


i READ THIS IF...

... you don't have room for the ARP 2600, but want that classic sound, and the flexibility of a built-in step sequencer and modular routing.

SOFT SYNTHESIZER

Arturia ARP 2600V

Can this new emulator give us all a taste of the classic ARP 2600? **Steve Hillier** is on the case...

DETAILS**ARTURIA ARP 2600V****PRICE** £199**CONTACT**Web: www.arturia.com**TECH SPEC**

Mac: OS X 10.2, G4/G5 800MHz or faster, 1GHz or faster recommended, 512MB RAM.

PC: Windows XP, Intel III/IV or compatible processor running at 850MHz-faster than 2GHz recommended. 512MB RAM.

THERE'S NO DOUBTING the ARP 2600's place on the roll-call of fabulous synthesizers. It was designed back in 1970 by ARP's founder Alan R Pearlman as the successor to his huge modular synth, the ARP 2500.

The earlier model used a system of matrix switches for patching modules together. These were expensive and unwieldy, so Alan redesigned it using a system of pre-wired connections between the modules that could be changed using patch cords. This made the ARP 2600 much easier to use, cheaper to build, and helped it assume its title as one of the most revered synths of all time. Check out Kool and the Gang's *Summer Madness* and Cowgirl by Underworld for two examples of it's unassailable character.

And now Arturia have released the ARP 2600V, a software emulation of the classic unit, which follows on from their Moog and Yamaha emulators.

Installation is hassle free; the ARP 2600V arrives on one CD

and requires only a serial number to install the standalone synth and the VST and AU plug-ins.

Once up and running, the ARP 2600V is divided into three distinct sections – the synthesizer, keyboard and sequencer. You can show or hide the various sections to rationalise your workspace, which is handy for those working on laptops, as this instrument can occupy a fair amount of screen space.

Sound device

The synthesizer includes three VCOs, a multimode filter, two envelope generators and a VCA. Being a modular synth, it also has a noise generator, a sample and hold section, various control signal mixers, a reverb unit and, diverging from the original ARP 2600 spec, a chorus and delay unit.

The ARP 2600V is pre-wired like a typical analogue synth, with envelopes connected to the filter cutoff and VCA level, as you would expect. You can expand and modify this using virtual patch leads that appear when you click a socket. There's no limit to the complexity

of your patches beyond the rule of connecting only one modulator to one input. Thankfully, Arturia have included some simple starting points for your patches, which you access via the Template heading in the Bank menu.

The keyboard section is far simpler. It responds to mouse clicks, so you can preview sounds easily without an external keyboard. It also allows you to route MIDI signals to any control input. For example, the pitch bend signal can be routed to filter cutoff for added expression.

Tracker and Sequencer

Another addition to the original spec of the ARP 2600 is the Tracker, an LFO with a twist. It generates low-frequency waves of its own, but it also processes incoming control and audio signals that you can then use to modulate any control input. I found it useful for mixing together diverse sources to make unusual evolving filter sweeps and bloops. In fact, I often felt as if I was in the venerable BBC radiophonic workshop making sound effects for *Doctor Who!*

Strangely, the usually excellent manual is a little cagey about exactly how the tracker works – trial and error wins here.

The ARP 2600V includes an emulation of the famous and extremely rare ARP Sequencer 1601, a relatively simple affair, where you can have two separate eight-step sequences running simultaneously or in series for a larger 16-step sequence. These can be patched to control almost any parameter, so you could patch them to open a filter to differing degrees for each key depress, or for sequentially changing the level of noise in a drone sound over time. You'll also find settings for poly, unison and mono mode on this unit. You can stack up to a whopping 32 voices in unison mode.

In use

If you're new to the ARP way of laying things out, the ARP 2600V will seem confusing at first. It's quite logical though, with signal flow moving from left (oscillators and audio inputs) to middle (VCF mixer and envelopes) to right (VCA and global pan and level

settings). Setting up complex patches becomes second nature remarkably quickly.

And so to business. The ARP 2600V was totally stable for a few weeks prior to writing the review. The standalone version didn't crash once, and the plug-in worked flawlessly in Logic Pro 7 and Cubase SX. I did find the occasional setting that produced unexpected results, such as random notes where PWM stopped when other notes continued to modulate.

But beyond this, the ARP 2600V is stable and mature, and I felt confident using it. It's no CPU-hog either, running comfortably on my 1GHz G4 laptop alongside many more demanding plug-ins. There are plenty of small refinements that make this instrument a pleasure to use. For example, whenever you click on a socket to make a patch connection, the ARP 2600V highlights all the sockets you can connect to. The virtual patch chords can be set to move out of your way as your mouse moves over them, enabling you to alter the settings they would otherwise obscure. Simple

The meanies

It's just a detail, but the ARP 2600V comes with three differing colour schemes that closely mirror the original ARP designs. The first generation, ARP 2600 came in blue, and became known as the 'Blue Meanie' (skin 1). They were all built in 1970 in Alan R Pearlman's garage, and were plagued with reliability problems. Next came the Grey Meanie (skin 2), the most common of the surviving ARP 2600s.

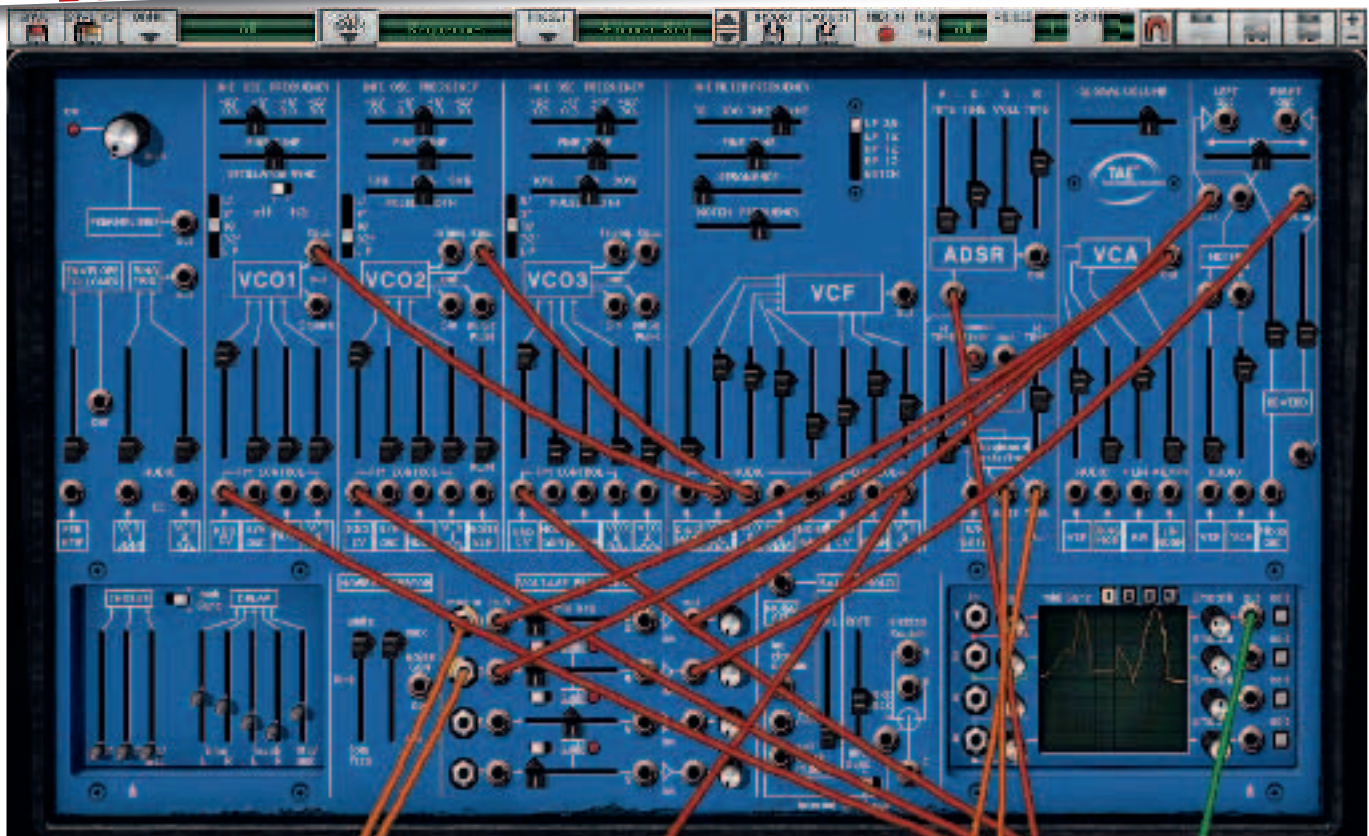
In 1978, ARP released a whole range of synthesizers in their classic orange and black design, and the 2600 received its last makeover. Modifying the ARP 2600V's look takes nothing more than a mouse click. Disappointingly, changing the skins does not change the performance of the instrument – it does not reflect the differing sound of the 2600 through the years. Oh well, we can't have everything.

My favourite skin has to be the orange and black, largely because it's the easiest to read by far, but also it's the coolest looking, and we all know how important that is!

things like this will help the beginner grasp what's going on. Add to that a simple and elegant MIDI learn feature, and you have a grade A GUI.

The way you access the presets on Arturia's whole range of synths, however, could definitely be improved. Arranging sounds in banks and sub banks is handy, but you still have to select them using the archaic 'cascading menus' system. It wouldn't be fair to single out the ARP 2600V for criticism, as countless products use this scheme, but it's clunky, graceless and needs ▶

THE ARP 2600V IS STABLE AND MATURE, AND I FELT CONFIDENT USING IT - AND IT'S NO CPU-HOG...





A little history...

The ARP 2600 is one of the greatest synthesizers ever produced, and it has held a coveted position with musicians and synth collectors for over 30 years. Around 3000 were produced between 1970-81, and the ARP 2600 went through various revisions due to reliability problems and a big bust-up with Moog music.

The original filter used in the earlier Blue and Grey 'Meanies' was a copy of Moog's patented ladder-filter design. This led to a lawsuit between Moog and ARP – consequently, ARP had to design their own filter. Interestingly, this new filter design was considered faulty at the time, as the cutoff frequency could go no higher than 12kHz. This gave the newer models a subjectively duller sound than models with the Moog-style filter, although the filter could easily be modified to open fully. Perhaps that's why the ARP 2600V's filter will open to nearly 19kHz, but it's only marked up to 10kHz on the front panel!

ALTERNATIVES

GMEDIA'S ODDITY
(£79, 10/10/7/8/10, FM133)
Ok, it's not modular and has no sequencer, but the Oddity is a great ARP Odyssey emulator. Gives you the ARP sound at less than half the price of the 2600V.
www.gmediamusic.com

NORD G2 MODULAR
(£1,595, 10/6/8/10/10, FM148)
If modular synthesis is your thing then this is the unit for you! It's a hybrid of a hardware synth and a software-based user interface, and sounds fantastic.
www.clavia.se

WAYOUTWARE TIMEWARP 2600
(\$249, not reviewed)
A highly-favoured ARP 2600 emulator by new American company, WOW. Look out for a review shortly.
www.wayoutware.com

ORIGINAL ARP 2600
(£3,000, not reviewed)
If you have the money, there's no substitute for the original ARP 2600. They're collectors' items now, so you'll almost certainly never find one for sale. Shame.

an overhaul. If we were navigating through a few dozen settings then okay, I'd look the other way, but we have over 400 sounds here!

Excuse the rant. So what does it sound like? Initial sonic impressions of the ARP 2600V are positive. It gives you instant access to a range of ARP-like sounds, from bouncing bass sequences to soaring leads. In fact, the 400 preset sounds are excellent, with notable inclusions from Kevin Lamb (currently working with Neptunes) and Klaus Schultze, one of the pioneers of electronic music. I would be happy to use many of these sounds as they are, but with the ability to tweak them readily available, I'm sure that most users will use them primarily as starting points for their own designs.

Just like the original instrument, the ARP 2600V excels at gritty, mid-range sounds with bite and presence. Even relatively mellow bass sounds have that unmistakable ARP growl – turn up the resonance on the filter and we're straight into Human League's *Sound of the Crowd* territory. You can also coax some impressive lead sounds out

of the ARP 2600V, but make no mistake – just about everything from this instrument sounds vintage. There are no Virus or Neuron 21st century lead sounds here. But does it sound like an ARP 2600? Well, it's pretty close and certainly isn't disappointing, but it doesn't have that 'je ne sais quoi' of a real synthesizer, let alone the ARP 2600. Now, I'm no analogue purist but, frankly, in isolation it sounds a little static and flat, just like most other analogue-emulating soft synths. Once the ARP 2600V is sitting in a mix it sounds great, and will fool all but the most golden of ears into thinking they're hearing a '70s synth. Is it a replacement for an original 2600? No.

So who needs this?

These days, you're just as likely to hear an analogue synth on an alternative rock track by Kaiser Chiefs as on an ambient workout by Ulrich Schnauss. The market for synths is bigger than ever, and the ARP 2600V will be a success, not least because it can add analogue-like grit to any style.

Purists will gag at the inclusion of chorus and delay, and may deny the overall authenticity of the sound, but I think the ARP 2600V is a great synth. Rating it on its sonic accuracy

is a mistake; no matter how good the emulation, a soft synth is not the hardware it's imitating. So let's move on from all the marketing hype we've endured for years and enjoy these programs for what they are. I've been a fan of the ARP sound for a long time, and the ARP 2600V goes 90% of the way towards giving you that sound. With internal 64-bit word length fidelity, we are listening to state-of-the-art analogue modelling here. If you want authentic-sounding early '70s analogue sounds, then this is the soft synth for you. **FM**

FMCD TRACK 03

Examples of the ARP. More info on p8.

VERDICT ARP 2600V

BUILD QUALITY/STABILITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
EASE OF USE	★★★★★
VERSATILITY	★★★★★
QUALITY OF RESULTS	★★★★★

Gives that classic ARP sound, the flexibility of a built-in step sequencer and modular routing.