Korg nanoSeries 2 | from £48

Portable production and performance tools are thriving – will Korg's second incarnation keep them on top? ***Chris Barker*** scopes out the micro machines

WHAT IS IT?

Three separate ultra compact controllers aimed at portable performers and travelling producers

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

1 Updated design
2 Amazing value
3 Works with iPad

SPECS

Korg nanoKey2 £48
25-button-keys with four velocity curves

Size:
325 x 83 x 16mm

Weight:
226g

Korg nanoPad2 £60
16 rubber trigger pads, four velocity curves, X-Y pad

Size:
325 x 83 x 16mm

Weight:
300g

Korg nanoKontrol2 £60
8 knobs, 8 sliders, 24 buttons, transport buttons

Size:
325 x 83 x 29mm

Weight:
300g

When Korg released the original nano series of controllers, they were first to market and travelling producers and DJs rejoiced at the idea of these MIDI marvels. But they weren't without their problems and users quickly began to make a wishlist for a fresh incarnation. Now it's time to find out if Korg answered correctly with version two of the nanos…

It's fair to say, visually the nano2 controllers look much better than before. They're also a slimmer and better built, with the robust plastic shells feeling much firmer. All three devices can be edited using the free software editor, allowing you to customise minimum and maximum values and assign CCs to the controls with relative ease. A software PIN is included in the box for the download.

Key commands

One of the biggest gripes with the original version of the nanoKey model was the lack of a real keyboard and considering Korg already manufacture micro-keyed synths and controllers it seemed strange that yet again they've failed to deliver on this.

Although the nanoKey2 is without a doubt an improvement on the original – it doesn't clatter as much and delivers more of a realistic 'action' – it's still way off being 'a keyboard'. The nanoKey2 copes with simple tasks and simple chords, but any real playing is a struggle. Strangely, the flaw in its design as a keyboard makes it much more flexible as a button trigger or a drum programmer, so for many it may be a better all-round option than, say, Akai's LPK25, which serves up a real keybed.

Pad vibes

Moving on to the nanoPad2, there has been a significant improvement in squeezing 16 pads on to its surface, rather than the previous Nano's 12.

The pads are still comfortably spaced and feel great, but adding the pads has moved the hold, gate arp, touch/scale, key/range, scale/tap and scene buttons above the pads to the right of the unit.

This means that the controls that used to be usefully located next to the X-Y touchpad are now at the top, making it harder to press these while using another finger to swipe around the X-Y pad. Meanwhile, the nanoKontrol2 has lost a fader but gained much nicer rubberised, back-lit transport controls and an extra button next to each fader making solo, mute and record arm much simpler.

Hooked up to an iPad via the Camera Connection kit, these tiny controllers take on a whole new level of use. Drawing little power, they will happily work without a powered hub. After a few tests, I found the nanoKontrol2 to be the only device that didn't work completely as planned without tweaking, but was perfect for use with Korg's brilliant iMS20 app.

Nano limits

Considering their small footprint, razor sharp looks and the way these three controllers work with Core MIDI enabled iPad apps they are an absolute bargain. The nanoPad2 controller feels rock solid, the nanoKey2 is a decent flexible keyboard replacement and although the nanoKontrol2 is the most wobbly in terms of build quality, to get this amount of faders, rotaries and back-lit push buttons for such a low price is quite extraordinary.

It's true that personally I'd opt for the Akai LPK with its proper mini-keys, but don't rule out the more slender nanoKey, if you're not bothered about complex playability. If you own an iPad these are a no-brainer when used with the Camera Connection kit. If you're on the road producing and performing these will certainly be an improvement on bashing on your laptop's keyboard. A sturdy update. FM

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

A nice update that should see Korg retain its position as kings of all things mini.