



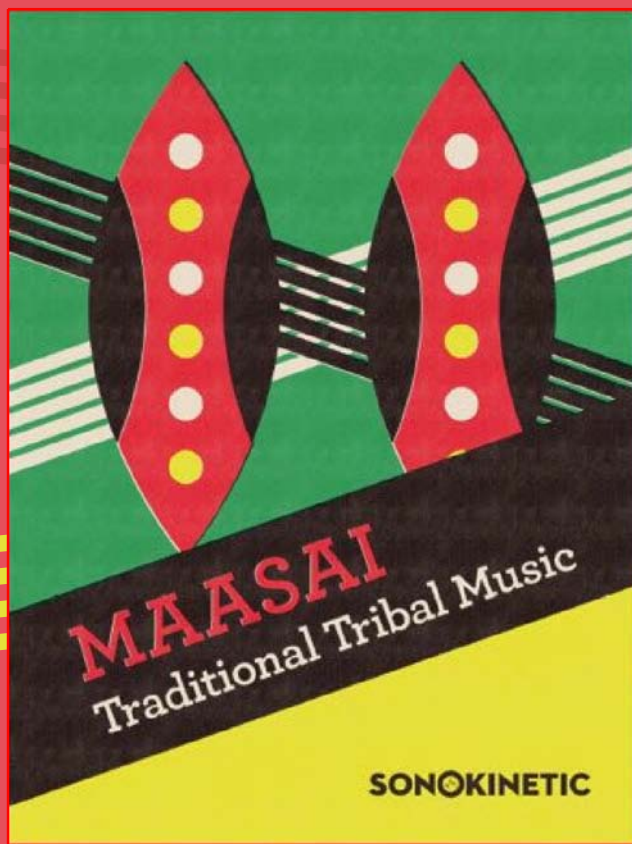
Sonokinetic's

# Maasai

by Jeffrey Powell

Sonokinetic is one of a small number of sample companies that sell unique and interesting libraries that can be found nowhere else on the planet. Among their products, you'll find a wide variety including an extremely detailed concert harp, weapons sound effects, a carousel organ, Middle Eastern voices, and a wide variety of world instruments and ensembles. In this review, we're going to take a look at one of these world libraries called Maasai, which aims to bring African tribal music to your DAW.





### Previously On *Survivor*

Before heading into the nitty gritty details of this library, there's one detail about this library that should be noted at the outset. One of the creators of this library is Russ Landau, the Emmy-winning composer known for his distinctive work on U.S. television shows *Fear Factor*, *Survivor*, and others. Now, I must admit that I've been an avid *Survivor* watcher since the very first U.S. season. Since that first season, *Survivor* has spawned versions in over 45 other countries around the world. For those who watch it, the music is one of the most distinctive features of *Survivor*, and the music for each season incorporates the rhythms and sounds of the indigenous peoples in that location. So, needless to say, Maasai certainly benefits from having Russ Landau's involvement and experience.

### Wanna Know What You're Playing For?

At its core, Maasai is an impressive collection of over 570 looped samples (over 1.89 GB) from actual recordings of native music in Kenyan tribal village communities. The loops themselves are categorized into Vocals (male, female, and children), Instruments, Drums and Percussion, Tribe Ensembles (drums & instruments combined), and Compositions (by Russ Landau). Normally, a loop collection of this size and breadth would be difficult to sort through, but Sonokinetic have provided these loops in an impressive custom Kontakt interface that makes previewing and mapping the samples quick and easy.

The most important part of the main page of the Kontakt interface is the drop down menu that allows you to

choose from one of the categories listed above. Once you select a category, the different sets of loops in that category are listed on the page. A single click on one of the loop set's name will play a quick preview of the loops. Once you've found the loops you want to load, click "Add" on the interface. You'll then be given the option to map that collection of loops (usually 8 to 12 loops) chromatically anywhere on the keyboard that you want. This is a really handy feature that allows you to quickly put at your fingertips the exact loops that you want. You can map as many different loop sets as you want to the keyboard (even overlapping them) and most importantly, the loops aren't loaded into RAM (or streamed) until you actually add them to the keyboard. So, Sonokinetic have come up with a great way to preview, map, and load samples to fit your project.

# Maasai

On that same page, you'll also find a standard ADSR envelope along with speed and volume controls. These are applied per loop set so you can speed up one set without changing the speed of another loop set. On the FX and Convolution tab, you'll find a standard delay and 3-band EQ along with a convolution reverb. For this collection, Sonokinetic has provided a unique collection of four impulse responses. Three of them are from African huts, and the fourth one is from a jungle area. All in all, the focus here is on providing authentic sounds in an easy to use interface.

## I'll Tally the Votes

Of course, the quality of this product is truly dependent upon the quality of the loops, and I can say that the loop collection is very impressive. There is a wide variety in the over 40 loop sets provided and, as noted above, each loop set has on average 12 different loops. The loops are 24-bit, 44.1 KHz, and are zero-crossed looped. As they are authentic recordings, these loops are not tempo-sync'd. This makes the loops a little less versatile (even with the speed control on the interface), but it's certainly more realistic as I've never seen a tribal ensemble playing along with a metronome. So, I found that it worked best to determine which loops I wanted to use first and

then build the other elements of the track around those loops. For example, I'd take several loops of a drum ensemble to flesh out a rhythm track. Then, I'd add instruments on top that worked well with that rhythm track. This is a little different way of working for me (as usually I'd just build both around standard beats and measures), but it was oddly a bit freeing as well. I also found the chromatically mapped loops really pushed me toward using shifting "meters" (to use the more traditional term), so the loops really can inspire some new directions in your music.

If I were to offer some points for improvement, I'd say that a more thorough documentation of the loops would be helpful. Nearly all of them are looped, but a few that can be used to end a phrase are not. It'd be helpful to have more detailed information on hand so that it wouldn't be necessary to just audition them all at the start. Also, just for fun's sake, I'd love to have seen a mini-tutorial or tips on how the pros might use these to piece together a track. I think that would be interesting.

Overall, though, these are minor points. The loops sound fantastic and inspiring. In the collection, the drum ensembles and the vocal chants are the real highlights to me, but I don't

think I found any that I thought wouldn't be useful. As noted above, the Kontakt interface looks great and provides a really quick workflow. It didn't take long before I was putting together my own *Survivor*-like cues and, most importantly, having fun doing it!

## The Tribe Has Spoken

Sonokinetic's Maasai is really a unique and inspiring product that can bring authentic African tribal music to your music. The non-tempo sync'd loops take a little bit of getting used to, but they give realism to the loops that can help stretch your creativity and writing. For 59.90 Euros, Maasai offers an excellent and diverse collection of African tribal loops in a useful and well-designed Kontakt interface. The .wav files are included as well, but you'll be missing out on a great deal of usability without the Kontakt interface. Be sure to check out their website (given below) to see more about Maasai and the other Sonokinetic libraries.

Company Website:

[www.sonokinetic.net](http://www.sonokinetic.net)

