



MusicTech
INTERVIEW

The Qemists

An approach that blends rock with drum'n'bass and a studio full of hardware makes The Qemists perhaps not the most obvious candidates when it comes to identifying users of NI software. A peek into their studio, however, reveals otherwise...

NATIVE FAVES The Qemists' Leon on his favourite NI software



1 KONTAKT
With Kontakt's groups and outputs under control, The Qemists use the soft sampler extensively. Leon explains how Kontakt has revolutionised The Qemists' workflow: "Now we have finally worked out how to use these to our advantage, Kontakt can run almost an entire project from one instance of the VSTi."



2 MASSIVE
Massive is, er, a massive part of The Qemists' sound as well. In fact, it is a large part of D'n'B full stop, popular with many of the genre's biggest names. "Massive's Performer LFO is genius – complex filtering is a huge part of drum'n'bass production, and this feature cuts out a lot of time automating."



3 KONTAKT (AGAIN)
Back to Kontakt – and it's the Banks in the software that Leon uses the most. "I'd imagine that not everyone uses these, but connect them to a MIDI foot controller and you have yourself an awesome live instrument, capable of layering several sounds in different combinations with each patch."

Dan Arnold, Liam Black and Leon Harris are The Qemists: a trio from Brighton who are making friends with all the right people in the music industry with their unique blend of uptempo drum'n'bass and rock. It's an initially odd combination and the band members have similarly diverse backgrounds in music-making. As well as being producers in their own right, they can also be found behind the controls at live gigs by the likes of Lady Sovereign and the mighty Basement Jaxx, and have remixed a wide variety of artists including Roots Manuva, The Cooper Temple Clause and label-mates Coldcut.

The rock side of The Qemists' sound simply arose from the fact that they started out as a rock band. After discovering the joys of drum'n'bass more than a decade ago, the trio tried to keep both passions going separately, so would release music in both styles. But they eventually realised that they could merge them successfully and create an altogether new sound.

And it's a sound that's certainly made waves. Fellow D'n'B rockers Pendulum are big fans and they also have friends at Radio 1 – Zane Lowe is a big supporter of their debut release, a remix of Coldcut's *Everything Is Under Control*, a track that Laurent Garnier described as "a phat monster mother***ker." He liked it, then...



The Qemists began life as a rock band and 'real instruments' are still a key component of their sound – but they're no longer the only one.

As you can see from the photos, the band aren't afraid of literally surrounding themselves with gear, both in the studio and within their live setup. They are currently in the midst of a massive gigging schedule that will see them play a string of festivals from Bestival to Glade. They will also be playing many dates across Europe and Japan. On stage they rock out in the traditional way, but also rely on a couple of laptops that not only help with the dance angle, but enable them to DJ as well. The Qemists are nothing if not versatile.

"As we spent more time in the studio, our sound took on more programmed elements." LEON HARRIS

So, the obvious starting question is: why the clash of sounds? Surely rock and drum'n'bass are two very disparate genres. It's certainly not an obvious path that they have taken...

"The Qemists' philosophy on music is, 'Do your own thing,'" says Leon by way of reply. "These were wise words handed down to us from Coldcut a long time ago. The title of our debut album, *Join The Q*, is, on one level, ironic and suspicious because we have rarely followed any path but our own. We like to take the best of all genres and carefully mix them into a single, intense experience.

"We started playing together as a rock band and got more and more into recording our own demos as time went on," he continues. "As we spent more time in the studio, our sound took on more programmed elements. We'd say that the mix of live music and programmed music in The Qemists now is about 50-50."

And they are obviously still fans of their gear – but it seems like the software might be taking over.

First Kontakt

"One of the first pieces of gear we ever had in the studio was an E-mu hardware sampler," Leon says. "That has long since been replaced by Native Instruments' Kontakt – thank God – which we now use for drums, basses and ▶

SELECTED KIT LIST

- Ableton Live
- AKAI MFC42
- Focusrite Liquid Mix & ISA 430
- Line 6 POD & DL4
- M-Audio X-Session
- NI Kontakt, Guitar Rig & Massive
- Roland Juno-60 & SPDS
- Waldorf Pulse
- Steinberg Nuendo
- Dynaudio speakers
- TC PowerCore