



CINDER

Usage & Documentation

A native techno-sketching audio workstation

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1 · WHAT CINDER IS

Cinder is a fast, native **techno-sketching** audio workstation (DAW-lite) built in C++ with JUCE. It is a simpler, mood / section / sample-driven alternative to Ableton, with an AI assistant — the **Brain** — that reads your whole arrangement and turns words into edits.

The core loop: **load samples** → **import a reference song** → **let the Brain help you build the track** → **export labelled stems for Ableton**. Cinder is a sketching tool, not a mastering suite — its output is clean, aligned stems you finish elsewhere.

What it does

- **Arrange** audio clips on a timeline — trim (extend = loop), fades, move between lanes, split, copy / cut / paste, snap, loop region, scrub.
- **Warp / pitch-lock** any loop or stem to the project tempo without changing pitch.
- **Melody** → **piano roll** → **synth** — pitch-track a clip into notes, detect its key, edit it, and voice it with a 303 / acid synth.
- **Vocal tools** — separate stems, find where the vocal sings, and trim / split / transcribe lyrics into labelled clips.
- **Mixer / EQ / FX** — per-track 3-band EQ, insert FX (filter, delay, reverb, comp), gain / pan, solo / mute, and automation curves.
- **The Brain** — an OpenAI-backed assistant that edits clips, mix, EQ, FX, sections and tempo, with preview-before-apply and an on-grid review loop.

This document covers installation, every view and tool, the assistant, and a full keyboard reference. It targets v0.1.0-alpha on macOS.

2 · INSTALL & RUN

Download Cinder from isoverge.com/cinder and open the disk image. Drag **Cinder** into your **Applications** folder.

- The build is an **unsigned alpha**, so the first time you open it macOS will warn that it is from an unidentified developer. **Right-click the app and choose Open**, then confirm — you only need to do this once.
- Requires **macOS** on Apple Silicon or Intel.

The app runs on its own. The AI, audio analysis and stem-separation features are **optional** and run through a bundled Python sidecar — see the next section.

3 · SETTING UP THE ASSISTANT

The AI assistant is **optional** and uses **your own OpenAI API key**. On first launch Cinder asks for it; you can change it any time from the ■ **Settings** button. The key is stored only on your Mac (in your app settings) and is never uploaded or shared.

- Get a key at platform.openai.com/api-keys.



- You pay OpenAI directly for what the assistant uses; with a small model this is cents.
- The app works fully without a key — you just won't have the AI.

Python (for the AI & analysis)

The assistant and audio analysis run through a bundled Python helper. It needs Python 3 with a few packages installed once:

```
pip install numpy scipy librosa openai
```

Optional tools unlock extra features:

- `ffmpeg` — audio decoding for analysis.
- `yt-dlp` — import from a YouTube URL.
- `audio-separator` — stem separation (BS-Roformer).
- `basic-pitch` — polyphonic (chordal) melody extraction.
- `faster-whisper` — local, free, offline lyric transcription.

```
brew install ffmpeg yt-dlp  
pip install "audio-separator[cpu]" "basic-pitch[onnx]" faster-whisper
```

Path overrides: set `CINDER_PYTHON` to choose the interpreter and `CINDER_BRAIN` to point at `brain.py` if the app cannot find it automatically.

4 · THE INTERFACE

Cinder has four main views, switched with the number keys:

- **1 — Arrange.** The timeline: lanes, clips, the playhead, section markers, and the automation overlay. This is where most work happens.
- **2 — Mixer.** Per-track gain, pan, 3-band EQ, mute / solo, and the master strip.
- **3 — FX.** The per-track insert chain (filter, delay, reverb, compressor) plus master FX; reorder, bypass, presets.
- **4 — Notes.** The piano roll: extracted melodies on the left, editable notes on the grid, synth voicing.

The **left sidebar** holds the sample library and, when a clip is selected, the clip inspector. The **bottom panel** is the assistant. A **kaomoji** face reacts to what the app is doing.

5 · SAMPLES & THE LIBRARY

- **Add samples** — import WAV / AIFF / FLAC / MP3.
- **Buckets** — auto-sorted into Drums, Bass, Synths, Vocals, Other.
- **Filter** — search by name, role, key, mood, tag or source.
- **Drag to the grid** to place a sample as a clip; double-click to edit source + tags.
- **BPM and key** are read from the filename when present (e.g. `Loop_140_Amin`), otherwise detected on import.



6 · CLIP EDITING

- **Move** — drag the body (including to another lane).
- **Trim** — drag the left / right edge. Extending past the sample end **loops** it (Ableton-style).
- **Fades** — drag the top corners for fade in / out; overlaps crossfade.
- **Split** — press S to cut at the playhead.
- **Merge** — select clips and press Cmd J; contiguous same-sample clips join losslessly, otherwise they bounce to one clip.
- **Right-click** for the full clip menu: fades, gain, warp, normalize, loop, reverse, vocal tools, melody, duplicate, delete.

Clip inspector (left sidebar)

With a clip selected: gain (dB), fade in / out, source offset, warp mode, transpose, loop and reverse.

7 · WARP, TEMPO & FOLLOW

Splice loops rarely share an exact tempo, so they drift even when the project says 140. Cinder fixes alignment two ways:

- **Warp to project tempo** — right-click a clip to conform it (or the whole row) to the project tempo without changing pitch (offline render via signalSmith-stretch).
- **Set tempo from a loop** — right-click a loop to make the project follow its BPM.
- **Follow tempo** — toggle a clip or row to track a reference beat; a badge marks followed clips, and follow-on-drop keeps new clips aligned.

8 · AUTOMATION

Automation draws per-track parameter curves over time — Gain, Pan, and EQ Low / Mid / High — as breakpoint lines you watch rise and fall across the bars.

- Press A to toggle automation mode.
- Use the target menu to pick which curve to edit.
- **Click a lane** to add a breakpoint; drag it to shape the curve; **double-click** a point to delete it.
- The Brain can write curves too (automate) — e.g. “filter-sweep into the drop” or “open the low EQ across the build.”
- **Exports honour automation** — offline stems and the mixdown sample the curves per block, so bounces match playback.

9 · MELODY, PIANO ROLL & SYNTH



- **Extract melody** — pitch-track any clip into notes and detect its key. With `basic-pitch` installed it captures chords; otherwise it falls back to a monophonic tracker.
- **Listen** — the play triangle auditions the melody through the synth without adding a track; click again to stop.
- **Synthesize** — 303 voices: acid, screamer, rubber, hoover, bass, dirty bass, pluck (with slide, accent and sub).
- **+ Sub** stacks an acid lead with a sub bass an octave down.
- **Edit notes** — drag to move (pitch + time), drag an edge to resize, click to add, double-click to delete; notes snap to 1/16 and the synth re-voices.
- The **Notes view** lists extracted melodies on the left (newest first) with audition and delete.

10 · VOCAL TOOLS

Right-click a vocal clip for vocal-aware editing:

- **Trim to vocal** — trim to where it actually sings.
- **Split at vocal phrases** — cut into one clip per sung phrase.
- **Transcribe lyrics (chop)** — local Whisper (faster-whisper, free and offline) chops the clip into one clip per phrase, each **labelled with its words**.
- **Spread track to lanes** — the Brain distributes existing clips across rows.

11 · REFERENCE IMPORT

From the Import menu, load a song from a file or a **YouTube URL** and optionally split it into stems (vocals / instrumental) laid out on their own labelled lanes — ready to flip the audio or match the vibe. Stems are analysed on import (BPM, key, energy, role).

12 · THE BRAIN (ASSISTANT)

The bottom panel is the assistant. Type an instruction and it proposes a readable plan you **Apply** or **Discard** before anything changes. It controls clips, mix, EQ, FX, sections and tempo, remembers the conversation (so “now do the same to the bass” works), and shows a live token meter.

On-grid Suggest review loop

Press **Suggest** and the Brain proposes targeted moves one at a time. For each move it **highlights the beat range and lanes** it wants to touch and shows what it intends to do; you click ✓ **Apply** or ✗ **Skip**, and it cycles until it runs out of ideas.

Tips

- Select a clip first so “this” / “the vocal” targets it.
- Set **reasoning effort** (Think menu) higher for harder structural asks.
- The face changes when it is thinking and when audio plays.



13 · TECHNO ARRANGE & EXPORT

Techno button (toolbar)

- **Arrange clips** — move every track's loop into a full techno structure by role (kick / perc / bass / synth / atmos / vocal across Intro / Build / Peak / Breakdown / Build2 / Peak2 / Outro), in one undo.
- **Section markers** — lay the section template only.
- **Connectors** — riser / sweep / downlifter / impact at the playhead.

Export

Export (Cmd E) writes **labelled per-track stems** with aligned starts — the primary output, ready for Ableton — plus a rough full mixdown WAV for preview / sharing. Both honour automation.



14 · KEYBOARD REFERENCE

Transport & views

Key	Action
Space	Play / Pause
1 / 2 / 3 / 4	Arrange / Mixer / FX / Notes
Cmd Z	Undo
Cmd Shift Z / Cmd Y	Redo
Cmd S / Cmd O	Save / Open project
Cmd E	Export (stems / mixdown)

Clip editing (Arrange)

Key	Action
Click	Select a clip
Cmd A	Select all clips (every lane)
Cmd J	Merge selected clips (join or bounce)
Drag body	Move the clip (including to another lane)
Drag edge	Trim — extending past the sample loops it
Drag top corners	Fade in / out
S	Split the selected clip at the playhead
Cmd C / Cmd X / Cmd V	Copy / Cut / Paste
Delete / Backspace	Remove the selected clip
Right-click	Clip menu (fades, warp, melody, vocal, ...)

Automation & timeline

Key	Action
A	Toggle automation mode
Click a lane	Add a breakpoint; drag to shape
Double-click point	Delete a breakpoint
Two-finger drag	Scroll: horizontal = time, vertical = tracks
Pinch / + / -	Zoom the time axis
Drag the ruler	Set the loop region
Double-click ruler	Add a section marker



?

Toggle the in-app reference overlay

15 · TROUBLESHOOTING

- **No AI / “OPENAI_API_KEY not found”** — add the key to `sidecar/.env` (see §3); the app itself still runs.
- **Analysis or separation missing** — install the optional sidecar tools (§3); the app reports what to `pip install`.
- **Sidecar not found** — set `CINDER_BRAIN` to the path of `brain.py` and `CINDER_PYTHON` to your interpreter.
- **Loops drift** — warp them to the project tempo or use Follow tempo (§7).

16 · CREDITS & LICENSE

Cinder is designed and developed by isoverge.

Software licence

The Cinder application is released under the **PolyForm Noncommercial License 1.0.0** — free to use, modify and share for any noncommercial purpose; commercial use is not permitted. See `LICENSE` in the repository.

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Typography

Display type is set in Cinzel (SIL Open Font License), used here as a free stand-in for Trajan / Trojan Pro. Body type is Helvetica.

CINDER · v0.1.0-ALPHA