



Korg

PC MAC



nanoSeries 2 nanoKey £48, nanoPad £60, nanoKontrol £60

The second generation of these diminutive MIDI controllers arrives, but is it evolution or revolution this time around?

> Korg's original nanoSeries kickstarted the super-compact MIDI controller concept in late 2008, and competitors Akai responded with their slimline LPD8 and LPK25 units. Korg now return fire with the nanoSeries 2, which comprises three units. All are USB-powered class-compliant MIDI devices, meaning that you just plug them in and off you go - no need for drivers or external power supplies. A sleeker and more rounded-out design makes the devices easier on the eye and in-keeping with the current trend for softer aesthetics.

Key to improvement

The big disappointment of the original nanoSeries was the nanoKey keyboard, which was let down severely by poor-feeling keys and a suboptimal layout. The 25 laptop keyboard-style keys are still here, complete with their

"Fans of the first series might be annoyed that certain features have been ditched to make way for new ones"

uniform size/spacing, but their feel has been considerably improved. As before, the action is really light, and it takes a little getting used to if you're accustomed to playing on a traditional keyboard. One big problem with the original nanoKey was that the velocity response varied

wildly if you didn't hit each key dead-centre, but there's none of that with the new version, and it's a lot more playable for it. The keys don't 'stick' against the edge of the casing, either. Overall, it feels way better.

The controls are much the same as before, but note that the old nanoKey's CC Mode - which let you use keys to send CCs - has been ditched. There are backlit buttons for octave switching, with the colour indicating the current octave. The unit features a sustain button (this is new), while the modulation and pitchbend up/down buttons work in momentary fashion, eg, ramping the pitch up while you hold the button down. The mod and sustain keys on the original model were flush to the lowest key of the keyboard, leading to accidental triggering if you weren't careful, but a few millimetres of plastic casing now separate them, which helps.

“The nanoKontrol 2 seems more geared towards mixer control”

While it may be easy to pick at the form of the keys themselves, these devices were never designed with concerto-style performance in mind. They're all about making music on the move or saving precious desk real estate, and the nanoKey 2 fulfils this role well.

Paddywhack

The original nanoPad pleased us greatly with its sturdy, responsive drum pads. They've grown in number from 12 to 16, with a slight separation down the middle, effectively presenting them as two banks of eight. The Flam and Roll buttons have been replaced with Gate Arp, Touch Scale, Key/Range and Scale/Tap options. These are performance-oriented controls for use in conjunction with the excellent X/Y pad.

In its standard mode, the X/Y pad transmits CCs; in Touch Scale mode, the X axis instead sends notes while the Y controls note length. Thus you can play musical patterns and phrases, much like on Korg's Kaossilator series. Scales and keys are accessible via the Key/Range and Scale/Tap buttons - while holding one of these down, you can select notes and scales by pressing the pads.

Gate Arp creates rhythmic 'gated' notes at a specified tempo (set via tap tempo or synced to MIDI). You hold a pad and use the X/Y pad to control the rate - ideal for glitchy effects or basic drum rolls. By engaging Touch Scale mode, you can play gated melodies on the X/Y pad.

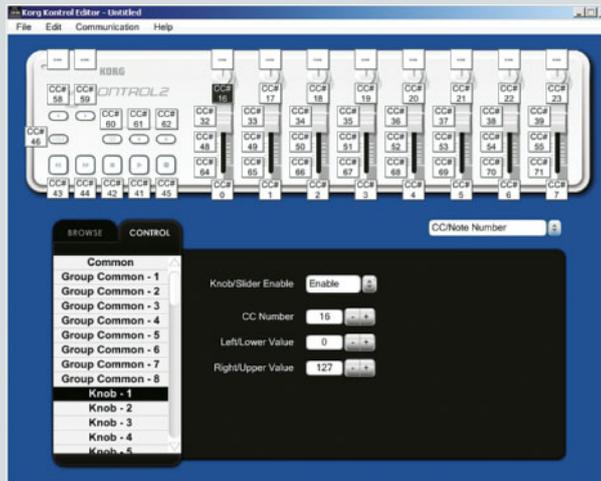
There are four bank select buttons, making a total of 64 'virtual' pads. With each able to trigger up to four notes at once (ie, chords), the nanoPad has melodic potential aplenty.

Kontrol freak

Bringing up the rear is the nanoKontrol. Almost every single control on the thing is configurable via the Korg Editor software (see *Editor's choice* above), making it a flexible general-purpose knobs, faders 'n' buttons MIDI controller. Like the other devices, it's lightweight but still feels solid for what it is.

Unlike the others devices, however, the nanoKontrol can now be used as a Mackie Control device. This gives you direct control of your DAW's transport and mixer channels, with minimal setup required. Here, you get eight channels' worth of level, pan and solo/mute/record switching. The dedicated record buttons are new for series 2, although eagle-eyed nano-lovers will have spotted that this new version has eight channels instead of the previous nine (which worked nicely as an 'eight plus master' configuration). The new marker buttons let you set markers in your arrangement and jump back and forth between them, which is a great workflow-smoother.

The new track select buttons let you page through the channels in banks of eight when in Mackie Control mode. This effectively replaces the original's Scenes function, the advantage being that you can access more than four banks, while the drawback is that there's no LED



Tinkering with the nanoKontrol's mapping in Kontrol Editor

Editor's choice

The full feature-set of the original nanoSeries could only be accessed via the Kontrol Editor software, and this is still the case. There are a few changes for the new devices, though.

The absence of the CC Mode means there's now less to configure with the nanoKey. It's still worth getting the editor, though, because you can set things like velocity curve and timing of buttons for pitch, mod, etc.

On the nanoPad, each pad can send four notes, CCs or program changes, as opposed to the original's eight. Per-pad options to determine whether a pad is

included when using the gated modes. The X/Y pad can also be assigned as you like, although this is now global and not per scene.

The previous nanoKontrol had attack and release options for its buttons, which faded CC changes in/out; these are now absent.

Your custom configurations can be stored in the device itself, so no matter what you plug into - iPad included - your mappings will be ready to rock. Note that you can download the Kontrol Editor before buying a nanoDevice to get a feel for its mapping possibilities.

indicator to tell you which bank you're currently in. You also lose the option of having four separate scenes in MIDI mode (ie, four switchable configurations), while MMC (ie, MIDI-based transport control) has also disappeared. This means that you can't have a setup that easily combines DAW transport operation with MIDI control of synths, etc. The new version seems more geared towards mixer control, then, but with such short faders and basic functionality, the value of this is questionable. Some users may therefore prefer the old nanoKontrol.

The original nanoSeries turned out to be nifty companions for Apple's iPad, and this holds true. Apps that support Core MIDI (eg, GarageBand and Akai SynthStation) should work just fine. Korg's own iElectric and iMS20 apps sport a 'nano 2 native' mode, which will assign the controls appropriately when you plug in a nanoKontrol or nanoPad. Just be sure to disable this if you want your custom mapping to remain!

Some decent new functionality and a gentle makeover sees the nanoSeries heading in the right direction, especially the much improved nanoKey. However, fans of the first nanoSeries might be annoyed that certain features have been ditched to make way for new ones, rather than the existing feature-set being expanded. **cm**

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Alternatively

Akai LPD8

N/A » N/A » £40

Eight pads and eight knobs, this is ideal for the very tightest of spaces.

Novation Nocturn

cm124 » 10/10 » £70

A less conventional compact, with buttons, rotaries and a crossfader

Verdict

For Improved design and build

nanoKey's feel is notably better

New performance modes on nanoPad

Expanded transport on nanoKontrol

Highly affordable

Against nanoKey still a bit awkward

Some functionality lost from first series

The new hardware looks and feels better, though some may be disappointed that certain features have been left behind

nanoKey: 7/10

nanoPad: 9/10

nanoKontrol: 8/10