

Akai MPK49 | £299

Controllers have come a long way from their humble roots. Can Akai's MPK49 offer something innovative in a packed market place? *Jono Buchanan* thinks so



ON THE DVD

WHAT IS IT?

A very capable controller keyboard offering a range of controllers including the famous MPC pads

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Real MPC pads
- 2 Nicely organised
- 3 A lot packed into a very portable package

Controller keyboards are lively, multi-tasking beasts these days, which is remarkable when you

consider that it doesn't seem like five minutes ago that such products seemed almost mind-numbingly dull. Early 'master' keyboards found favour in the late '80s with studio and live musicians keen to control stacks of other MIDI keyboards and modules but they offered little appeal to everyone else as they contained no internal sounds and were frequently complicated to set up.

It seemed possible that the whole concept of keyboard control in this sense would struggle with the software revolution, as more and more musicians consigned hardware synths to the attic or local rubbish dump. But some manufacturers saw an opportunity that was too good to miss and began releasing controllers designed to offer tactility over a whole range of functions required by the software musician – keyboard note input for sure, but also sliders, knobs, switches and pads – so that the modern controller could become as essential a studio workhorse as the computer itself. It worked and

the souped-up controller keyboard market is now thriving. So can Akai set divert attention with the MPK49?

Packed to the gunnels

As you can see, the MPK is a fine-looking fellow. A brief glance across its top panel hints at the range of control it offers, with the right-hand third offering eight 'endless' knobs, faders and

switches. To the left-hand side, orange-illuminated pitch bend and assignable modulation wheels glow gently and below the commanding blue back-lit screen, a set of mode buttons flank the transport switches, which allow control over the very functionality of your sequencer. Most divertingly, the MPK features a set of 12 distinctive pads, which will be familiar to anyone with a working knowledge of Akai's product history; these bad boys are lifted from the MPC range of sampling sequencers.

Even as an overview, that's quite an impressive set of controllers but appearances can be deceptive. As it transpires, while there's only one set of eight physical controllers for knobs, sliders and buttons, a Control Bank button lets you assign three different sets of data for these controls. So, rather than having 24 total parameters assignable to the MPK at any one time,

And more besides

If you're such a control freak that you need more besides this solid array of features, don't turn the page just yet. For starters, the bundled CD offers

some nifty things in the form of a dedicated Graphical editor and a 'Lite' version of Ableton Live. The former maps the control set-up options of

the MPK to your computer, so if you'd rather use your computer keyboard to set up and assign controllers, that choice is yours. In general I'm a huge fan of such editors and this one is just as intrinsically useful.

Because Akai have made using the MPK itself so straightforward, very little time is saved doing this in the computer. And in case that sounds like a criticism, I mean precisely the opposite...



