



# THE DIGITAL DJ GEAR BUYER'S GUIDE 2026



The ultimate guide to picking the right digital DJ gear & software while avoiding all the common pitfalls

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# A WORD FROM THE EDITOR



**THE RANE PERFORMER: A MODERN,  
MOTORISED-PLATTER DJ CONTROLLER.**

**DJING HAS CHANGED SO MUCH THAT** people returning to the game after a break may feel it is unrecognisable nowadays. In the past, everyone from beginners to the best-paid DJs in the world used basically the same gear to do basically the same thing. But in the last 10 to 15 years the options available have exploded, making DJing not only more accessible to more people than ever before, but also in many ways more complicated.

With the explosion in ways to DJ has come a big change in how the actual DJing is done, too. New features mean that the possibilities are wider than before, with DJs able to nail the basics in a fraction of the time it used to take, and those with elevated skill and creativity now able to do incredible things with today's gear that could barely have been dreamt of back in the old days.

But whether you're just starting out as a DJ, trying to up your game having dabbled a little, or indeed getting back into the hobby after a break (maybe an extended break...), it can be difficult to know where to start and what choices to make, given this huge range of systems, software and approaches.

Nowadays there are "DJ controllers" - clever boxes that plug into your laptop and let you DJ with software. There are "standalone" or "all in one" DJ systems, that let you DJ with music files saved to USB/SSD drives or even streamed from the cloud. Then there are "digital vinyl" systems (usually shortened to "DVS") where you



use traditional turntables to control DJ software. Plus, you may have seen DJs playing with just a laptop, an iPad, a phone, even in VR, leading you to wonder: “Do I even need specialised hardware at all to DJ nowadays?”

As soon as you start to seriously consider a purchase, you’ll find yourself mired in decisions around what software platform to go for and whether you should choose a laptop or a tablet to DJ with, which systems have the features you need, how much it’s really going to cost you once you factor in things like software and music subscriptions, and on and on. It’s a far cry from the old days when everyone from Carl Cox to your mate Dave used Technics turntables and a simple DJ mixer!

That’s what this guide is here to help you with. At Digital DJ Tips, we’re the leading DJ school in the world, and we teach DJing in five areas: Gear, Music, Mixing, Performing, and Success. This guide is all about the first area: Gear. If you’re just starting out down the digital DJing route - whether you’re new to DJing entirely or just new to this way of doing things - this guide will ensure you make the right decisions, hopefully save you time, and just as importantly, help you to avoid expensive mistakes.

It draws on our many years of experience helping DJs take their first steps, and so we are pretty sure you’ll find it useful in answering lots of the questions you’re no doubt asking yourself, and to help you clear some of the confusion around buying digital DJing gear.

We’re excited about how digital has changed DJing. It’s brought the ability to DJ within the reach of practically any music fan who is motivated to learn. No longer do you need to invest many thousands in bulky equipment that’s hard to move around and difficult to

master; nowadays, you can spend a fraction of what it cost to get yourself set up 10 or 15 years ago, and - using easy-to-learn features - get yourself at least good enough to play your first “public” show in a fraction of the time it used to take.

Now of course, there’s a big difference between mastering all the tools that digital offers you and actually becoming a good DJ! The effort that goes into doing that - developing the ability to read a crowd properly, learning to sensitively move from one track to the next, complementing rather than upsetting the flow of the music, developing deep musical knowledge - is a lifetime’s work, as it always has been.

That’s why we’ve made it our mission to help as many people as possible become great DJs and DJ/producers, through our world-leading training courses. We’ve trained over 50,000 students since 2010 - so once you have the gear you need and are ready to learn the skills, head to [DigitalDJTips.com](https://DigitalDJTips.com) and browse our training. We work with some of the biggest names in the world, like [DJ Jazzy Jeff](#), [James Hype](#), [Laidback Luke](#), [Ferry Corsten](#) and more.

However, you are going to need some gear... and that’s what this guide is all about.

Whatever your reasons for DJing, you’ll find all the advice you need in this guide and our other resources to help you get the most out of your hobby..

Happy digital DJing!

Phil Morse  
Digital DJ Tips Founder  
May 2026

# THE LAST 12 MONTHS IN DJING

## AS I PREPARED WHAT I WANTED TO COVER IN THIS YEAR'S

round up, I looked back on how much DJing has changed since I first stepped behind the decks in the late 1980s. Clearly the technology has changed profoundly, but DJing as a craft has both matured and widened. The traditional clubs and bars have, of course, been joined by festival slots, but also by non-traditional venues as gear becomes easier to incorporate outside of these places.

DJs now livestream their sets, DJing happens on short-form video platforms as fun transitions go viral, and more than ever we see people who don't even call themselves DJs just dabbling for fun - whether that's to help them relax with an absorbing hobby, or because it's a passion that they've decided now is the right time to embrace. All of this means that whatever is drawing you to the world of DJing, there's likely to be a way you can engage with it that works for you.

The biggest developments in DJing in the last 12 months are the continued development of real-time stems, the big streaming providers finally hooking up with the DJ world, and the first tentative steps towards interoperable formats across the industry.

Stems have gone from strength to strength, allowing you to punch in instant acapellas and instrumentals at the touch of a button whenever the mood takes you. The sound quality continues to improve across all the major platforms, and stems are now a standard expectation rather than a novelty - every serious piece of DJ software and an increasing number of standalone hardware units support them. Whether you want to drop an acapella over an instrumental on the fly, swap the drums from one track into another, or strip a vocal out to create a smooth blend, stems give you options that simply didn't exist a few short years ago.

The big streaming providers have finally hooked up with the DJ world, too. Apple Music and Spotify users can now use their collections directly inside DJ software and gear, a huge step forward for DJs who've been waiting for their existing streaming music libraries to become accessible without purchasing tracks. Combined with the cloud library features now maturing on several platforms, the days of music only living on a laptop or USB drive are clearly numbered.



**THE RANE SYSTEM ONE IS THE FIRST ALL-IN-ONE STANDALONE MOTORISED DJ CONSOLE AND HAS BEEN AN INSTANT HIT WITH OPEN FORMAT DJs.**



**THE ALPHATHETA CDJ-3000X IS THE CURRENT FLAGSHIP MULTIPLAYER THAT PRO DJS EXPECT IN THE DJ BOOTH AND WAS LAUNCHED WITH IMPROVED FEATURES AND A CUSTOMARILY HIGH PRICE LAST YEAR.**

Perhaps most exciting for the long term are the first tentative steps towards interoperable formats with Onelibrary, meaning your choice of gear or software needn't lock you out of using gear made for other platforms. This has been a long time coming and, while it's early days, it signals a real shift in how the industry thinks about the DJ experience.

Speaking of gear, the usual big wheel of releases has rolled on, and you'll find new and exciting DJ gear throughout this guide. A standout this year has been the Rane System One - the first ever motorised standalone all-in-one DJ unit, aimed at open-format DJs who want the traditional turntable feeling in an easy-to-transport single unit. Rane also launched the Rane One MkII, an updated, stems-friendly laptop controller designed to work with Serato DJ Pro.

We've seen interesting new pro gear from AlphaTheta, including the RMX Ignite hardware effects unit for the DJ booth and the DJM-A5 mixer, aimed at remixing DJs who want to do more than just play tracks end to end but for whom the V10 is overkill. AlphaTheta has also rounded off its pro booth updates with the CDJ-3000X, the long-awaited replacement for the CDJ-3000.

Native Instruments launched the MX2 controller for Traktor, although with the company in administration at the time of writing this, its future is uncertain. We also noticed a trend in battery-powered PA systems, with JBL launching the Eon One battery column array and Mackie adding the ThumpSub to its Go battery speaker range to give a truly portable, full-range small PA.

That all said, I have to say my personal favourite this year has been the impossibly cute Reelock RP-7 turntable - just like a full-size turntable but smaller, designed only to play seven-inch records. Niche for sure, but turn to page 51 and tell me you don't want to find a reason to buy a pair of these!

Among all the changes though, one thing has stayed the same: DJing is about playing the right music for the people in front of you right now, and the technology you choose is simply there to help you achieve that. Whatever area of DJing appeals to you, and whatever you want to get out of it, here at the Digital DJ Tips DJ school we're here to help - so if you're not already in our community, make sure you head to [digitaldjtips.com](http://digitaldjtips.com) and join now. Enjoy this guide, and have fun with in your DJing in the coming year.

Phil Morse, May 2026.

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

**THIS GUIDE IS DESIGNED TO BE USED ALONGSIDE THE [online reviews](#)** on the Digital DJ Tips website. There, you'll find lots of recommended controllers, standalone systems, modular gear, production stuff, mixers and more in one place, with in-depth reviews and videos to help you in your buying decision.

The summaries here in this guide will help you to make sense of the masses of information we provide for you in those reviews. We suggest you immerse yourself in all the information in this guide first, in order to make sure you're aware of your options, and then browse the online reviews next, referring back here whenever you find something that you need clarification about. Should you just want to buy something right away without doing all the research, we offer you our top recommendations here too.

Finally, a couple of tips on how to approach choosing a DJ controller or standalone system. Practically all choices nowadays are good enough for you to learn to DJ on. Also, there is no "best" DJ set-up. When buying, it's best to trust your instinct a little; as a DJ, you're going to be using the system you buy a hell of a lot, at least if you want to get good at this game. If you think a piece of DJ gear looks too small, or too big, or is too heavy or too plasticky, or you don't like the shape of it, or you think it makes you look like you're playing with a toy - act on that instinct. That stuff matters! So choose something that not only gets good reviews, but that you feel you'd be comfortable using. Because remember, hopefully you'll end up using it not only in your bedroom, but in front of other people too.

As we all know, DJs are increasingly dabbling in being DJ/producers, so we also have a section highlighting some of the production software and hardware we use and teach with. Music production is a great extra thing for DJs to try, and having released production courses with James Hype and Laidback Luke in the last few years, we wanted to share some of the products we use and recommend. So whether your ultimate aim is to be a great DJ or a great DJ/producer, read on - there's lots for you here!



# THE TYPE OF DJ GEAR YOU CAN CHOOSE FROM IN 2026

**BACK IN THE “OLD DAYS” IT WAS ALL SO** simple. You had two turntables, and a “mixer”, which was a box that sat between them and made them blend together. That was it. Boy, how it’s changed! Nowadays we are bombarded with weird, wonderful and ever-changing DJ technology, each innovation promising to wipe the floor with the last, each manufacturer refreshing, revamping and relaunching its gear every year, shouting loud about the new features as if they’re the only thing worth knowing about.

And while “DJ controllers” (a single DJ unit that plugs into a laptop) are the most popular way to digital DJ today, with more than half of our audience and students here at Digital DJ Tips using a DJ controller and a laptop to DJ with, they’re not the only choice - far from it. While this guide contains lots of this type of DJ controller - again, we’re talking about single boxes with two “decks” and a mixer, plus audio circuitry and a way to connect a computer of some kind - you do need to be sure that this is the right route for you in the first place.

So let’s start by looking at all the other types of DJ system you’ll come across out there...



**A TECHNICS SL1210 TURNTABLE: ONE OF THE ORIGINAL TOOLS OF DJING**

## “TWO DECKS AND A MIXER”

**DJ CONTROLLERS ARE THE MOST POPULAR WAY TO DIGITAL DJ NOWADAYS, WITH OVER HALF OF OUR AUDIENCE AND STUDENTS USING A DJ CONTROLLER AND LAPTOP.**

**THE CLASSIC DJ SET-UP: TWO TURNTABLES** (usually Technics) and a DJ mixer (usually a Pioneer DJM-something). I saved for years to be able to afford just such a set-up as a twenty-something DJ. There are still pockets of DJs who use such gear, and there are scenes where it’s a badge of honour to perform from real vinyl on a system like this. Trouble is, most music isn’t even pressed on vinyl nowadays, it’s expensive, these systems are bulky, and to perform in this way is really to ignore any of the changes that have happened in DJing since, well, the DJ CD player...

# “TWO DJ MEDIA PLAYERS AND A MIXER”

## A MEDIA PLAYER IS WHAT YOU USE TO “SPIN” YOUR MUSIC.

A traditional media player was basically a CD player designed for DJs, where once you slid the CD in, a platter let you control it as if it were a record. Indeed, some early CDJs even had “real vinyl” on them, and spun around. Most, though, were and continue to be “fixed platter”, which means the round bit doesn’t actually turn when the music is playing, but nonetheless can be used to control the music when touched.

Back in the day, the first media players gave vinyl DJs their first opportunity to shout “it’s not real DJing!” (something some of them have been doing regularly ever since...), but nonetheless CDJs caught on really quickly, and are still dominant in much of the world as the standard way to DJ - although nowadays most DJs put their music on USB drives or SD cards instead of using CDs (and modern units don’t even have CD slots, just like modern laptops don’t have DVD drive slots).

Today’s media players are becoming more and more complex, too. Nowadays, they have most of the functions and features associated with laptop DJing - even the “sync” button so hated by some vinyl DJs. In recent years, this kind of set-up has become more and more like a type of big, expensive DJ controller, only with the computer effectively built-in. The only brand you’ll find in Pro DJ booths is AlphaTheta with its CDJ-3000X, a replacement for the brand’s previous (Pioneer DJ-labelled) CDJ-3000, although I would expect Denon DJ to replace its now unavailable SC6000 players at some point to at least offer some competition here.

As well as working “standalone”, all of these players can also be used as “controller decks”, capable of controlling DJ software, too. This means you can often plug your laptop straight into them and play from software just like you can when you plug your laptop into smaller, more consumer-focused DJ controllers, giving you the best of both worlds.



**THE CURRENT CLUB STANDARD CDJ SET UP, ALTHOUGH SUCH EQUIPMENT HASN'T PLAYED CDS FOR MANY YEARS NOW.**

# DIGITAL VINYL SYSTEMS (DVS)

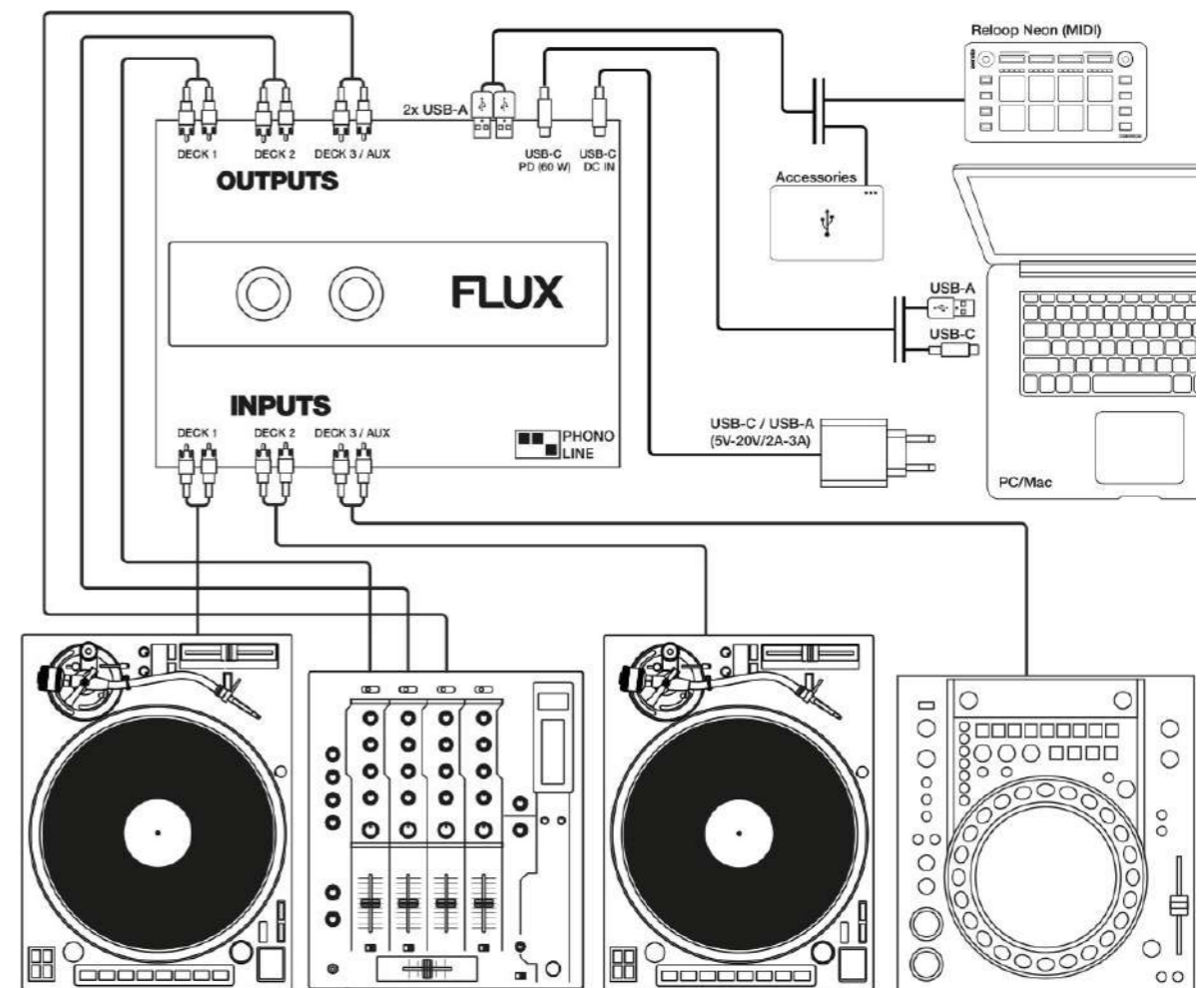
## A DVS SYSTEM CAN BE THOUGHT OF AS A WAY OF “ADAPTING”

either of the above types of set-up to turn them into laptop DJ systems. In that respect, a DVS can be seen as a “half-way house”, bridging the old, analogue way and the new digital world.

Here’s how it works. You use special “control” vinyl or CDs, that instead of containing music, contain computer code (shrill, screechy and very much not music if you accidentally listen to it). You then either attach a special box, often referred to as a “breakout box”, in-between your record decks/CD players and mixer, or just use a DVS-enabled mixer. Plug your laptop in, and your DJ software intercepts the computer signal from the control vinyl or CDs, and sends music from your hard drive to the mixer and speakers, following your every manipulation of it on your decks or CDJs. You get to use “normal” DJ gear, but you also get to use DJ software at the same time.

Advantages? Well, you can use your existing gear (or the club’s) and still have many of the benefits of using DJ software. It “looks” like “real” DJing (even though you get all the advantages of digital nonetheless). It can feel more natural to DJs coming to digital having used analogue in the past. And because many clubs still don’t have the kind of modern, digital-friendly media player set-up described above, but most do have at least some kind of DJ CD players and mixer, DVS is a failsafe for DJs who can’t be sure what they’ll find when they turn up to play at any given venue, and for this reason DVS remains popular. Disadvantages? Tricky to set up (although the wireless [Phase](#) system makes it easier), and expensive if you have to buy the analogue gear first and then add on a DVS system to make it “digital”.

**A DVS TRADITIONALLY COMPRISED CONTROL VINYL AND AN AUDIO INTERFACE THAT HELPED TURN A STANDARD TURNTABLES AND MIXER SET-UP INTO A DIGITAL DJ SYSTEM - ALTHOUGH NOWADAYS, THE AUDIO INTERFACE IS USUALLY BUILT INTO THE MIXER ITSELF.**



# STANDALONE DJ SYSTEMS

**THIS TYPE OF GEAR, SOMETIMES ALSO CALLED 'ALL-IN-ONE', LOOKS SIMILAR** to the controllers that the majority of digital DJs use, but with the vital difference that you don't need to use a laptop to DJ with them. With standalone all-in-one systems, you don't only get the two "decks" and a "mixer" like with a controller, but you also get a built-in dedicated "computer" and screen. The idea is that you add your music (via a USB drive or SD card, usually) and then you can do most of the same things you can do with DJ controllers. That means you get waveforms, beatgrids, sync, musical key features, search, hot cues and so on.

AlphaTheta (formally Pioneer DJ) launched its flagship [XDJ-AZ](#) last year with four full standalone channels and streaming/cloud capabilities, but Engine DJ is still arguably the tech leader here, with its Rane, Denon DJ and Numark models having better features, including a sampler and stem support. It's important to note that for best operation you do still need to use a laptop to prepare and output your music to a USB drive to use with these systems, even though they are starting to play nicely with cloud libraries too. Standalone all-in-ones like these are a serious alternative to using a DJ controller and laptop - although the most cutting-edge features will almost always come to laptop systems way before reaching hardware systems such as these. But they're never far behind what laptops can do...



**FOR PURE CONVENIENCE AND VALUE THE MIXSTREAM PRO GO HAS A SCREEN, BUILT-IN BATTERY, SPEAKERS AND WI-FI TO GET MUSIC FROM A SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE. IT'S A GREAT WAY TO GET STARTED IN DJING.**



## IOS/ANDROID APPS

**BEING ABLE TO DJ ON YOUR IPAD, ANDROID TABLET OR EVEN** smartphone is now a reality. Not only is it a reality, but it's incredibly addictive and a lot of fun. It's truly amazing what you can do on such devices, and with apps like [Algoriddim's Djay Pro](#) proving enduringly popular, and [Rekordbox v4 for iOS/Android](#) offering another option, tablet and smartphone DJing isn't going away any time soon.

Really this is just a tablet/phone take on the laptop-only DJ system described on the next page, and it's actually coming full circle, with a number of DJ controllers now able to work with tablets and phones, so you can use your iOS or Android device as a direct replacement for a laptop in such set-ups. Like with laptop-only systems, you'll need an audio interface for those all-important audio outputs, because of course most tablets and phones don't have headphones sockets at all nowadays.

By the way, DJing with iPads or iPhones is a bit easier than on Android: the apps tend to be updated first and more frequently, and sometimes offer better features. Android's tech is roughly comparable with iOS/iPadOS tech, but the Android ecosystem is more fragmented, which is maybe why developers find it harder to code on that platform.

# MODULAR DJ SYSTEMS

**REMEMBER HI-FI SEPARATES, WHERE YOU'D HAVE A TUNER, AN amplifier, a CD player, a record deck and a tape recorder, instead of just buying one box with the lot in?** That's how a modular DJ system is. A modular digital set-up is where instead of all being in one box, the parts are separate. You get to pick and choose the items that make most sense to you and to your DJing style, dependent on size, weight, functionality and so on. Turntable and DVS set-ups are two types of modular set-ups.

Do you only need one "deck" and a load of buttons? Then buy a pad controller, a single "deck" controller or DVS turntable and maybe a small software mixer. Really interested in triggering samples? Buy a "button" controller designed to unlock that part of your DJ controller. Got a DVS system (as described earlier) but want extra control over parts of your software that your record decks and control vinyl can't give you? Grab a small device that unlocks that stuff for you, and wire it in alongside the DVS.

Modular systems let experts "build to measure", and can be popular with DJs who want to squeeze their custom set-up into cramped DJ boxes. Essentially, a digital modular system does some or all of what an all-in-one does... but simply split across more than one physical unit.

**DESIGNED BY OUR TUTOR LAIDBACK LUKE, THE MIXTOUR PRO IS A GREAT EXAMPLE OF A MODULAR CONTROLLER.**



## LAPTOP-ONLY DJ SYSTEMS

**REALLY, DJ CONTROLLERS ARE JUST AN alternative to using the mouse and keyboard to control your DJ software.** Sure, they're a great fun alternative, but all DJ software can also be controlled without anything else plugged into the computer at all. And some DJs do just that.

Whether because they're just starting out and can't afford a DJ controller, or they want to travel light, or they just love the whole minimal thing, for these DJs, a controller is one box too many. I actually started out like this, because in 2004 I couldn't find a Midi controller ("Midi" is the technical word for how digital music devices talk to each other and to computers) that was good enough for my needs, so I hacked and adapted how all the keys of my computer controlled my software... and DJed like that for several years!

If you go down this "laptop only" route you're still going to need some kind of audio interface to give you two audio outputs (one output for your headphones and one for your speakers) - but nonetheless, this is still just about as minimal as digital DJing gets.

# WHY MOST DJS STILL CHOOSE A DJ CONTROLLER



**WHEN ALL'S SAID AND DONE, YOU'LL PROBABLY CHOOSE A DJ CONTROLLER (AND BY that, just to reiterate I mean a device with "decks", "mixer" and "audio interface" all in one box, that needs a laptop to function).** Here are the assumptions I'm making about you to make that call on your behalf.

I'm guessing the idea of playing on traditional, simple all-vinyl or CD systems is not of appeal to you - mainly because you're reading a digital DJ guide! I'm also guessing that a full nightclub-style system is an expense that's prohibitive to you. Likewise, while adding DVS to a vinyl or CD system to make it digital will give you an awesome set-up, I'm guessing the commitment, complexity and large ticket price of setting up such a system from scratch will rule this option out for you too.

DJing from just a laptop, tablet or phone would be tricky (and look rubbish), you're thinking, and probably wouldn't even feel like DJing. You're right. Likewise, laptop-only DJing is great as a backup or for those of us who learned on "real gear", so can compensate for its weirdness, but it's no way to learn the DJing hobby. (This is also why manufacturers put out controllers that work with iOS and Android devices: The touchscreen is not so hot for truly immersive DJing, even with the best DJ apps.)



Nowadays, out of all the “alternative” system types we discussed, the one most likely to appeal to you instead of a “normal” DJ controller is an all-in-one standalone system that can work without your laptop too if you want it to, such as the [Denon DJ Prime 4+](#) or [AlphaTheta XDJ-AZ](#).

They’re often very appealing to mobile DJs, who enjoy the reliability and convenience of not having to set up a laptop at every gig, for instance - but as they have become more and more powerful, they’ve also become a truly viable alternative for a wider audience too.

Later on in the guide we round up the best of these - but most people still decide that standard DJ controllers are the way to go, coming back to cost efficiency, portability and choice. So controllers will be the first thing we look at in this guide. However, just to be sure that we go into this with our eyes wide open, let’s look at some of the disadvantages of using a DJ controller (or standalone system).

Depending on where you are in the world, you may find there is considerable resistance to using DJ controllers in your local venues. While in some parts of the world DJs are literally given a table to set up their own gear on (so you can bring what you want), often bars, lounges and clubs have gear they’ve invested heavily in, and rightly or wrongly the managers of such venues can’t understand why “these new DJs” are insisting on bringing small, cheap-looking plastic boxes to DJ on when the venue has provided pro-grade gear to use. (This may explain why there isn’t so much of a stigma attached to using DVS

systems in such venues, as such systems utilise the existing gear.) Even when you have club management that’s happy for you to bring a DJ controller or standalone system to play from (at least, in theory), there’s the issue of finding the space to set up. That’s why certain DJs occasionally settle on more minimal, modular systems; having maybe a single slimline controller and a laptop is more likely to be tolerated in cramped DJ booths than a big all-in-one. As long as you’re comfortable with using such gear - and many experienced DJs are - this can be a great alternative. (Often, DJs combine this with some kind of DVS control for a truly powerful digital set-up, that still uses the club’s gear too.)

Another disadvantage of any digital system is the chance of crash or failure, as this means curtains for the music; this is why digital DJs should always have a backup plan in place, even if it’s just a short mix on your phone that you can switch in should your system fail and need a reboot for some reason.

But all that said, I bet you still want a DJ controller, or maybe a standalone system - yeah? I don’t blame you! So now that we’re definitely all on the same page, let’s start to make sense of what’s out there.



# WHY SOFTWARE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HARDWARE

**EVEN IF YOU'RE USING "STANDALONE" DJ** system, you'll still need software to prepare your library to work with it. But if you are going down the laptop and DJ controller route, the software pretty much does everything for you. Indeed, apart from giving you an audio interface for separate headphones and speaker outputs, all a controller really contains is a bunch of specialised controls that make your DJ software easier to use. It's the DJ software that actually does all the clever stuff.

It's the DJ software that loads the music from your hard drive into your computer's memory for playback, or grabs the next track from your streaming service. It's the DJ software that monitors what you're doing on the transport controls (play, pause, forward, back, speed and so on) to manipulate the music. It's the DJ software that watches your every move on the mixing controls, not only the volumes but all other controls, and then alters the audio to your exact instructions. It's the DJ software that gives you two decks, or four decks, or a load of clever samples, or all the amazing effects like echo and filter and the rest. Think of your DJ controller as a "dumb box" that takes all the glory, and you're not far wrong. Even if you go for a flashy controller with built-in screens and all the rest, it's still the computer that's doing the hard work.

So in order for you to be able to choose a DJ controller wisely, you're going to need to understand DJ software, and the choices that are out there for you, especially because it isn't cheap. That's why before looking at the best controllers for each piece of software, we are going to take a short while to explain a bit about each software platform itself. If you haven't made up your mind what software platform to go for, this will help you to narrow down your hardware choice considerably. Changing software is much harder than changing your gear: Pick your software for life, even if your DJ controller is "just for Christmas"!



**IT'S THE DJ SOFTWARE THAT WATCHES YOUR EVERY MOVE ON THE MIXING CONTROLS, NOT ONLY THE VOLUMES BUT ALL THE OTHER CONTROLS, AND THEN ALTERS THE AUDIO TO YOUR EXACT INSTRUCTIONS.**



**SERATO DJ IS STABLE, MODERN AND RIGHTLY POPULAR, AND IS ONE OF THE MOST USED PLATFORMS AMONG OUR READERSHIP.**

# SERATO DJ SOFTWARE

**SERATO DJ IS A HUGE POPULAR AND STABLE PLATFORM** for digital DJs. Particularly popular stateside and with its roots in the hip-hop community, it is now used by DJs worldwide and for all types of DJing. It comes in two flavours: Serato DJ Pro and Serato DJ Lite. Serato DJ Lite comes for free with entry-level DJ controllers, but you'll really want to upgrade to Serato DJ Pro if you get serious about your DJing, as Lite has some intentionally annoying restrictions.

Furthermore, many of the features you may want require you to buy a higher level of the Pro software: the "baseline" Serato DJ Pro doesn't even come with key shifting, for instance. And with prices from \$279 to \$449 (a subscription is also available), it is expensive. Also note that while more expensive DJ controllers tend to unlock Serato DJ Pro rather than Lite, as soon as you unplug the controller your software reverts to a lower version: If you truly want to own it, you still have to buy it.

Serato doesn't make its own hardware, instead partnering tightly with manufacturers, thus guaranteeing a high degree of quality control to ensure great performance. So any Serato-compatible controller will give you a decent DJing experience, meaning you're really looking at what hardware features are important to you when choosing a controller - and factoring in any extra cost of the software itself.

Serato is all about usability and stability, meaning you're more tied to what Serato's engineers have decided than with some other platforms, and developments can be slow. This means that while DJs tend to have fewer "head scratching" moments when learning and using Serato software, it can also feel limited. For instance while it supports all the main streaming services including Spotify, Apple Music and Beatport, you can currently only use one at a time. However, with all the latest features including great-sounding stems, it'll more than likely do all you need. The five following controllers all need a laptop to function but you can also use Serato on many of the standalone DJ units that you'll find later on in the guide. If you want the best of both worlds one of those might be a better bet.

# SIX OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR SERATO

# 1

## RANE FOUR

FOR OVERALL CONTROL OF SERATO'S many features, the Rane Four is a wonderful controller. It has full stems integration for real-time acapellas and mashups, is beautifully built, and has lots of hardware effects on board to make its "standalone" mixer (for plugging in external music sources) sound great. It's the most rounded, professional Serato DJ controller there is, and you'll likely never outgrow what it lets you do in your DJing. It unlocks Serato DJ Pro of course, but also comes with Pitch 'n Time, meaning you don't need to buy or subscribe to Serato DJ Suite to get the necessary key manipulation features.



# 2 PIONEER DJ DDJ-REV5



A DIFFERENT TAKE ON A "PRO" SERATO controller to the Rane Four, this Serato DJ Pro controller (with a Pitch 'n Time licence, meaning you won't have to shell out extra for Suite just to get decent key mixing features) is a slightly scaled-down, fixed-platter version of the also excellent - motorised jogwheeled - REV7. It does appear like a bit of a mish-mash of other DJ gear (CDJ jogwheels, scratch mixer/deck layout) and lacks external inputs apart from an Aux, but with its pro mic and outputs and mixing/mashup innovation features, it's a winner.



# 3 RANE ONE MKII

**A SMALLER AND MORE STYLISH TAKE ON THE DDJ-REV DUO OF CONTROLLERS.**

The Rane One MkII updates a popular previous model, essentially adding deep support for real-time stems in Serato, plus hardware effects. Other than that it's business as usual with motorised platters, rock-solid build quality, and a new white livery to boot. It unlocks Serato DJ Pro and comes with a pitch and time licence in the box for professional key manipulation without the prohibitive extra fee of Serato DJ Suite.



# 4 ALPHATHETA DDJ-GRV6

**BASICALLY A FOUR-CHANNEL RIFF ON AN ENTRY-LEVEL**

controller, nonetheless, this unit succeeds where its predecessor, the DDJ-FLX6, failed, by working better with Serato (it comes with Pro), and offering a more thoughtful mix of features, removing some of the more zany controls. If your budget is limited, you don't need pro inputs, outputs and build quality, and you want four channels, this unit (complete with full-sized jogwheels) may well tick all your boxes.



# RELOOP MIXON 8

# 5

**THIS REFRESHING UNIT FROM RELOOP HAS AN** ace up its sleeve - as well as unlocking Serato DJ Pro, it also works with Algoriddim's djay Pro AI, and even has a stand in the back for your iPad or iPad Pro for working with that software. However, it's in our Serato list because it has an "old school" symmetrical layout (which some DJs prefer, but which is hard to find in controllers nowadays), and - more importantly - full, direct control over Serato's effects, with two separate effects control panels (again, rare nowadays).



# 6

# PIONEER DJ DDJ-FLX10



**BEFORE THE DDJ-FLX10 CAME PIONEER DJ'S** DDJ-1000 and DDJ-1000SRT, hugely popular controllers for its own Rekordbox software and Serato DJ Pro, respectively. Now there's the DDJ-FLX10, a single unit that unlocks both platforms. It's business as usual - CDJ jogwheels, a four-channel club-style mixer, external inputs for decks and mics, pro outputs. It is better suited to Rekordbox than Serato, as some features don't work as well (or at all) with Serato, but if you're looking for a controller like either of the now-discontinued DDJ-1000s, this is it.



**REKORDBOX DJ IS A DEVELOPMENT BY ALPHATHETA OF ITS** existing Rekordbox platform, turning Rekordbox from a DJ library/music preparation tool into a fully fledged DJ program, just like Serato DJ Pro etc. There are several reasons why this is important.

Firstly, AlphaTheta gear is by default found in the majority of DJ booths around the world, and its controller range (for other people's software) sells bucketloads, too. Having its own DJ software means the company can offer its own hardware/software solutions, keeping DJs in its own ecosystem.

Secondly, this software works with the same library system as Rekordbox, the software used by many pro DJs to prepare their music to play on in DJ booths on AlphaTheta equipment. That's because it IS Rekordbox - Rekordbox DJ is simply an extension of that software. This is actually a crucial selling point, because it means AlphaTheta can bundle Rekordbox DJ with DJ controllers of its own manufacture to "hook" beginners in, and as those DJs grow into their hobby or career, they can buy more "pro" gear, sticking with the same

platform. Therefore all the work done by DJs on their music while they were DJing with a controller (cue points, comments, analysis etc) is not lost in the "switch" to digital CDJ / DJ booth DJing - something none of the other platforms can offer.

As a piece of DJ software, Rekordbox is fully featured. It has stems, good effects, four decks, a deep and comprehensive tagging system in the library, streaming service support, a decent sampler and sequencer, DJ lighting control, plus video and DVS abilities.

If you want some of the more advanced features or to use Rekordbox's Cloud Library Sync, you'll pay a subscription to move up from the Core/Free package to the either Creative or Pro version - but that said, the version that comes with even the cheapest controllers is much better than the equivalent "beginner" Serato version. Note that there is no outright purchase option with Rekordbox.

# FIVE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR REKORDBOX DJ



## PIONEER DJ DDJ-FLX10

THE DDJ-FLX10 WAS THE DIRECT REPLACEMENT FOR the hugely popular DDJ-1000, and brought everything the DDJ-1000 had, plus more. You get deep control over Rekordbox's new Track Separation (aka stems) feature, an on-board DMX interface for easy lighting control via Rekordbox Lighting, and improved sound quality. One for pro DJs who play open-format, and those who want an experience that's as close to a CDJ / DJM set-up as possible in a controller. As a bonus, it also unlocks Serato DJ Pro.



# 2

## PIONEER DJ DDJ-FLX4

**THIS ENTRY-LEVEL TWO-CHANNEL CONTROLLER TAKES THE CDJ/DJM club set-up as its influence, and distils it into a portable device for home use and maybe bar gigs. The deck controls and Beat FX layout help new DJs get up to speed with Pioneer DJ/Alphatheta's workflow for easier transition when they start gigging at clubs. Its predecessor, the DDJ-400, became a much-loved controller even among pro DJs, because it was small, laid out in a familiar way, and sturdy. The DDJ-FLX4 builds on that legacy.**



# 3

## ALPHATHETA DDJ-GRV6

**THE REPLACEMENT FOR THE FLAWED PIONEER DJ DDJ-FLX6, the Alphatheta DDJ-GRV6 retains the consumer build and limited inputs and outputs of its predecessor, but ditches some of the zanier features and adds something cool called the "Groove Circuit", from which it gets its name. This lets you instantly swap drums in playing tracks based on samples you've stored, and is actually harder to explain than to use: It's a lot of fun! Throw in full-sized jogwheels, and it's worth considering if you want four channels and don't have too much to spend - although it is hardly cheap, and still arguably overpriced.**

# 4

## PIONEER DJ DDJ-REV5

**FROM A REKORDBOX STANDPOINT, THIS IS AN** intriguing controller, because although it is primarily for Serato DJ Pro, which it unlocks, it also unlocks Rekordbox software. It's a well-built software controller, with full-sized CDJ-style jogwheels yet overall, a scratch layout (a DJM-S-style mixer section and the pitch controls horizontal at the top of each deck). If you like the scratch mixer layout, but want CDJ-style jogs, this could be the one for you.



# 5

## ALPHATHETA DDJ-FLX2

**THIS IS THE MOST ENTRY-LEVEL CONTROLLER FOR REKORDBOX** and is small and somewhat limited. That said, unlike its predecessor, the DDJ-200, at least this one wisely does include an audio interface. And if you can live without gain controls and any kind of library access from the unit, then it's a decent enough controller, either as an ultra-casual entry into the hobby or as a super-portable second controller to throw in a bag and take anywhere with you.





COMPLEX AND POWERFUL, TRAKTOR REMAINS POPULAR AMONG CERTAIN TYPES OF DJs, DESPITE THE FIERCE COMPETITION

# TRAKTOR PRO DJ SOFTWARE

**TRAKTOR RECEIVED A SHOT IN THE ARM THANKS TO THE** release of Traktor Pro 4 in 2024. It now has elastic beatgridding (finally!), stem separation, Beatport streaming, and an overhauled audio engine. The unpopular subscription level has been dropped, and the Pattern Player and Ozone Maximizer from that level are now in the software for all to use.

Traktor remains popular among our students here at Digital DJ Tips, especially electronic DJs, for whom it is best suited. It's quite complex (many think over-complex), but the flipside of that complexity is that it is capable and customisable to an extent not shared by other DJ software.

If you decide Traktor is the way to go for you, your choices of controller that are ideal for it are actually quite limited: Native Instruments has its own controllers, and so maybe isn't massively motivated to help other people's controllers work seamlessly with its software.

While it is possible to use Traktor with practically any DJ controller (like several DJ software packages, it can be "mapped" to do this, and comes with "mappings" for many popular models), in practice what users tend to find is two things: One, it's harder than they might have wished for to get such pairings to work properly; and, even when they do, the performance is not as good as with Native Instruments' own controller range.

Do note that at the time of going to press, Traktor's parent company Native Instruments had got into full administration in Germany, putting a question mark over the future of this platform and its hardware. Do keep an eye on Digital DJ Tips's news section if you're interested in going down the Traktor route, where we'll keep you updated with any developments in the status of Native Instruments.

# THREE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR TRAKTOR



1

## TRAKTOR KONTROL S4 MK3

**NATIVE INSTRUMENTS'S THIRD UPDATE TO ITS FLAGSHIP** four-channel controller comes with motorised Haptic Drive jogwheels that are smooth, silent and feel fantastic to spin on. It's also got onboard effects and Mixer FX controls, onboard deck displays and a streamlined performance pad section. A worthy update to the venerable Traktor Kontrol S4 line.



# 2 TRAKTOR MX2

**BASICALLY A REPLACEMENT FOR THE POPULAR TRAKTOR Kontrol S2 MK3**, the Traktor MX2 has muted styling, LED lighting in its base, bigger jogwheels, and has been generally well received as an entry-level device offering all the essential control over Traktor DJ Pro software. This is the one to go for if you don't want to go down the modular route or buy the more expensive Kontrol S4 MK3.



# 3

## TRAKTOR X1 MK3 & Z1 MK2

**THESE MODULAR CONTROLLERS OFFER TARGETED CONTROL** of aspects of Traktor. The revised models have useful screens, good-looking but also functional underside LED lighting, and a cool new look while retaining the build quality that Traktor is known for. If you're into modular DJing with Traktor, you'll be sorely tempted by both of these, and for good reason - they're great.





**VIRTUALDJ IS A POWERFUL DIGITAL DJ PLATFORM THAT IS** popular with professional and mobile DJs because it's easy to use and is packed with plenty of features. Like Serato DJ, VirtualDJ doesn't make its own hardware controllers and audio interfaces, but it's got the largest gear compatibility list out of all the DJ apps in this guide. That includes controllers made by rival manufacturers that have their own DJ software such as Native Instruments and Pioneer DJ; VirtualDJ's programmers just go ahead and ensure their software works fine with as many controllers as possible.

VirtualDJ is a pacesetter when it comes to adding new features, and it's often one of the first to add digital DJ innovations. Notable updates in recent years have included the new StemSwap Sampler, plus fresh updates for VJs and those who spin with visuals, as well as new livestreaming features including streaming-specific skins baked in for more engaging livestreams. Currently,

VirtualDJ is the only laptop DJ app that lets you stream from multimedia content libraries that include music, video, and karaoke files. It was one of the first platforms to offer real-time stems DJing, and has the most flexible (and some of the best-sounding) stems in the business. It's also got advanced features such as cloud-based track recommendations, in-app editors that let you work with your music at a deeper level, and even intriguing AI features such as auto generation of lyrics for karaoke and AI visuals created on the fly for your performances.

You can choose to subscribe to it at US\$ 19/month, which lets you use it with all compatible hardware, or pay a one-time US\$299 fee for "VirtualDJ Pro Infinity". If you want access to the streaming catalogues, you'll also need to pay a monthly fee for each that you plan on using.

# FIVE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR VIRTUALDJ



1

## PIONEER DJ DDJ-FLX10

**THE DDJ-FLX10 IS A FOUR-CHANNEL CONTROLLER THAT WORKS** with both Rekordbox and Serato, but VirtualDJ takes it further. The stems control available through VirtualDJ far surpasses what either official platform offers, and VirtualDJ's stems engine sounds noticeably better than Rekordbox too. For DJs who want deep, customisable control over a professional-grade controller, this is a meaningful step up.

# 2

## RANE ONE MKII



**BUILT FOR SCRATCH DJS WHO WANT MOTORISED PLATTERS IN A compact controller format, the Rane One MKII is designed for Serato but pairs beautifully with VirtualDJ's low-latency scratch engine. You won't get a better experience than Serato here, but you certainly won't get a worse one - proof that VirtualDJ holds its own on serious vinyl-feel hardware.**

# 3

## ALPHATHETA XDJ-AZ



**ALPHATHETA'S FLAGSHIP STANDALONE HYBRID** unit gets a real boost from VirtualDJ's OneLibrary integration. You can export playlists complete with pre-separated stems directly to USB and play them on the AZ as if you'd exported from Rekordbox. Used as a laptop controller, VirtualDJ used on a laptop also opens up more streaming services. Most AZ owners are in the Rekordbox ecosystem already, but for VirtualDJ users who want this hardware, it's a strong combination.



# 4

## RELOOP MIXTOUR PRO

**DESIGNED BY LAIDBACK LUKE FOR PROFESSIONAL** use on the move, the Mixtour Pro is tiny yet surprisingly capable. VirtualDJ's mapping squeezes full four-deck control and stems manipulation out of it, going further than the official DJ Pro mapping. It's fiddly by nature, but if you're considering this controller you've already made peace with that. Note of course that VirtualDJ is laptop-only, so the phone-based workflow the Mixtour Pro was partly designed for isn't available here.

# 5

## PIONEER DJ DDJ-FLX4

**THE BEST ENTRY-LEVEL CONTROLLER AVAILABLE, THE** DDJ-FLX4 is affordable, sensibly laid out, and a natural stepping stone to professional gear. VirtualDJ integrates with its Smart CFX and Smart Fader functions in ways that even Serato doesn't manage. That said, the FLX4 comes with Rekordbox for free, and for most beginners that's all you need until you know which direction you want to go.



# OTHER LAPTOP DJ SOFTWARE (THREE TO TRY)

**MOST LAPTOP/CONTROLLER DJS USE ONE OF THE PACKAGES** mentioned previously, but that's not the end of the story. There are several other DJ software programs out there, and just because they don't have the same user base as the "big boys", doesn't mean that they're not worth a look.

All three of the DJ platforms we're about to look at are capable and established, and although they're very different from each other, for their own reasons, both are worth a look. Bear in mind too that while pro DJs tend to stick to a single platform so they can concentrate on other areas of their careers, there's no stipulation at all for hobby DJs to do so. If you're inclined to experiment and try other things, do so! Many DJs have a first platform of choice, and a second - and that's fine.

## 1 DJAY PRO

**EASILY ONE OF THE BEST LOOKING DJ APPS,** Djay Pro is also powerful, packing more and more features just under the hood, yet keeping things simple on the surface so as not to overwhelm beginners. It works on Mac and PC laptops, and it packs contemporary features like Fluid Beatgrids, stems DJing, cloud-syncing of your music library, AI-powered Automix, music streaming including Apple Music, a pad sampler and sequencer, and support for DJ controllers as well as media players and DVS. One subscription covers both iOS and Mac, although it is also available for Windows, Android, even in VR with versions for Apple's Vision Pro and Meta's Quest headsets.





# 2

## DJ.STUDIO

**WHILE NOT EXACTLY DJ SOFTWARE (YOU can't "play" DJ sets on it as such), DJ.Studio helps you come up with great transitions, can automix whole sets for you, and works with a huge range of music services. For non real-time construction of great DJ mixes, it's a revelation - well worth a try in addition to your main DJ software.**

# 3

## YOU DJ

**BILLED AS "THE MOST FUN AND EASY DJ APP",** YouDJ runs in your browser, so if you use a Chromebook, for instance, you're in! It comes complete with music for playing with, and is a great way to experience what DJ software feels like, instantly. If it looks familiar, that's because Beatport browser-based DJ app, Beatport DJ, is build by the same developer. This one, though, can also be downloaded to your laptop if you like - and is surprisingly powerful.



# FIVE OF THE BEST STANDALONE SYSTEMS

**STANDALONE DJ SYSTEMS ARE APPEALING** to DJs who just don't want to take a laptop into the DJ booth with them, or have one hanging around when they're practising at home. Nowadays they're starting to feel as if they've basically got a computer embedded in them - which is because they have! And with touchscreens, smooth graphics, powerful DJ features and built-in music streaming services, they're becoming more appealing than ever.



## RANE SYSTEM ONE

The first standalone DJ unit from Rane and the world's first motorised platter standalone all-in-one DJ unit. The System One is aimed squarely at open format DJs with its vertical waveforms on a vertical screen. Real vinyl control, spacious two-channel scratch mixer, and heavy-duty build plus the power of Engine DJ, including built-in sampler and real-time stems, make it a stunning unit.



# ALPHATHETA XDJ-AZ

**QUITE SIMPLY, THIS IS THE CLOSEST YOU WILL GET TO** pro DJ booth gear without buying pro separates. It has a great screen, four channels, full-size jogwheels, built-in streaming and cloud, club-standard effects, and the traditional look and feel that most DJs are instinctively at home with. It's a major upgrade on the equally popular XDJ-XZ that came before it, and it's proven to be a huge success already.

# 2



# 3

## DENON DJ PRIME 4+

**IF FEATURES ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO** you, then the Denon DJ Prime 4+ will probably tick all your boxes. Like the XDJ-AZ, it's four-channel and has a great screen. But while it loses the familiar club layout and has inferior jogwheels to the AZ, it wins with stems support, a built-in sampler, more streaming services, and even control over lighting.



# 4 NUMARK MIXSTREAM PRO GO

**THIS PORTABLE UNIT WITH A BUILT-IN BATTERY AND** speakers actually offers nearly all the functionality of the Denon DJ Prime 4+ as far as the features go, but in a much smaller unit - albeit with just two channels and more limited hardware effects controls. It is incredible value for money, because it gives you true standalone DJing at way less than any other unit on the market, and for this alone, it's worthy of note. Amazon Music streaming is the main change from the previous model.



# 5 PIONEER DJ XDJ-RX3

**THE XDJ-RX3 IS A WORTHY REPLACEMENT FOR THE** XDJ-RX2, bringing a bigger screen, faster loading of tracks, much easier browsing, many usability improvements, and the Pioneer DJ look, feel and workflow that made its predecessor so popular. It has got better effects than any other standalone DJ unit, but feels a bit limited in other areas - it offers no cloud music functions, for instance, and we would like to have seen Pioneer DJ's excellent key sync incorporated from its CDJ-3000 players.



# THREE OF THE BEST DJ LAPTOPS

**YOUR LAPTOP IS THE HEART OF YOUR DIGITAL** DJ system. It's where you download and manage your music library and, if you decide to spin with a laptop in the DJ booth, it's what your DJ software will run on. Whether you end up spinning with media players and thumb drives or DJ controllers and DVS, your laptop will be an integral part of your set-up and it's advisable to get the best one that fits your budget.

Things to look out for will be its processor, onboard RAM (go for 16GB if you know you're going to want to use stems), hard drive space and operating system. Almost all DJ apps are cross-platform these days, so it's up to you to decide whether you want to take the Mac or the Windows route - but with modern features such as stems needing huge processing power, now is maybe the time to make sure your laptop is, literally, up to speed.

# 1



## APPLE MACBOOK AIR M5 (15-INCH)

**IDEAL FOR DJS WITH ITS SPACIOUS 15" SCREEN, POWERFUL M5 CHIP, AND** silent operation. Perfect for managing large music libraries and running demanding DJ software smoothly. Its sleek design and long battery life make it a top choice including for stems DJing with its 16GB of RAM.



# 2

## LENOVO IDEAPAD

**LENOVO'S IDEAPADS ARE POPULAR WITH** DJs due to their build quality, great screens, and configurability. As long as you get 16GB of RAM and a large enough SSD to comfortably hold your music collection, this is a great choice that can be spec'd up to work fine with production software as well as just DJ apps.

## ACER SWIFT X14

**EXCELLENT BUDGET-FRIENDLY OPTION** for DJs, featuring a powerful CPU and GPU in a slim design and 16GB of RAM as standard. The OLED screen provides vibrant visuals for track selection and mixing. Its combination of performance and portability makes it a great value for aspiring and professional DJs alike.

# 3



# THREE OF THE BEST DJ MEDIA PLAYERS

**THIS TYPE OF EQUIPMENT IS DESCENDED FROM STANDALONE DJ** CD players, the type that replaced record decks in DJ booths almost completely back at the turn of the century. As digital DJing took hold, they were first used by laptop DJs via digital vinyl systems (DVS), with special “timecode” CDs and audio interfaces - and indeed, some DJs still DJ like this to this day. However, DJ media players quickly developed further, adding USB sockets so DJs could bypass the CD slots entirely.

Nowadays, the best of them play perfectly with laptops and DJ software via direct connections, and have amazing screens and features. This makes a pair of them (alongside a digital DJ mixer) a powerful option, whether you want a pro “separates” take on the all-in-one standalones featured on the previous pages, or to assemble what is effectively a huge (and expensive) DJ controller. Oh, and of course the CD slot is history on current devices...



# 1

## PIONEER DJ CDJ-3000X

**ESSENTIALLY AN UPGRADE TO THE CDJ-3000** and a stop gap before a presumably more radically improved CDJ-4000, the CDJ-3000X adds a more powerful processor, a bigger screen, music streaming, and other features that it bring it closer to what DJs expect from laptop controllers but in a standalone unit. The current only real industry standard media player and the one you'll find in all serious up-to-date DJ booths.



# 2

## PIONEER DJ XDJ-1000MKII

**GETS YOU MOST OF THE FEATURES OF THE CDJ-3000X AT A fraction of the price.** It's the same form factor more or less and a good option for DJs who want this style of equipment but just can't justify spending the multiples extra for the 3000X. It is definitely showing its age with no key shifting, streaming, or cloud features but nonetheless it's a solid more affordable alternative.

# 3

## PIONEER DJ XDJ-700

**THE FACT THAT A PLAYER THIS OLD MAKES IT ONTO** this list at all shows what a small choice there is in this sector of the market nowadays. If you are looking for a more compact and portable media player and are prepared to forego a lot of the features that most DJs are expecting as standard nowadays, the XDJ-700 is still manufactured and still on sale.



# FIVE OF THE BEST DJ MIXERS

**DJ MIXERS WERE TRADITIONALLY THE CENTRE “PART” OF EVERY** DJ set-up, and still are away from the controller world and in practically every DJ booth in the world. Nowadays, mixers can work with digital-friendly media players, resulting in a kind of hybrid “software controller plus hardware mixer”

model - DVS without the timecode, if you like. Mixers offer DJs a versatility not found in even the very best DJ controllers, and are still very much a part of today’s DJ climate.

## 1 PIONEER DJ DJM-A9

**THE PIONEER DJ DJM-A9 IS THE COMPANY’S REPLACEMENT** for the DJM-900NXS2, the mixer found more than any other in clubs worldwide. It will be instantly familiar to DJM-900NXS2 users, but adds many new features, including dual headphones cueing, a USB-C option for laptops, and a clever new “lock” on the filter knobs for those who hit the Sound Color FX hard, to prevent accidentally turning them past 12 o’clock. Oh, and they’ve improved the audio quality noticeably too.



# 2

## ALPHATHETA DJM-V5

IF YOU LIKE THE LOOK OF THE ALPHATHETA DJM-V10 mixer, which doesn't make this list but is a favourite in seriously heavyweight techno DJ booths, then the DJM-V5 is a more accessible, affordable variant. It has similarly flexible routing, limited but great-sounding on-board effects, and bold design choices like no crossfader and three main channels. It certainly makes a statement for a certain type of DJing and a certain type of DJ.





# 3

## RANE SEVENTY-TWO MKII

**RANE'S LATEST FLAGSHIP BATTLE MIXER** has a high-resolution screen onboard for viewing Serato DJ's waveforms, performance pads, fader contour controls, and knobs and buttons for Serato's FX. It makes for an impressive set-up when flanked by a pair of Rane Twelve Mark II controllers, but it can be used with turntables and other media players too. One for digital battle DJs who want nothing but the best.





# 4

## PIONEER DJM-S11

**THE DJM-S9 MIXER FOR SERATO SCRATCH DJS** was such a hit that it in many ways pushed the art of scratch performing forward - and Pioneer DJ replaced it with not one but two mixers. The "other" one, the DJM-S7, is a modest but worthy update, but this one, the DJM-S11, has a touchscreen to show your Serato settings and allow you to control X/Y effects, that also gives you control over decks 3 and 4 of the software. It's a worthy successor and our pick of the two.



# 5

## NUMARK SCRATCH

**THE NUMARK SCRATCH MIXER HAS A** built-in audio interface, also designed to use with Serato as a DVS mixer – although it works fine as a standalone DJ mixer too. Simple, nicely done, and loads of fun, and the quality is there where it counts. Sure it makes compromises, but none of them are dealbreakers, and it opens scratching with Serato up to a whole new sector of the market, as it's by far the cheapest mixer in this line-up.



# TWO OF THE BEST IPHONE / IPAD DJ APPS

TABLET AND SMARTPHONE DJING HOLDS LOTS OF APPEAL FOR A WIDE range of people. From true “dabblers” (after all, the apps are really cheap - once you own a tablet, of course), to “serious” DJs wanting a second system, to people who simply need something compact that they can use anywhere, as the storage space in tablets has risen along with their capabilities, today’s models can match laptops in all the areas that count.

# 1



## DJAY PRO

ALGORIDDIM’S DJAY PRO FOR IOS SQUEEZES IN A TON OF features, functionality and power into an app made for the iPad and iPhone. It’s got Fluid Beatgridding, stems mixing, four-deck mixing, streaming service integration, and AI automixing built in. You get the ability to mix video in high-resolution 4K, and you get access to the Looper feature that lets you trigger loops and sounds while you spin. It’s compatible with the iPad Pro’s Smart Keyboard, and if you’d like to spin with actual jogwheels, it works with controllers like the ReLoop Buddy, ReLoop Mixon 8 and others, and you can now map it to any Midi controller using the Midi Learn feature. The subscription also gets you access to the Mac version.

# 2



## REKORDBOX FOR IOS/ANDROID

THE LATEST VERSION OF THE REKORDBOX APP FOR IOS AND Android turns what was initially just a music preparation app into a full-blown DJ app too. This makes it far more useful, albeit you’ll need to pay a \$5-a-month subscription to make it worth using. Once you’ve done that, you get seamless access to Rekordbox cloud sync (assuming you subscribe to it - yup, it’s a separate subscription), for the full Rekordbox experience across all your devices.

# TWO OF THE BEST

## DJ CONTROLLERS FOR IPHONE & IPAD

**HOOKING PHONE AND TABLETS UP TO DJ CONTROLLERS WAS** until recently a bit of a Wild West, same way hooking laptops up to DJ controllers was 10 years ago. If you were a geek with time to spare this was all fine, even fun, but for everyone else? It was fiddly. It still is unfortunately for Android (at least, a lot of the time), but for iOS, it's much simpler, with some great software and easy connection. What's more, you can plug just your phone into a full-sized DJ set-up nowadays and DJ immediately from it - it's more like a USB drive with a screen and waveforms built in!

Mostly we're talking about using Algoriddim's djay Pro, although other mobile apps do exist, and some are quite good. Also, both of the controllers we feature here are from German brand Reelap, but any class-compliant DJ controller could potentially work with your phone nowadays. That said, you'd be back to the geeky stuff with trying to get some controllers connected and mapped properly. Go with one of the systems featured here though, and you'll be up and running in no time.



## RELOOP MIXON 8 PRO

**IF YOU WANT THE MOST "PRO" EXPERIENCE** possible DJing with your iPad and Algoriddim's djay Pro, right up to using the iPad Pro, the Reelap Mixon 8 Pro is it. Four-channel mixer, great jogs and pads, decent pro-quality metal construction, and a built-in iPad stand that works right up to the size of the iPad Pro - it's all here. As a bonus, it also unlocks Serato DJ Pro, so you have a choice of platforms to use.

# 2

## RELOOP MIXTOUR PRO

**DESIGNED BY DIGITAL DJ TIPS TUTOR LAIDBACK LUKE, NO** less, the Mixtour Pro is what he's using to DJ directly from his phone with Algoriddim's Djay Pro software to the biggest audiences at clubs and festivals worldwide. You'll need a little stand for your phone or iPad, but apart from that, this can control four decks and do lots of other goodness too. Well worth a look if you want something tiny.



# TOP FIVE TURNTABLES FOR DJs

WHETHER TO USE IN A DVS SYSTEM, TO LEARN TO SCRATCH “how it’s always been done”, to rip vinyl, or even for true old-school “vinyl only” DJing, turntables aren’t going away. Sure they’re still niche, and sure they won’t be a purchase for most DJs - but they’re definitely still a “thing”. Here are our favourites.

# 1



## RELOOP RP-7000

A RIGHTLY POPULAR “STANDARD” TURNTABLE, THIS DOES nothing out of the ordinary, instead, simply doing what DJ turntables ever since the classic Technics 1200/1210 Mk2 have done - and doing it well. These are well-priced units, and you won’t go wrong choosing a pair of these for a modern take on a classic turntable set-up.

# 2



## PIONEER DJ PLX-CRSS12

AN INNOVATIVE COMBINATION OF MOTORISED CONTROL deck, pad controller and traditional turntable, Pioneer DJ’s new PLX-CRSS12 tries to be the turntable that does it all - and if you’re a Rekordbox or Serato user who also likes to play “real” records, you may well decide that it’s succeeded.

# 3



## AUDIO TECHNICA AT-LP1240XP

**A PROPER HEAVYWEIGHT TURNTABLE AND GREAT VALUE FOR** money at the “pro” end - built for use anywhere, and also optimised for scratch DJs and the “90 degree” layout they prefer, thanks to its second start/stop button.



# 4



## TECHNICS SL-1200/1210 MK7

**WHAT TURNTABLE LINE-UP COULDN'T INCLUDE TECHNICS?**

While the Mk7 version of its 1200/1210 turntable divides people (we think it's lightweight, and prone to bass feedback, for instance), many still sing its praises - and its release in a host of new colours certainly catches the eyes.

# 5

## RELOOP RP-7

**LAST BUT DEFINITELY WORTH INCLUDING IS THE DIMINUTIVE** Reeloc RP-7, essentially a shrunk version of the Reeloc RP-7000 that can only play 7-inch singles. You might question the sanity of such a product, but it's undeniably cute, and for a certain type of DJ - myself included - who have a fascination for playing singles and singles alone, a pair of these is an irresistible temptation.

# SEVEN EXTRAS EVERY CONTROLLER DJ NEEDS

**SO THE SHOPPING CART'S OPEN AND** you're ready to hit "buy now". Before you do though, time to think about the other bits and pieces you'll need to finish your set-up. Two pieces of good news here: First, you probably have some of them already, and second, you don't need much. Here's what you've got to have covered:

# 1

ADAM AUDIO'S ADVANCED A SERIES OF SPEAKERS OFFER DSP-BASED ROOM CORRECTION AND VOICINGS, ENABLING YOU TO TUNE THEM FOR YOUR ROOM AND YOUR EARS.



## SPEAKERS

### HAVE YOU GOT A HOME CINEMA SYSTEM? HI-FI? 2.1 SYSTEM FOR GAMING?

Loud portable speaker? Yes? As long as you can have that in the room you want to DJ in, you're sorted. Your controller can plug into that. (You'll need a cable, though. Don't use Bluetooth. There's a delay, see? DJs don't like delays.) Still want to buy something? On a budget, go for a loud twin satellites-plus-woofer gaming computer speaker system - the Logitech type stuff. Bit more? I love Pioneer DJ's [DM-40s](#). More? Look at the Rokit range from KRK (you'll need two, they're sold separately). These are all "powered" meaning you don't need separate amplifiers. Oh, and *don't* use them for parties. You'll blow all of the above if you do, sooner or later. Rent a PA, or use someone else's speakers (I didn't tell you the last bit).

# 2



**THE ALPHATHETA HDJ-F10 IS OUR CURRENT FAVOURITE HERE AT DIGITAL DJ TIPS.**

## HEADPHONES

**MORE IMPORTANT THAN SPEAKERS,** headphones are absolute essentials for any DJ. They need to be able to cover your ears to isolate you from ambient noise, be durable, and be loud. Traditionally, DJs have flocked to the Sennheiser HD-25 II, which we wholeheartedly recommend. Another current favourite at the Digital DJ Tips office is the AlphaTheta HDJ-F10, which offers latency-free wireless and is incredibly cool when used with the XDJ-AZ as headphones and DJ unit link together with no additional hardware. Coiled cables are preferred by most DJs (you don't trip on them as easily), and detachable cables mean you can replace them if they break.



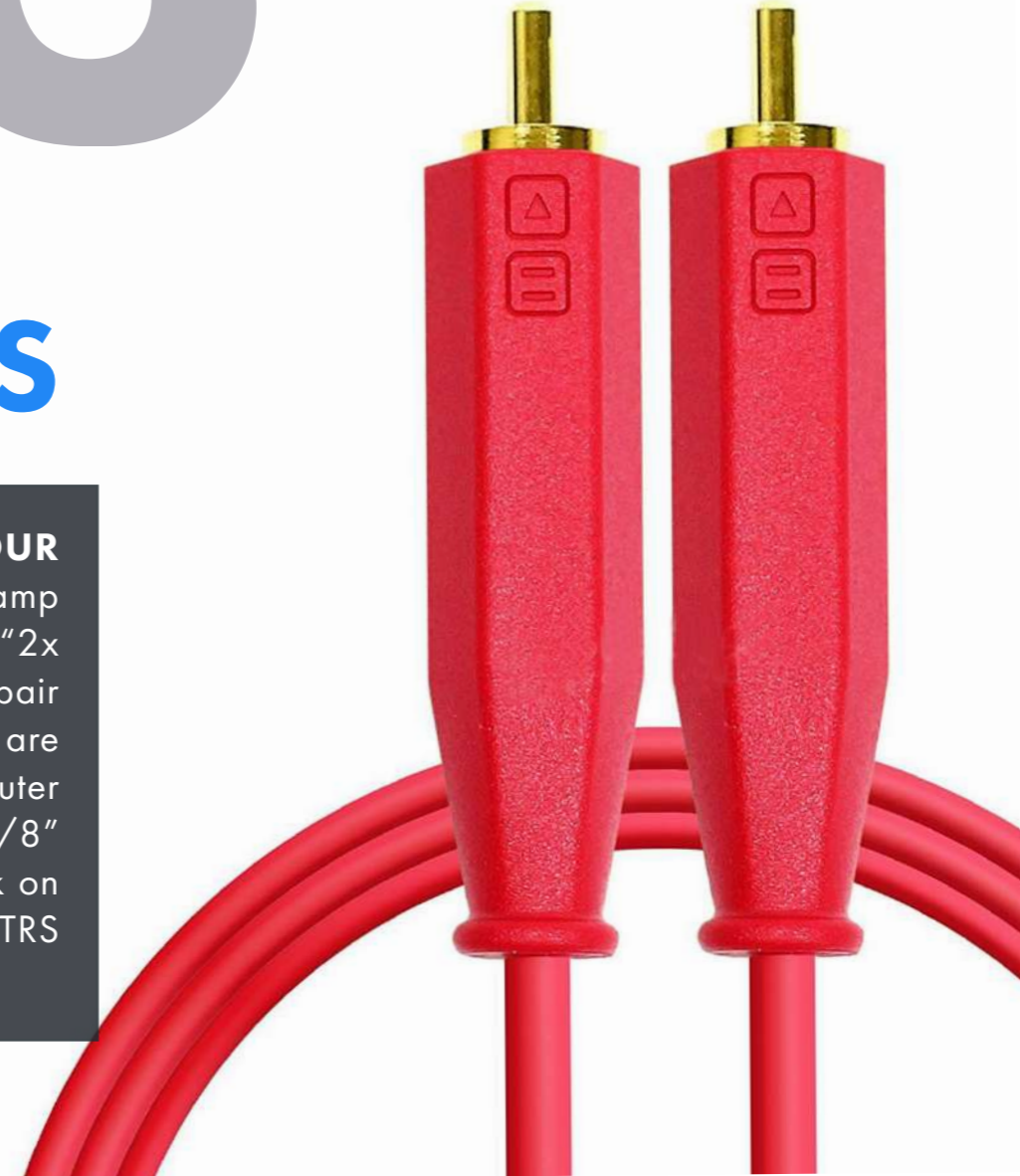


# 3

THE MINIMUM YOU'LL NEED IS A CABLE TO GO FROM YOUR CONTROLLER TO YOUR POWERED SPEAKERS OR AMPLIFIER AND SPEAKER. THE USB CABLES FOR THE COMPUTER ALWAYS COME WITH THE CONTROLLERS, THOUGH.

## CABLES

**YOUR CONTROLLER WILL COME WITH A USB CABLE TO CONNECT IT TO YOUR** computer, but you'll need cables to connect its audio output to your powered speakers (or amp and speakers). If your speakers have "RCA connectors" (a red and white pair of sockets), a "2x RCA male to 2x RCA male" cable will do; it will usually have two wires joined together with a pair of sockets on each end, red and white, for right and left channel. DJ Techtools' Chroma Cables are awesome and durable, plus they come in different colours and lengths. If you're using computer speakers that have an 1/8" TRS socket for an input, you'll need a "2x RCA male to stereo 1/8" TRS male" cable. If your computer speakers are the cheap type with only a headphone jack on them that's meant to be plugged in to a computer headphones socket, you'll need an 1/8" TRS female to 2x RCA male lead. Buy one longer than you think you'll need.





## PORTABLE SPEAKER

**WHAT HOUSEHOLD DOESN'T HAVE ONE OF THOSE "BEER CAN" speakers from JBL or Bose etc knocking around for listening to music anywhere, anytime? By far a better choice though is this one, the Minirig, because it sounds great, is virtually indestructible, and has a zero-latency wired auxiliary in, meaning you can actually DJ through it. It's loud enough to do that as well. This is the only portable rechargeable speaker that we have used for about a decade and we recommend it day in day out to our students.**

## STAND

**LAPTOPS NEED RAISING IDEALLY FROM their "sitting position" at the table you'll no doubt be setting your gear up on, so a laptop stand is pretty much an essential, especially if your eyes struggle at all reading your computer screen. We are particular fans of the Hercules Stands laptop stand and last time I checked you could still get the Hercules stand.**



**A DECENT STAND WITH MANY POSSIBLE ADJUSTMENTS IS DEFINITELY WORTH INVESTING IN, AND CAN BE A GODSEND IN CRAMPED DJ BOOTHS WHERE YOUR LAPTOP NEEDS TO BE CAREFULLY ANGLED TOWARDS YOU.**

A DECENT DJ BAG WILL PROTECT YOUR INVESTMENT AND WITH MODELS FROM BASIC (AND CHEAP) UP TO PRO DJ BACKPACKS AND TROLLEYS, THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE.



# 6

## BAG, CASE OR BACKPACKS

**YOU REALLY DON'T WANT TO BE CARRYING YOUR DJ GEAR** around in a plastic bag, in the box it came in, or even worse, under your arm. And nowadays, you don't have to. All the manufacturers of bags and cases - names like Magma, UDG and more - now have "budget" no frills cases, with models that go all the way up to all singing, all dancing trolleys, backpacks and even "true" hard cases made of plywood and aluminium. For most, a mid-range backpack or shoulder bag will suffice.

## TRANSPARENT PLASTIC COVER

# 7



**TO USE AS A DUST COVER WHEN NOT DJING OR TO PROTECT KNOBS AND FADERS IN TRANSIT, A COVER IS A GREAT IDEA.**

**THIS TYPE OF SNUGLY FITTING PLASTIC LID IS A GREAT IDEA BOTH FOR COVERING** your controller up at home when you're not using it, and for putting over it when you stash it in its bag, case or backpack to travel with. These polycarbonate cases protect the knobs, faders and switches from accidentally getting bent in transit or worse, as well as keeping the dust out in-between times. The biggest name in the game is Decksaver.

# KIT FOR LIVESTREAMING YOUR DJ SETS

MANY DJs ARE LIVESTREAMING DJ SETS NOWADAYS, AND many more want to. It's not hard to do with the right kit - and you don't need an awful lot of it, either. Here are some outstanding pieces of livestreaming tech that we've been using heavily these last few years...



## 1 OPEN BROADCASTER SOFTWARE (OBS)

**IT'S FREE, IT'S UBIQUITOUS, AND IT WORKS GREAT** - there's little not to like. Get OBS for your Mac or Windows laptop and turn it into an instant live broadcasting studio. You can even run it alongside your DJ software, so you don't have to have a second computer for livestreaming at all.



2

## LOGITECH STREAMCAM

**THESE LITTLE CAMERAS ARE WEBCAMS ON STEROIDS. THEY** can be tripod mounted, are full 1080 resolution (the highest for livestreaming), are really well made, and give great results. Plug one of these into your laptop, and that's your video sorted.

## IK MULTIMEDIA IRIG MIC HD2

**THIS SMART HANDHELD MICROPHONE PLUGS DIRECTLY INTO** your computer so you don't need an audio interface to get your voice into your DJ livestreams. It is ruggedly built, sounds great, and is reasonably priced.



3



4

## YAMAHA AG03 AUDIO INTERFACE

**IF YOU DO NEED AN AUDIO INTERFACE TO** get your music and voice into your computer for livestreaming, our favourite is the oldie-but-goodie Yamaha AG03. It's like a hybrid between a mixer and an audio interface, and is supremely flexible (we also love the bigger AG06).

## MEVO START

### **DON'T FANCY USING A LAPTOP TO GO LIVE?**

The Mevo Start is a camera that can go live to Twitch, YouTube etc directly, no computer required! It has a stereo audio input to feed your music into, and can easily be mounted on a tripod. Control is via a smartphone app. It's the ultimate in simplicity, and it works great.



# MAKING MUSIC ON YOUR LAPTOP

**A DIGITAL AUDIO WORKSTATION, OR DAW, IS A PIECE OF SOFTWARE** that you run (usually) on your Windows or Mac laptop for making music with. Nowadays you can make complete songs without the need for any additional hardware at all, just on a computer, with one of these packages - and that's exactly what many DJ/producers do.

The software will contain at its heart a timeline where you can lay out multiple tracks of music - be that drums, instruments, vocals, whatever - to construct your song. It'll come with software synthesisers, samples, drums and instruments, effects, a mixer... everything you need to make a track from start to finish.

You may choose to add extra hardware (often, producers like to add "pad" controllers for finger drumming, or a control keyboard to make entering chords and playing melodies into the computer easier), and some musicians like to buy synthesisers and samplers to "jam" on which they can also hook up to the computer, making "hybrid" production set-ups.

But the important thing to know is that the kind of music-making power that once was accessible by very few people and called for dedicated studios to be built in order to even exist, can now happen in your home, and is by comparison ridiculously affordable. DAWs and modern music making hardware have democratised the world of making music, so that if you want to have a go, you can.



# FIVE OF THE BEST MUSIC-MAKING PACKAGES



## 1 ABLETON LIVE

**THIS MAC/WINDOWS PACKAGE IS THE BIG ONE,** used by more electronic music producers and DJ/producers than any other by far. It has everything you need, doesn't tie you to any particular workflow, and - as its name suggests - is also a great live music tool. It has some pretty cool "jamming" features too, to help you come up with ideas.

# FL STUDIO

**FORMERLY "FRUITY LOOPS", THIS IS A MUCH-LOVED** Mac/Windows program, the starting point in music making for so many of today's top producers, and a package that has been at the heart of many hit records. Their scrupulously fair pricing policy and "outsider" status appeals to many, and the package has a lot of loyal proponents.



# LOGIC PRO

**MAC-ONLY, THIS APPLE PRODUCTION SOFTWARE** comes from a slightly more traditional music making background than the first two in our list, but nowadays it can do an awful lot of what, say, Ableton can do, while retaining the Apple polish that will appeal to Mac fans. You get a lot for your money here, too.



# 4 SERATO STUDIO



**A BIT DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER THREE MENTIONED SO FAR,** the Mac/windows Serato Studio is a much more simple tool, designed as a kind of sketchpad or beatbox, with particular appeal to hip hop producers, and to existing Serato users, because it looks and feels similar, and uses the same music library.

# GARAGEBAND

**THIS APPLE-ONLY PACKAGE GETS A MENTION HERE** mainly because it is absolutely free. It's sort of a "Logic Pro Lite", but it is a capable program in its own right. One appealing feature is that its project files are compatible with Logic Pro should you decide to continue working on an idea on Logic at any point in the future.

# 5



# FIVE PIECES OF MUSIC-MAKING HARDWARE

**THERE IS A LOT OF HARDWARE OUT THERE** for making music, but here are five items we've enjoyed this year and find ourselves recommending to our community regularly, a mix of old and new...



## SERATO SLAB

**CO-DEVELOPED WITH ALPHATHETA, THE SLAB IS THE** first dedicated hardware controller for Serato Studio, and it unlocks the full version of the software the moment you plug it in. With 16 velocity-sensitive pads, a step sequencer, touch strip and OLED display, it's a compact, affordable way into hands-on beatmaking for DJs who already know and love the Serato ecosystem.





2

## AKAI MPC SAMPLE

**INSPIRED BY THE LEGENDARY MPC60, THE MPC SAMPLE IS A** battery-powered, portable standalone sampler with a built-in speaker, microphone and 16 RGB pads. It strips away the complexity of Akai's bigger MPCs and gets back to what made them fun in the first place - sampling, chopping and sequencing on the fly, no laptop required..

3

## ABLETON MOVE

**ABLETON'S PORTABLE STANDALONE GROOVEBOX GIVES YOU** four tracks of drums, synths and samples in a slim, battery-powered unit you can take anywhere. It's designed as a sketchpad for capturing ideas that you can then open and develop further in Ableton Live, bridging the gap between inspiration on the sofa and finishing a track in the studio..





# 4

## AKAI MPC XL

**THE MONEY-NO-OBJECT CHOICE, AKAI'S NEW FLAGSHIP** standalone production centre has a 10-inch touchscreen, an 8-core processor, and enough connections on the back to make it the hub of an entire hardware studio. It's overkill for most home producers, but if you want a single device that can replace a laptop for making complete tracks, this is it.

## ROLAND SP-404 MK2

**THE SP-404 MK2 CONTINUES TO BE ONE OF THE MOST** popular portable samplers around, and regular firmware updates have kept it feeling fresh since its release. Its big pads, real-time effects and long, thin form factor make it a natural companion to DJ gear in a hybrid set-up, and it remains a fantastic tool for making beats live.

# 5





# FINALLY...

## DIGITAL DJ TIPS EXISTS TO INFORM, ENTERTAIN AND EDUCATE

the modern generation of DJs. Our guides and website are all designed to help DJs get started in this game, either as a great hobby or to earn a part-time or even a full-time income. But did you know we are also the biggest online DJ school in the world, with over 50,000 students in 163 countries having taken our courses?

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