

# Alesis SR18 | £190

After 17 years the SR16 gets an update, but is it enough to keep the humble drum machine relevant? **Robbie Stamp** beats the pads to find out.



ON THE DVD

## WHAT IS IT?

Programmable high-definition stereo drum machine with instrument input

## CONTACT

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Impressive, quality sample list
- 2 Separate percussion and bass parts
- 3 Rugged construction

**S**ince the SR16 came out in the early '90s, technology has set some serious challenges for the humble

drum machine. Though there is a market in 'retro' (i.e. before 2000) drum machines, one might be sceptical about the relevance of a non-sampling hardware drum box.

Obviously Alesis don't suffer from such cynicism and have updated the stalwart SR16, doubling the number of sound samples and preset slots, adding an instrument input and utilising 24-bit output DAC resolution. I found a review of the original SR16, buried in the sands of time, bemoaning the lack of battery powered operation and lighting for the LCD screen.

After about 17 years of consideration, Alesis have taken note, adding a bay for six AA batteries and a backlit LCD. Now that's progress!

After a quick perusal it becomes clear that SR18 is ostensibly the same as it's ancestor, but considering the amount of time that model has been selling for, you'd wonder what needed changing. Space is at a premium at the rear of the module, so to fit the new instrument input in, the two Aux output jacks have been shrunk down to a TRS stereo jack.

## SR16+2=?

Though the main outputs are unbalanced, a stereo jack is not a very popular option, necessitating a splitter (or a bit of soldering) for connection to most equipment. Whether the instrument input is a worthwhile addition for this annoying sacrifice will be dealt with later.

The usual offenders are also found lurking around the back: MIDI In and Out/Thru, two footswitches (for start/

stop and fill/pattern toggling), volume knob, headphone jack and power switch with DC input. On top the rubbery knobs are pleasingly tactile yet durable and the LCD is now well lit and substantial enough to make it visible from a distance. The casing may be plastic, but the SR18 feels weighty and rugged enough to endure a constant, long term beating.

If you've ever used a drum machine before, most of the controls here will be familiar: Step Edit, Roll, Fill, Tap Tempo, etc. Maybe it's some kind of residual memory of programming the now archaic Alesis HR-16, but creating, editing and arranging patterns is simple, though step editing is still a bit of a battle compared with modern programming methods. There are plenty of preset rhythms on offer, which can range from the surprisingly good to the frankly cheesy (you know you wanna bossanova!) What is impressive is the sheer number of drum kits ready and waiting for you to bash around.

The sounds are generally of a good quality, free from any nasty digital noise artefacts and the range is definitely an improvement on previous models. The standard pitch and envelope controls help tailor the hits just enough to give them flexibility, though not with so many options you get lost spending hours just



