

# Roland JD-Xi | £459

The JD-Xi couples a real analogue monosynth to Roland's SuperNatural sound engine. **Dan 'JD73' Goldman** explores Roland's first 'crossover' synth...

## INCLUDES AUDIO

### WHAT IS IT?

An analogue monosynth and digital polysynth with sequencer, vocoder, effects and USB/audio interface

### CONTACT

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### HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 The real analogue monosynth sounds great, whilst the SuperNatural engine is deep and extremely versatile
- 2 The four-part onboard sequencer is an inspiring live and studio tool
- 3 The vocoder and effects, plus audio interface capability round things off nicely

**E**veryone has been lamenting the lack of a Roland analogue synth for years but, with real analogue having such a

resurgence currently, Roland simply couldn't afford to sit out of this market any longer. The new JD-Xi is Roland's first 'crossover' synth fusing Roland's respected SuperNatural technology to an all-new analogue synth engine.

The JD-Xi looks classy, taking many design cues from the FA line. Like the FA, the colour scheme is black and red with a glossy front panel but the JD-Xi also features striking metallic red plastic sides. The panel features 15 sturdy-feeling knobs that send/receive MIDI, plus translucent rubber backlit selector buttons and it all feels well built. The red LCD is easy to read and relays the

plethora of onboard parameters well considering its small size. However, with so many functions/parameters hidden in menus, there's inevitably a lot of cursor/button pressing so I hope the rumours of an editor in the works come true.

Thankfully, you can scroll in tens and

jump straight to editing sections when holding shift plus pressing the incremental buttons, but perhaps Roland can add an alternative value dial mode for the tempo knob in an update.

## Take a gander

Front left you'll find mini pitch/mod wheels that feel smooth and work well, whilst the velocity sensitive four-octave mini-key keyboard feels nicely balanced and fast. There's no aftertouch included but the JD-Xi responds to incoming aftertouch. Physically, the footprint is similar to Korg's microKorg and Novation's MiniNova, and similarly there's a large category dial for selecting sound types and an XLR gooseneck mic socket (with a nice bendy gooseneck mic included) for vocoding and

## The Pattern Sequencer

The sequencer is intuitive yet it can produce pretty complex results. Each of the four parts has a dedicated sequencer track with up to 64 steps over four measures and you can record into the sequencer via external MIDI input, by using step record using the 16 step pads, or in real time to a click. If you

make a mistake, hold erase while the sequence cycles or remove offending steps by clicking on the respective step pad. You can also record dial movements (including the analogue filter cutoff) and, by using the 'favourite' slots/banks, you can organise several sequences into songs or arrange live sets for gigs. Currently there is no swing function and you

can't transpose sequences by pressing any key, but I hope these features can be added. Importantly, the workflow is very fast and the sequencer's feel is super-tight – press record, add some chords on digital part 1, bleeps on digital part 2, drums on part 3 and an analogue bassline on part 4 and hours will pass without you even noticing – very inspiring indeed!

### Vocoder And Autopitch/Autonote

Use the gooseneck mic to impart your vocal characteristics onto the inbuilt digital sounds whilst playing the keyboard. (Note: the vocoder defeats the analogue synth.) Use Autopitch/Autonote for Auto-Tune-like effects.



**MIDI**

The JD-Xi controls send and receive MIDI data and dial tweaks can be recorded into the sequencer too.

**Audio Input**

Plug audio sources into the audio interface here. Plug in a guitar/line signal and use Autonote to turn the JD-Xi into a guitar synth.

MiniNova-like vocal tuning duties. Physical downsides are that there's no rear gain control (mic gain is in the menus), some straplocks would have been great (to enable you to strap on the JD-Xi keytar/DX100-style!) and there's no battery power option.

Round the back there's USB for DAW connection and the JD-Xi acts as a 16-bit/44kHz 2in/2out USB Audio/MIDI interface. Then there's two 1/4-inch jack outs (one of which can send out the sequencer click for gigs), plus a

Autopitch/note too, you can use your voice to record notes into the sequencer and also use the JD-Xi as a guitar synth where you use your guitar/bass to trigger the digital oscillators. It tracks guitar audio very well, though I advise using a gate pedal so string noise doesn't inadvertently trigger the oscs.

**SuperNatural sounds**

Now the sound engine(s)! The JD-Xi is four-part multitimbral – two digital parts, a drum part and a monophonic

antiquated!) and the JD-Xi surprisingly houses a full-blown Roland SuperNatural synth engine with an editing depth almost equal to the FA and Integra 7/Jupiter series which is big news at this price point! The sound quality is just about up there with Roland's more expensive product lines and the character is similarly warm, hi-fi and engaging.

Each of the digital parts is very powerful and within a Program you can have a tone with three partials, so you

can layer a PCM piano, plus SuperNatural strings and brass (for example) per digital part. Admittedly there aren't the complex multi-sampled

piano sounds or keyboard split sounds that you'll find on the FA/Jupiter series, but the included sounds/sequences are decent (very Dance orientated) and the PCM samples very usable, plus you can add more from the Axial library. There's more than enough tweakability to keep avid programmers happy including editable amp/filter envelopes, an A/D pitch envelope, several great sounding digital filters, a separate modulation and general purpose LFO per partial with fade, key trigger and more (and the list goes on)! This is luxury for a sub £500 synth! Due to the small form factor, only a few real-time knobs are present but Roland have chosen them wisely with controls for filter, pulse width, LFO (with three destinations), effect/amp levels and a clever continuously variable amp envelope dial that gives you short decays/long releases to the left, punchy sounds in the middle and slow attacks/longer releases to the right. The envelopes are nicely snappy too.

The versatile drum part allows kits with two sounds per key (with labels for drum type above each key). The beauty here is you can have different filter, envelope, volume, effect, pan and pitch levels per key. The preset kits include authentic samples of Roland's classic drum machines and more, including various noises, percussion sounds and vocal samples, whilst the 453 onboard drum waves are very good quality.

**SPECS**

37 mini keys (with velocity)  
**Max polyphony:** 129 voices (Digital Synth/Drum Kit: 128, Analogue Synth: 1)  
4-part multitimbral  
2 x Digital synth parts  
1x PCM drum part,  
1x Analogue synth part

**Analogue synth:**  
Saw, triangle and variable pulse waves (with PWM)  
Sub oscillator  
1x analogue LPF

**Effects:**  
**Effect 1:** Distortion, Fuzz, Compressor, Bit Crusher  
**Effect 2:** Flanger, Phaser, Ring Mod, Slicer  
**Delay:** 2 types  
**Reverb:** 6 types  
Vocoder  
Auto Pitch  
Auto Note

**Sequencer:**  
**Tracks:** 4  
64 steps/4 measures max  
Step and Real time modes  
Arpeggiator with 128 presets

**I/Os:**  
Headphone Jack  
**Output (L/MONO, R):**  
1/4-inch  
**Input jack (LINE/MONO/ Guitar input):** 1/4-inch  
MIDI Connectors (IN, OUT)  
USB Port (Hi speed Audio/ MIDI, 16-bit 44kHz, 2in/2out)  
**MIC input jack:** XLR type, unbalanced

**Dimensions**  
**575 x 245 x 85mm**

**Weight:**  
**2.2kg**

## The ladder-based analogue LPF can produce speaker-shaking subs, juicy squelches and sizzling highs!

headphone out and a mono input which can be switched between Hi-Z/line level. You can plug in an instrument or MP3 player here and also use any audio source to trigger the vocoder and the monophonic Autopitch/note function. Autopitch/note corrects badly sung audio according to a user-selected scale (automatically or via the keyboard) but, as any incoming audio can trigger

analogue part all outputting/receiving on separate MIDI channels (1, 2, 10 and 3 respectively) and each part has a corresponding sequencer track. There are 256 digital presets, 64 analogue presets and 32 drum kits onboard with 256 user spaces. The digital parts are each 64-note polyphonic (making the microKorg XL's eight-note and MiniNova's 18-note polyphony seem

**Effect Dials**

The four dials on the panel are simply level controls but in the menus are separate send level controls. Use these to spice up your live performances.



## ALTERNATIVES



**Korg microKorg XL**  
£339

The original microKorg's success still inspires other manufacturers today and its more powerful successor, the microKorg XL+, still offers some great sounds, effects, arpeggiator and a vocoder.

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



**Novation MiniNova**  
£249

Another microKorg inspired synth, the MiniNova offers plenty of Dance-orientated sounds with a vocoder and VocalTune, plus effects and arpeggiator. Has a pretty deep synth engine too.

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



**Yamaha DX100**

£495

One of the first minikey synths, the classic DX100 is a portable DX21 offering dirty 4-op FM sounds, though it can do great analogue impersonations too with some careful programming.

[eBay](#), [Gumtree](#) etc

Now the analogue part! The Roland boffins have informed me that there's "one DCO analogue oscillator (plus Sub Osc), one TVF analogue filter (LPF) and one TVA analogue amplifier (similar structure as Juno-60, 106, Alpha Juno/JX-3P/JX-8P/JX-10), whilst the

general character is precise, warm and present (even rivalling the quality of some more expensive analogue monos) – the JD-Xi certainly reminds me of my old Juno-106 sonically, which is a good thing too. Also, you can't detune the main analogue osc against the sub

main downside is that you can't route the digital parts through the analogue filter or layer them with the analogue synth except when sequencing; but still, when you add in the sequencer and audio/MIDI interface you realise that the JD-Xi is surely the most fully featured

synth in the sub £500 bracket.

The JD-Xi has just turned the synth world upside down! It has just about everything live performers, beat makers,

## Inspiring to perform and compose with, all the controls you need for live/studio tweaking are onboard

envelopes and LFOs are digital". Importantly, the analogue engine sounds classy and modern, yet unmistakably Roland-y, which bodes extremely well for the upcoming JD-XA poly. You can hear some stepping when turning the filter cutoff slowly (though only at extreme high resonance settings) but the saw, triangle and variable pulse waves are rich, full and punchy and the

oscillator but there's PWM available via the LFO for adding movement/detuning.

The ladder-based analogue LPF sounds great and can produce speaker-shaking subs, refined lows, juicy squelches and sizzling highs. Like the digital and drum parts, the analogue part can be routed through the effects and it's a godsend having everything so fully self-contained for gigging. The

analogue heads and studio producers desire for very little outlay in a sturdy and portable form factor. Although there are minor downsides, most are likely tweakable in OS updates and the bottom line is that the JD-Xi's feature set, versatility and sound quality are wholly unrivalled at this price. The JD-Xi is inspiring to perform and compose with, all the basic controls you need for live/studio tweaking are onboard and the 'crossover' concept is ingenious. Roland surely have a hit on their hands – now bring on the JD-XA! **FM**

### Arpeggiator And Effects

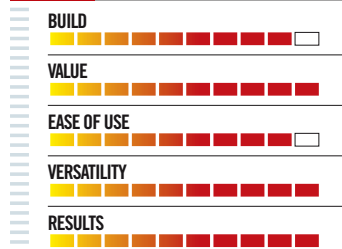
The MIDI-syncable arpeggiator is another powerful tool in the JD-Xi's already well spec'd arsenal. Simply switch it on, press hold to latch the arp and then scroll through the 128 onboard patterns which offer loads of different styles and feels. It's a very quick way to get ideas going or for jamming along to.

Effects-wise, there are two multi-effect blocks

plus a delay unit with standard and panning modes and a reverb unit with two room, two stage and two hall reverbs. Effect 1 includes distortion and fuzz plus a compressor and bitcrusher, whilst Effect 2 includes flanger, phaser, ring mod and a slicer. The reverbs and delays sound good, the distortions and bitcrusher are great for adding general grit or for

dirtying up sounds, the compressor is handy for beefing up beats/basses, and the phaser, flanger and ring mod can all be used to subtly enhance or destroy sounds! The slicer is notable as it can be used as a roll-like function on all parts – you can also tweak effect level per key/drum in drum mode and use the slicer to create fills on just the snare, hats or entire beat.

### FutureMusic VERDICT



The JD-Xi's feature-set, versatility and sound quality are unrivalled at this price point. What's not to like!

#### Digital Parts

The two 64-note polyphonic digital parts use SuperNatural and PCM waves. You can have three partials per tone with separate envelopes, LFOs and more. Deep and powerful!

#### Drum And Analogue Parts

The drum part allows you to build kits from classic Roland samples and effect/filter each drum sound separately. The analogue monosynth features three waves with PWM and a dual octave sub oscillator.