



MakeMusic Finale 2014

Notation software takes another leap forward

SUMMARY

STRENGTHS New file format allows sharing of scores across different Finale versions. Better default handling of staves with multiple layers. Score Manager better organizes features related to staff layout. A number of refinements improve workflow.

LIMITATIONS No custom Staff Sets in Studio view. Cannot import 24-bit or mp4 audio files.

\$600 retail;

\$350 academic;

\$140 upgrade
makemusic.com

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THE LAST version of MakeMusic's flagship notation program reviewed in *Electronic Musician* was Finale 2011. Since then, a number of significant features have been added in both Finale 2012 and the latest release, Finale 2014.

The biggest news may be that Finale's new file format (.musx) is now backward-compatible with Finale 2012 files and will be forward-compatible with all future versions. This is a welcome feature for large projects involving multiple arrangers and copyists working in different versions of the program.

In addition, the tool icons have been elegantly redesigned; no more garish color choices. The new icons are immediately recognizable for anyone who has worked with Finale; the intention was to make it easier for users to jump between different machines and

Finale's new .musx file format is designed to make your current work compatible with Finale 2012 as well as future versions of the program, so that it is easier to work with collaborators.

operating systems, and have everything remain comfortably familiar. Although the new tool buttons felt a bit small at first, I got used to them after a few days of scoring and have come to appreciate the cleaner look.

The linking of scores and parts has been a Finale feature for a while. Finale 2014 now gives the user additional control over what may be linked or not, including ties, angles, beam extensions, dots, and stem length. Hairpins and trills can also be unlinked. For example, notes can be changed or corrected everywhere simultaneously while still preserving intentional differences in slur shapes between the score and parts.

When the user is working with multiple layers in a staff, accidentals and rests automatically look much better by default. Gone are the double accidentals when two

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layers fall on the same note, and the separate “high and low” rests for two parts now default to a single, shared rest when appropriate (although you can switch back to having duplicated rests if you want). Smart Shapes, like trills and crescendos, are now attached to specific beats that easily result in expressions that automatically look consistently good in both the score and individual parts as the surrounding context changes.

A “keyless” option is now available in the Setup Wizard, resulting in all necessary accidentals being displayed. This makes it easier to write an entire score without key signature when using transposing instruments. Both the individual measures and existing staves can also be made to be keyless afterward, and any necessary accidentals will be displayed.

Sound Set Since the introduction of Garrigan instrument libraries in Finale, score playback has always been top-notch in this notation program. New instruments have been steadily added over the years, and a partial list added in



Fig. 1. Finale 2014's Studio View, showing the Tap Tool, mixer, a reference audio file that has been imported, and the Playback Controls window.

Finale 2014 include Alto Flute, Banjo, African Percussion, Bass Flute, Contrabass Clarinet, Eb Clarinet, Flugelhorn, Piccolo Trumpet, Steel Drums, Tablas, and Tubular Bells. The Human Playback feature has been further refined with several more techniques and styles, resulting in playback that provides a remarkable musical interpretation of traditional score markings.

Finale 2014 can export an audio file of the score playback for dropping into a DAW session as an orchestration reference. Volume, record, mute, and solo for instruments are immediately available in Studio View or by pulling up the Mixer window, although customized Staff Sets are not available in Studio View (see Figure 1). I like to solo different sections, strap compressor and EQ plug-ins across the main outputs to beef them up, and export multiple audio files (strings, horns, woodwinds, etc.) so I can more easily manipulate them later in my DAW.

One feature of Finale that is sometimes overlooked is its ability to import an audio file (like a rhythm section rough mix) to play along as you create your score. Only 16-bit AIFF and WAV files, as well as mp3 files, are currently recognized for import, but it's worth the extra effort to create. If the original audio reference was not performed at a specific tempo, there is a Tap tool that allows you to set the beats in Finale to match your track. It's a great way to orchestrate using your ears, which I'm sure our musical forefathers would have embraced.

Introduced in Finale 2012, the Score Manager puts control over the look and sound of the score and individual staves in one window. Staff names, transposition, clef, score order of instruments, and sound playback can be edited easily with the changes to score appearance and instrument sounds reflected automatically. Adding

new instruments is simple, with new staves automatically placed in the correct position of the score, based on your score-order setting, and the correct sound played back. Staves can have different transposition and playback settings, such as when a sax needs to switch to a clarinet in a particular part.

The main usability issue I have found is that I must reach for my mouse to change to specific tools a bit more than I'd like. Although there are keyboard shortcuts within certain tools, I wish there were a way to customize what you use to switch between a handful of common tool choices by keystroke (e.g., going from note input in Speedy Entry to slurs in Smart Shapes). Of course, there is a certain amount of GUI interaction required in all major music apps, but as a Logic user, I am used to switching between tools more quickly, either with the help of key modifiers or by right-clicking. Finale has some catching up to do, in this regard.

Finale Analysis Overall, Finale's workflow has continually improved, to the point that the main thing slowing me down is just deciding what I want to write. Exporting parts results in a better-looking layout by default, and the Score Manager is brilliant. The audio playback keeps getting better and more comprehensive, and the backward and forward file compatibility will be welcome by many power users.

Finale 2014 feels very stable, capable and reliable, and it remains the standard. ■

Composer/producer Rob Shrock is currently working on the new release from UK Atlantic artist Rumer. He also serves music director for the legendary Dionne Warwick.