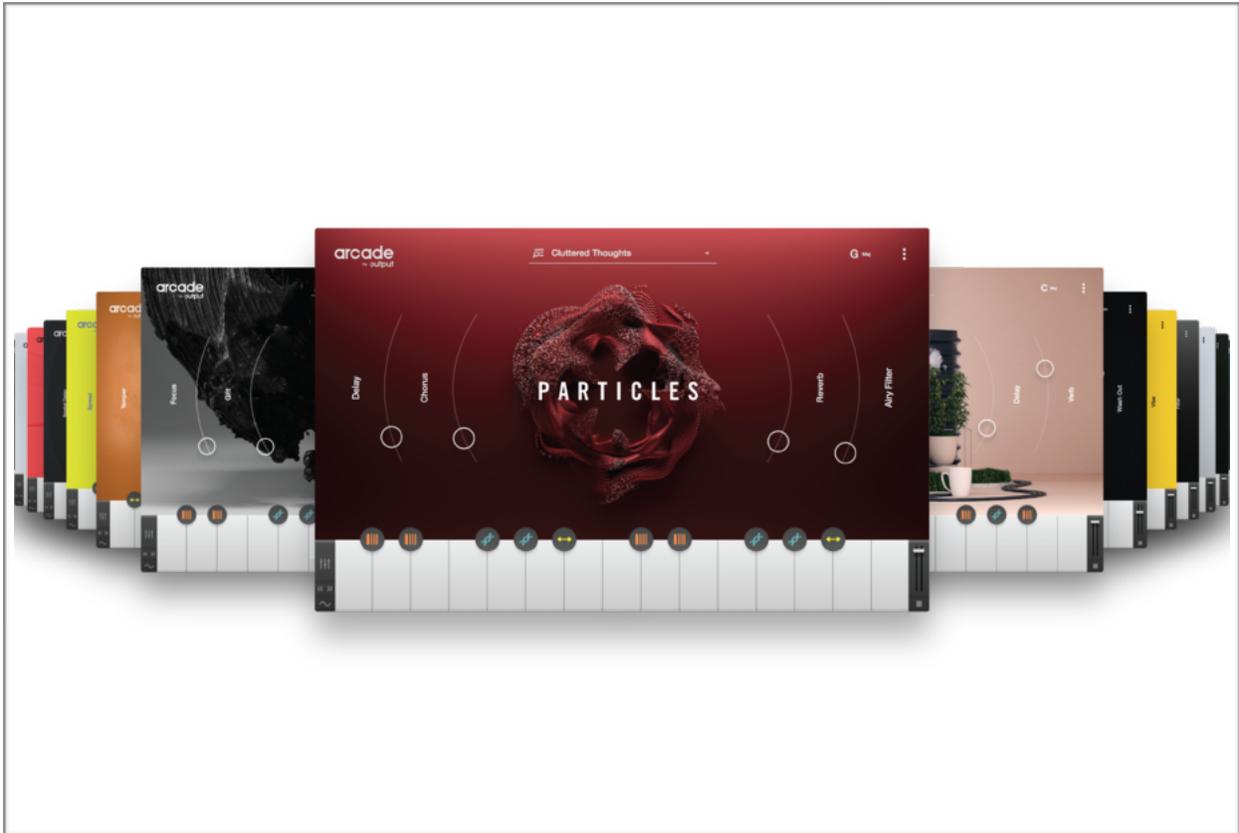


Review: Arcade

Output's New Loop Synthesizer

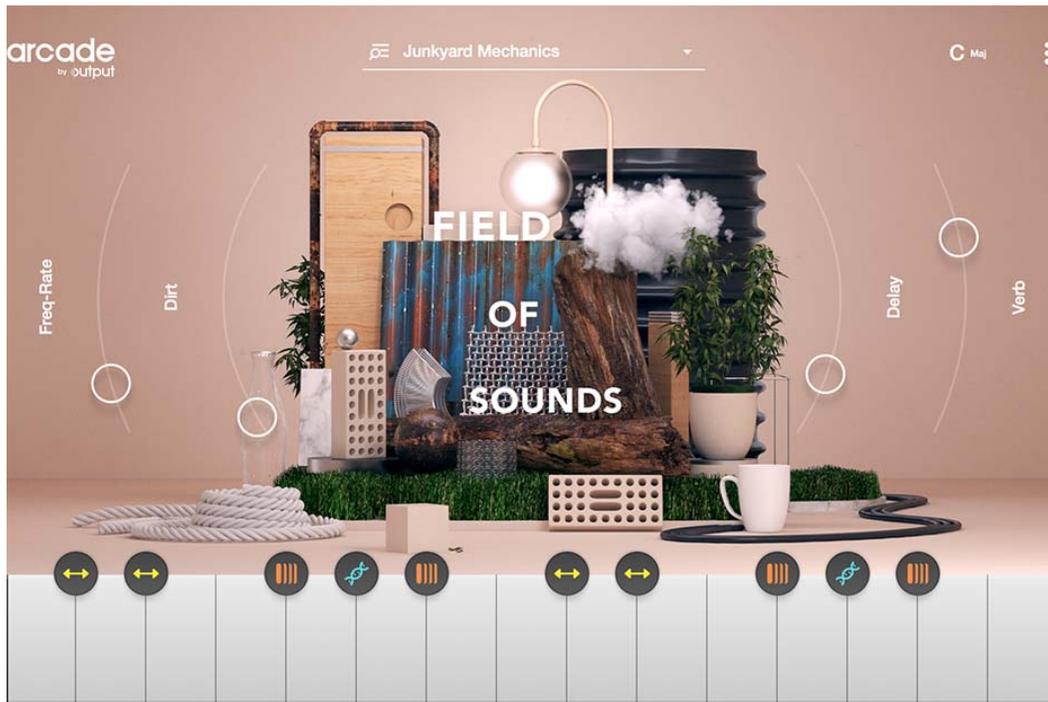


Overview

As an owner of many of Output's plugins, I was very eager to try its latest offering, Arcade, a robust playable loop engine which comes with a vast library of loops that you can modulate in real time. Granted, I'm always a bit apprehensive regarding the term loops, and there are millions out there from services like Splice and Loopmasters, but it always felt a bit like cheating to me. And would the loop I chose show up in another song? Well comparing Arcade to a simple loop library is unfair to loop libraries. So let's take a look at some of the features that will make you rethink your attitude on loops.

Features & Functionality

The way Output presents its content is the first major difference you'll notice. Instead of organizing loops in folders on a web browser, Arcade allows you to search, audition and load kits within the plugin itself, from 3 categories: Lines, Kits and Loops. Lines are collections of sounds, representing multiple genres and vibes. Lines are broken down into kits and each kit has 15 loops covering a 2-octave range on your controller keyboard. The white keys are for the preset sounds themselves



Beautiful and easy-to-use GUI.

which include everything from drums and other rhythmic beats to arpeggios to cinematic effects. The black keys are modulators which you use in real time. You can preview each loop and download only those you want, saving time and storage space. Once downloaded, you are presented with an abundance of options for editing, which enables you to really make these presets your own. As a bonus, you can also import your own loops (including those from Splice) and edit them as you would the factory presets. Both white and black keys can be edited.

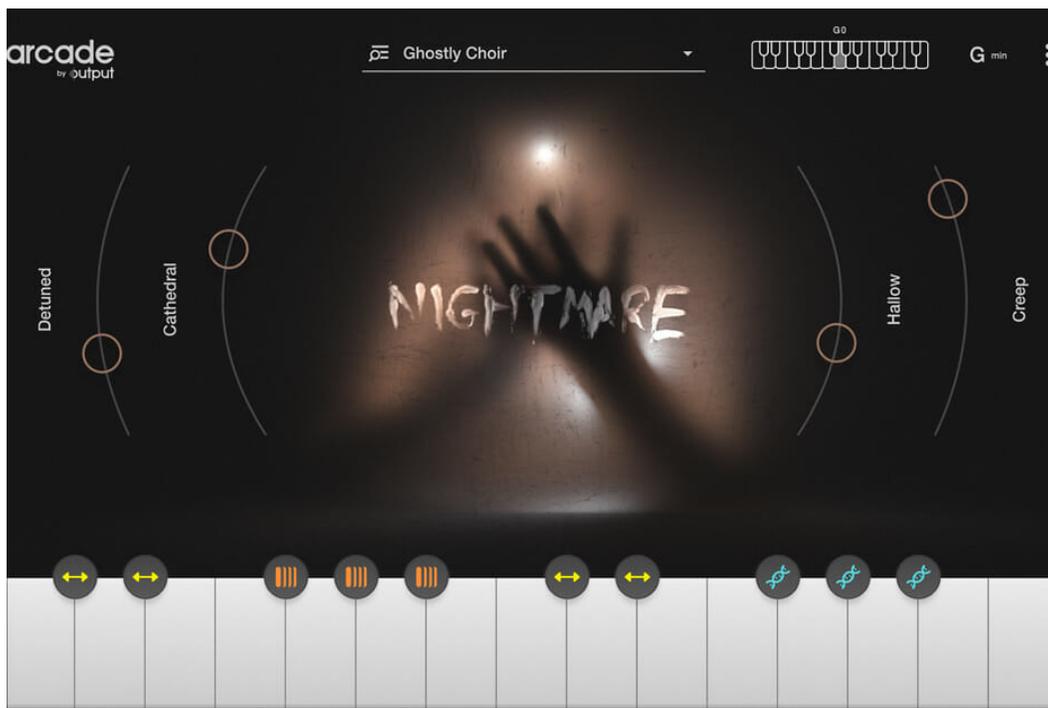
As mentioned, the black keys are real-time modulators featuring Playhead, Repeater and my favorite, Resequencer. The latter creates completely new sequences from the original loops, ensuring you won't hear them on other recordings. But even if you decide to forego this process, keep in mind each preset tempo locks to whatever BPM you set and you can select different keys, including changes from major to minor, flattening the 3rd in chords and arpeggios, taking out the guesswork for beginners and adding yet another touch of uniqueness to your composition.



Each loop offers abundant editing options.

The white keys also have their own Edit function that allows you to adjust volume, panning, attack time, release time, crossfade time, speed, tuning, send level and filters. Arcade's Mixer assigns a channel strip for each loop, which controls volume, pan and send level for each white key. In addition, there's a master bus which allows you to add 4 different audio effects of your choosing, including chorus, compressor, multi-tap and stereo delays, distortion, EQ, filter, limiter, lo-fi effect, phaser and, of course, reverb.

Now, given all these options, you might think the learning curve is intense, but I assure you it isn't. Its sparse, beautiful interface, (Output never fails to deliver in this regard) is intuitive, never intimidating and easy to navigate, so you'll feel comfortable jumping right in. Each kit has four sliders unique unto itself and of course you can edit these as well by opening the Macro Overview and making changes as you see fit.



Each kit has 4 unique sliders for quick real-time edits.

In all honesty, I haven't dug as deeply as I normally would into the sound design aspect of Arcade. I've had this product for about a month and haven't even scratched the surface. I've had my hands full with just the presets and I've composed with it daily since subscribing. Currently, there are 23 Lines, each containing anywhere from 40 to 100+ kits and they're adding more daily. Oh yeah, that's the best part, you get all this for \$10 per month (perfect for starving artists such as myself) and new content keeps coming in. If you do cancel, you don't

lose your recorded work, for which companies like East West are notorious. If you've ever had to resubscribe to a service just to revisit a year's worth of work, bounce every track which uses its presets to audio, well, don't get me started. Output takes the ethical high road in this regard and I'm grateful. Of course, when you cancel, you do lose access to the library, but again, sounds already recorded are forever part of your composition.

Drawbacks

There are only a few problems I've encountered with Arcade. For me, the main issue is key changes. As I mentioned, you can select whatever key you like, in major or minor, prior to playing the loops, but not in real time. So, creating progressions can be difficult and time consuming. You have to create tracks for each key change but the presets don't always conform, meaning there may be some sonic adjustments needed and this can be a chore. So, where some programs, such as Alchemy and Omnisphere, offer one key arpeggios that are played across the keyboard in whatever note/key you choose, Arcade is limited to just the one key.

The other issue is you may be bound by the speed of your internet. If you still have - gasp - DSL and you're subject to iffy connection speeds, it can kill your creative flow. I've personally downloaded every kit onto an external SSD drive in the event I lose internet, but if that's not available to you, this can be a major headache.

Summary

With Arcade, Output has created a unique, easy-to-use loop synthesizer with features you won't find with Splice or Loopmasters. And while there is always the possibility of hearing certain bits you've used elsewhere, the abundance of editing capabilities, key and tempo changes narrows the odds in your favor. Use their presets, import your own or use other services loops and make *them* your own. The first month is free (full version trial) and only \$10 per month thereafter with new content added often. Trying it is a no-brainer, keeping will be too.