

Native Instruments Kore 2 | £349

The Kore is back and more determined than ever to change the way you work. *Daniel Griffiths* plugs in



ON THE DVD

WHAT IS IT?

Software and hardware combination to give you quick and easy control over all your plug-ins. Now with built-in sounds too

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Being able to browse all your sounds by category simultaneously
- 2 Built-in sounds mean it's ready to go, straight out of the box
- 3 Easy, tweakable access to your sounds' most important elements

Kore 2 is without doubt an amazing piece of kit but it still has many folk scratching their heads. And

despite Native Instruments' continued efforts to simplify and empower what was always a good idea, Kore 2 remains a remarkable device, but one that's still not exactly... *essential*.

It's primarily a bit of software that sits between you and your plug-ins. In addition to the Kore 2 plug-in (as an AU, VST and RTAS) comes an A4-sized wedge with push buttons and dials that let you tweak on-screen parameters. So it's basically a new, shiny, unified, hard-and-soft front end to the often overly complicated world of your plugs. No need to learn them – learn Kore and it'll do it all for you. So far so simple.

At the kore

Things get a little trickier to grasp when you consider that Kore 2 now comes complete with sounds built in. The

previous Kore baffled some by not making any noise out of the box – it was literally just a front end – but the new software contains the audio engines of NI's Reaktor, Massive, Absynth, FM8, Kontakt and Guitar Rig. For £349. Smells like a bargain, right?

That's not to say that Kore comes complete with the cream of NI's output. Rather it comes complete with (in our test version at least) 418 sounds that use these engines. Tweaks are possible with the K2 controller but the from-scratch sound-building fun remains the preserve of the full-price option. That said, presets from Kore 2 sound just like the full plugs – to the degree that you'll start cursing NI for deliberately handicapping the plug-in power behind Kore 2's façade. But hey, they're not a charity y'know.

The easiest way to add genuinely new sounds to your Kore 2 set-up is to buy KoreSound Packs, each with 200 sounds in Kore's KoreSound format.

There are currently four packs available (Best of Reaktor, Best of Massive, and so on) for 59 euros each. So a fully loaded Kore 2 is an amazingly diverse and powerful synth but there's even more available if you team Kore 2 with more of NI's plugs. Spring for Kore 2 and Komplexe 5 (NI's über bundle of everything they make), and you'll have 7,500 world-class sounds all catalogued and ready for you.

By storing its sound data as KoreSounds, Kore 2 operates beyond the boundaries of the individual synth elements themselves. Call up 'Alpine Flora' for example and there's no need to know that FM8 is running behind Kore's façade – a small FM8 logo gives the game away. Tool up Kore 2 with Komplexe 5 or a load of KoreSound packs and it really becomes the 'Super Instrument' its makers boast, able – via its integration with NI's expansive plug-in collection – to make any sound imaginable from those glassy FM8 textures to fat Pro-53 leads. And because Kore 2 can host these engines in a single 'Ultimate Pad' MultiSound, the result of a search can just as easily be a stacked rack of multiple synths of every genre, combined to make ever-larger sounds.

Finding suitable sounds is a breeze with Kore 2's innovative sound browser. First coined in the original Kore (and recently copied in the likes of Logic 8) you turn on different parameters ('Processed', 'Organ', 'Bright', 'Film Music' and so on) and Kore 2 filters the results as you click. Suddenly from 7,500 sounds you're down to a 'final



ten' from which to make your selection – something that's quick and easy when you have the new pre-listen button engaged, which lets you play and hear each sound without actually loading it in for full-on tweakage.

Kore control

Controlling Kore 2's most multi-layered beast of a sound is a cinch with the K2 controller. The eight knobs instantly map to different parameters all unique to the sound being played. A knob could be called 'Grit' or 'Drive' or 'Sheen' as often as more mundane features as 'Frequency' or 'Attack'. Suddenly being able to quickly and meaningfully tailor a sound exactly as you require is a single knob turn away – rather than a grapple with multiple parameters of multiple synths when all you want to do is make a sound a little 'darker'.

Special mention to the morphing section, which allows you to rack up eight different sound variations and not just crossfade but magically morph between them. If you're scoring a movie set on a deserted space station, your prayers have been answered. Getting vast, evolving, epic sounds (or even full tracks) out of Kore 2 is laughably simple. Indeed, dialling through the KoreSounds on board it's hard to find

Kore 2 controller

While the software has undergone most of the improvements from the previous version (mostly in terms of the built-in sounds and a host of stability fixes that plagued early Kores) the Kore 2

controller has also had a tweak. It's lost the audio interface part, which was frankly unnecessary and is now slightly smaller and neater as a result. It's also no longer necessary to have it plugged in so you

can boot up Kore – something mobile sound tweekers will appreciate.

The screen is cramped but bright and clear and the touch-sensitive dials (which glow when you touch them) are as impressive as they were previously. It's also much better built than before. Buttons have a distinct click to them (rather than a spongy twang) and the previously glued feet stay on this time thanks to being embedded in holes on the underside.



something that won't rattle your speakers off their mounts. The accent is definitely on 'impressive' rather than 'immediately practical', with Kore 2's built-in effects used extensively to shape the sound further. A side effect of this is that sounds often have a surprisingly high processor load and given the unified mass of sounds it's not immediately obvious which innocuous name in the browser is going to set your Mac's beachball a-spinning. Massive

alone is notorious for sucking the power out of your system but layer it with a subtle bit of FM8 and a shimmer from Reaktor and behind that 'Layered' moniker lies a sound that could bring your computer to a grinding halt. My G5 regularly hiccupped on my bigger creations but my Intel Mac fared better.

The 'economy' question rears its head when you use Kore 2 in your DAW. I used Kore 2's browser for locating sounds but when it came to placing

them on a track I couldn't justify the extra load of having a redundant K2 sat in the way. Of course, this is to do a great disservice to the

level of control and tweakability Kore 2 gives your plug-ins but most of the time you just want 'Synth 7' and have no intention of manfully riding multiple parameters while it plays. In a live set up though K2 makes all the sense in the world. Rack up sounds and tap through them as you need, and enjoy real-time knob-tiddling control. Suddenly Kore 2 makes the unthinkable instantly possible.

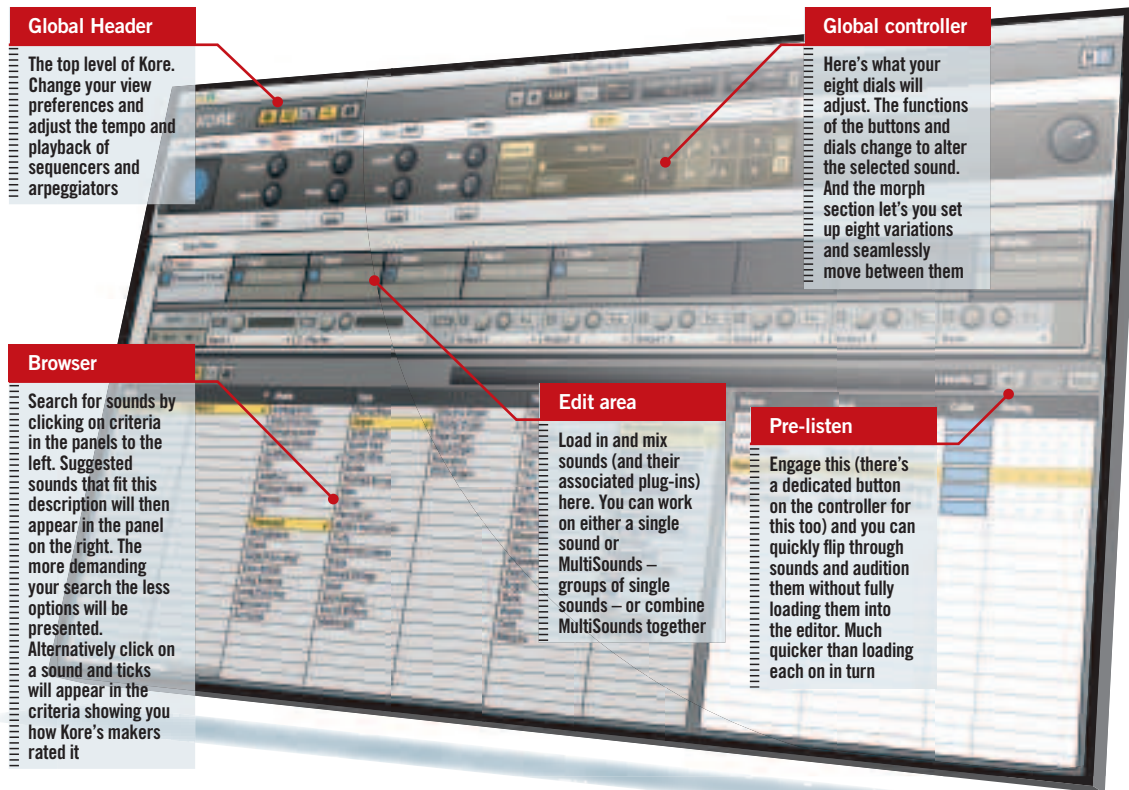
It's worth reinforcing the fact that Kore 2 works with any plug-in too – not just NI's own. But we thought we'd 'break it in gently' and NI's promise that Complete 5's pre-sets were already filed and mapped was too tasty not to try. I expected Kore 2 to install and congratulate me upon sensing Complete 5 but getting Kore 2 to admit that I had the right to play every KoreSound thrown at it was a complex process. Likewise adding other plug-ins – yes,

SPECS

418 built-in sounds
Six audio engines: Reaktor, Massive, Absynth, FM8, Kontakt and Guitar Rig
Compatible with any VST, AU or RTAS plug-in
Two footswitch inputs
Two pedal inputs
USB 2.0
MIDI In/Out
Windows XP / Mac OS X compatible

The morphing section lets you rack up eight different sound variations and morph between them





ALTERNATIVES



Arturia V-Collection
£370

There's nothing quite like Kore but the super-synth concept isn't new. Take this superb package from Arturia for example, bundling together all their soft synths.

arturia.com



NI Complete 5
£699

Another soft synth bundle, this time from Kore 2's makers, Native Instruments. It's a fantastic palette of sound that'll serve you well for years.

native-instruments.com

any plug-in, be it AU, RTAS or VST can be made Kore friendly. However we experienced a greater processor load and the process of turning our VST's

7,500? Really? With so many sounds to choose from I found myself regularly stepping outside K2's browser suggestions – by switching off a criteria

the doubt that Kore 2 had found all my sounds and occasionally certain favourites from the stand-alone plugs failed to appear. Even when I

If you're thinking of buying a new soft synth to bolster your catalogue of sounds then consider a Kore 2

presets into KoreSounds is both less 'auto' than we'd like and – frankly – a time-consuming chore that will get in the way of music making. Will I ever take the time to make my thousands of sounds Kore categorised? I'm not sure.

And I'm a little dubious about some of Kore's classifications. A single sound can make a track so do you really trust Kore 2 when it says there's only three suitable pad sounds? Three? Out of

or two – and found better options.

The basic package of the K2 software and controller is an amazing piece of kit. If you're thinking about buying a new soft synth to bolster your catalogue of sounds then you should consider a Kore 2 instead. It's when you add in Complete 5, and dabble with adding non-NI plugs that things get more complicated and potentially more distracting. I was never able to shake

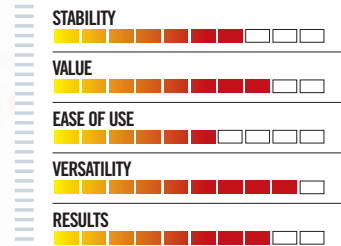
specifically targeted them with laser accuracy in the browser. And don't even consider it on anything less than an Core 2 Duo. But, for anyone

who's ever endured the grumpiness of Massive on a G5, this is nothing new.

You'll know if you're the sort of person that needs a Kore 2. It's debatable as to whether you'll ever be able to hear Kore 2 at work on your plug-ins but auditioning and tweaking them has never been more fun. **FM**



FutureMusic **VERDICT**



Surrendering control of your plug-ins to Kore 2 is hard, but once you do you might never go back.