

AUDIO PRODUCTION

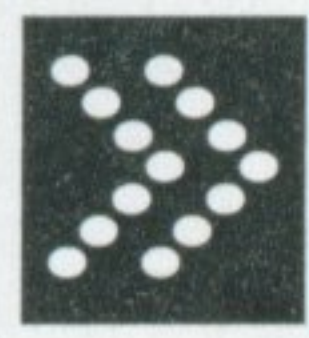
Rosegarden 4

A year after the beta release of this sequencer, **Graham Morrison** finds things have flourished – but do some of the cutting-edge features need pruning?

BUYER INFO

An audio and MIDI sequencer now with virtual software synthesiser support. See also: *Ardour* or *Muse*.

- **DEVELOPERS** Guillaume Laurent, Chris Cannam and Richard Bown
- **WEB** <http://rosegardenmusic.com>
- **PRICE** Free under GPLv2



When we featured *Rosegarden* in our *LXF48* audio sequencer roundup, it was with a review of the nearly-complete version 4, still in beta testing but intended for “imminent” release. It’s taken well over a year for the development team to finish the job, but that’s not from lack of effort. In fact, looking at the change log, it’s difficult to make a quick summary of even the most significant changes, as *Rosegarden* seems to have been in a constant state of flux. The team has zapped a swarm of bugs as well as adding cutting-edge features.

Nearly all recent audio production software for other platforms has been integrated virtual versions of old recording studio hardware. The protocol they most often use to network this web of equipment was developed by Steinberg and christened VST (Virtual Studio Technology). Since then, Apple has introduced its own protocol called AU (Audio Units) in reaction to VST’s massive impact on the audio software market. Virtual studios have been a hotly debated subject on Linux audio forums, leading to the development of a Linux

VST equivalent called DSSI. DSSI makes the perfect framework for running real x86 VST instruments, and a successful wrapper for these is already available.

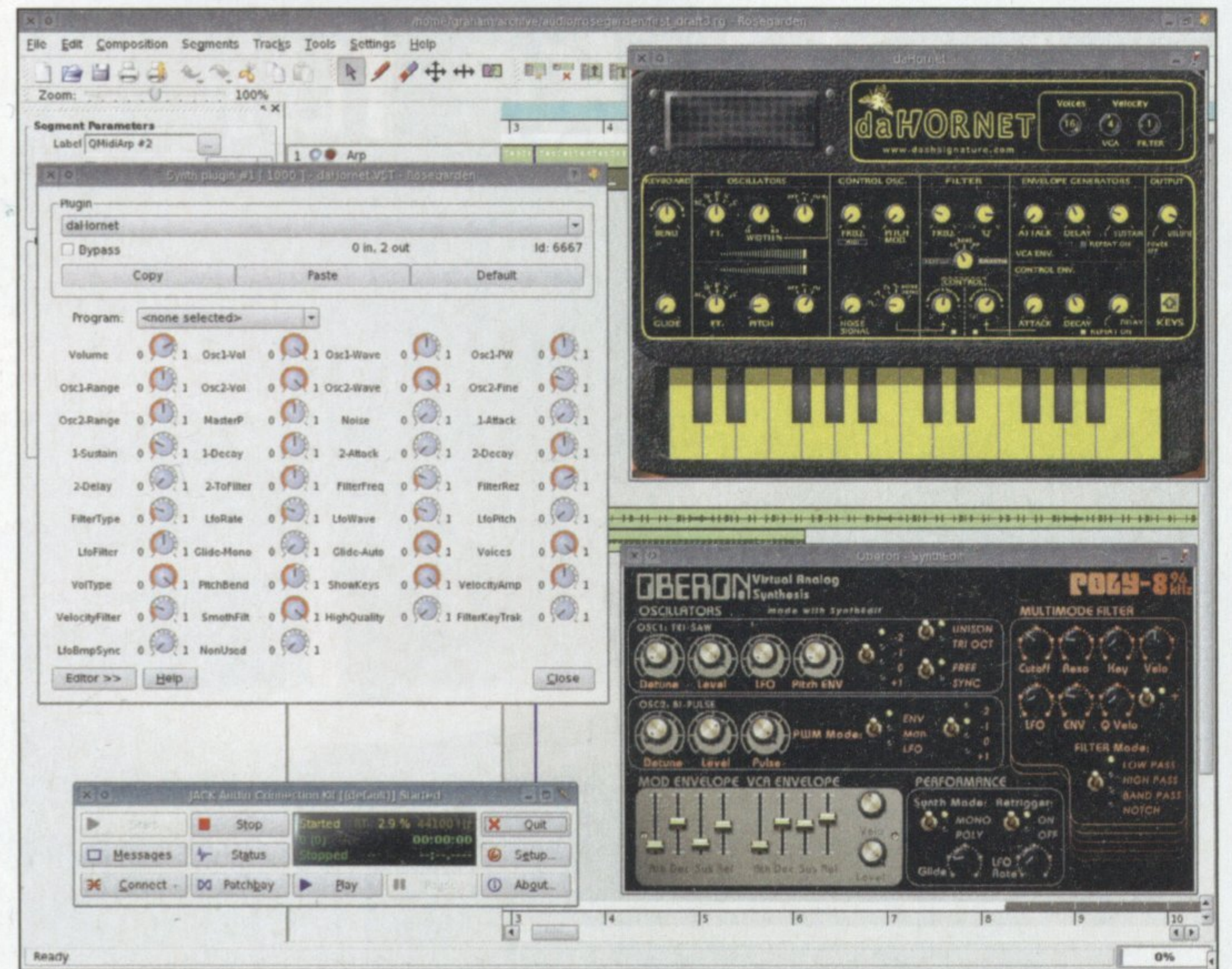
Rosegarden is the first serious audio application to offer native support for DSSI plug-ins. These sit alongside the audio and MIDI channels but work as a combination of the two. Once a software synth has been assigned to a channel, MIDI segments can be created and edited in the same way as with external MIDI equipment. Segments of notes can be edited with either the matrix editor or the notation editor, and the output generated by the internal DSSI plug-in can then be processed as if the track contained audio.

With a channel assigned to use a synth plug-in, you can load and manage synthesisers from a separate window. This takes you to the list of installed DSSI instruments and – depending on the current plug-in – also grants access to the instrument’s parameters. The number of parameters that can be edited can range from just a couple of controls for tuning or volume to dozens of rotary encoders representing every possible function.

Because *Rosegarden* handles all these parameters it’s logical to expect it to also have a degree of control over them. Sadly this isn’t the case. Other than sending MIDI notes to a DSSI synth, there’s no way to control an instrument’s parameters over time. This is usually achieved by sending MIDI control codes to the software synthesizer, and while the DSSI

specification fully supports this, *Rosegarden* doesn’t implement it. The developers have really missed a trick here, as this can be one of the greatest advantages in moving to a virtual studio.

MIDI control data can still be sent to hardware synthesisers connected with physical MIDI connections and to other software synthesisers connected via Jack. But



VST instruments like the waspish Da Hornet analogue synthesizer shown here can be run from their own tracks using DSSI.

the only way to send this data (other than recording it from external equipment first) is with the Event List editor, which, while powerful, isn’t the most conducive environment for creative synth noodling.

True, the Matrix Editor does have an excellent MIDI control data editor, where values can be edited and ramped up over time, but it falls just short of perfection by providing for only a limited set of MIDI data, rather than custom values.

Secure but illogical

One year on, *Rosegarden* is much more stable, with complete and sudden crashes being (mostly) a thing of the past. The whole application also feels far more integrated now that audio and MIDI tracks can sit side by side. The audio implementation is still quite a way behind that of *Ardour*, though, and seems to use its own internal voodoo rather than logic for routing tracks to and from Jack.

Audio segments can be handled from the Arrange page in much the same way as MIDI, but *Rosegarden* doesn’t feature its own audio editor for making any finer adjustments. An external editor can easily be defined, but this can lead to DSP sharing violations unless you can find a well-

behaved Jack-compliant editor. Audio tracks can work well with real-time LADSPA effects, and the audio mixer provides access to additional buses.

These days, music production needs a combination of audio, MIDI, software effects and virtual instruments, and *Rosegarden* is the only open source application that can lay claim to supporting all four. But there’s a cost to being so cutting-edge, and more mundane workhorse features are taking their time to appear. It would be great to see a drum editor and a more flexible user interface, for example, or a simple audio editor for creating clips. But even great audio sequencers have a to-do list – and if that’s the only downside to success, then so be it. **LXF**

LINUX FORMAT VERDICT

FEATURES	8/10
PERFORMANCE	8/10
EASE OF USE	7/10
DOCUMENTATION	5/10

Rapid development has given version 4 a slew of new features, and DSSI synths are without doubt the future of Linux audio, but attention to usability is needed.

RATING **7/10**

