Introduction

A Brief History of this Guide

I have a diverse group of friends and family, most of which have no clue about music production, sound design, or musicianship. From these people I usually receive a common question when people visit my Facebook page, take a look at my website, or read the occasional Twitter post. This question comes in many forms, but it basically goes like this: "What the heck is all this? I don't understand what you're doing but hey, you seem happy about doing it."

I used to find myself trying to form a clever answer, which usually led to a blank stare or complete incomprehension. Reason is a set of virtual instruments and a sequencer so that I can compose music using my computer. Something along those lines. Instead, I've developed a better answer which most people immediately understand. Reason is to audio what Photoshop® is to imagery or Lego® blocks are to kids. I then go on to say that Reason is a music studio that allows me to take the music I hear in my head and turn it into an audio file on my computer. Reason is also a set of instruments; any instrument I want it to be, and a multi-track recorder that I can mix into music compositions. It's also a way for me to record any instrument of choice, be it a guitar or drums, and incorporate that into a song. This answer seems to satisfy most. And it's the one I go with currently.

So that's what all this is about. That's what I do in my free time. But it goes even deeper than that for me. I enjoy toying with sounds. I enjoy coming up with new sound designs and I enjoy finding clever ways to use the software. When someone provides a challenge and says that something can't be done in Reason, I enjoy proving them wrong. Not to be mean, but to show them that Reason can do many things that people think it can't. And it's much deeper than even I realize most days. You can easily spend your entire life inside the program and still find new and interesting ways to use it to create what you want. In this respect, the program becomes my Lego building blocks. And the more I learn about new blocks, the better constructions I can build. That's one of the fundamental concepts that sets Reason apart from other audio workstations (termed DAW - Digital Audio Workstations). I've seen people build 4-way crossfaders, noise gates, and logic processors that make my head spin. But it also motivates me to learn more and create more with the software. Maybe I'm a glutton for punishment, but I enjoy "this stuff." And I'm happy to say I've developed a few original ideas of my own along the way, most of which are outlined here.

What you hold in your hands is the book that I wish I had when I first started using Reason. It's the book I always envisioned for the program, and I'm happy to be able to present it to you, so you can stand over my shoulder and see why I find this software such a compelling and creative tool for anyone with a love of music and audio. I hope you enjoy it and get a lot out of it.

Assumptions

Before we embark on a trip through the Reason devices, let me outline the assumptions I'll be using throughout the text. First, I assume you've read through the preliminary chapters of the Reason Operation Manual, especially the ones that focus on the Sequencer, the Main Mixer, Audio, Sampling, Blocks, and any other chapters outside the devices and rack. The rack in all its glory will be covered thoroughly here. The Sequencer and Mixer are not. We'll save that for another publication at a later date. There's plenty to go over here already.

You do not, however, have to read any device-specific chapters of the Operations Manual to get the most out of this book. You'll find every parameter on every core device explored fully. You'll find plenty of tips and tricks and tutorials for every one of those devices. And you shouldn't need anything more to get you started.

I will assume you have some basic information about synth concepts and audio concepts. Though this is not mandatory, it will help to know what a Filter does, or the difference between a synth Oscillator and a Sample. It would also help to know a little about LFOs and Envelopes. Yes, I'll touch on these subjects briefly, but the chief focus is on the Reason devices, their parameters, and how you can use them creatively and practically. The more you know about the concept of sound synthesis, and digital music creation, the better. Never stop learning!

How to Use this Book

I've designed this book to act as a reference guide for all the Reason devices that you'll find in the standard Reason rack (factory install). The rack is one third of the entire Reason program, with the Main Sequencer and Main Mixer being the other two thirds. However, the Rack is where most of the action happens. It's a huge chunk of the software, and you can't use Reason without touching the rack in some way, shape, or form. So that is what this book is about. You can use it by jumping to the specific device you want to understand and reading about it. Or, if you have a specific question about a rotary, connection, or control on a device, you can quickly locate it.

Devices are laid out in the same order you will find them under the Edit Menu, Tools Instrument Palette (F8) or the context menu when you right-click to select a new device. This order was not chosen lightly. I had a hard time figuring out the right order, simply because there was a good argument for ordering devices by least complex to most complex, or in the order in which they were introduced in progressive Reason versions. If you prefer this method of learning, I've provided a chart on page 12 that provide these alternate paths to discovering the devices. Feel free to follow those layouts instead, to learn about each device in the sequence you prefer.

Each device is cross-referenced with tutorials that use that device, and each Tutorial, in turn, lists all the devices used to complete the tutorial in question. You'll find these cross-references in the Heading section on the first page of each device and each tutorial. Tutorials are numbered 1 through 101 at the top right corner of each page to make locating them easy.

Another way to use the book is to read it straight through, and work with the tutorials one by one. Or focus on a specific device you want to learn about and doing the tutorials that use that device. My hope is that you walk away learning a new device, or if you are a seasoned Reason aficionado, you'll hopefully gain a few new insights you may not have known about. Any way you approach it, come at it with an open mind.

IMPORTANT NOTE!

Before working on any tutorials, you should set up Reason by performing one small modification in the **Edit > Preferences > General** tab. In the **Miscellaneous** section, deselect the "Load default sound in new devices." This ensures that any new device you create will be "reset," instead of loaded with a default patch. But more importantly, this ensures that both you and I will be working from the same page when working through the tutorials. I know when I ask you to change a parameter on a synth, it's going to sound correct. Whereas if you are using a default patch and I'm using the "reset" device, the device won't produce the desired result for you.

If you really don't want to change this setting, that's fine too. Just keep in mind that each time I ask you to create a new device in any of the tutorials, you'll have to go through one extra step of right-clicking over the device and selecting "Reset Device" from the context menu.

I've designed this guide to contain as little fluff as possible. There's not a lot of empty space in here. The design is limited. The layout ideas are simplistic. And that's intentional. Because I think you deserve less fluff and more content, packed with more ideas.

In addition, I wanted to display the Reason devices in full form. I didn't want to intrude on their interfaces. And I tried really hard to keep out of the images. That's not always easy. Thor is a complex beast of a device, as is Kong. But every effort was made to keep away from poking and prodding the devices with too many lines and pointers that enter the User Interface. I hope I've done my job at letting Reason speak for itself.

I started out with the aim to present each device on approximately 3 pages, with no device receiving less than a page. In order to reach this goal the text size had to be reduced slightly to 7-point newspaper print size, rather than a more traditional 10-point book size.

I also realized from the start that each page would need to be crafted individually, and without any possibility for a consistent design. The margins are consistent. The introduction for each device is consistent, and the fonts / headings are consistent, but nothing else could possibly be similar. Each device required its own layout and its own treatment. The benefit to you is a concise and complete guide to using the Reason Rack.