



The best new open source software on the planet

LXF Hot Picks



Graham Morrison vs. Mike Saunders

This month's LXF tag-team puts the righteous smackdown on awful applications and putrid programs to bring you the very fittest...

» QTractor » Jukebox 3D » Kvkbd » Aqualung » SDL Asylum » Vulcan » White Dune » Miro » Songbird » NoteCase » Ultimate Stunts

Audio application

QTractor



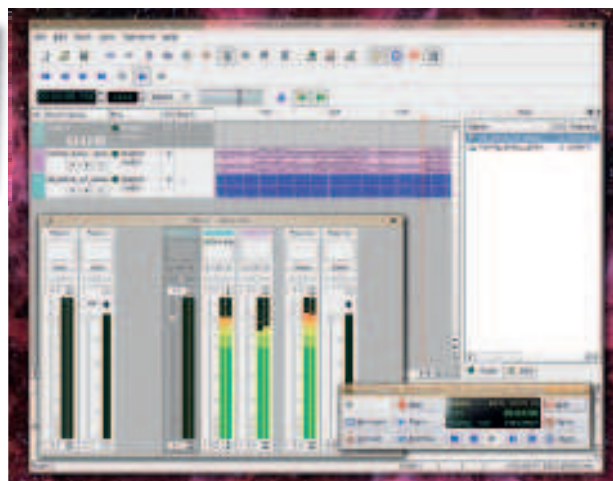
Version 0.0.7.752 (wow!) Web <http://qtractor.sourceforge.net>

Not to be confused with the Windows and Mac *Traktor* DJ software from Native Instruments; functionally, the only thing the two have in common is that they're both music apps. *QTractor* is more like a traditional audio/MIDI sequencer than a spontaneous music mixing tool. Considering computer software can safely be considered recent history, 'traditional' is a strange word to describe any piece of software. But it's the closest word we can think to describe a GUI paradigm that has changed very little in the 20 years since it was first used.

QTractor uses something called an 'arrangement' view. This places tracks of MIDI and audio data on top of one another in the vertical axis, and blocks of music stretch horizontally to the right. It's exactly the same method used by the other

popular audio/MIDI sequencers you find in Linux – *Ardour*, *Rosegarden* and *Muse*. But *QTractor*'s implementation has more in common with *Ardour* than the other two. It's totally reliant on a Jack audio server to provide all the internal and external interconnectivity, for instance, and the track mixing view is almost identical to *Ardour*'s. This means you can add realtime effects by either using some clever Jack routing, or by simply inserting them into reach mixing channel, just as you would in *Ardour*. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, as *Ardour* is our current favourite Linux audio app, but you do wonder why the *QTractor* developers want to duplicate so much functionality when the excellent *Ardour* does everything and more that *QTractor* does.

QTractor still qualifies as this month's *Hottest Pick* because it works so well. In



» The mixer view lets you drop in real time effects and monitor audio levels for your project.

many ways, it's easier to use than the functionally superior *Rosegarden*, and it's a good choice for multi-track recording and music editing if you've taken a vow to only use *Qt* applications. Thanks to *Qt 4*, everything looks super-smooth and scales well, and the channel strip in particular is nicely rendered. It's also efficient, and we were able to mix 12 tracks without any noticeable hit on the CPU – dragging blocks around the arrangement view and ramping the volume curve for each channel without any glitches.

What's where in QTractor

Overview

An unusual feature that gives you a grand overview of your project.

Arrangement view

Drag blocks of MIDI and audio data left and right through time.

Matrix editor

Create and edit MIDI note data by dragging your mouse.

Control data

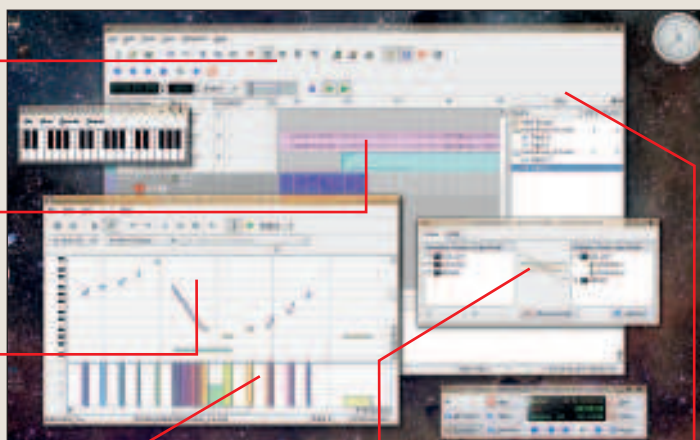
Editing note velocity and control data in amazing technicolour is clear and simple.

Jack support

Use Jack to route audio to other music applications and effects.

Asset management

See all the various components of your project in a basic list



Missing functions?

Most notably, we couldn't find a way to manually create a new block of MIDI data. We had to resort to patching a virtual keyboard into the MIDI input of *QTractor* and record something first before we were able to edit and create notes manually. But the most annoying thing is that there isn't a Stop button! You need to press the Play button again to stop playback. This makes a real difference to intuitive use!

QTractor is still only in the alpha stage of development, and if this early release is anything to go by, it's going to grow into a serious competitor to the likes of *Rosegarden* and *Ardour*. As it is, it's still a useful addition to your audio software, especially if you want a quick and easy editor for your own multitrack music. It's excellent format support, efficient CPU usage and clear user-interface makes this a great choice for budding composers.

Album browser

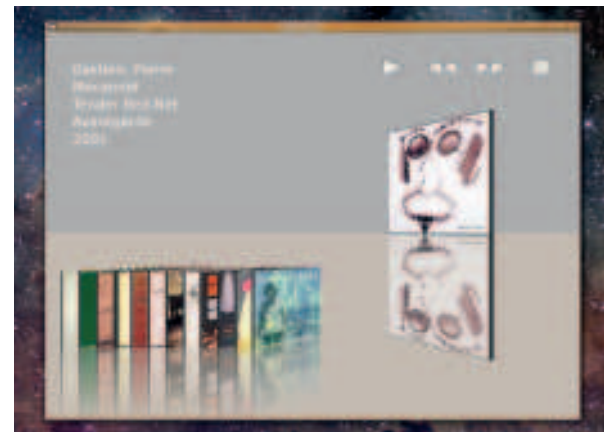
Jukebox 3D

Web <http://j3d.linuxonfire.org> **Version:** 0.4.0

Who hasn't looked in envy at Apple's *CoverFlow*? It lets you browse your music collection from your computer as if you had the CD cases hovering in front of you. It makes the whole business of dealing with a music collection on your hard drive much more tangible, and brings the art of cover design back into the foreground. We've had cover art integration in all the main Linux music players, but nothing that let's you feel your way through your collection. *Jukebox 3D* doesn't do this either – yet, but it does open similar window onto your music collection. It works in tandem with your music player, and this needs to be a either *Amarok*, *RhythmBox* or *Exaile*. You will also need to make sure you've already downloaded the cover art for your music. *Jukebox 3D* is designed to be used as a screensaver while you play your music using on of these players, although it can quite happily live in a window on your desktop. It communicates with the music

player using either DBUS or DCOP, and will show the current playing track, the album art for the CD the track has come from, and when you move on to another album, it will add this CD to a shelf of boxes.

A configuration panel lets you change almost every aspect of this front-end, and you can switch the CD case rendering between a normal case, a spinning cube and ordinary flat rendering. You can also change the background colours, how the text is rendered, and whether or not to include the music transport icons on the window (these are the controls you'd find on an ordinary CD player). You can also drag the elements around the main window, placing the various components wherever you see fit. The 3D CD cases will



› If you're desperate for a little *CoverFlow* lovin' but don't want the Apple hardware, *Jukebox 3D* has potential.

move with real perspective, which is a nice touch, and you can save you layout as a theme from the configuration editor.

At its present stage, some users may feel that *Jukebox 3D* is more of a gimmick than a really useful addition to your Linux system's music playing capabilities, but it does have massive potential. It contains all the technology needed to reimplement something like *CoverFlow* in Linux, and it's something that should really be picked up and integrated into all of the major music players. But it's still a nice addition if you often play music from your Linux box and want something to show off to visiting friends and family.

“A nice addition if you often play music from your Linux box.”

Virtual keyboard

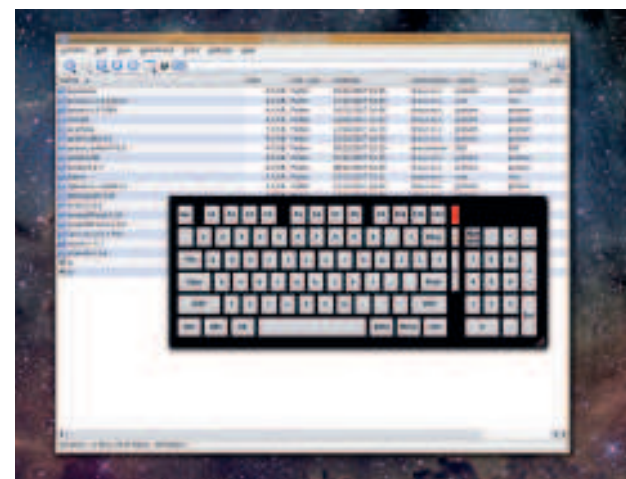
Kvkbd

Version 0.4.5 **Web** <http://pan4os.info>

At first glance, virtual on-screen keyboards might not seem all that useful. But they are. There are certain circumstances where an on-screen keyboard is essential. You might use your Linux box as a media centre, for example, and don't want to clutter the room with a mouse. Or you might be building a kiosk with a touchscreen out of a Linux box, and need something for people's fingers to press on. There are also plenty of accessibility advantages to an on-screen keyboard for people who can't use a physical one too. *Kvkbd* is the best onscreen keyboard we've come across. It's a KDE application that sits on top of everything else on your display. It even took precedence over our *Compiz* installation, which means that no matter what application you might be running – from full screen video to 3D games, *Kvkbd* is always going to be on top of things and give you access to keyboard entry from any application you may try. This is exactly

what you need with an application like this, and we couldn't find any situation where the virtual keyboard lost focus or wouldn't find the right entry point. And it looks good too. The keyboard seems to be modelled on the black and grey rubber of the 48K Sinclair Spectrum, and features a sliding number pad that can be extended and retracted out of the main layout. And the whole window can be scaled in size anywhere between a tiny thumbnail and fullscreen, and it scales perfectly. Fonts are resized automatically, and there's no sign of any pixelation. A special red colour key to the right of F12 will minimize the whole thing into the toolbar, so that you can show and hide the keyboard at will, and you can access a small configuration window by

“We couldn't find any situation where the virtual keyboard lost focus.”



› On-screen keyboards can be helpful in all kinds of circumstances, and Linux has been lacking a decent tool until now.

clicking in the wrench icon. From here you can change the font used on the keys, and choose whether this font is scaled when the keyboard window is resized. The only features we found lacking were a hotkey to show and hide the keyboard, and a virtual recreation of the cursor keys. These would be handy for the menu navigation tasks that are assigned to the arrow keys – especially when editing a text document. Other than these small points, *Kvkbd* is pretty much perfect, and highly recommended to anyone who has a need for an on-screen keyboard.

Music player

Aqualung

Version 0.9beta8 Web <http://aqualung.sourceforge.net/>

We came across *Aqualung* while looking for a media player to use with Jack, an audio connection layer that lets any Jack-compatible audio app share the same hardware, as well as share the same audio streams with one another. This is something you can't always do with the standard audio drivers installed by most Linux distributions, and Jack should really be taken more seriously. Jack also means you can route the audio as you see fit, whether that's to an audio sequencer like *QTractor* or the *Project-M* visualisation tool we looked at last month. It's a true innovation, and it's a pity it's not

news is that unlike *XMMS*, *Aqualung* is surprisingly full featured for a music player that very few people have heard anything about. It plays all the important formats, including Ogg Vorbis, MP3, WAV and Flac, and can even be used to play Soundtracker files if you've got any in your bag. It's one of the few players we've seen that gets gapless playback right. Two consecutive tracks that are designed to fade into one another will do so automatically, without the usual mood-destroying click you often get with other players. There are two main windows to the user-interface. A flexible playlist window that includes the player

(think *XMMS* for the 21st Century), and the Music Store. We originally thought this was some kind of affiliated online music purchasing mechanism like the

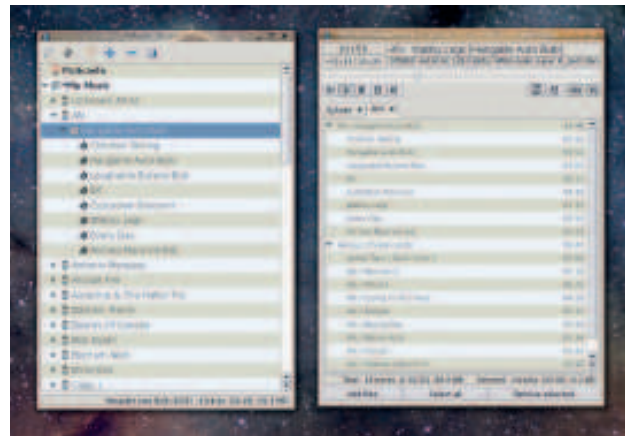
“You can even listen to old-skool Soundtracker files, if that’s your bag.”

installed by default. But this is likely to be because many mainstream music players don't include support. *Amarok* can be made to work with Jack by compiling a version of *Xine* with Jack support, but even this doesn't work too well. The only other option is the venerable *XMMS*, featuring an excellent Jack plugin, but then you're stuck with an anachronistic media player.

Enter *Aqualung*, a player with native Jack support, as well as supporting all the other popular audio drivers. And the good

Magnatune integration in *Amarok*, but 'store' in this case refers to local music storage. Add a folder to the store, and an ID tag database is built from your music collection, and can be used to browse your music. This works really well: simply drag albums and songs into the playlist window.

A surprising addition to the Music Store is its ability to subscribe to online podcasts. Just add a remote URL as a location, and the Podcast functionality will periodically check the site and download any new

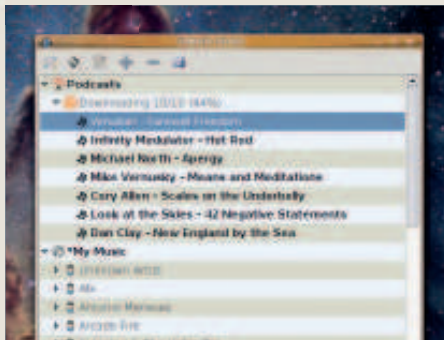


> Aqualung uses a cut-down, informative user interface which is a refreshing change from the usual eye candy you see in a music player.

Podcasts to a local folder. Combine this with tabbed playlists (with a foldable hierarchy, skins and integrated LADSPA effects, and you have one of the best music players available. And it works faultlessly with Jack, which often causes problems with high performance codecs like Flac.

Aqualung is a serious music tool with lots of potential: a worthy competitor to any Gnome-based players. Unlike its competitors, it doesn't use overly complex eye candy, or provide too many options, but we haven't found a single feature missing that we really need. The only thing we'd really like to see is an instant pause when you click on the toolbar applet. This is a handy addition to *Amarok*, and is a great way to stop the music when you get a phone call for example.

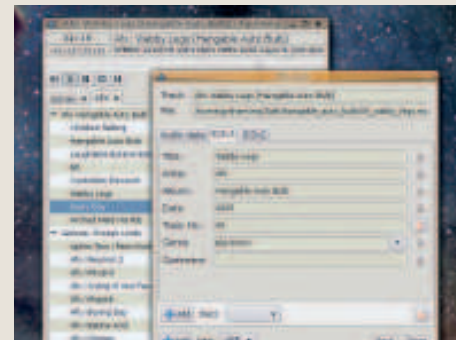
Features at a glance



>> Not a retail outlet
The Music Store manages your collection as well as your podcast subscriptions.



>> Album covers
Cover art is shown in a small icon window and the whole application can be minimized.



>> Track info
Edit ID Tags directly from the music player to keep your database up to date.

HotGames All play, and no work!

Platform game

SDL Asylum

Version 0.2.3 Web <http://sdl-asylum.sourceforge.net>

We all love classic platformers, and it's not often that the genuine article makes its way to Linux. *Asylum* was a popular platformer for the Acorn Archimedes that has built something of a cult following. Fortunately, its original author (Andy Southgate) has released the source code under the GPL licence, and has endorsed this SDL clone of his work. The result is an authentic recreation of a game that was originally released at the end of the golden age of 2D platformers, and it's a game that's still a lot of fun to play.

You progress through the game as this bloke called Young Sigmund, and you've got some form of mental instability that can only be resolved by entering your inner consciousness and closing down those parts of the brain that are misbehaving. It's this strange world inside the head of Young Sigmund that you must navigate in an attempt to find numerous starfish-shaped neurons that

need to be closed down. On the way, you'll encounter all kinds of surreal scenery, from jet powered tables to heavily armed daffodils. It's a little like *Jet Set Willy*, only you get a gun and everything moves much quicker. Small red arrows help you to important locations, and a health bar deteriorates as you take a hit from what are presumably aggressive thoughts swimming around the head of our hero.

You can shoot nearly everything that moves, and weapons look more like vacuum cleaners. But there's some excellent variety, ranging from single-shot tubes, to flame throwers that spread a flower of tiny sprites across the screen. This game is a real challenge, but more importantly, it has classic gameplay that you just don't find in any newer games. It's compulsive, and you want to keep going back into the game to try and find another synapse to close down. The only problem is that there are no concessions



› Help the hero overcome the side effects of the Oedipus complex by blasting everything in sight.

to the modern age, and a save and restore system would certainly help (rather than having to go back and do everything all over again). But otherwise, the crazy mix of psychedelic sprites and manic jumping running and shooting, makes this game a classic. If your copy of **LXF** is delivered late this month, it's all *SDL Asylum's* fault!

Star Trek chess

Vulcan

Version 0.7.1 Web www.fzort.org/mpr/projects/vulcan/

This is a game of chess with a difference. As you might guess from the name, it has taken its inspiration from a popular science fiction television show that featured a similar game in one of its broadcasts. The rules of the game aren't that dissimilar to chess – the pieces move in the same way as in ordinary chess, for example. It's just that there's an added dimension to the board. Quick. Get a coffee. You'll need it for the explanation. The idea is that the traditional chess board of an 8x8 matrix is split across several vertical levels. At the top and bottom there are two 4x4 grids that contain two Knights guarding two Bishops and a line of defensive pawns – one group for each player. In the vertical middle ground is an empty 4x4 platform which acts as a kind of no man's

land. Pieces can be slid onto this panel if their squares are adjacent to the squares on the middle platform from a top-down view, and this movement is dependent on how the piece can move. But the most important pieces – the King, the Queen along with the two Rooks – live on two isolated 2x2 platforms (along with 2 pawns) that start the game attached to the far corners of the top and bottom 4x4 sections. These small panels can move to different levels and corner of the board when they're empty or contain a single piece, and are called the 'attack boards' because they enable the player to leverage pieces into the heart of your opponent's board. If none of this has made sense, don't worry. When you click on a piece to move, the board highlights the squares you can move, making it easy



› Find chess to easy? Try splitting the board across several different vertical levels that can move around.

to get started. And because the piece moving rules are the same as chess, you quickly get used to the split-level playing arena. The thing that takes time is learning how all these peculiar foibles can be used to your advantage, and that's likely to take a lifetime to master. But the most important thing is that playing *Vulcan* is fun.

3D website creator

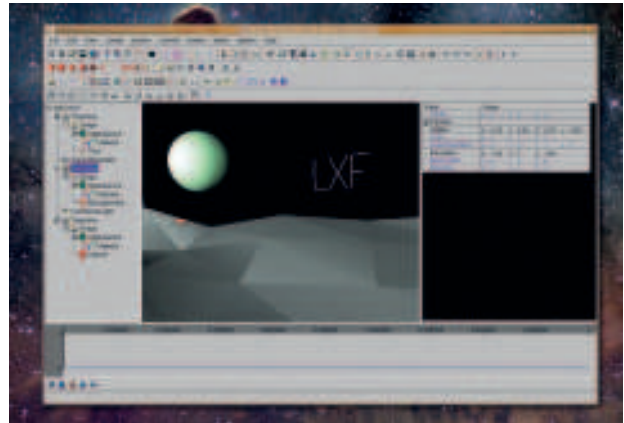
White Dune VRML Editor

Version 0.29 Web <http://vrml.cip.ica.uni-stuttgart.de/dune/>

Back in the late 1990s, VRML looked like a cool technology for web browsing. It promised 3D worlds instead of simple pages of text. Imagine walking your avatar through an art gallery or museum, rather than clicking through page after page of images with your mouse. Sadly, it never happened, and VRML has been suffering something of a slow death. But VRML is not dead yet, and it's applications like the *White Dune VRML Editor* that could help to save the day. It's an integrated environment for designing 3D worlds that you can export as VRML-compatible pages. These can then be viewed by any web browser using a compatible VRML viewer. Linux users have a choice between *FreeWRL* and *OpenVRML*: both open source, hosted on SourceForge.net.

White Dune's user interface might feel a little neglected, but the GUI belies hundreds of features and a GUI that's considerably easier to use than *Blender*. Click on a shape and it appears in the

realtime 3D view. Click on the shape in the view, and you can easily edit the points that make up the shape, or transform it on any of its axes, although it doesn't feature advanced functions like mesh editing. You can also move objects and define points along a timeline using envelopes. Rotating an object around its X axis, for example, by changing the angle in the timeline from 0-90-180-270 at different point in time. This is the same way *Lightwave* works, and it's a very intuitive way of adding motion. The 3D view updates to reflect any changes you've made, and will also show textures on objects as well as the lighting from any light sources you add. It won't look exactly the same in a browser (this is dependent on the VRML plugin you're using), but it



› VRML might be a little dated, but 3D websites still sound really cool to us.

gives you a good overview of your scene. Full screen mode is particularly useful if you're recreating an Egyptian temple, or want to see a wider angle; Preview mode will mimic the mouse and cursor control of VRML by letting you wander around your creation as your users will. At any point, you can save your construction as a VRML or WRL file, and load this into your plugin-equipped web browser – job done. Upload this onto a website, and visitors will see your creation in glorious 3D!

“Your audience can view your 3D creations in any web browser.”

Multimedia player

Miro

Version 0.9.9.9 Web www.getmiro.com



In its previous incarnation as a media app called *Democracy Player*, *Miro* garnered a ton of attention from the popular press and various online new sites. This is because *Miro* embodies our current obsession for internet TV, free content, and peer-to-peer downloads. *Miro* embeds all three of these technologies into a single application, designed to make multimedia consumption as easy as browsing the news. *Miro* is best described as a syndication for multimedia content – an RSS reader for movies and an iTunes for video. It features dozens of channels you can subscribe to, and new broadcasts are downloaded automatically in the background. You can also subscribe to torrents, or other content sites, and there's integration for searching through the media held on sites like YouTube, Google Video, Blogdigger or Blip.tv.

Video isn't converted either, and is played in its native format using an

installed Flash player, or FFMPEG, for instance. The user interface presents all this media using thumbnails of the videos, and a brief description of what the video is about. A single click will grab the media and place it on your hard drive, where it will eventually expire and be removed. You can also keep the media if you want to, making *Miro* a good solution if you want store some of your favourite online content locally. A share button for each clip will help you spread the word about a clip you enjoy to the likes of Video Bomb, del.icio.us and digg. The user interface is well designed and very easy to use with a mouse and keyboard. But the *Miro* developers are missing something. This is



› *Miro* is the closest thing to an integrated video-on-demand application that Linux users have access to.

the perfect app for a TV-attached Linux machine, and it really needs a simplified UI that could be easily navigable with a few clicks of a standard remote control. Other than this small problem, *Miro* does a brilliant job, and really delivers the closest experience yet to television on demand. On its website, it proudly proclaims that it's better than Joost – the brainchild of the Skype and Kazaa founder. And we concur. Not only is *Miro* open source, the diversity of the channels at the open subscriptions mean that there's far more content available for *Miro* than its proprietary competitor. Which is just as well, as there's currently no Linux support for Joost.

“More content is available than for its proprietary competitor Joost.”

Online music player

Songbird

Version 0.3 Web www.songbirdnest.com

We're not entirely sure why, but *Songbird's* mascot is... Well, a bird that appears to be suffering from visible flatulence. Perhaps it's to underscore the fact that this online music player is still in the early stages of development, and things may not work as expected. Still, the *Songbird* team claims over 500,000 downloads so far – not bad for a 0.3 release – and is poised to become “the *Firefox* of media players” according to some pundits. It has a good development pedigree: the project is being guided by

“[*Songbird*] is like taking *iTunes*, ripping out the music store, and replacing it with the rest of the internet”. The program's mission statement notes that current media apps such as *iTunes* and *Windows Media Player* are proprietary and single-vendor – it's like *Internet Explorer* only being able to view www.microsoft.com.

Exactly what the *Songbird* team aims to achieve is hard to deduce from the wishy-washy marketing speak, but right now, the program hooks up with various music sites and blogs around the net, ideally helping

you to find your favourite tunes and explore new genres. It's built around *XULRunner*, the Mozilla framework, and consequently

feels much weightier than the likes of *Amarok* and *Rhythmbox* – *Songbird* taking up a comparatively large 26MB of RAM when it started, next to the diminutive 14MB that *Rhythmbox* uses. To run the application, extract the **.tar.bz2** archive from our DVD into your home folder, and run the *songbird* binary in the resulting **Songbird** directory.

“Is Songbird poised to become the Firefox of media players?”

Rob Lord, one of the first Nullsoft employees (which created the gigantically successful *Winamp*).

Songbird is a music player mixed with a web browser, which initially sounds like a messy kludge, but starts to make sense when you consider the amount of music trading (legal or not) that takes place on the web. As one tech blogger put it:



When started, *Songbird* pops up a dark, broody main window containing a web page view, which by default points to a search page on *Songbird's* website. At the time of writing, this search facility uses **skreemr.com**, an MP3 finder that's alarmingly good – it has links to tens of thousands of (commercial) songs, most of which are immediately downloadable. Even though SkreemR isn't hosting these files itself, its detractors will complain that it makes it easy to grab music without paying, so we wouldn't be surprised if the big recording groups get involved. In which case, *Songbird* will have to use something else.

Turn on, tune in

Currently, *Songbird* lets you create playlists based on music links around the web: when you find a piece of music you want, you can drag the link into your Library folder on the left, and have easy access to it in future. Alternatively, if you want a local copy of the MP3, you can drag it into your Downloads folder, also in the left-hand panel. The main web page view is populated with links to various music-hosting websites, so you can click on music blogs and sample the contents that feature therein.

So at this stage, *Songbird* is essentially a super-themed web browser which aggregates music download links and presents them in a traditional playlist format. There's lots to be done, but it's a lovely use of the powerful Mozilla framework and could become a household name like *Firefox* when it hits 1.0. But given that it provides ultra-easy access to masses of commercial music, we won't be surprised if the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) and co. assemble an army of lawyers to investigate. *Songbird* doesn't do anything wrong – but these are touchy times...

The Songbird interface

Controls

Standard Play, Pause and Skip music buttons.

Shortcuts

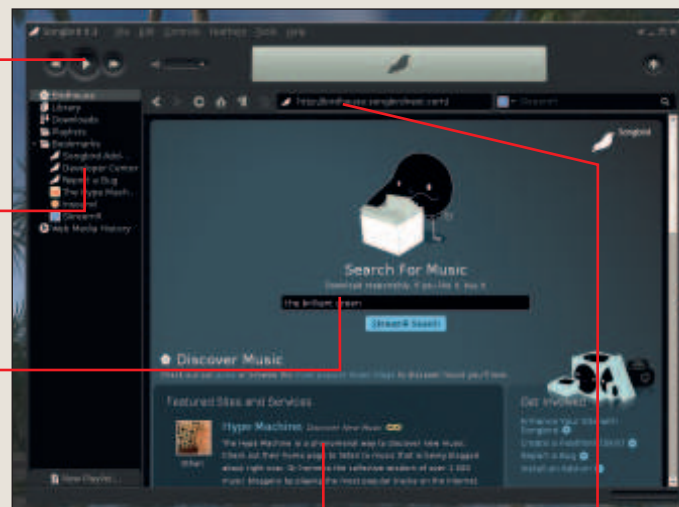
This list provides quick access to your bookmarked sites and playlists.

Search

Using SkreemR, you can search for MP3 files.

What's new

The start page shows links to new and popular music sites.



Navigate

With this panel, you can operate Songbird like a normal web browser.

Outlining note-taker

NoteCase

Version 1.7.2 Web <http://notecase.sourceforge.net>

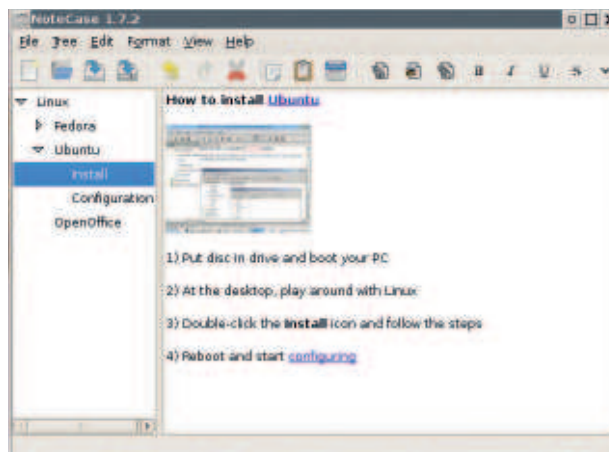
When you're at your computer and receive an important phone call or email, what do you do? Chances are, like us, you fire up your text editor and tap/paste in the important bits, before saving it somewhere on your desktop. Or if you're slightly more organised, you might have a single text file for all your notes, or perhaps you use a sticky-note type program. Either way, it leads to a horribly disorganised mess of info-snippets that become impossibly hard to manage.

NoteCase fixes this: it helps you to order and categorise your note-takings, keeping relevant information together and providing an outline of your jottings. The program is based around 'nodes' – categories or pigeonholes in which you can drop text. And you can create sub-categories, so that, for instance, you might have a main 'Linux' category and then separate 'Ubuntu' and 'Fedora' categories beneath. *NoteCase* isn't tied to any

particular theme, though; you can create hierarchies of notes for contacts, recipes, stats, or anything else that is representable in text format.

Even better, you can spruce up your jottings with formatting and pictures. This isn't a charged-up word processor, but it lets you add bold, italics and colours to your note entries, and insert images to mingle between the text. The most useful of all is linking: you can select a chunk of text and make it link to another node or file. As an example, in our screenshot we have some notes on installing Ubuntu. You can see that the word 'Ubuntu' is underlined – when clicked, it switches to the main Ubuntu node. This is an excellent way to organise your information, giving it something of a wiki feel.

To view your notes on the move, you can export the whole lot to a HTML file, which is very plain in its presentation but orders your notes in a tree-like structure. You can also export to .hnc format for



› Via the tree widget on the left, you can add new nodes and drop them into categories.

Windows shareware application *NoteCenter*, or encrypt the contents in *NoteCase*'s native format. As a demonstration of the program's versatility, the online documentation is supplied as a *NoteCase* file, illustrating extra features such as icons for nodes.

NoteCase succeeds because it doesn't try too hard: it's not riddled with pointless gadgets or never-to-be-used features. The GUI is sensibly clean, leaving you to deal with the most pressing job – organising your info. If your desktop is littered with small text files called **finance_todo.txt** and **phone_nos.txt**, then you need this today!

Wacky 3D driving sim

Ultimate Stunts

Version 0.7.3 Web www.ultimatestunts.nl

Remember *Hard Drivin'* in the arcades? Or possibly its lesser-known follow-up *Race Drivin'*? These 3D stuntfests eschewed the bland, flat courses of other driving games in favour of crazy ramps, loop-the-loops and banked corners. They were top-notch fun – and *Ultimate Stunts* does a pretty good job of bringing the same over-the-top gameplay to Linux.

We looked at an earlier version of *Ultimate Stunts* quite a while ago back in **LXF74**; since then, the game has improved in all areas, with a variety of background tunes, more cars and more courses. Graphically, it's still rather half-baked in places, with uninspired textures and chunky polygons making up the scenery, but we're not bothered about that. After all, Geoff Crammond's legendary *Stunt Car Racer* had nothing more than monochrome wireframe graphics on the Speccy, and it was utterly brilliant. To run *Ultimate Stunts*, extract the **.tar.gz** as

provided on our DVD and, in the resulting directory, run the **ustunts** script. You can start playing straight away by clicking Drive in the menu, then using the cursor keys to control your car (up to accelerate, down to brake, and left/right to turn). However, the default course is very long and boring, so hit Esc to return to the menu and select another track. We recommend 'mountain.track' for copious stuntage – including an outrageous loop-the-loop – and for a total speed frenzy, choose the F1 car.

As you drive round the courses, the game keeps track of your time, but it's so much fun to off-road that we've never even bothered completing laps yet. It's much more entertaining to go off-roading, zooming off ramps and landing in all manner of comedic situations. The cars aren't invincible, though, and a particularly bad impact will lead to a smashed



› "Oh my word! Schumacher is... is driving on the loop!" "No, that's Diniz, Murray."

windscreen and replay time. If you've had a good run, you can put your feet up and watch a complete replay, switching camera views with the right Shift key.

Ultimate Stunts looks prehistoric compared most modern racing games (aside from the car models, which are pretty good), but that doesn't detract from the grin-inducing spins, leaps and flips that your vehicle suffers as you tear around the courses. And best of all, if you're willing to experiment with the track editor (which isn't too difficult to grok), you can create many more stratosphere-scraping ramps.

Backup utility

Clonezilla

Version 1.0.6-5 Web <http://clonezilla.sourceforge.net/>

Disc imaging is cool. It means you can forget about the intricacies of back up, and just copy the whole disc to a single image. If you later get problems and need to restore data, then restoring from an image means you lose nothing. All applications, configuration files and personal files are restored to exactly the state they were in when you first ran the backup. This is more important to Windows users, because the operating system will often install hidden files and settings in places that are not immediately obvious, making backup and restoration of certain applications and games difficult.

But Linux users can also benefit from imaging software, as it makes the task of recovering from complete data loss considerably easier – especially if you run a server. *Clonezilla* is one of the best imaging tools we've seen, and runs as a Live CD before your operating systems have a chance to open files. The latest version has one important addition – the

ability to read and write to NTFS partitions, which is probably the most common format used by Windows installations. This will really help those of us who have both Windows and Linux installed on the same machine, and want to use the same tool to backup both operating systems.

› You should run through the *Clonezilla* backup routine whenever you install a new distribution.



Screenplay organiser

Celtx

Version 0.9.9.5 Web www.celtx.com

If you didn't see *Celtx* in LXF83's HotPicks, then it's unlikely you've come across this wonderful app unless you are involved with the production of movies and short films. *Celtx* is an application that's designed to take the pen and paper out of writing a screenplay, as well as make the whole process of making a screenplay into a film much easier. Despite the obviously niche market for such a tool, *Celtx* is so good that it makes you want to produce a film yourself, and newer versions are no longer restricted to film. Project templates now include theatre as well as radio, and there's an excellent selection of example projects, including a complete *War of the Worlds* radio play and a partial story board for *The Wizard of Oz*. *Celtx* will manage all the scripts, research, images and ideas associated with your project, and let you print and output any combination of the various performers involved in the production. A new feature will even break down the entire production

into a series of index cards, which you can layout in front of you and reorder over a coffee – just like Orson Welles no doubt. If you're looking for something for your local school or college troupe, this is exactly the platform you need to explore ideas, and put those ideas into action. **LXF**

› If you have any desire to write a screenplay, make a movie or produce a play, get the help you need.



Also released

New and updated software that also deserves a look...

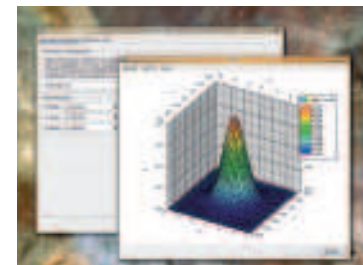
› **Snd 9.5** Command line audio editing that's almost as capable as any graphical app and uses almost no resources. <http://ccrma.stanford.edu/software/snd/>

› **Ghouls and Ghosts remix 0.43** Excellent recreation of the arcade game, but desperately needs public domain images for distribution. www.valarsoft.com/ramuso

› **XScreenSaver 5.04** The standard collection of screensavers for your Linux desktop; several new designs in this release. http://freshmeat.net/redirect/xscreensaver/12141/url_homepage/xscreensaver

› **Bazaar VCS 0.92** Massively popular revision control for programmers. This version improves performance by adding a faster storage format. <http://bazaar-vcs.org/BzrTools>

› **Genius Mathematical Tool version 0.6.2** A little like *Matlab*, *Genius* is a programmable calculation tool using its own extension language. www.jirka.org/genius.html



› *Genius* can map surfaces and functions using a Gnome frontend, and is a scary proposition for anyone who can't manage long division or multiply fractions.

› **Beesoft Commander 4.0.05** Like the *Midnight Commander* file manager but implemented using the Qt toolkit; a lightweight alternative to *Konqueror*. www.beesoft.org/bsc.html

› **NTFS-3G 1.1104** Transforming our NTFS experience from Linux, by finally letting us reliably write to NTFS partitions. www.ntfs-3g.org

› **Rally 0.1.1** Front end to the common RPM package format, *Rally* lets you browse and search for packages, as well as add and remove them. <http://crow-designer.sourceforge.net>

› **Thunder&Lightning 071031** A previous *HotPick*, and an excellent flight simulator. This update finally includes a GUI for mission management. <http://tnlgame.net/>