

# Nord Electro 4D | £1,649

Nord's latest incarnation of the Electro now features real drawbars and a new organ engine. *Dan 'JD73' Goldman* explores...

#### INCLUDES AUDIO

#### WHAT IS IT?

Upgraded version of the Electro with real drawbars

#### CONTACT

Who: Sound Technology  
Tel: +44 (0)1462 480000  
Web: [www.soundtech.co.uk](http://www.soundtech.co.uk)

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Compact, tough and portable
- 2 Real drawbars, upgraded organ engine and delay
- 3 Excellent range of sounds onboard plus user sample upload



It's three years since we reviewed the Electro 3 and concluded that it was one of the most authentic piano/organ and electric piano

emulators around. Notably, while the Nord Wave was the first Nord board to feature user sample uploading, the E3 was the first Electro to include it, massively expanding its sonic range.

Subsequently, this feature has found its way on to the flagship Stage 2 series and the Nord Piano 2, and there's now a free and ever-expanding library of sampled sounds available via Nord's website. The Electro series' small and light form factor, plus this expandable sound library, means both the E3 and E4 are great investments.

All E3 models are still available (for now) and come in 61, 73-note semi-weighted and weighted (HP) variants, though currently the E4D is

only available with a 61-note keyboard, which may be a little restricting for some. (We presume Nord will phase out the E3 and introduce an E4D SW73 and E4D HP but only time will tell.)

The semi-weighted waterfall keyboard on the E4D (the same as the E3) is great for organ sounds and still controllable enough for playing piano-type sounds too, while the case and switchgear is built to the very sturdy standards we've come to expect from Nord. Note that the front panel layout is largely the same as the E3HP (the standard E3 doesn't have a delay effect like the E4D) but it's time for a bigger screen on the next revision: editing system settings is still pretty cryptic.

So, the Electro 4D is evolutionary rather than revolutionary, but that's not to say it doesn't have some very worthwhile changes on the surface and

under the hood. The most obvious is the addition of real drawbars, something that for a while now players have been lobbying Nord for. The first Nord to feature real drawbars was the new C2D. When we reviewed this powerful Hammond clone in *FM253* we concluded that the real drawbars transformed the C2 into a real player's instrument – and the same can be said for the 4D. While the button/LED system on all models before the C2D is still a great system – and in some ways preferable due to the great LED visual feedback – you just can't beat real drawbars when playing live; there's just something more involving about grabbing some drawbars and getting stuck in.

#### Twice as nice

It's worth running through how the physical drawbar settings are stored and recalled. Basically, if you have an organ patch selected, pressing the 'preset' button immediately recalls the patch as it was originally stored (though, unlike the button/LED system, the drawbars don't physically reflect the sound you're hearing and don't become active unless you hit the 'drawbar' button).

By either pressing the 'preset' or 'drawbar' button you can also handily flip between the preset/stored sound and the live drawbar setting, giving you two distinct sounds to play with, plus you can split the keyboard with independent drawbar settings and access the split via an external MIDI board too for dual manual action. Note that if the 'drawbar' and 'preset' buttons are unlit, it means that the drawbars are active but the drawbar light will only come on once the drawbars on the



#### Organ Section

Organ engine taken from the latest C2D with improved key click, drive, Leslie and general sonics.

#### Piano

Contains acoustic and electric pianos/clavs plus harpsichords and a user sample section.



#### USB

For uploading/downloading sounds and for sending and receiving MIDI information.

#### Connections

Monitor input, MIDI In/Out, stereo audio outs and control pedal inputs for sustain, rotor and general control.

panel are in the same position as stored in the preset. While this is initially confusing – we'd prefer to see an LED under each drawbar, as on the C2D, which makes it much easier to match the drawbars to the position stored in the preset – in practice the system is a fair compromise.

The organ engine has also been upgraded – it's the same as the C2D, Nord's flagship organ. We have few complaints about any of the revisions of Nord's organ engines – though again this one is evolutionary rather than revolutionary – and the sonics are absolutely spot on and very like a real B3. The new B3 model sounds subtly chunkier and more in-your-face somehow when compared with the old E3 and the new key click and drive is superb, the key bounce feature (triggers the click when the key bounces) is a

### Effects

The E4's onboard effects and EQ are powerful and blend effortlessly with any sound. There's a 3-band global EQ with sweepable mid, plus the two effect blocks containing a pedal-wah (sweepable using an external pedal) auto-wah, pan, ringmod, flangers, phasers and chorus, plus reverb and

delay. It's great to finally have the stereo delay onboard (with ping pong and tap-tempo option) which really opens up the sonics, it's just a shame that it can't be used at the same time as the reverb, as they use a combined control. If you want both you need to move up to the Stage 2.

Also, there are still no continuous effect amount controls (as on the Stage 2) but there are preset effect amounts instead. The speaker emulations and compressor remain the same as on the E3, but the drive effect has been improved and blends more easily with all sounds now.

more solid and realistic than the Stage 2 and is certainly a match for the highly regarded Neo Ventilator. On that subject, many Stage 2 owners emailed Nord to ask if the C2D/E4D organ engine could be ported to the Stage 2

one sound section can be used at a time (no layering or splitting of organ and piano sections). We really hope this changes with the next revision, particularly at this price point. Okay enough about the organ. What else has

changed? Well the piano engine remains largely the same, with the same amount of memory onboard, but there's now a long release function which

adds a more realistic long decay to the acoustic piano sounds. Like the organ improvements, this is a subtle addition but one that adds much again to the overall authenticity.

### Piano fort 

We're rather fond of Nord's piano samples as they sound more 'real' than most and you can choose from a number of excellent options bundled on the onboard DVD, or alternatively download extra sounds from the Nord website using the Nord Sound Manager application for Mac or PC, which provides a very elegant way to manage sounds and update the OS.

Our favourite piano sounds include the warm and comfy 'Steinway Grand Lady D' and the 'Yamaha Bright Grand' plus there are some really great uprights onboard too. All the piano samples can be in stereo or mono and while the number you can have onboard at once is constrained by memory, Nord do provide different-sized samples if you wish to have more sounds onboard (by

### SPECS

#### Keyboard

61-key Velocity sensitive semi-weighted waterfall

#### Piano Section

**Five types:** Grand, Upright, EPiano, Wurli & Clav/Harpsichord.

185MB of flash memory  
String Resonance  
Long Release  
Sample Section  
Sample Library

#### Organ Section

B3, Vox Continental and Farfisa with full polyphony  
B3 Tone Wheel Organ engine from Nord C2D  
9 physical drawbars  
Two complete organ registrations for every program

#### Effects Section

**Effect 1:** pan, tremolo, auto-wah, pedal-wah and ringmod

**Effect 2:** phaser, flanger and chorus

**Delay Effect:** Rate, Amount, Tap-tempo and Stereo Ping Pong

#### Connections

2 Audio outputs L & R

1 Monitor input

1 Headphone output

1 Control pedal input

1 Sustain pedal input

1 Rotary Speaker speed switch pedal input

MIDI In, MIDI Out

**USB:** Type B connector

#### Dimensions

**900 x 100 x 300mm**

#### Weight

**7.65 kg**

The organ engine is the same as the C2D... the sonics are absolutely spot-on and very like a real B3

subtle yet important improvement, adding greatly to the overall playing experience, and the new Leslie 122 emulation (with close and distanced mic settings), extends the sonic palette nicely. The fast speed setting sounds

but currently it seems the answer is 'no'. That's a shame, as once again that leaves us with a flagship Nord without the latest features.

One last thing – and it's a biggie: the Electro 4D is still mono-timbral, so only



#### FX section

Plenty of effects onboard including modulation, reverb, compression, amp emulations and a new drive, rotary speaker and delay effect.

#### Keyboard

61-note semi-weighted waterfall keyboard for fast organ and piano playing.



## ALTERNATIVES



## Hammond SK1

**£1.349**

The closest competitor to the E4D. Very compact with organ, pianos, clavs and more, plus an upgradable sound library. Crucially it's four-part multi-timbral too.

[www.hammondorganco.com](http://www.hammondorganco.com)



**Korg Kronos 61**

**£2.399**

A little more expensive but it comes with a very deep synth and sample-based engine onboard, plus sequencer, CX3 organ engine, sampler, FM synthesis, KARMA engine and many real-time controllers.

[www.korg.co.uk](http://www.korg.co.uk)



### Yamaha Motif XF6

**£2.080**

Powerful Yamaha workstation, with plenty of real-time control and flash memory. Onboard synth, sequencer, sampler and effects. An oldie but still a goodie!

[www.yamahasynth.com](http://www.yamahasynth.com)

forfeiting the long release samples, for example). The electric piano samples are still up there as some of the best on the market, however since the Korg Kronos dropped, we're starting to feel like Nord could do with some new killer

also be nice to have case resonance and long release samples for the Rhodes samples too. Let's also not forget the Wurli and CP80 samples which are still great, but again these could both benefit from string

the delay (which the E3HP also has) and of course the eagerly anticipated real drawbars, which will massively increase the Electro series' appeal to organ players and non organists alike. Not to mention the addition of the

long release  
function for the  
pianos and the  
very handy  
MIDI-over-USB  
as well.

All things considered then, the E3 has

definitely been improved in the right direction. It's time, however, for Nord to spruce up the electric piano/clav samples and we hope that the E5 is multi-timbral, has a pitch bend and mod wheel, and the ability to use the delay and reverb separately.

For now though, the E4D deserves to be at the top of your list at this price point as its features, playability, portability and, more importantly, sounds are still right up there. **FM**

## User Sample Library

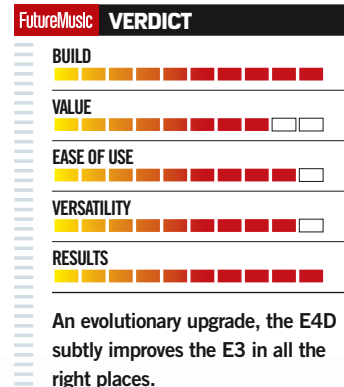
The sample library section memory remains at 69MB, which, while a little on the small side, is still capable of holding about 50 samples. This could be taken up with drum loops, synth sounds, vocal samples or sounds from the ever-expanding Nord

Sample Library, and the Sample Manager software makes it easy to sample and convert your own sounds for use in the E4D. Though the sample section doesn't have the deeper envelope controls or filters of the flagship Stage 2, it does have preset release and

attack times to alter the dynamics. The only thing that's really missing is a pitch stick and mod wheel, which would make the samples more expressive – though of course this would require additional mod routings onboard. Maybe on the Electro 5, then...

## Vital organ

To sum up, the biggest reason to grab the E4D over the E3 is the upgraded organ engine rotary/drive simulation,



## Real Drawbars

**No more buttons and LEDs to fiddle with – now you have real grabbable drawbars. Real B3-ers take note.**