



As its name suggests, the Cycloops is a loop sampler aimed straight at the DJ



RSS Cycloops

✧ In the valley of the blind the one-eyed man is king. Or so they say. Oz Owen investigates a new angle on sampling with the Red Sound Systems Cycloops. . .

£275

ALTERNATIVELY

Boss SP-202 (£322, 6/10, FM103) has a few effects but not the looping power or functions. www.roland.co.uk

Yamaha SU10 (£239, 7/10, FM103) is getting on a bit now, and is fiddly to use, but it does have the cool ribbon controller. www.yamaha.co.uk

WHILE WE AT *Future Music* like to concern ourselves with all things studio-based, we have been known to stray from the path when the mood takes us. It doesn't happen often, but then it's not every day that we come across an interesting piece of gear that *isn't* designed to work primarily in the studio.

And the piece of gear in question is the Red Sound Systems Cycloops, a sampler that's been developed for the DJ side of the tracks, and given the amount of DJs who read *FM* we thought we'd

better take a look. Don't think of it as a traditional sampler though.

DJ sampling

At this point I know what you're thinking: DJing has largely been a simple business. And although there have been many (noble) attempts to improve upon the basic 'two turntables and a mixer' scenario, not much of the DJ-orientated gear that we've seen so far has actually been taken up by the DJing fraternity, usually because the gear in question has

been over-complex and impractical to use on the fly.

There are, of course, exceptions. Korg's Kaoss Pad and Electrix's Filter Factory are a couple of examples of DJ-friendly gear that can regularly be seen making appearances in a DJ booth near you, but what about sampling though? Well that's another matter.

Anyone who's tried pepping up their set with a sampler, purely for spinning in the odd loop or some crazy effects, will realise that it can be a pretty dodgy busi-

ness. For a start the extra gear can be a handful (and expensive), there can be all manner of syncing problems, not to mention a keyboard or other MIDI trigger... you get the picture.

What you need is something simpler, a gadget that doesn't need a hundred menu pages, something that can seamlessly loop whole sections of a tune, then sync them to a beat so you can spin them into your sets effortlessly and to good effect, all by pushing just a couple of buttons. Surely you can see where all this is leading?

An overview

Enter Cycloops, the latest addition to Red Sound's range, and, as with their Micro Sync Beat Xtractor, the Cycloops incorporates Red Sound's very own bpm engine for syncing MIDI to audio; very handy for clocking those grooveboxes and so on to vinyl. The deal with the bpm engine is that you play audio into it and it works out the tempo. When it knows the tempo it can easily sync sampled audio to it. It may not sound like much on paper, but in effect it can be an excellent way to kickstart all manner of tempo-related high jinks.

As can be seen from the picture, Cycloops is an uncomplicated piece of kit, for a sampler anyway. Gone are the usual wealth of buttons, a full-on LCD screen and multiple outs for bussing those signals all over the place. Instead we have a refreshingly different take on things. It's also built like a brick. With its blue, felt-effect covered, metal front and back plates and flightcase-style sidebar, Cycloops is built to last.

For getting signals in and out of Cycloops there are four RCA phono plugs on the top of the unit, comprising a stereo pair in and a stereo pair out. There's also an input for 9V DC from the included power supply. The bottom of the unit houses a quarter-inch headphones socket for monitoring purposes and a tempo selector switch enabling the Cycloops to work within three tempo ranges covering 60-230bpm, so it *might* not suit you gabba-heads!

Next up, fitting Cycloops into your set-up is pretty simple. Using the supplied cables, take a feed from the headphone out on your DJ mixer into the Input on Cycloops. Then connect the Loops Out to a spare channel on your mixer. It's no problem if you've only got a two-channel mixer. Most have the cut switch above each channel that flips between phono/line inputs, so simply connect Cycloops's output to the line

input on one of the mixer channels. Admittedly, it's not as convenient as having Cycloops return on its own channel, but I s'pose you can't have everything.

For the curious among you, the headphones plug straight into Cycloops, so as far as monitoring goes nothing's actually changed; whatever you select for monitoring will already be running through Cycloops, all ready to be sampled.

In play

Now put a 12-inch on the deck – remember this works just as well with CDs, or any audio in fact – and you'll be monitoring the deck through Cycloops, which automatically sets an appropriate input level, and after a few seconds analysing the incoming audio the bpm is

displayed in the four-digit LED screen. Now that Cycloops knows the tempo of the track, it knows how long to sample for to get a perfect loop.

All you need to do is tell it when to begin sampling, it couldn't be simpler. Of the eight pads on the front panel, the top two take care of the admin duties, record and erase. The six pads below them will each hold a sample, and the number next to each pad is how long that pad will sample for – be it one, two, four, eight or 16 beats – and this is not variable. While the record spins simply hit the 8 Beats pad to record two bars of the tune, 2 Beats for half a bar, and so on. When sampling's finished, Cycloops loops the sample seamlessly, all ready to be brought into the mix.

When the sample's been captured, pressing the pad toggles the sample on and off, so it's easy to bring loops in and out on the fly. Up to six samples can be held at any one time, that's one for each pad. And using the jogwheel and the two admin pads you can change the volume of each sample (between -9dB and +6dB), jog them backwards and forwards in time for manual syncing, or erase individual/all samples in memory.

Another handy feature that wasn't put into Cycloops in earlier models is the toggle bpm on/off, meaning you can stop Cycloops from clocking to incoming audio if you wish. This is handy when letting the odd loop roll and if you want to cue up another track without the bpm drifting accordingly.

Cycloops fits so easily and transparently into your set-up that it's always plumbed in ready to go, so just playing a normal set and using Cycloops to capture



the odd snare-roll, or a chunky breakbeat is no problem. How about a spinback that you can crossfade into every four beats? Just having those snippets loaded in and ready to drop can certainly work wonders for your creativity.

Sampling a house break, then letting it roll in and out, or just one beat of a vocal break, then spinning it into a

There aren't too many connections round the back

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mental breakdown can really get a crowd jumping. And how many tunes have you got with a killer intro that all goes a bit messy when the lead line comes in? Just sample up four, eight or 16 beats before it all turns nasty, then let the beat kick while mixing in the next tune at your leisure.

The verdict

Cycloops is a one-off. There's certainly nothing else quite like it in terms of instant sampling and looping. Sure, it's not got everything we've come to expect from a sampler but that's to miss the point, 'cos you can use it, and to good effect, after just a few minutes of experimentation.

Straightforward it may be, but don't underestimate its power to enhance your set as the results can be truly stunning. Its speed and simplicity in use make it an instant winner as a tool for adding some real excitement and individuality to your set in a way no other piece of DJ-orientated gear can do.

Couple that to the reasonable price tag (it is cheaper than a third 1210 deck, after all), and the fact that anyone who sees this baby in action will probably mug you for it, and you've got what looks like a fairly inevitable addition to your set-up. **FM**

RSS CYCLOOPS	9/10
Without a doubt the most exciting and instantly rewarding DJ tool around. OK, so it's a one-trick pony, but what a trick! PLATINUM AWARD	

INFO

Red Sound Systems
Cycloops
DJ-orientated sampler

Price
£275

Audio ins
Two RCA phono

Audio outs
Two RCA phono,
headphone out

Sample rate
Variable (48kHz max)

Bit depth
16

Polyphony
Six loops

BPM range
60-230BPM

Dimensions
202 x 106 x 30mm

Weight
1kg

Contact
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Website
www.redsound.com