REVIEWS M-AUDIO KEYSTATION 88ES



QUALITY KEYBOARD

M-Audio Keystation 88es

An 88-note semi-weighted keyboard for less than £180? Les Selby just has to see what this is all about...

DETAILS

M-AUDIO **KEYSTATION 88ES**

PRICE£179

CONTACT

Supplier: M-Audio Tel: 01923 204010 Web: www.maudio.co.uk

KEYBOARD 88-note, semi-weighted,

velocity-sensitive

Connections: USB, DC 9V power, MIDI Output, volume and sustain pedal inputs Features: pitchbend wheel, modulation wheel, volume slider, octave up/down (Reason Adapted Express included) Dimensions: 136 x 24 x

Weight: 10kg

SYSTEM

PC: Windows 98SE/ Me/2000 (SP4)/XP (SP1), spare USB port Mac: OS 9.2.2 or OS X 10.2.6, spare USB port

ALTERNATIVES

M-AUDIO KEYSTATION 88 PRO £399

M-Audio's flagship controller. This 88-note model has hammer-action keys and 59 assignable MIDI controllers.

STUDIOLOGIC SL-990 PRO £350

A no-nonsense, 88-note hammer action controller. Give it a look if you want that true 'piano feel'

www.studiologic.net

ONTROLLER KEYBOARD DESIGNERS must struggle sometimes. What do they do when they're asked to come up with a new model: lay the keys out in a circle perhaps? This may have worked for the bluenosed chap who played in Jabba The Hutt's house band, but pianists are unlikely to approve.

interface, though you can also use a DC adapter (sold separately). Other connections include a standard MIDI Output, and sustain and volume pedal sockets - all of these are located on the back of the unit.

Things don't get much more complicated on the Keystation's top surface. To the left of the keys are the slightly flimsy pitchbend and

the budget 49-note variety. I found the 88es an excellent companion to the grand pianos in Synthogy's Ivory - anyone who's bought a half-decent piano ROMpler should take a very close look at this controller.

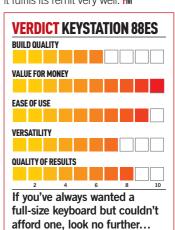
I think M-Audio have filled a potentially lucrative niche with this one. The lack of hammer-action keys will put some people off, but if you

M-Audio have released a fair few 'boards in their time. What's more, they also have British controller manufacturers Evolution under their wing. As such, they've got most bases covered, but the Keystation 88es brings something different to the party. Although 88-note keyboards of this nature have been around for a while, this is certainly the cheapest one I've ever seen.

I know what you're thinking: M-Audio must have cut more corners than Dick Dastardly in a Wacky Race to keep the price down. There's no disguising the fact that the 88es is made of plastic – it would probably crack if you dropped it – but at 10kg, it's sturdy enough.

Provided you're using Windows XP or Mac OS X, the installation procedure is non-existent. You just plug the 88es into your computer via the supplied USB cable and play away. Power is provided by the same mod wheels; above these is a volume slider. Unfortunately, this betrays the 88es' low price tag: it feels as if it could come off in your hand. Next to this are octave up/ down buttons (plus two blue LEDs that let you know whether they're in use) and an Advanced Functions button. You press this when you want to enter Edit mode: once in this configuration, you use the keys to select functions and enter data.

I was pleasantly surprised by the 88es' performance. The semi-weighted, velocity-sensitive keys feel pretty good under your hands, and while pianists will be disappointed to learn they're not hammer-action, they have no right to expect such functionality at this price. Although they can feel a little stiff, the keys are conducive to some reasonably expressive playing, and are streets ahead of what you'll be used to if your existing controller is of want these, you'll have to fork out more. And although other potential customers will miss knobs and faders, such folk are well catered for already - this is a keyboard that's been designed with the budgetconscious 'player' in mind. As such, it fulfils its remit very well. FM



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