

Nord Electro 3

from £1,369

The original Nord Electro caused quite a stir back in 2001. Two incarnations later, *Dan 'JD73' Goldman* finds out what's hot with the Nord Electro 3

 ON THE DVD

WHAT IS IT?

The third incarnation of Clavia's well-loved Electro mechanical keyboard emulator, now with added Nord C1 Organ Engine, sample upload and more

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Compact, light, portable, well built
- 2 Great sounding organ, pianos and FX and infinite sonic palette using samples
- 3 Great feeling semi-weighted waterfall keyboard available in 61/73 note sizes

PRICING

61-key
£1,369
73-key
£1,565

The Nord Electro (1 and 2) is now something of a classic. Reliable, tough, very portable and above all, having onboard

some of the most realistic classic keyboard emulations around, it's no wonder it's remained so popular.

On the face of it, the Electro 3 looks very similar and the general look and operational concept will be very familiar to existing Electro owners. However, on closer inspection, it's lighter and slimmer and the front-panel has altered significantly to reflect the new features.

First up, the main control panel has been moved to a more central position with all controls and functions now directly in front of the performer. The red case and grey and black with white livery look has also been adopted from the Wave and Stage EX.

New layout

The area on the right-hand side of the control panel is stamped with the menu hierarchy for the operating system which, while ugly, is very useful as the display is very small and cryptic. This space can perfectly accommodate a laptop too.

Significant new features include the Nord C1 organ engine (including its excellent Leslie rotary speaker emulation), the inclusion of the Mellotron sound library (found most recently in the Nord Wave), user sample upload capability (with detailed editing software), new effects and EQ, a

monitor input for playing along to stereo tracks from your MP3 player and a bigger on-board memory with 128 user-writable programs.

Switchgear on the Electro 3 is standard Clavia issue with high-quality plastic buttons for on/off functions and rubberised dials for continuous functions. Sound access is easy and the general feel of the instrument is high quality throughout.

Under the lid

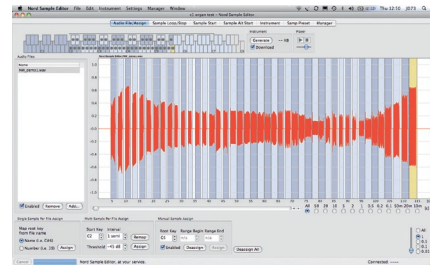
On the left part of the control panel is the organ section, master volume and controls for the rotary speaker emulation, virtual drawbars (that work great in practice), the organ type selector (Hammond B3, Farfisa or Vox), percussion selectors and the split/assignment function.

This function enables a different organ sound each side of the split point and also MIDI control of the lower manual (with its own independent

Using Samples with the Electro 3

The Electro 3 has 68MB of flash sample memory onboard and Clavia provide their own software editor to edit and transfer samples. The Electro 3 can read most formats of mono/stereo files (WAV/AIFF etc) with up to 44.1kHz/24-bit resolution.

The sample editor can also run without the Electro 3 connected, so you can make samples at your leisure! You will of course need a compatible computer with USB. To sample a Rhodes, you could even record every



note as a continuous audio file into your DAW and the editor will chop and automatically map each note to a note on the Electro's keyboard!

Each note can then be edited (cross-faded,

tuned, gained, zoned) and then uploaded to the Electro. Note: a sample instrument could even contain a bass sample in the lowest zone, a pad in the middle and a lead in the top zone.





drawbar settings) from an external MIDI board. There are two keyboard sizes available (61- and 73-note) as previously, both in the waterfall organ format. The actions feel pretty much the same as before (well-balanced and positive) and almost identical to my Stage Compact, except that aftertouch is missing. The improvement in sound provided by the C1 engine is

Next up the piano section. Recently Clavia standardised their own sample library so the piano section instruments could be used across the Stage and Electro ranges which is great. I'm happy to say there's little to fault in this section, sonically. The Rhodes and Wurlitzer sampled emulations are very authentic and still some of the best out there. They bark, sparkle and growl in a

on-board acoustic pianos and the Yamaha CP sound very highly. These really are some of the best ive heard. They sound very real and are warm, clear, resonant and beautiful – just as real pianos should be, though of course some may not enjoy playing them from a waterfall organ-type keyboard. You'll have to buy a Nord Stage for the fully-weighted keys I'm afraid!

Finally, and most significantly, is the sample library button. Here you can access sounds you have downloaded from Clavia's growing sample

library or you can import and use your own samples as the basis of your sounds. (See the *Using Samples with the Electro 3* box).

Perfect sounds

There are plenty of very useable sounds on board here, including lush and authentic strings and flutes from the Mellotron Library along with pipe organs, accordions, harmoniums and some analogue synth samples too. While this is great, there's no pitch stick or mod wheel to bring out the best in synth type sounds and this also cripples the Electro 3's controller ability (which is already pretty basic).

To conclude then, the Electro 3 undoubtedly delivers sonically and its feature set, while a compromise in some areas, is certainly very powerful

SPECS

Organ Section:

- > Organ section from the acclaimed Nord C1 Combo Organ
- > Three classic organ models: B3, Vox Continental, and Farfisa 1 semi-weighted keys
- > Nine digitally controlled drawbars

Piano Section:

- > Five selectable types of pianos – Grand, Upright, EPiano, Wurl & Clav/ Harpsichord.
- > 68 MB of the flash memory is allocated to samples 6 Reverbs
- > 40-60 Voices polyphony

Effects Section:

- > Effect 1 – pan, tremolo, auto-wah, pedal-wah and ringmodulator nob quantise
- > Comp/Amp – three amp/speaker simulations, compressor and rotary speaker

Global:

- > 128 program memories
- > Velocity sensitive, semi-weighted 'waterfall' (square front) keyboard

Connections:

- > Two Audio outputs
- > One Monitor input
- > One Headphone output
- > One Control pedal input
- > One Sustain pedal input
- > One Rotary Speaker speed switch pedal input
- > MIDI In, MIDI Out
- > USB interface

Dimensions:

1120 x 100 x 300mm

Weight:

9.1kg

The Electro 3 is a huge improvement over the outgoing model in many important ways

immediately noticeable, particularly in terms of the rotary emulation, key click, percussion and the overall clarity. The organ in my Stage Compact sounds much muddier in direct comparison. So now there is a lower-end Clavia model with a better organ than their flagship model!

Organic

There are also new organ sound shaping options, including settings for low and high rotor speeds, acceleration, different tonewheel vintages and new key click and percussion level controls.

One thing I do like better is the placement of the rotary selection/drive control next to the drawbars, whereas on the Electro 3 the drive control is further away, although all the effects in one area does keep things tidy.

very musical way though there is no way to alter the velocity response curve like the Stage.

Clavia provide several Rhodes models sampled with different tone and pickup placement that adds greatly to the versatility. Further tone shaping can also be applied to the Rhodes (or the organ, user samples and other piano instruments) via the on-board EQ, FX and amp simulators (more about these in the *Effects and Amp Simulations* box) so the permutations are pretty endless and you can truly personalise your sound.

The Clavinets and Harpsichords are just about the best you could hope for save for the real thing and it's nice having the clav EQ/pickup selectors like the original Clavinet D6. The only thing missing is the mute function. I rate the



ALTERNATIVES



Nord Stage Compact EX 73

£1,957

Same keyboard and form factor as the Electro 3 73 but with versatile split and layer capabilities, aftertouch, bigger screen, synth and external section.

clavia.se



Korg M3 expanded 73-key

£2,149

High spec'd Korg workstation utilising Oasys technology for its sound. Includes sampling, touch screen, sequencer, effects and Karma engine.

korg.co.uk



Roland Fantom G7

£2,380

Latest 76-key Roland Flagship workstation with advanced emulations of electro-mechanical keyboards, sampling, large screen with mouse, sequencer and effects.

roland.co.uk

and improves greatly on previous models. Unfortunately, by including the C1 and user sample ability, some confusion has now opened up in the Clavia product lineup and I sincerely hope the imbalance of features between Electro 3 and Stage is addressed soon.

Where the Stage series still stands head and shoulders above the Electro 3 is its synth section, split/layer/MIDI abilities, aftertouch, performance

controls, bigger screen, keyboard velocity options and the option of 76/88-note weighted keyboards.

Electro or Stage?

Make no mistake then, there are still many reasons to purchase a Stage over an Electro 3, but the gap has closed somewhat and while the Electro 3 is a huge improvement over the outgoing model in many important ways,

I suspect some will be weighing up the Stage Compact EX next to the Electro 3 and struggling to decide which to buy.

My advice would be to try both and carefully weigh up which features are most important and of course the price differential (around £400). One other key point to consider is the Electro being monotimbral – only one piano or organ can be used at a time, while the Stage allows several instruments to be layered/split.

If you'd like the C1 organ/on-board sample capability in one box, the Electro 3 is the only option. Couple that with great pianos, FX,

portability and a high-quality simple approach, I feel Clavia have another winner on their hands. Otherwise it's a waiting game to see if these features appear in the Stage line. **FM**

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Effects and Amp Simulations

The Electro 3 is very well specified in the effects department. First, it shares a similar three-band EQ to the Nord Stage with +/- 15dBs of gain for seriously boosting or cutting sounds.

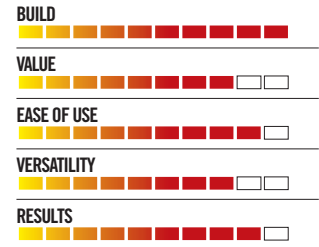
Available effects are split into four sections on the right of the front panel. Section 1 includes Autowah, panning, tremolo and ring mod. Section 2 includes flange, chorus and phase while section 3 includes the C1 rotary cabinet, amp



simulators and a compressor. The effects are easy to use and sound great. The choruses and phases are lush, the wahs are juicy and the amp simulations give an

authentic 'amped-up' feel. Finally, a great-sounding reverb processor tops things off. The only real downsides are the lack of dedicated amount dials for each and no delay.

FutureMusic VERDICT



A worthy successor to the Electro 2. It builds on its solid heritage while adding key new features.

