

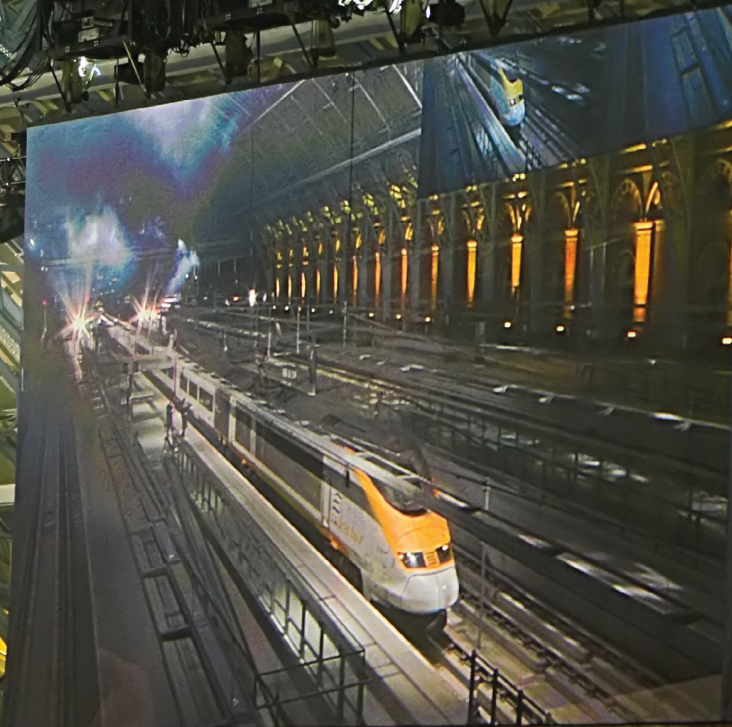
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Classic Gear: The Akai S1000 Sampler

Rob Halliday takes a nostalgic but instructive look back at the tools that have shaped the industry . . .

From where we sit now, comfortably inside the 21st Century - when iPods abound and even cheap PCs happily double as video editing suites - it can be hard to comprehend the revolution that was the Akai S1000 Sampler.

But at a time when audio editing for theatre was accomplished with a razor blade, it was revolutionary. Its introduction in 1988 meant that, in the middle of Revoxes and cart machines, there was suddenly a reasonably affordable, digital, CD-quality (16bit, 44.1kHz), 16-voice stereo sampler capable of storing up to 200 samples. Sound editing became about what you wanted to achieve rather than what you could physically achieve . . . or, at least, what you wanted to achieve within the maximum sample time that the early models offered - 23 seconds of mono audio with the sampler's base 2MB memory configuration.

As well as its relatively low cost, the S1000's strengths were its rugged construction, its relative ease of use, and its versatility. The case was tough and rack-mountable. Operation was through a compact, blue-backlit LCD display above a set of softkeys used for menu navigation, and two rotary knobs for parameter setting and picking edit points within samples. As well as trimming functions, the S1000 offered a multitude of digital filters, up to eight loop points within a sample, reverse playback, crossfade looping and more. From software version 1.3 onwards (software was stored in EPROM, but new software could be run from the S1000's built-in floppy drive by the user or installed into the EPROMs by Akai) the S1000 gained 'time stretch' - the ability to change the length of a sample without changing its pitch.

Connection to the outside world was versatile: for audio, XLR and 1/4" jack plugs on the front panel, a stereo out, eight assignable outputs, effect send and return, and a footswitch input on the back panel, plus

MIDI in, thru and out connectors allowing the S1000 to control or be controlled by other devices. Internal memory could be expanded up to 32Mb. File storage was to the built-in 3.5" floppy; for those with bigger budgets, expansion cards allowed either a SCSI hard drive or (once again setting the S1000 within a specific period in history) an Atari hard drive to be connected.



In the performing arts world, the high cost of memory and storage meant that the S1000's revolution was gradual. At first, the sampler would be used to create effects then played back from tape. Then the S1000 and its successors (the S1100, later S3000 series) would be used for precise (and silent - no 'ka-chunk' of a Revox starting to play!) cueing of spot effects, while the tape decks handled the longer background effects like wind and rain. Later, the samplers would handle everything - but with new effects loaded from hard drive as required, often in the interval. And now, computers handle all of the editing playback with no thought of memory costs at all . . .

Away from theatre? Well, the S1000 is credited with allowing the creation of drum and bass/jungle music, is still used by a whole raft of musicians and, like so many classic products of the period, is available for very reasonable prices on eBay!

The S1000 user manual and software versions are available from:

>>> www.akaipro.com/archives.php

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