

# Korg Kaoss Pad 3 | £315

Fresh from on-stage duties with Radiohead, Kaoss Pad has had more updates. Does v3 reign supreme? **Jono Buchanan** adds one to his Christmas list...

It's amazing how the toys we play with as kids remain firm favourites. Sound-designers and producers I know are constantly scouring eBay for Speak'n'Spells, talking robots or 'Feel The Force'

replica Yodas. There's something so immediate about children's toys – they flash and speak and assault the senses, but the truly great ones also offer features that draw you back in time and again.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most studio gear just isn't the same. Packing multiple functions into a box usually compromises its immediacy, so while we're frequently dazzled by how much a product can actually do, we're less impressed by how long it takes to figure out how it all works.

But Korg's Kaoss Pad is back, now in its third incarnation, to challenge that. For those unfamiliar with the Kaoss concept, here's some background. First released in 1999, the Kaoss Pad is (first and foremost) a signal effects processor with a large, 'playable' surface. This means that parameters from a particular effects program can be mapped onto a large X-Y control surface and an incoming signal can then be manipulated by changes you draw on the screen itself.

Since the initial release an update arrived in 2002, prompted by requests from Kaoss users who demanded

## WHAT IS IT?

The third incarnation of Korg's super-malleable effects processor.

## CONTACT

Who: Korg  
Tel: +44 (0)1908 857101  
Web: [korg.com](http://korg.com)

## HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 More effects algorithms
- 2 Performance tools have been enhanced
- 3 USB port for direct DAW connectivity





onboard sample triggers, extended effects algorithms and an improved control surface. This duly arrived, along with DJ tools like BPM detection and a dedicated mic input.

### Christmas? Already?

So, what's new in KP3? Firstly, the screen has, once again, been modified. Gone is KP2's grey and blue approach,

additions, including some properly munchy tricks. The decimator is effectively a bit-crusher, which grabs your audio by the scruff of the neck and then beats it into lo-fi submission.

The filter has also been expanded to offer up to 72dB of cut-off, which is pretty extreme to say the least. Combine this with some of the Kaoss' resonance and you're in filter heaven.

which appears as a long-throw fader to the left of the main screen. This allows you to set a fade-out time for any effects with a release time, such as delays and reverbs.

Imagine you're using KP3 with a modulating delay effect. Suppose you want to return to an unprocessed, dry signal. FX release allows you to set a time for the delay to regenerate and

fade away, so that you can easily return to your source material without an obvious glitch or gap. Think of it as anything from a dramatic effect in

## A minute of inactivity triggers a series of dancing screensavers to rival the Blackpool Illuminations

which subtly shifted hue as you applied finger pressure. In comes a screen divided into red LED blocks that light up like Christmas as they follow your movements around the screen. It's all much clearer and even more intuitive than before, which (for a product famed for its immediacy) is quite a coup.

Indeed, so proud are Korg of their new screen that each time you load a new effects program its name scrolls across the screen in giant letters. And in case you're still not impressed, a minute or so of inactivity will trigger a series of dancing screensavers to rival the Blackpool Illuminations. Take my word for it, the surface is truly brilliant.

The next key update is in the number of effects programs offered by KP3. The 100 programs offered by KP2 always seemed a little ungenerous and I'm delighted to report that KP3 swells this number to 128. Kaoss Pad's great forte has traditionally been tempo-based effects, whereby modulating delays clocked to the tempo of your input signal spin off into weird and wonderful places.

There's still plenty of programs that subscribe to this philosophy, but they've been joined by some great

EQ effects are also brought more to the fore in KP3, with EQ parameters sprinkled liberally around the control pad. It's astonishing how quickly you get used to how the effects parameters are spread around the pad, and therefore how quickly you can learn to play and control them.

### Performance features

It's not just the number of effects types that have been overhauled, as some great new performance features lie in wait too. For starters, KP3 has spawned an FX release level control,

its own right to a useful safety net for DJs. Either way, it's very welcome.

Other enhanced performance controls include the revamped Pad Motion control. Introduced on KP2, this function allowed you to flick a switch and draw some motion data on the screen, which would then loop once the switch was un-flicked, allowing you to busy yourself with other functions. KP3 enhances this by putting the effect under a pad button, which is easier to operate.

Pad Motion data can also be reversed, so you can build-up some

### SPECS

#### Effects: 128 programs

Filter (low-pass/high-pass / band-pass/72dB/oct. and low-pass), Isolator & Distortion, Talk-Filter, Flanger, 8-band EQ, Mid Pitch Shifter, Broken Modulation, Phaser, Ring Modulator and high-pass filter, Decimator, Low Compressor, Auto-Pan, Slicer, Delay (Ping-Pong, Multi-tap, Reverse and high-pass filter), Tape Echo, Reverb, Gate Reverb, Grain Shifter, Vinyl Looper, Looper Forward / Reverse, Four-Sample-Bank Cross Fader Roll, Pad Drum 1 / 2, Unison Saw Bass, Noise Synthesizer and Looper, Vocoder

#### Program Categories:

Filter (16 types), EQ (2), Modulation (12), LFO (25), Compressor (2), Delay (16), Reverb (6), Grain Shifter (5), Looper (13), Vocoder (4), Sample Effect (7), Sample Bank Crossfade (4), Drums (6), Synthesizer (10)

#### Sampler:

Sample Memory: 100 samples (maximum)  
Sampling: 16-bit, 48kHz  
Convertors: 24-bit A/D, D/A

#### Connections:

Ins: Mic (1/4") with trim knob, Line In (L,R) (RCA)

Outs: Headphone (1/4" Stereo) with volume knob  
Line Out (L,R) (RCA)  
USB Port (Type B)  
MIDI In/Out

Data Storage: SD Card

#### Power Supply

DC 12V; 700mA

#### Dimensions:

210 x 226 x 49mm

#### Weight:

1.3kg

### USB connectivity

Control over other studio devices has expanded with the release of KP3, as the box has now spawned a rear-mounted USB port.

There are, of course, many benefits to this. First and foremost, this means KP3 could be set up as a control surface for your software instruments and effects

programs. It's simply a case of devising new programs with appropriate MIDI controller numbers – once you know these, you can build an editor for any software you own.

KP3 also now ships with its own software editor, which arrives on CD. Once you're installed, you can edit the KP's own

programs direct from your computer. Lastly, you can dump program data from the KP down the USB cable to your computer.

This is good for backup and great too for those requiring a vast number of programs for a live set.

Store those you don't have room for on your laptop, and then upload at will...

quite complex motion loops with the minimum of fuss. The enhanced surface really comes into its own here, as the Pad Motion is actually displayed by the running lights on the screen.

KP3 has also grown a brand-new knob on the front panel – FX Depth. This is like a dry-wet setting, allowing you to immediately blend the balance between the processed and unprocessed signal. Whilst the rear-mount toggle switch for selecting whether you want to run the Kaoss Pad as a direct source or mix send processor remains, this is still a great addition, and it quickly becomes a new performance tool in its own right.

ALTERNATIVES



**Roland SP-404 Sampler**

£249

The SP-404 is a new sample trigger unit that allows you to record in realtime and assign samples to the unit's 12 pads. A suite of onboard effects lies in wait, but it doesn't feature anything like KP3's control surface. [roland.com](http://roland.com)



**Alesis AirFX**

£80

The AirFX is a processor with 50 onboard effects that can be 'played', theremin-like, by waving your hand in proximity to the unit to alter the parameters. Editability is kept to a minimum and there's no onboard sampling, but the price is very attractive. [alesis.com](http://alesis.com)

Sample capacity

The Kaoss Pad's affinity with tempo-related matters has always been present and correct. The tap-tempo control introduced with KP2 remains, but the sampling department of KP3

possible to chop your brand-new audio file into slices and map these to the eight program buttons at the top of the unit, so that new loops can be created from triggering the slices in an unusual

previous incarnations have picked up some high-profile fans, and I expect its success to increase with this overhaul. With the release of KP2, Korg listened carefully to the wishes and needs of

their user base, and I can only praise them for the continuation of this process. The result is a tool that within a minute of power-up will provide

intuitive control over a great range of effects programs. Try KP3. Don't arrange anything for the subsequent three hours though. You'll be late. **FM**

also now benefits from a stricter sense of time. Sampling is now of a 16-bit, 48kHz standard and four pads below the screen allow you to trigger up to four of these at once.

Direct record mode can be selected for each pad, so it's easy to keep track of where your recordings are held. However, the clever part is that new recordings can be made in terms of beats rather than time. Before a recording is made you can select the tempo of the incoming signal and then capture up to 16 beats of audio at that tempo.

This auto-record function means it's as easy as pie to grab tempo-relevant audio files. Again, this is great for DJs and performers alike. It's also

order. Resampling is possible too, whereby your loops can be re-recorded directly by the unit through its own FX.

A new onboard SD card slot mounted at the front of the unit means that samples and data can now be easily stored or backed up. There's scope for Korg to go further in future updates, with even more sample time and a larger number of sample triggers among my personal requests.

Just what I always wanted

I wish more technology was made like this – with the potential for extraordinary, wonderful musical results, but with a control surface and interface so simple a child could understand it. It's no surprise that

Celebrity endorsement

It's no surprise that technology that features this unique blend of fun, performance and creativity has amassed such a wide range of users, including some industry leading lights.

Radiohead's Thom Yorke (right) is a devoted fan, and a quick internet search will yield some great footage of his vocals being processed in real-time in recent live shows.

Examples can also be heard on his recent *The Eraser* album. Brian Eno has also spoken with affection of Kaoss Pad, with significant chunks of his most recent studio



album, *Another Day On Earth* inspired by the results he managed to squeeze out of this rather special processor.

In interviews given at the time, Eno picked up on the fact that Kaoss Pads will get you 'playing' again, moving computer musicians away from operating everything with mouse clicks and a remote approach to more hands-on music making.

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Please try KP3. Don't arrange anything for the subsequent three hours though: you'll be late...

**FutureMusic VERDICT**

**BUILD** [Progress bar]

**VALUE** [Progress bar]

**EASE OF USE** [Progress bar]

**VERSATILITY** [Progress bar]

**RESULTS** [Progress bar]

**Great fun, great results, really easy to use. And I want one. Can't say fairer than that.**

