

PC VST Brass ROMpler  
DSK WWW.DSKMUSIC.COM



## ON THE RECORD

Victor Márquez



The man behind DSK Music has been an amateur musician since 1990, composing electronic, R&B and hip-hop music. He produced his first software in 1997. "I have tried to improve little by little since then. I believe that I'm a simple musician, who one day had a mystical revelation where I saw the God of the oscillators, and since then I

practice the VST religion - Alleluia!"

Right... OK. "Considering that I'm an amateur programmer, I don't believe in releasing paid-for versions of my work" he admits. "I was looking for a free brass instrument for a long time. Finally I decided to create one, and I'm very happy with the result."

And as for Victor's future plans? "I'm considering buying Native Instruments and probably Steinberg too. OK, maybe not, so for the moment I'll continue programming - it's a good hobby!"

## DSK Brass

The human voice and brass instruments are arguably the last two Holy Grails of electronic instrument design. Both are hugely difficult to replicate in software, although brass is probably the easier of the two. For years, hardware synth manufacturers have included (pretty standard, it has to be said) brass presets on instruments, but software manufacturers haven't been quite as prolific. And finding freeware examples of brass instruments is near impossible, so it was with some surprise that we came across DSK's Brass. It was released in late 2006 and DSK claim that they have had over 30,000 downloads, so they must be doing something right!

### Brass with class?

A Pentium III PC with 'at least' 512MB will run the software, so it's not going to put too much strain on your system. That means it's not doing too much in the way of processing, which in turn surely means it's not crunching too much in the way of those complicated brass algorithms we mentioned earlier. True enough, it's based on 23 waveforms, but a clever layering and effects system makes the results surprisingly effective.

With DSK Brass, you're not getting 100% authenticity with all of the intonations and characteristics of the original instruments, but what you will find are plenty of competent presets and some quite

moody patches too. Hardware synth brass patches were often a bit of a joke and these easily surpass those, at least.

DSK Brass is incredibly easy to use thanks to the well laid out GUI. The instrument is split into two halves with the virtual keyboard below. Each half represents one of the preset partials, ie, which of the two waveforms make up the currently selected preset. Whenever you change one of the two partials, a neat graphic indicator of the instrument you select is shown. There are simple but effective controls to change the sound of each partial comprising two effects (flanger and delay), envelope shape and octave shift, plus overall controls for retrigger, portamento time, pitchbend, volume, and so on. The two effects are especially useful here for creating more subtle changes, although they can be equally handy if you want to go right off the wall as we demonstrate in our walkthrough on p29.

In fact, some of the most successful presets in DSK Brass are the ones in which the makers have moved towards more unusual combinations of sounds. In particular, Dreamy Metals (an ethereal mix of tuba and trombone) stands out as one of the better presets on the software.

Overall, DSK Brass is very easy to use and sounds good in parts. It's not accurate *all* of the time, but then again it is free after all!

## Getting the perfect brass sound



**1** To achieve more accurate brass sounds in DSK Brass, create a preset that doesn't mix and match wave shapes too much when layering up a sound. Simply choose both partials to be the same sound or similar, as shown in the example where we have the **Trombone Cup** (left partial) and **Trombone** (right partial). >



**2** Using similar sounds will get you accuracy but in order to get some more subtle nuances going you'll need to vary the two partials so that they complement one another and fatten the sound up. Here, we're experimenting with the **Delay** and **Flanger** areas to introduce some breath. >



**3** As well as using the effects to introduce very subtle differences between partials, experiment too with the fine tuning of each partial. Very slight tuning edits will create a more realistic sound and provide a chorusing effect which adds thickness. >

## Twisting timbres



**1** A less obvious use for DSK Brass is to move away from the accuracy of real instrument sounds into a more twisted reality. The software's plethora of wave shapes mean that you can get some really off-the-wall sounds going. Having said that, start by selecting similar sounds as we did in the first tutorial on the previous page. >



**2** Experiment with the **Octave** shift button and move it by 0.5. You'll hear the combined sound taking a more unusual twist. Select another wave shape, in this case **21 Brass Ensemble**, and things start to get very interesting. That preset itself is already a fat sound... >



**3** ...and when combined and pitchshifted with the **Trombone** you get a very odd combination. For even more dramatic effects, by twisting the **Octave** shift even further or experimenting with the **Feedback** controls for both flanger and delay. As you can hear, DSK Brass makes a good job of real brass sounds but an equally good job of some unreal ones!

## Setting up DSK Brass and making some noise



**1** Drag the DSK Brass .dll file from the **cm** disc into your **VST instruments** folder. It should appear as an available instrument next time you boot your sequencer up. Place the file in the instrument rack and assign it to a MIDI track as you would normally. >



**2** As you can see, the main screen is split into two areas for each of the two partials that make up a preset sound. Each of the two partials has its own envelope shape, octave shift, fine tune and simple effects sections. Functions such as **Portamento Time** and **Retrigger** mode are accessed along the bottom. >



**3** How you mix and match these partials is key to using DSK Brass (as we'll see in later tutorials), and changing each is a matter of stepping through the available 23 options using the arrow keys, or clicking on the partial name to bring up a list of all of them (as shown above).