

# M-Audio Keystation Mini 32 | £55

The war of the musical micro machines rages on. **Declan McGlynn** hits the road with M-Audio's iPad-ready Keystation 32

## WHAT IS IT?

Mini portable MIDI keyboard controller from M-Audio

## CONTACT

Who: Avid  
Tel: +44 (0)175 365 9590  
Web: [www.m-audio.com](http://www.m-audio.com)

## HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Highly portable
- 2 Bouncy keys
- 3 Assignable volume controller

## SPECS

**Controls:** 32 mini keys, reassignable pitch bend and volume controls, octave up and down buttons, button-controlled sustain

**Dimensions:**  
416 x 104 x 33mm

**Weight:**  
454g

**T**he battle of the mini music makers began with Korg's nano series back in 2009. Laptop musicians were crying

out for tactile control on the road, as well as live performance controllers that were flexible and light and the success of Korg's series quickly saw other manufacturers catch up with their own offerings. M-Audio are the latest to jump on the mini bandwagon with their new Keystation Mini 32.

## Mini key

Due to the size of the controllers, there's not a lot of manoeuvre in terms of adding unique features to elbow out the competition. The main differential between the mini offerings is the keyboard action. Here, it's bouncy – bouncier than any other mini music maker we've tried. This is excellent for leads, basses and effects but for chords, it's tough to play quickly and will take some getting used to.

Another gripe is the lack of USB hub. Korg's microKey included two USB inputs, perfect for pesky dongles – although the extra juice this requires may have been one of the reasons it didn't work with Apple's iPad. If you do have more than one dongle, you'll need a USB hub to use the Keystation, adding to what you have to bring on the

road and crowding your already small desk space. We want to see a hub on all controllers, mini or otherwise, going forwards. It might seem trivial but as the competition is so similar in design and price, every small addition can tip the balance.

## Assignable controls

As for the rest of the controls, pitch, sustain, octave control and modulation are taken care of by buttons and there's also a dedicated volume knob mapped to CC#7. It's possible to edit the modulation and pitch amounts as well as assigning the volume knob to another control, but with no screen, it's a bit of a blind journey, with the keys labelled with numbers and functions.

You will definitely need the manual for any changes you want to make, but it's all well explained. Build quality is important on these transportable units and the Keystation feels very flexible and very plastic. When you twist it, it bends quite a lot, more than I was comfortable with – I don't think it would take much abuse in a bag so do bear that in mind.

The one thing that the Keystation can boast over some other mini keyboards is iPad compatibility. Using the Camera Connection Kit – and the manual overstates that it must be the

legit Apple version – you can plug the Keystation in to trigger any music-making app that supports Core MIDI.

We tried it with GarageBand and the Fairlight app, and it worked first time. It was great to be able to introduce a tactile control to these powerful apps and it unlocked a new, more serious approach to iPad music making.

This is definitely the biggest selling point of the Keystation – it means with a combined weight of 1.1kg you've got a truly powerful package that's only getting more flexible as new apps are announced. In the studio, we'd still recommend something more professional like the Alesis I/O Dock with its physical MIDI DIN as well as MIDI over USB and balanced outputs.

## On the road

Aside from train and plane writing and iPad use, the Keystation isn't anything new. It'd work well as a dedicated keyboard for a rack unit but you'd need to route it through software, as there's no MIDI DIN port, or pick up Kenton's MIDI USB Host. As we mentioned the action will suit some more than others – it's better than the nanoSeries and has an extra half-octave than Akai's LPK25. We still love the Korg microKey for its action and extra USB inputs though, but without iPad support, the Keystation will just edge it for iOS musicians, for now. **FM**

## FutureMusic VERDICT

<b>BUILD</b>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
<b>VALUE</b>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
<b>EASE OF USE</b>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
<b>VERSATILITY</b>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
<b>RESULTS</b>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
<b>iPad-ready means it's flexible but so is the build quality. Useful for on-the-road music making.</b>	

