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Question:

I love the MIDI instrument sounds I've been making with TriplePlay, but is there a way to add traditional electric guitar sounds to my mix?

Answer:

Absolutely. One of the most exciting ways to use TriplePlay is to combine conventional guitar tones with MIDI synth and sampler sounds. Adding guitar to the mix can be as simple as plugging in to your usual amplifier while the TriplePlay pickup communicates wirelessly with your computer.

Another method, which we'll focus on here, is to route the signal from your regular guitar pickups into the TriplePlay software. That way, your regular guitar sounds appear alongside your synth sounds in the TriplePlay mixer, where you can blend and balance them to taste. You can also use the slider switch on the TriplePlay controller to toggle between guitar and synth sounds, or produce both sounds at once.

You'll Learn About:

- Configuring TriplePlay for traditional guitar audio input
- Combining those guitar sounds with MIDI instruments
- Using the TriplePlay mixer to adjust and balance sounds
- Working with VGRs (virtual guitar rigs)

Read Me First!

If you encounter a confusing term or concept, all TriplePlay controls and parameters are explained in the online User Guide for your product. This tutorial requires installation of the TriplePlay hardware, software and partner sounds from IK and NI. Please consult the user documentation at http://www.fishman.com/tripleplay for more information on these installations, if necessary.

Requirements
- Internet connection
- Installation of Fishman TriplePlay hardware and software
- Installation of IK Multimedia SampleTank 2.5 XT
- Installation of NI Komplete Elements

Signal from Pickup into Computer

If you haven't already done so, check out these sections of the online User Guide:

- Typical TriplePlay setups can help you choose the ideal configuration for your gear and playing preferences.
- Follow the steps in Audio Hardware settings to configure TriplePlay for your preferred setup.
- If you're confused by the differences between audio signals (such as the ones generated by traditional guitar pickups) and MIDI signals (like the ones transmitted by your TriplePlay pickup), read MIDI vs. traditional audio.

Once TriplePlay is properly configured, you should see the meter lights in the Preferences tab glow green as you play. (To display this tab, click-hold the Options menu and select Preferences.) You may or may not hear guitar sounds yet, depending on which TriplePlay patch is currently loaded.
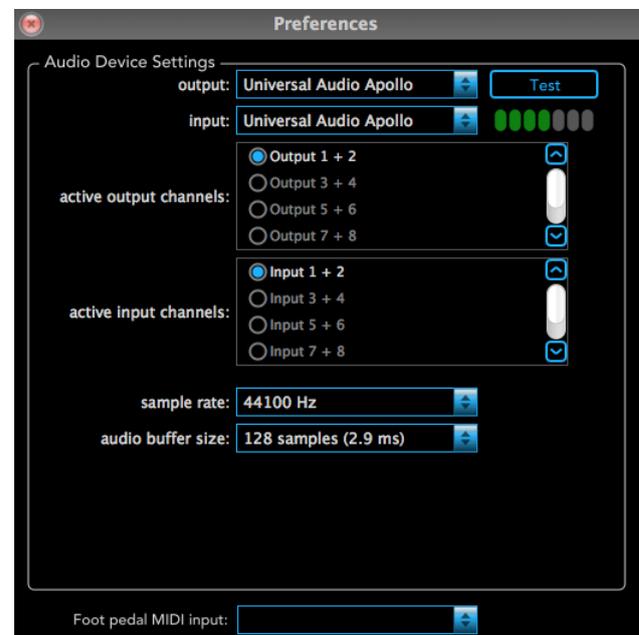

figure 8

Adjust the level controls on your audio hardware so that only your very loudest notes send the input meter lights to the tops of their ranges.

Now let's load a TriplePlay factory patch by clicking the folder icon to open the Patches tab, and then clicking on Blues Organ. Depending on your software installation order, your patches may appear in different order than the diagram below.
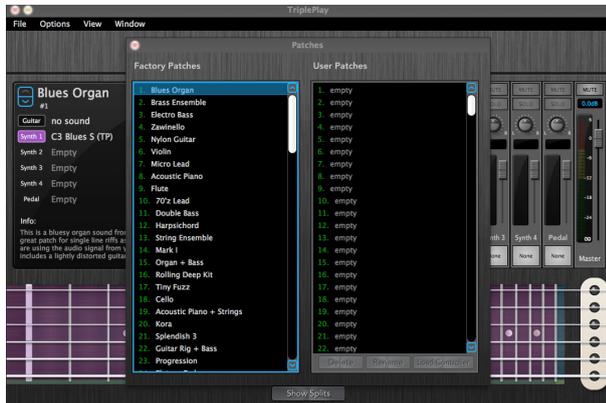

figure 9

Close the Patches window and play some guitar while looking at the mixer portion of the TriplePlay screen. You should see the level meters illuminating for both the Guitar and Synth 1 channels.

Try moving the three-way switch on the lower-facing surface of the TriplePlay controller. The "guitar" setting mutes the organ sound, so you hear only guitar. The "synth" setting mutes the guitar, so you hear only organ. And the "mix" setting lets you hear both at once. You should hear something like this: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w60fwRXS0Tw

You can also specify which sounds are heard using TriplePlay's mixer. Here you can set the relative levels of the sounds, position them left or right in the stereo field, and solo or mute individual channels.

If you've ever used a hardware mixer or music software with a virtual mixer, you can probably find your way around here. If you're new to this idea, check out this video, which covers the basic procedures: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oOjTUbaxiI

The Blues Organ patch we've been listening to has two sound sources: guitar audio and MIDI organ. TriplePlay lets you combine up to six sounds within a TriplePlay patch: guitar audio, four virtual instruments, and a fifth virtual instrument whose sound appears when you use a properly configured MIDI controller pedal. (We'll look at creating more complex patches in Tutorial Module #4, and we'll focus on using a controller pedal in Tutorial Module #9.) But whether your patch is comprised of one sound, six sounds, or something in between, the basic mixer functions are the same.

Many of TriplePlay's factory patches only have one sound source: a virtual instrument on the Synth 1 channel, with the guitar track muted so you hear only the MIDI instrument. As an example, load factory patch #2 (Brass Ensemble). When you play your guitar, you hear only the brass sound because the guitar channel is muted. (And if your controller's selector switch is set to guitar, you hear nothing, because that setting mutes the synths as well.)

To hear guitar along with the brass samples, unmute the guitar track. Now you can switch between guitar and brass (or hear both at once) using the controller's selector switch. However, the guitar might not sound very good yet. It's probably too quiet relative to the brass, and the tone may be thin and unsatisfying.

While guitarists sometimes record by plugging a guitar directly into a mixer without using a guitar amplifier, most players prefer the way an amplifier (and often pedal effects) shapes and focuses the guitar's tone. That's where amp simulators like Guitar Rig and AmpliTube Custom Shop come in. (Both are included with TriplePlay.) Plug-ins of this type mimic the characteristics of amps, pedals, and other analog components.

Let's experiment with the guitar sound. Click-hold the guitar channel box that says "None" and select Guitar Rig 5 from the list that appears.

figure 10

This adds the amp-simulation plug-in to the guitar channel, and the plug-in window for Guitar Rig opens. This is where you'll choose and edit your guitar sounds. (You can close this window anytime and reopen it by double-clicking the box at the bottom of the guitar channel.)
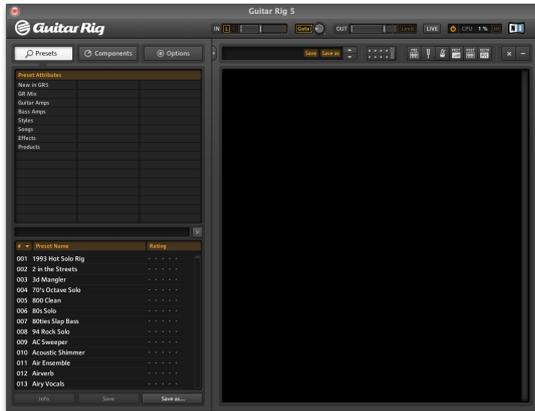

figure 11

Like the other third-party plug-ins bundled with TriplePlay, Guitar Rig is a deep and powerful program that we can't cover comprehensively here. (For more info, see the Guitar Rig documentation.) But as an introduction, try auditioning some presets using the Guitar Rig browser (the left portion of the plug-in interface.) Use the upper panel to select a preset category, and then double-click any preset name in the lower panel to load it.

Here's a video demonstrating the steps described above:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzMdSPYxOtk

Try creating some new patches by mixing synths and guitars as described here. (Sometimes sound design is as simple as scrolling through presets till you hear something inspiring.)

We delve deeper into patch editing in Tutorial Module #4, but before moving on, it is helpful to check out Tutorial Module #3 for more instruction on how sounds are organized in TriplePlay.