

Arturia BeatStep Pro | £199

Arturia have revisited their standalone sequencer. **Bruce Aisher** asks has it got what it takes to go pro?

WHAT IS IT?

Desktop controller and step sequencer with USB, MIDI and CV/Gate and Drum Trigger connectivity

CONTACT

Who: Arturia (Source Distribution)
Web: sourcedistribution.co.uk

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Four analogue CV and ten Gate outputs
- 2 Plenty of syncing options
- 3 Lots of customisation options available

The last few years have seen Arturia expanding ever further into the physical world, and the MicroBrute really upped the ante. As an analogue synth with a built-in modulation patch panel it is a very cost-effective starting point for a patch-cable empire.

Last year the BeatStep sequencer/controller arrived, but I found it too dependent on a host computer's USB port for my liking. Arturia clearly learnt a few lessons as they've now introduced the much expanded BeatStep Pro. The new unit has a similar feel to the earlier box – a low profile, predominantly white box with 16 continuous control knobs and 16 MPC-style pads. However, these have been expanded to include 16 backlit step-programming buttons and a much enhanced left-hand transport and function panel.

The BeatStep Pro has three independent pattern sequencers – two geared towards melodic material, and

one aimed at programming drum parts. All three can transmit on separate MIDI channels via the back-panel MIDI port (using the included 3.5mm to MIDI socket adaptor), but the big attraction for many will be the Pro's analogue connectivity. Sequencers 1 and 2 each have dedicated dual CV + Gate outputs, while the drum sequencer has eight drum trigger ports. You'll also find analogue clock in and out, and more digital in the shape of the MIDI In and micro USB port.

Flexibility is the key here, so you can sync the unit from its internal clock, USB, MIDI or analogue clock, in different formats such as 'trigger per step' or even DIN Sync. There are also plenty of options elsewhere with both Hz/V and V/Oct CV pitch standards and V and S-type triggers for sequencer gate and drum triggers. This only scratches the surface of the customisation options, and you will need to dive into the MIDI Control Centre software to

access the vast majority of these. While connected to a computer (via USB) you can also use the Pro as a MIDI to CV/Gate/Drum Trigger interface and – if you're tired of all the other possibilities – as a DAW and MIDI control surface.

Both sequencers can store 16 patterns, with each being anywhere from 1 to 64 steps in length – though obviously you can only view/edit 16 steps at a time. Notes can be played in via MIDI or the pads in real time, though classic step-time sequencing is of course catered for as well. Steps are enabled or disabled via the smaller step buttons (backlit according to which sequencer has been selected). By default, the knobs allow you to adjust the pitch for each step. Pitches increment in chromatic intervals, but you may also select from a range of other scales – or choose your own (though there is no way of achieving unquantised atonal sequences via the pitch output). Once you've got a pattern going, you can choose the playback direction and speed, and engage in some real-time transposition via MIDI or the front-panel pads. Transposition, along with pattern selection and swing, can be global or per track.

An intriguing additional feature comes in the form of the Randomness and Probability knobs that add some real-time unpredictability in the timing, length and pitch of notes – though pitches are restricted to those that are already present in a pattern. It would have been great to have a way of storing a newly created randomised pattern on



So far we've only mentioned how to program the pitch of notes, but each sequencer also allows you to alter the gate time and velocity for each step. When using MIDI this is straightforward, but with CV you can of course use the Velocity lane to control filter cutoff or any other patchable parameter. Things get even more interesting when you bring the second sequencer into the

In the BeatStep Pro's Control Mode nearly every encoder, button and pad transmits user defined MIDI data via MIDI and USB. You can

With this in mind, the configuration software is an important part of the equation. It also allows you to backup, restore

It would have been nice to rely a little less on the software, but the Pro is still very capable as a standalone unit.

Weight:
1.450kg

Unlike Roland's TR-8 where pattern changes are permanent, the BeatStep Pro requires that you store them after

track within the pattern – the classic XOX drum machine approach. Each pad/track sends MIDI On/Off, and pads 1-8 trigger the rear panel Drum Gates, though it's a shame pads can't be set to different MIDI channels. A nice touch is that each pad gets a Shift parameter (instead of Pitch) for moving individual steps backwards or forwards in time.

Though it isn't perfect in every sense, there's so much to the BeatStep Pro that it can be overwhelming if you insist on learning every feature. I suspect users will pick and choose what they use depending on their individual requirements. For the money little else comes close – I will be buying one. **FM**

koma-elektronik.com

Plenty to offer in terms of connectivity and controller capabilities, and great value.