

Roland VP-770 | £1,649

Hot on the heels of the successful VP550 Vocal Ensemble keyboard, comes its successor – the VP770. *Dan 'JD73' Goldman* sings for his supper



WHAT IS IT?

Successor to the Roland VP550 vocal ensemble keyboard, providing realistic vocal backing and vocoder with onboard instrument sounds

CONTACT

Who: Roland UK
Tel: +44 (0)1792 702701
Web: roland.co.uk

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Well-built with plenty of connectivity and control
- 2 High quality and great sounding vocoder with highly realistic vocal designer backing
- 3 A doddle to use

Relased at NAMM 2006, the VP550 has a reputation as perhaps the best vocal production keyboard

currently available. Seamlessly blending vocoder, realistic vocal backing and a good set of ensemble sounds coupled with a foolproof interface, the VP-550 has firmly cemented Roland at the forefront of vocal keyboard technology.

Cosmetically, the VP-770 is considerably different to its predecessor, sporting many new controls, a new LCD display (there was no LCD on the VP-550), jog wheel, a USB memory stick slot and an altogether more classy looking design.

First things first

First impressions are very good. The VP-770 is reassuringly heavy and serious 'pro'. It feels like it could stand any abuse thrown at it with its solid metal chassis and some vintage 2009 wood end panels to boot! All this adds up to a classy, high quality feel. The

keyboard is also very playable and now has channel aftertouch for applying pitch bend, modulation, volume changes and other functions.

On the very left of the keyboard is a USB slot that allows backup of preset registrations, sound looper phrases, system backups and playback of audio

files in WAV, AIFF and MP3 formats. Any audio file can be assigned to the lowest 15 notes of the keyboard for playback, using the nifty 'Audio Key' feature – great for solo performers.

You could bring backing tracks for a song in its component parts and trigger the chorus from one key, intro from another and end from another and so on, almost like a very simplified Ableton Live.

New connections

Below the USB slot is the familiar Roland pitch bender and two new assignable buttons for mode switching and effect control. The main control section contains the volume control, a V-link control (for controlling video images in sync with your music when connected to other V-link equipped gear) the also familiar D-Beam for controlling pitch, filter or expression and a new phantom powered XLR/combo mic input. This is a great

The Sound Looper and Other Goodies!

The Sound Looper is a handy new feature and expands on the 'Soundcheck' feature from the VP550. I can see this being a hit with solo performers who like to create on the fly. Anything routed through the VP770 can be captured and looped, be it dry or vocoded vocals or the ensemble sounds.

Once you've set the length and speed for the loop, simply hit record/

play and off you go. Then it's just a question of overdubbing layers as required by pressing the rec/play button again until you've added all the layers you need. You can then use these loops as beds for soloing over with the ensemble sounds or trigger them using the 'Audio Key' feature.

The maximum recording time is 18 seconds. Other goodies onboard include the ambience (reverb)

feature, which includes two types of hall and one studio reverb (the quality of these is decent and can really bring sounds to life) and there are also some very playable brass ensemble sounds onboard, taken from Roland's 'Supernatural' ARX-03 brass card. Finally, there's a 'Voice Expression' function for imparting the vocal intonation onto the ensemble sounds.





addition to the keyboard and means any type of mic can be connected. There's also an external audio input.

I'm happy to report the included headset mic works well, picking up all the inflections and diction required for realistic vocoding, while the new mic preamp does a great job without inducing any noticeable noise. What's

shaping. These new functions are never more than a few button presses away and menu diving is kept to a bare minimum – the new operating system has been very well thought out.

Now the most important bit – the sounds! The vocal designer section is simple to use and covers pretty much every type of vocal sound you'll ever

adds very in-tune backing parts to your vocal. There are also some new 'auto harmony' generation features built in, with several modes. 'Auto note' generates a note in tune with your voice without having to play the keyboard, while 'Auto harmony' generates harmonies based on the melody you sing in combination with

the chords you play (unlike the vocoder which generates harmony purely on the notes you play combined with your voices inflections)

The vocal designer is simple to use and covers pretty much every type of vocal sound you'll ever need

also cool is you can add compression, a noise gate or EQ to the input too, though it would have been nice to have a few more effects on board. Surely at this price, Roland could have squeezed in a chorus, phaser, flanger and delay at least?

Sounds good

Other notable new features include the Sound Looper (see the *Sound Looper and Other Goodies* box) more preset registration buttons for recall of front-panel settings and sounds (16 preset and 16 user) a vibrato section (with vibrato delay, rate and depth) and new tone, attack and release sliders in the ensemble section for sound

need. The quality really is astounding throughout and I think it's fair to say these are the best vocal group and digital vocoder emulations I've ever heard in a keyboard. All the modes from the original VP550 are included and have been improved (classic, male&female, Gospel, Pop, vocoder) and there are now several variations for each type of vocal section.

These really have to be heard to be believed and you could easily build realistic backing vocals for your tunes with just this keyboard – the vocal design engine picks up on every nuance in your voice and always sounds natural. As a bonus, there's also a new background vocal mode that

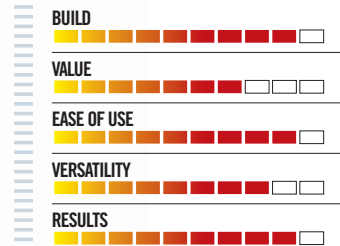
Conclusion

Finally, the ensemble sounds (see the *Sound Looper and Other Goodies* box) are a useful addition and can be switched in or out as needed and can be split and layered with the vocal design sounds too. Strangely, there's a complete lack of bass sounds on board (unless you count the vocal bass sounds which have limited scope).

All in all, this is a versatile and highly-capable vocal ensemble keyboard that produces high-quality results with little fuss. For an all-in-one solution for realistic vocoding and backing vocal creation, it's hard to beat and it's great fun to use. My biggest reservation is the steep price and bearing this in mind, Roland have also been stingy with the available onboard effects and lack of bass sounds. These gripes aside, the VP770 is very worthy successor to the VP550. **FM**



FutureMusic VERDICT



The VP770 has little competition and delivers highly realistic backing and vocoder vocals.

SPECS

Keyboard: 49 keys (with velocity and channel aftertouch)

Maximum Polyphony: 128 voices

Audio Key Function: File Format: WAV, AIFF (44.1 kHz, 16-bit linear), MP3

Sound Looper Recording Time: 18 Seconds

Input Effects: 3Band Equalizer, Compressor, Noise Suppressor

Connectors: Headphones jack (Stereo 1/4 inch phone type), output jacks A (L/MONO, R) (1/4 inch TRS phone type), output jacks B (L, R) (1/4 inch phone type), mic jack: 1/4 inch phone type or XLR type (phantom power), external input jack (1/4 inch phone type), MIDI connectors (In, Out), hold pedal jack, expression pedal jack (1, 2), AC inlet, USB memory connector

Display: 128 x 64 dots graphic LCD (with backlight)

External Storage Device: USB Flash Memory

Dimensions
886 x 369 x 118 mm

Weight
11.0 kg

ALTERNATIVES



Electro Harmonix Voice box

£160

Still the best sounding stomp box vocoder I've ever used, this is a steal at this price and it does some pretty decent auto harmony generation too.

ehx.com



Roland VP550

£999

The outgoing model still sounds great and you should be able to find it cheaper now the new model has appeared!

roland.com



Korg microKorg XL

£379

Latest Korg Micro has a much-improved 16-band vocoder and included gooseneck mic, plus it's a great synth too.

korg.com