

SOUND FORGE PRO ADVANCED WAVEFORM EDITOR

New Developer, New Version, New Features

In late 2012, Sony Creative Software released the first Mac version of Sound Forge, its wave editor that had previously been for Windows only. In mid-2016, the German developer Magix (Simplitude, Sequoia, Spectralayers Pro) purchased a majority share in Sony Creative Software, and we now have the first update of the editor since the transfer of ownership. The application is fundamentally the same but adds some useful new features.

Sound Forge is a 64-bit float application that can record and play back up to 32 channels of 24-bit, 192kHz audio. It can read and output in multiple audio formats and supports burning Red Book audio CDs. The GUI is quite flexible, allowing users to open and display two different files in editor windows, with more open under tabs. Utility windows such as the Channel Meters, Plug-In Chooser, Media Browser and others can be opened on the sides or bottom of the screen. By default, the two open sound files stack vertically, but you can change them to horizontal.

In addition to a standard waveform display, each song file has an Overview Bar, which is a narrow lane above the main display that shows the entire file, no matter how much you're zoomed in on the waveform. It's useful for quickly navigating from one section to another.

One area in which the GUI is not flexible is its color scheme: There's no way to customize the color of the background or the rather retro-looking waveforms. There's no spectral display in Sound Forge, either, but the program is designed to integrate with Magix's Spectralayers Pro, a spectral editing application. If you want to edit spectrally and don't want to pony up for an additional program, there's another option: Open your audio in iZotope's RX Elements software, which is bundled with Sound Forge Pro Mac 3. It features a standalone RX window with spectral editing. RX Elements has only some of the modules included in fuller versions of RX, but does offer some useful tools, including De-Click, De-Clip, De-Hum and Voice De-Noise. You get all four in plug-in format, too, allowing them to be opened directly in Sound Forge.

Also included is iZotope's Ozone Elements. This standalone application is essentially a preset-only version of Ozone 7. It comes with all the Ozone 7 presets (including the Greg Calbi collection), but with only a couple of parameters per preset. Nevertheless, its results are impressive.



The Sound Forge GUI with the Loudness Meter open at the bottom.

The iZotope applications would cost \$129 each if purchased separately.

One other application, Convrt, also comes with the program. It's an easy-to-use and powerful batch converter that lets you not only convert multiple files to other formats, but also add metadata and even process the files with plug-ins. The interface looks similar to Sound Forge, and it makes you wonder why Magix didn't just merge its functionality, saving the trouble of opening files in a separate program. If you count the two iZotope programs, there are four different applications in Sound Forge's ecosystem, which is not a particularly integrated approach.

The editing interface is flexible and powerful, offering four different modes. In Time mode, it functions as a standard stereo editor with cut, copy, and paste operations, zooming to the sample level, snapping options and so forth. Pencil Mode lets you draw in waveforms to fix glitches. Event Mode lets you designate regions and then move them around relative to each other, and even overlap them. This is ideal for album mastering, as you can create a region for each song, then manually adjust the spacing and create fades between them. The final mode, Envelope Mode, can be used to automate the parameters of effects that are opened in the Plug-In Chain.

Sound Forge also has a useful feature called Find/Repair. With the Find option selected, you can set it to search for a variety of glitches and specific events. These include End of Silent Region or Largest Peak, Level Above (the first instance where level exceeds the Find Window's

Threshold slider) or Clip. The Clipping detection is new to version 3.

The Repair side offers three options. Interpolate replaces the selection with a straight line connecting the points just before and after the selection, and is only useful for very short glitches. Replace uses what comes before as source material and replaces the selection. Other than the size of the selection, there are no other adjustable parameters, so these de-glitching features are not nearly as effective as those in iZotope RX's impressive Spectral Repair module (unfortunately not included in RX Elements), but they're still effective. The final option, Copy Other Channel, is sometimes useful for eliminating glitches.

Sound Forge comes with a small suite of effects, some of which—Noise Gate, Reverb, Simple Delay, Chorus and Flange—are new to this version. Another, WaveHammer, a powerful compressor and volume maximize, has been a Sound Forge staple for years. The other built-in effect is Channel Volume. Sound Forge also supports VST2 and AU plug-ins, letting you integrate your own plug-in collection.

You can apply effects to any selected audio in the timeline. A preview button lets you audition the effect and adjust parameters in real time as the audio plays, which is particularly useful. The other way to apply effects is in the Plug-In Chain, which lets you create a chain of effects that are included when you export audio, and even when burning a CD. You can adjust the order and hear the results before committing the effects on export. Most effect parameters are automatable using Envelope mode.

Sound Forge Pro Mac 3 includes several third-party processing algorithms, most notably élastique for pitch shifting and time stretching, which is capable of large changes without a lot of artifacts. You also get iZotope 64-bit SRC and iZotope MBIT + Dither.

Sound Forge Pro Mac 3 includes some powerful professional loudness features. The Loudness Meter, which can be opened independently from the Peak and VU/PPM Channel Meters (which are very informative), lets you set the meter to either the EBU R 128 or ATSC A 85 standard. You can also choose a loudness scale, either EBU +9, EBU +18 or Absolute Scale (-23 LUFS).

The meter reads out several different measurements at once, including Momentary Loudness, Short-Term Loudness, Integrated Loudness, and Loudness Range. There's also a True Peaks Meter, which shows you've exceeded the target loudness.

A new feature is Loudness Leveling, which adjusts your audio levels to be compliant with your choice of the loudness standards. You can even set Sound Forge to generate a Loudness Log. If you're working in post-production or even podcasting, the loudness features could obviate the need for a dedicated metering plug-in.

Mastered For iTunes is a new feature that creates an M4a version of the sound file (or files) you're work-

PRODUCT SUMMARY

COMPANY: Magix 3

PRODUCT: Sound Forge Pro Mac

WEBSITE: www.magix-audio.com/us/

PRICE: \$299

PROS: Four distinct editing modes. Plug-in chains. Flexible GUI. Clip detection. iZotope Ozone Elements and RX Elements included. Pro loudness metering and leveling. Mastered for iTunes feature. Élastique pitch-shift and time-stretch algorithms.

CONS: Workflow spread over four applications. No video support. Look of GUI not customizable. Interpolate and Replace functions lack parameter control.

ing on, making it possible to easily compare the compressed and uncompressed versions to see if you need to adjust anything in your mastering. It's a nice addition, although it's a little clunky to use compared to the Codec feature in the iZotope's Ozone 7 Advanced, which lets you preview how your audio will sound when compressed with a variety of codecs by simply pressing a button.

Sound Forge Pro Mac 3 also adds the ability to extract the audio portion of a video file for editing. It doesn't let you recombine it with the video, however, so you'll have to fly the processed soundtrack back into your video editor or DAW to do so. Sound Forge 11, the Windows version of the program, does offer video support, so hopefully, Magix will add it to the Mac version soon.

Magix's first revision of Sound Forge is solid. New features like Loudness Leveling and Clip Detection are excellent additions, and the inclusion of the RX Elements application and plug-ins and the Ozone Elements application add significant capabilities. Sound Forge Pro Mac 3 is definitely a player in the Mac audio-editor market; this revision should reassure users who were concerned what might happen after Sony sold the program. ■

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