



FXpansion

BFD DELUXE COLLECTION

FXpansion drummed up the support of legendary producer Steve Albini to create one of the most ambitious drum samplers yet. **Mike Hillier** stays ahead of the beat.

KEY FEATURES

- 55GB of drums
- Create unique drumkits from the massive selection of kicks, snares, toms, cymbals and hi-hats
- Mix three types of ambience with the direct recordings
- Control the routing in your sequencer

BFD DELUXE COLLECTION

Manufacturer **FXpansion**

Price **£150**

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Web **www.fxansion.com**

Minimum system requirements

PC 1GHz processor, Windows XP, 1GB RAM, 55GB free hard disk space, BFD 1.5
Mac G4 733MHz, Mac OSX 10.2.8, 1GB RAM, 55GB free hard disk space, BFD 1.5

When it comes to capturing the best possible drum sounds, there are few with more experience than legendary recording engineer Steve Albini. His attention to detail and incredible knowledge of microphones have helped define the sound of more than 1,000 albums – the vicious, incendiary drums on Nirvana's *In Utero* are just one example of his unique approach to producing and recording.

Recording drums is a particularly difficult job, even if you do have access to a top-flight studio equipped with an extensive selection of rare and expensive microphones and preamps. Equipment aside, Albini's mastery in this department is also due to his knowledge of where to place mics to capture the desired sound.

Acknowledging this expertise, FXpansion hired Steve to record the most detailed collection of drum

samples yet at his Electrical Audio recording facility in Chicago. Thus, BFD Deluxe Collection was born, bringing Steve's legendary sound to project studios across the world.

All kitted out

BFD Deluxe Collection includes samples of 69 kit pieces, including a trio of vintage Ludwig kits (a 1970s Vistalite kit with six toms and two kicks, a 1965 Clubdate kit and a 1960s Mod Orange kit), a prototype BackYard Drums kit, five Zildjian hi-hats and a large assortment of Zildjian, Sabian, Paiste and Wuhan cymbals, all recorded using a variety of direct, room, overhead and ambient microphones and with up to 128 velocity layers. The original BFD offered only drum kits with one kick and three toms, so to take advantage of the massive BFD Deluxe Collection kits you will need to upgrade your software to BFD 1.5, which is available as a free upgrade to all registered BFD users from the FXpansion website. It is worth checking the FXpansion site regularly to keep track of updates, as at the time of writing (version 1.5.0.31) there are a number of known bugs that the FXpansion team is busy ironing out.

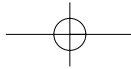
For many users, the thought of installing 55GB of drum samples may be an initial deterrent to choosing the Deluxe Collection. After all, the level of detail achieved in the original 46-velocity layer BFD library and the 93-velocity layer BFD XFL expansion

pack is more than enough for most circumstances. Furthermore, the processing and RAM requirements of an 18-piece drum kit comprising pieces from the Deluxe Collection might also prove too much for lesser computers. However, FXpansion has provided solutions to these problems by enabling users to decide during installation whether to install the instruments with up to 128 velocity layers each, or with more manageable 32- or 64-velocity layer quotas.

Upfront and personal

Having used BFD with the XFL and 8-Bit Kit expansion packs for some time, we have become somewhat accustomed to the Eldorado Studios sound (so much so that we often use the impulse response from the Eldorado room – provided as a free download to registered BFD users on the FXpansion website – as a basis for convolution reverb on other instruments). So, when we first loaded up the BFD Deluxe Collection kits, our attention was immediately grabbed by the tighter sound of the drums in the smaller Electrical Audio Studio A drum room.

The tight, punchy sound is well suited to aggressive playing styles, where the drums need to be upfront in the mix. This is ideal for metal, punk or rock, which shouldn't come as much of a surprise given Steve Albini's history with bands such as Nirvana, Slint, The Pixies and PJ Harvey. The vintage Ludwig 1970s Vistalite kit is perfect for



hard rock – it was one of these kits that helped define the genre when played by John Bonham for Led Zeppelin.

Less aggressive styles can also benefit from the upfront, punchy sound that is produced by BFD Deluxe. Many of the kick drums have been sampled with a selection of beaters, enabling you to select a softer, more rounded kick sound while keeping it clearly at the front of the mix. Listen to any of Albini's work with singer-songwriter Nina Nastassia for ample proof that a tight, focused drum sound can work wonderfully in simple acoustic arrangements.

BFD Deluxe contains some kit pieces recorded with up to 128 velocity layers, one for each MIDI velocity setting.

But is there a need for this level of detail? Put simply, yes. 128 velocity layers really does add to the level of realism when compared to the same instrument in the 64- or 32-layer installations. In isolation, a single sample doesn't sound any more impressive regardless of the number of layers involved, but when played as part of a drum track, the differences become apparent. Instruments that are triggered repeatedly sound more natural with a greater number of velocity layers as

RECORDING DRUMS IS A PARTICULARLY TRICKY JOB, EVEN IF YOU DO HAVE ACCESS TO A TOP-FLIGHT STUDIO.

The more the merrier

When BFD was first released, each instrument had up to 48 velocity layers and it offered the ability to mix between four different mic sources. The level of detail was such that a recording made with it was nearly impossible to distinguish from the real thing. With the XFL expansion set, not only were more kit pieces added, but the detail was taken up to a staggering 93 velocity layers. In its full installation,

BFD is able to play more unique samples each time that instrument is triggered. A hi-hat part that modulates between velocity levels of 81–90 throughout a track, for instance, will be able to call on ten unique samples in the 128-layer installation, but only five in the 64-layer installation, and two or three in the 32-layer installation.

With this in mind we can foresee future libraries for BFD that use even greater numbers of samples,

Measuring Up

The only other drum sampler capable of producing acoustic drum sounds as accurately as BFD is ToonTrack's Superior Drummer range, DFH Superior and Superior Custom & Vintage (both £166). Each of these 35GB libraries uses the Superior plug-in, which enables users to determine how much bleed from each instrument enters the other mics, providing even greater control over the mix.

alternating between samples at the same velocity whenever two notes of equal velocity are played. Whatever FXpansion has in mind for BFD, if it is anything like as good as this, it can't fail to impress. **MTM**

METHOD SPOT

To use BFD Deluxe Collection you will need to have version 1.5 of the BFD engine, which can be downloaded for free by registered users of BFD from the FXpansion website. Version 1.5 adds a second mixer page, with a further nine instrument slots and the ability to load any kit piece into any slot. In this way you can load massive kits such as the Ludwig Vistalite – with both kicks and all six toms – and still have room for hi-hats, cymbals and even a percussion piece or two from the XFL or 8-Bit Kit expansions.

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- Engineered by Steve Albini
- Exceptional sound quality
- Tight, punchy sounds
- User retains full control

WALK ON BY

- You need a registered copy of BFD
- High system requirements for full installation

VERDICT

One of the most exciting plug-ins around just got better. If you have BFD and are looking to expand into more aggressive, forward sounds, this is the package for you.



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