass drops out for about 30 seconds while the atmosphere sounds are brought back up in the mix, and then it appears again until, at around six minutes, it and the drums disappear for good. From here the arrangement seems to be a reverse of the intro section, until it fades out with just the drone and the electric piano. To be fair, this kind of music doesn't have much in the way of rules, so it's hard to criticise the arrangement, but for me, the intro is too long and the outro is too similar to it. The track is just getting interesting when it all breaks down again. I'd have stuck a completely different section in there to give it a bit more interest.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation is fairly sparse. There's the drone sample that Paul made himself using a load of loops put through Spektral Delay and a bit of reversed wah guitar. Then there's the Rhodes kind of sound, a deep bass guitar and some drum loops. The loops come from the Cyclick collection on

What the artist says

"I started this track in Ableton Live by looping a couple of non-rhythmic samples: one a synth loop put through Spektral Delay and the other a bit of wah wah guitar pitched down and reversed. These combined nicely to form a kind of background wash that I could import into Cubase. "I then added a simple bassline and some beats (mostly Cyclick samples from your CD), a bit of electric piano and some assorted synth noodling. It's quite a simple track, really, but I've aimed for a slightly messy, organic feel."

Equipment used

Cubase SL, Ableton Live, NI Kontakt, NI Spektral Delay, AAS Lounge Lizard, Yamaha B5000 bass guitar



our cover disks, but Paul doesn't say what the other sources are. I'd guess that the sounds are all from his soft synth collection, or maybe samples from a soft sampler. The Rhodes sound is great in the higher registers, but the low parts sound too muffled. The bass is spot-on, though. If it is a sample of a synth, it's been well played and treated. The loops are fine and he's used them well to drive that part of the song along. If there's a weak point, it's the drone sample. It's very clever and quite atmospheric, but I feel it's just masking the lack of a proper song structure.

Engineering

Based as they are around a sampled drum loop (supplied by the sampling geniuses at Cyclick), you would expect the drums to be good, and they are. The bass, too, sits just right for that dub feel. The electric piano, however, seems a bit confused. When it's played low it's too resonant – it's got too much low-mid energy. When it's played high, on the other hand, it's a little quiet. This is nothing that couldn't be sorted with a little compression and EQ, but it hasn't been, so it's obviously passed Paul's quality control. He needs to work on his mixes a bit more.

Overall

It's easy to pick holes in this kind of music, but the truth is that if this was the opening piece in a sci-fi film's soundtrack, you'd never think twice about it. With a little improvement in the engineering and arrangement, Paul could think about trying to get into this area of the business. As a commercial music release, I'd say it'd be unlikely to raise any eyebrows in A&R departments. Either way, I'd advise Paul to spend time on the engineering and arrangement of his next tune to make it more polished and interesting. • SV

■ **Sean Vincent** is currently writing and recording for a new Sony artist, as well as working on new tracks for Kim Wilde