Korg Minilogue £435

Korg's Minilogue analogue polysynth has arrived and there's a lot to be excited about! **Dan 'JD73' Goldman** checks it out...

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WHAT IS IT?

Versatile four-voice polyphonic analogue synth with multiple voice modes, audio input, delay, sequencer, and more!

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

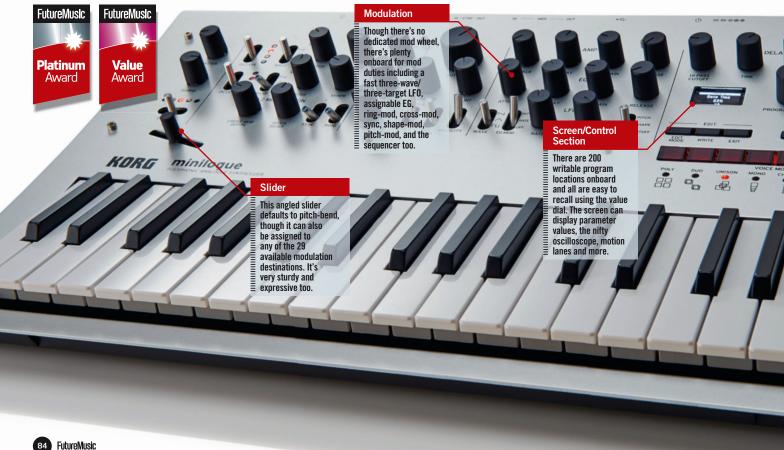
1 An absolute steal! 2 Well-built with intuitive hands-on control panel 3 Versatile analogue engine with powerful-sounding VCOs and filter plus built-in delay and arp/sequencer elieve it or not, Korg haven't released a keyboardequipped analogue poly since 1985's DCO-driven,

Poly-800 MK2. With the current resurgence of all things analogue, it was only a matter of time before a new analogue poly keyboard emerged from the Korg camp. While Korg have been perfecting their analogue tech with the re-release of the ARP Odyssey (duophonic) and their super-cheap Volca Keys desktop module (three-note polyphonic), many of us have been trying to predict what Korg would do next. Well, now we have the answer and it's the Minilogue, an all-new, four-voice analogue polysynth priced at just £435.

By now I'm sure you're salivating over this new beast so here's the lowdown! As already mentioned, it has four voices, so you can play up to four notes simultaneously but, notably, this price-point is bereft of keyboardequipped analogue polys except for Akai's two-octave, four-voice Timbre Wolf at £299. Then there's a significant jump in price up to DSI's Mopho X4 at £730, the Elektron Analog Keys at £1,035 and the Roland JD-XA at £1,549 (all DCO, not VCO). Consequently, the Minilogue now owns the lower-midrange poly-analogue keyboard market - let's see if it delivers!

Straight out of the box, the build and looks are impressive. The front

panel is fashioned from 2mm sandblasted anodised silver aluminium which feels tough and is nicely contoured/textured, while the chassis is constructed from tough yet lightweight plastic with a Pyinkado wood back panel (a South Asian tree known to have very durable properties) - this finishes off the Minilogue's future/retro vibe nicely. There are 14 metal 'paddle' switches (like a '70s music centre/'80s video recorder!) and 29 black plastic dials on the panel. These all send/ receive MIDI and feel very sturdy indeed due to the metal shafts, underlining that Korg have designed the Minilogue to last going forward and not just to a price-point; interestingly, the Minilogue feels more 'premium' than many of the more-expensive synths I've tested recently! (And you can remove and swap the dial caps for something a little more blingy if you so desire). You'll notice there's a small, perfectly-formed OLED display on the right; this displays patch names, parameter values/ changes, four sequencer 'motion' lanes and a handy real-time oscilloscope so you can 'see' your sounds. It also helps you navigate program, sequence and global settings in combination with the eight red-backlit function/Voice Mode buttons (underneath) - these also double as sequencer steps and editing/ page buttons. Reassuringly, for general sound-making and sequencing you





don't need the screen at all, just your ears and fingers!

Connection-wise, the Minilogue runs off a wall-wart (expected at the price point) plus there's a full-size mono-jack output (use the headphone out to run split-mono/pseudo-stereo) a mono audio input which runs through the filters, envelopes and delay too (fantastic news!) plus USB (MIDI only), full-size DIN MIDI In and Out and Sync In/Out minijacks for interfacing with other Korg Sync-equipped gear, along with other third-party equipment that can read or send 5V pulse signals.

Great for gigging

Two of the Minilogue's strongest assets are its small footprint and 2.8kg/6lbs weight, made possible largely due to the use of Korg's familiar SlimKey keybed as found on their ARP Odyssey, MS-20 mini and RK100S keytar. However, unlike the Oddy, the Minilogue is velocity-sensitive, though it doesn't receive or transmit aftertouch. Whether



Voice Modes

The Minilogue features eight Voice Modes with a Voice Mode Depth dial (VMD) which unlocks functionality specific to the selected mode.

Poly allows four-voice chords with VMD dialling in inversions of the chord you're playing - great for instantly spicing up chord sequences. Duo Mode turns the Minilogue into a two-voice poly, with two oscs per key played and detuning via the VMD dial. Unison stacks all the

voices together for a massive sound (great for Trance/Electronica), again with detuning via the VMD dial. Mono Mode is a classic monosynth mode, with VMD acting as a sub-oscillator level control for adding low-end, weight and growl to your monophonic sounds. Chord Mode turns the VMD dial into a chord selector where chords are triggered by a single key press - very handy for quickly coming up with

chord sequences. Delay Mode allows each voice to be triggered in turn, with VMD varying the delay between voices. Arp Mode turns on the 14-mode Arpeggiator (MIDIsyncable but currently not latchable). Finally, Sidechain Mode lowers the volume of any already-played voice when a new one is triggered.

There's plenty to work with and it's fun switching between the modes during live performances too.

you're a fan of downsized keybeds or not, it's fast and enjoyable to play and, when you consider that the Minilogue will fit into a very compact case that you can easily take onto a plane as hand luggage, any reservations are soon firmly guashed – this will likely be the perfect form-factor for many gigging and touring synth players.

You'll also notice that there are no pitch and mod wheels. Instead there's a sprung and centre-detented angled slider which can be assigned to 29 destinations including pitch-bend, filter and LFO (though only one destination at a time). I hope Korg can implement an OS update as soon as possible so that you can assign a separate destination to each side of the slider's centre position for quick-flipping between pitch/mod duties. Regardless, the slider is very expressive, the bend-range can be set independently either side of centre and you can easily perform fast, accurate pitch wobbles and bends with it.

Power on the Minilogue and you're greeted with a 'tuning' screen while the oscillators warm up and the Minilogue is ready to go in about ten seconds (you can even play a little game of onscreen bat and ball as you wait)! At its heart are eight lively-sounding analogue oscillators (two VCOs per voice), each with saw, triangle and square waves. There's also a square wave sub-oscillator available in Mono Mode (via the Voice Mode Depth dial) which sits one or two octaves below Osc 1.

All the oscillators sound rich and full and you can really hear that these are VCOs and not more controlled-sounding DCOs. In addition, each wave has a continuously variable (and modulatable) shape, making the Minilogue a surprisingly powerful and versatile sonic toolbox. You can go thin, fat, evolving and anywhere in between and I was seriously impressed by the huge range of timbres that are available using the eight available Voice Modes and some shape modulation. I made deep, subby and growling basses, a great Wurlitzer EP impression, wah clavs, rich evolving pads, cutting leads, huge stacked unison sounds and MS-20-style FX and bleeps - in fact it's scary how so many different types of sound just drop out of the Minilogue with little effort and it's a good job there are 200 locations to store your patches and sequences, as the Minilogue is so inspiring!

The presets are also decent and there are eight 'favourite' locations for quickly recalling patches too. Also available is a chunky-sounding white noise oscillator (which comes in handy for making sound effects and snares) and a single, MIDI-syncable LFO capable of audio-rate modulation. Having a dial-per-function and such a

SPECS

Keyboard: 37 keys (slim keys, velocity sensitive) OLED Screen 200 writable preset spaces

Maximum polyphony: four voices

Sound generating system:

2 VCO (square wave, triangle wave, sawtooth wave). All waves with variable shape, 1 VCF (2-pole, 4-pole modes), 2 EGs (EG 2 is assignable), 1 VCA. 1 LFO. 8 Voice Modes. 16-Step polyphonic sequencer with 4 Motion lanes, Delay effect with pre/ post filter placement, High-Pass Filter

I/Os: Headphones jack, Mono output jack, Audio In jack, SYNC In jack, SYNC OUT jack, MIDI In, MIDI Out, USB B, AC adaptor (DC9V)

Dimensions: 500 x 300 x 85mm Weight: 2.8kg

ALTERNATIVES



DSI Mopho X4

£731

DSI's four-voice poly features DCOs, aftertouch, a 16-step x four-track gated sequencer, two sub-oscillators per voice, four LFOs, three envelope generators per voice and Curtis filters. Still worth a serious look.

www.davesmith



Roland JD-XA

£1,549

Like the Minilogue, the JD-XA is a great-sounding four-voice analogue poly (DCO) with a hands-on control panel but it also has a 64-voice digital engine (and 64-step sequencer), plus a Vocoder/Multi-FX.

www.roland.co.uk



Akai Timbre Wolf

£299

Akai surprised everyone recently with this twooctave, four-voice poly. It has a 32-step, four-track sequencer and four independent, stackable monosynths with individual outs. Each monosynth has saw/square waves and filtering.

www.akaipro.com

well thought-out interface is a godsend too, making sound-making extremely pleasurable. The only other function I wish had a direct dial is portamento, but it can be set up quickly enough in the menus and set only to trigger when playing legato.

A game changer

The Minilogue's architecture is really versatile and stands out even against pricier competitors. It generally produces a very high-quality sound,

though it'll do dirty and hissy when you crank the levels through the mixer, push the delay or use the cross mod/sync and ring mod. It's unmistakably Korgsounding (like a polyphonic MS-20 at times), though it's warmer and more refined-sounding, while simultaneously sounding edgy and progressive. The filter can also be velocity controlled/keyboard-tracked and has two and four-pole modes which have nicely different resonant characteristics, adding much to the overall versatility.

The four-pole is smoother/darker while the two-pole is brighter/more lively/ biting but both sound sweet and the resonance on both types is great for making kicks or hats. I also found the envelopes to be pleasingly snappy (perfect for punchy leads, basses and drum sounds) and the second ADSR can be used as a general envelope and assigned to the filter and/or other parameters including LFO rate/intensity.

Couple all this to the onboard 16-step polyphonic-sequencer, the

It's scary (and inspiring) how so many diverse sounds just drop out of the Minilogue with little effort!

Sequencer, Mod And Delay

Each program has its own 16-step (with real-time overdub) sequence which sends MIDI out and can record polyphonically. The sequencer is a handy ideas scratchpad and an addictive evolving looper, particularly when you record dial (motion) tweaks. Sequence/note length and gate-time can all be customised and there's adjustable swing too (great!) There's no sequence transposition via the keyboard (like the Sequential Prophet-6/

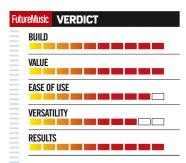
Moog Sub 37) but I'm hopeful Korg can add this via an OS update. When MIDI-clocked from my DSI Tempest/Logic, the Minilogue's timing was rock-solid.

Modulation-wise, there's loads to mess up or subtly massage sounds, including the audio-rate-capable LFO with three waveshapes, cross-mod, ring-mod, shape-mod, PWM, sync, pitch-mod, the assignable EG and white noise – all of which can be tweaked directly via the panel (or over MIDI).

The characterful delay is indispensable and can add reverb-like ambience and/or distorted atmospherics - it's stored per patch and can be placed pre/post filter too. The included high-pass filter is also very welcome, winding out lows from the delay repeats (or the Minilogue's overall output) and I love that delay tweaks can be sequenced too.

arpeggiator, the aforementioned audio input for processing external audio, the very tape-like delay, plus patch storage and MIDI, and the Minilogue will

surely fly off the shelves. It's been a long time since I was this surprised or inspired by a synth and I'm sure it's going to stir things up in the synth world. Game changer? Absolutely! FM



We're not sure how Korg pulled this off for the price, but they've nailed it. An essential purchase!

