

Roland Jupiter-80 | £2,939

The Jupiter-80 is Roland's first Jupiter-badged synth since the '80s, but is it really worthy of wearing the legendary name? **Dan 'JD73' Goldman** investigates

 ON THE DVD

WHAT IS IT?

Roland's new 'supernatural' supersynth, featuring acoustic tones, virtual analogue synth and 76-note keyboard

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Sonically punchy and versatile synth section
- 2 Acoustic tones are superb
- 3 Extremely expressive/ responsive to play

OK. Let's get the obvious bit out of the way first. If you came here looking for a 2011 remake of the Jupiter 8 – the classic '80s Roland synth – then you're about to leave disappointed. This isn't the synth you're looking for. Despite the retro paint job, despite the name (how dare they!) even a casual glimpse at the surface will reveal a disappointing lack of physical controllers and – if you look even closer – yes, that is a button marked 'Pipe Organ'... Alarm

bells ringing yet? No? OK. How about the synth engine? Analogue? At all? Just a bit? Nope. This is completely 100% digital. I think some of you might need to have a sit down.

Jupiter-80 is actually largely based on Roland's acclaimed 'Supernatural' sampling technology, which samples every key from the instrument (instead of just a few zones) for super-realistic, dynamically smooth sounds. It also features a virtual analogue modelled synth, which Roland call a 'Supernatural Synth', featuring several

virtual analogue waves, the 'Supersaw' wave which debuted on the JP-8000 (which is a staple sound for Trance producers) a noise source, plus (like the Nord Stage 2) it also has sampled PCM waves too, though you can't import your own currently.

Supernatural

The really clever bit of the Jupiter-80 is it's 'Behaviour Modelling Technology' which captures the performance nuances of particular instruments, analyses your actual playing performance in real-time and then melds these characteristics with the Supernatural samples to add a greater breadth of expression to sounds. For example, if you play a sax sample, as you press harder on the keys you can add more growl, while it'll also subtly change in tone, much as would happen when blowing harder on a real sax. On a violin or cello sound, as you lean into the aftertouch keybed, you'll find that the dynamics smoothly change and a very natural vibrato fades in. It's certainly no marketing gimmick and the results are truly stunning. Without doubt, the strings, brass and woodwinds (solo and ensemble) are the most realistic



USB Slot
Under this flip-up cover is a USB connector for OS upgrades and audio file playback/recording, using a memory stick.

Part Volume Control
These sliders and switches allow you to fade parts in and out, or switch sounds on and off on the fly.

Category Buttons
Direct access to preset or user sounds from these Jupiter-8 style switches.

and expressive I've ever had the pleasure of playing in a keyboard.

Performance

Instead of making 'a 2011 analogue monster' Roland have taken the original JP-8s heritage as a boundary-pushing live synth and ran with it. Jupiter was where Roland put their latest technology and the same holds true with the 80. The case and controls (which are obviously designed to hark back to the Jupiter-8) feel very high quality (which is what you would expect on flagship pushing-£3,000 instrument) and the 76-note, synth-action semi-weighted keyboard, is great, though it's a shame there's no weighted option. The acoustic and electric pianos, plus many of the other acoustic sounds would benefit from being played via a weighted keyboard.

Controller-wise, the Jupiter-80 is pretty sparse for a performance instrument and this is its biggest downfall. There's the usual pitch/mod wheel, four volume part sliders/switches, the D-Beam (for hands-off expression) plus four assignable dials under the screen that are preset to control filter cutoff (for the upper and lower parts) and for controlling the

The Synth Section

The synth section is one of the punchiest and most versatile VAs available.

A 'Supernatural Synth' tone consists of three 'partials' (oscillators) with two LFOs per partial, ring mod and a powerful multi-mode filter with selectable 12 or 24dB slopes. It's a brilliant synth, though the filter does step a little with fast cutoff changes.

When you consider you can have two 'Supernatural Synth' based live sets (with four 'Supernatural Synth' tones in



each) plus another synth tone on the percussion and solo parts, if you combined them all, you could have a humongous 28-oscillator synth running (depending on the processor and

polyphony of course). The PCM samples in the synth cover most of the bread and butter sounds that you'd expect (more pianos, strings, guitars and effects) plus sampled synth tones.

'tone blender' function, that allows you to control multiple parameters via one dial (which is a godsend). It's a real shame that this basic interface lets the Jupiter-80 down, as it really is a super-powerful synth and thus it would have really benefited (like the Jupiter-8) from dedicated hardware controls for envelopes, filters and effects – why just a reverb and rotary

on/off? I would have been much happier with a tiny screen and a full compliment of analogue style sliders, dials and switches (like the JD-800 or JP-8000) and this would have made many people take it much more seriously as a Jupiter-8 successor.

The colour screen is large and the fonts are easy to read compared with the Korg Kronos but it would have

SPECS

- Keyboard:** 76 keys (with velocity and channel aftertouch)
- Colour LCD touch screen
- Polyphony:** 256 voices (varies according to the sound generator load)
- Parts:** 4 parts (Upper, Lower, Solo, Percussion)
- Registrations:** 256
- Live Sets:** 2,560

- Effects**
- For Live Set (Upper/Lower Part): Multi-Effects (MFX): 4 units, 76 types per each Upper/Lower (total: 8 units), Reverb: 1 unit, 5 types per each Upper/Lower (total: 2 units)
- For Solo Part/Percussion Part: Compressor + Equaliser + Delay: 1 set per each Solo/Percussion part (total: 2 sets), Reverb: 1 unit, 5 types
- Master Effects:** 4-Band Equaliser, USB Memory/Song Player/Recorder Section
- Tracks:** 1 stereo track
- Format:** WAV, AIF, MP3
- Arpeggiator Preset:** 128 styles User: 128 styles
- Harmony Intelligence:** 17 types
- Continues over...**



Touchscreen

The heart of the beast. Most of the editing is done from here. It's clear and easy to read.

76-notes with Aftertouch

The semi-weighted, synth-action keyboard allows plenty of room for sound splits and layering.

ALTERNATIVES



Nord Wave
£1,684

Versatile and portable virtual analogue synth, with user sample import and sample library access for loading acoustic and other synth sounds.

nordkeyboards.com



Korg Kronos 73
£2,999

Very powerful synth workstation, with modelled analogue synths, sampled waves, and acoustic modelling, plus sequencer and sampler.

Korg.co.uk



Roland Jupiter-8
£3k+ second hand

The Jupiter-80's predecessor, now fetching silly money second-hand and very sought-after for its hands-on control and versatile analogue engine.

been nice to have a monitor screen output, plus it's not yet apparent whether or not there's going to be a software editor to aid with patch making. Also, some of the on-screen boxes are a little awkward to select with your finger as they are just that bit narrow. What is good here (unlike the Kronos) is that if you select a parameter on screen you can simply drag the selected control to change its

value (whether it's a slider or dial). Plus if you select and hold a parameter and turn one of the four under-screen dials, that parameter becomes assigned to the dial.

Roland in the deep

Now let's examine the sound structure as it's initially pretty confusing. The main element in a Jupiter-80 sound is a 'tone'. This can be a 'Supernatural

Acoustic' tone or a 'Supernatural Synth' tone. Up to four tones (acoustic or synth) can be layered to form a 'live set' (which includes envelopes, filters, offsets etc.) and up to two live sets can be used together in what's called a 'registration'. This registration contains a snapshot of performance related settings such as splits, layers, note ranges, arpeggiator settings, pedal control assignments and more, plus it includes 'upper' 'lower' 'percussion' and 'solo' parts which all have dedicated front panel volume sliders/switches and to which you assign the live sets. This gives you a total of 10 separate tones to split and layer per registration. Thankfully, the Jupiter-80 also has 256-note polyphony to accommodate this huge sound engine and sonically, a 10-tone stack can sound massive. Also note that you can assign any type of tone to the percussion or solo parts too, not just monophonic parts. There are also some very nice percussion, FX and drum kits available, accessed from the drum/SFX and manual percussion buttons on the front panel.

Live and kicking

For live performance, it's easy to change registrations/banks/sets using the Jupiter-4-style buttons under the keyboard and there's a 'lock switch' option to stop you inadvertently changing sounds if you brush them with your body or fingers, which is actually quite easy to do. Finally, the multi-coloured Jupiter-8-style switches provide quick access to several categories of sounds (to which you can also assign your favourites) giving you instant access to all the sounds you could want for live performance. However, the lack of hands-on editing controls is again a persistent disappointment.

The sound department is where the Jupiter-80 really pulls its punches. If when you think of the

The Good and Great

Things we really love about Roland's brand new super synth



> Be under no illusion. This thing can create huge walls of layered sound. Layering a super expressive 'Supernatural' sax with an orchestra, bells, Rhodes, Moog bass and FX

can be very inspiring and it's pretty easy to set up using the colour touchscreen



> Having the dedicated front panel sliders with meters and direct on/off switches for upper, lower, solo and percussion parts, allows you to quickly switch sounds in and out

whilst performing and also smoothly fade sounds in and out too This adds a lot to the expressiveness of a performance, whether live or in the studio



> Make no mistake, this is one serious synth with a phat and heavy sound. It's a sound designer's/film scorer's dream, yet it can do simple, subtle and beautiful sounds too,

much in the spirit of the original Jupiter-8



