

Tenori-on Orange | £599

Can the new Tenori-on Orange model capture a wider audience? **Jono Buchanan** ponders...



ON THE DVD

WHAT IS IT?

A cheaper Tenori-on aimed at studio use providing classic Tenori-on sequence control

CONTACT

Who: Yamaha UK
Tel: +44 (0)870 444 5595
Web: tenori-on.yamaha-europe.com/uk

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 A unique approach to sequencing and track creation
- 2 A cheaper way to get onboard with the Tenori-on concept
- 3 Brighter, clearer LEDs

Premiered back in 2005, Yamaha's Tenori-on, designed in collaboration with Toshio Iwai, represented a breakthrough in its approach to sound production and sequencing.

Its 16x16 matrix of playable LEDs let users create intricate, multi-timbral performances for its internal sounds, or over MIDI to any sound source desired via 'buttons of light'. A simple press of any LED triggered a note and the internal sequencer did the rest, playing single notes or chords as the step sequencer cycled round. The concept

has proved popular, particularly for performers keen to draw attention to the unit. Bill Bailey famously featured a Tenori-on on his comedy tour and the unit also features prominently in Little Boots' live sets and her *Remedy* video.

Fast-forward five years and Tenori-on Orange now greets us. With most of the original's functions carried over, this represents a more economical way to get your hands and fingers on Yamaha's concept, but there are some crucial differences between the two models, so it's well worth a second and closer look.

What's new?

The principal differences between Tenori-on Orange and its big brother (which remains available) are physical. Whereas the original Tenori-on features a brushed aluminum construction, its sibling uses a tough white plastic surround instead. Perhaps more significantly, the new unit features no battery power option, with mains power instead supplied via a bundled wall-wart that connects, somewhat inconveniently, via the front bottom left hand corner. Also, as a cost-cutting measure, the rear LEDs which feature on the back are removed, leaving a blank white panel in their place.

While these LEDs aren't 'active' on the original Tenori-on and simply reflect the pattern playing to the rear, they do represent an eye-catching performance tool that is lost on the new unit. On the upside, Tenori-on Orange gets its name from the new LEDs that ditch the original 'white' lights in favour of orange ones instead, which are really pleasing on the eye and show up nicely.

The sound engine at the heart of Tenori-on remains the same – 253 AWM2 generated tones (including 14 drum kits), capable of producing 32 notes of polyphony, with the option to



add reverb and chorus to each of the multi-timbral layers within a sequence. Additionally, Tenori-on can play back user samples of up to 0.97 seconds in length (saved to the rear-mounted SD card) or can output its sequences via MIDI. On this subject, improvements have been made courtesy of the recent firmware Version 2.0 update – see the *Firmware 2.0* box for details.

Tenori-Operation

In case you've missed out on Tenori-on's wonders, it's worth briefly recapping its *modus operandi*. A range of modes are available with the system, with Score Mode at the top of the function list. This provides multi-timbral playback of a number of internal or MIDI sounds with each sound assigned to a Layer which can have a sequence created for it simply by holding down LEDs which correspond to notes in a sequence.

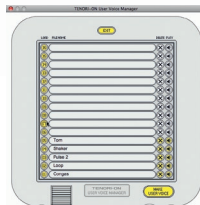
Alternatively, you can use modes like 'Random' to create 'join the dots' style, less predictable sequences, or Solo Mode to construct sequences with different 'quantise' values for a single instrument – perfect for drum sequencing. Via the ten function buttons on the case to the left and right, you can access parameters



Firmware 2.0

As you'd expect, the operating system at the heart of Tenori-on has come some distance since its debut in 2005 and in January of this year, Version 2 was launched to address some key issues.

For a start, processing performance has been enhanced so that the 'lag' some users experienced with note input is significantly reduced. MIDI sync has been looked at too, with the



aim of enhancing Tenori-on's integration into DAW environments. Unfortunately, things don't run as smoothly here as Yamaha intend. As MIDI controls are still

carried out via a breakout MIDI I/O cable, the immediacy of USB connection, favoured by the majority of today's controllers isn't present here. I experienced some frustrations slaving the unit to synchronise within Logic and the manual isn't terribly helpful either. Also bundled is Tenori-on's Voice Manager, which lets you configure sample content ready for transfer to an SD Card.

but I do think that the majority of studio users will soon want to break out from those sounds and apply Tenori-on's unique sequencing approach to their own noises. Obviously, this is possible

original model, which now goes for £699. Forget any notion of the 'bargain Tenori-on'. This isn't it.

Perhaps the future of Tenori is a 'control only' version, which completely

removes the internal sounds and instead provided a USB port and a neat application to let you use the LEDs for note input, clip launching, even

MIDI CC on/off commands? Meanwhile everything that's unique about Tenori-on's brilliant sequencer would remain. That's the kind of studio Tenori we'd like to see. But, until such a time lands, I'd recommend choosing between the current model and new Orange version carefully. **FM**

As the hardware alterations suggest, Yamaha see this as the 'studio Tenori-on'

specific to either the current sound or sequence playing, so it's possible to build complete performances by dropping from one section to another, temporarily muting instruments, assigning effects to them or adjusting their volume in real-time.

It's immediate and fun, but also capable of truly sophisticated results once you've familiarised yourself with Tenori-on's approach.

The score

As the hardware alterations suggest, Yamaha see this as the 'studio Tenori-on', it's important to ask how well this instrument integrates into the studio environment and whether its feature set matches that which the majority of musicians would want.

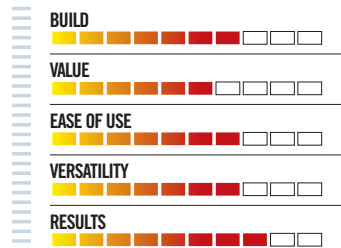
The AWM2 soundset onboard is nice to have as a scratch-pad to learn Tenori-on's functions and capabilities

via the MIDI breakout cable but it's fiddly and as the unit doesn't feature USB and integrate as readily as the majority of controllers available today, this does strike me as a missed opportunity. Equally, the option to work with samples is great but the 0.97sec sample limitation is restrictive.

I feel in a way that time has caught up with the Tenori-on and whereas a completely independent hardware unit offering these facilities made sense in 2005 and continues to for the 'big brother' model, were I designing a 'studio Tenori-on', I'd suggest different changes to those Yamaha have implemented.

The RRP of £599 is perhaps our biggest disappointment however. Despite 'missing things out' and making the machine out of less impressive materials it's the same price as that originally charged for the

FutureMusic VERDICT



Still an exciting concept but there are restrictions here – choose your model carefully.

SPECS

Sequencer:
Note Resolution: ¼ note = 96 clocks
Gate Time: 10ms – 9990 ms
Octaves: -5 to +5
Tempo: 40-240
Scales: 9 types
Transpose: -7 to +8
Performance Modes: 6 types: Score, Random, Draw, Bounce, Push, Solo
Sync: To computer host or other Tenori-on via MIDI

Tone Generator:
Type: AWM2
Max. Polyphony: 32 notes
Preset Voices: 253 (including 14 drum kits)
Effects: 2 processors – Reverb (10 types), Chorus (5 types)
Sampling: 3 voices (AIFF or WAV audio with max 0.97 seconds)

SD Card
 SD Card port (SPI compatibility required) for saving Song, Block, Layer, Setting, Samples.

Controller/Display
LED buttons: 256
Function Buttons: 10 (L1-L5, R1-R5), Jog Dial, Clear, Cancel and OK buttons

Display: 122 x 32 dot graphic LCD
Stereo 1-watt output speakers

Connections
Line Out/Phones: Stereo mini jack
MIDI: In/Out

Dimensions: 205 x 205 x 32 mm
Weight: 610g

ALTERNATIVES



monome
from \$500

monome can be configured to carry out a whole range of commands across a variety of apps, via USB.

monome.org



Novation Launchpad
£149

Primarily a controller for Live, there's no reason you can't use this for any application you like too. No sounds or sequencer, mind.

novationmusic.com