



Native Instruments Complete Kontrol Mk2

£479/559

PC MAC

With its all-new dual displays and improved integration with Maschine and certain DAWs, this futuristic keyboard hits all the right notes

> The second generation of NI's innovative MIDI keyboard claims even deeper integration than its predecessor (**cm212**, 9/10) with their own Complete suite of instruments and Maschine, as well as NKS-compatible plugins from developers including Arturia, Rob Papen and u-he. It's available in 49- (£479) and 61-key (£559) versions, and while the Fatar synth action keybed is unchanged, everything else has been redesigned to match the simultaneously-released Maschine Mk3 (**cm249**, 10/10). It's got the same sexy new look and feel, and - more importantly - the same full-colour LED screens (replacing Mk1's monochrome text displays), the same combination 4-way joystick/rotary encoder/button, and a new layout similarly reconfigured for workflow parity.

Physical presence

Complete Kontrol Mk2 is 23mm deeper from front to back than its predecessor, as is to be

expected given the addition of the screens. Happily, it's now USB bus-powered, and we know that many Mk1 users will be overjoyed at the ejection of the pitch and modulation touchstrips in favour of regular pitch and mod wheels and a single freely-assignable touchstrip. The build quality is exceptional - it feels and plays like a premium instrument in every sense.

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Complete Kontrol Mk2 hooks into the Complete Kontrol software, which runs standalone or as a VST/AU/AAX plugin. Without that, it's just a conventional controller keyboard, albeit CC-mappable using the free Controller Editor software. Complete Kontrol is a browser for all your NI and NKS instruments, essentially. Prior to Mk2, you had to look at it on your computer monitor to see what you were selecting, and use a single push encoder for stepped navigation and loading. Now, the dual screens replicate every bit of it in glorious technicolour, and the main row of capacitive knobs (touch to pop up menus) and 4D encoder give 'parallel' access to a series of hierarchical selection filters - it's a vast improvement. Hit the Browse button and the left screen shows your NI and NKS-compatible plugins as thumbnails, while the right lists their presets and banks. Select a single instrument or category (drums, samplers or synths), and filter the resulting

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presets by Type (Bass, Strings, etc) and Mode (FM, Sample-Based, etc). It’s exactly the same interface that Maschine Studio users have enjoyed for the last couple of years.

Newly added (for Mk2 and Mk1), however, is the Prehear option, which fires off a stored sample of every preset as it’s selected, so you can audition before you load. This is just a static one-shot or loop, but obviously it wouldn’t be possible to instantly load each device as you sweep through them, so it’s as good a solution as is possible. We expect we’ll be able to generate preview files for User patches at some point, but currently it’s for factory presets only.

As before, loading a preset launches its instrument within the Complete Kontrol shell, where it appears just as it would if called up as a plugin in any other host. The Mk2 displays show a static graphic of the plugin (not a real-time representation), and the knobs are automatically assigned to its parameters in banks of eight - it all looks a lot nicer than before, but functionally, everything is as it was.

Apart from thinner LEDs, the brilliant Light Guide system remains the same. This uses an RGB LED on every key to highlight the notes of the scale, chord or arpeggio set up in Smart Play, as well as indicating the MIDI notes coming in from the host DAW, and mirroring the coloured keyswitches and cells in instruments that have them (Kontakt, Battery, Polyplex, etc), and the pads in Maschine. Smart Play is one of the keyboard’s most useful features, enabling scale/key filtering/snapping, automatic chord generation and arpeggiation directly from Complete Kontrol itself.

Despite those swanky new displays, for us Light Guide is still Complete Kontrol’s best feature. We loved it before and we love it now.

Kompletely integrated

Complete Kontrol’s Host Integration setup affords a degree of control over a handful of DAWs - currently, for this version, Ableton Live, Apple Logic Pro X and Garageband, with Steinberg Cubase and Nuendo coming soon. With Mk1, this was limited to transport functions, and track selection and focus, but now, thanks to the screens, 4D encoder and new multifunction buttons, it includes the mixer



The Complete Kontrol software is a central hub for all your Native Instruments and NKS instruments



Partner Complete Kontrol Mk2 with Maschine Mk3 for the ultimate Maschine rig

Ghosting the Maschine

With Complete Kontrol Mk2’s dual screens being the same as those of Maschines Mk3 and Studio, NI have been able to dramatically expand its capabilities as a companion controller for the Maschine software. The Mixer, Plug-in and Browser buttons parallel their Maschine equivalents, and a set of five dedicated buttons access various Maschine-specific views and modes.

The Scene and Pattern buttons switch between Maschine’s Scene and Pattern view modes (Complete Kontrol’s displays actually mirroring the former more literally than Maschine’s!), while Track pops up a track selection overlay. The Key Mode

button toggles between pitching the currently selected Sound up and down the keyboard (the original Complete Kontrol behaviour) and mapping all 16 Sounds in the current Group to 16 keys, and the Clear button deletes the contents of the current clip.

Transport control, and browsing and mixing using the displays and their associated controls are identical to Maschine Mk3/Studio, and the ability to view different things on each and unit at the same time - eg, the mixer and plugin parameters - is every bit as cool as it sounds. For those who can afford both, Maschine Mk3 and Complete Kontrol Mk2 make for a great combo.

(selection, levels, pans, solos and mutes, with the displays showing level meters and faders), Live clip/scene launching and recording, tap tempo, timeline scrubbing, and dedicated buttons for Quantize, Undo/Redo, Automation arm, and Loop and Metronome on/off. It’s a big step up from the original implementation, which was (and, indeed, still is) hobbled by the limitations of the Mk1 hardware.

K class

Complete Kontrol Mk2 is a huge upgrade. With Mk1, the hardware controlled the browser on the computer, but now the hardware is the browser. And the integration with Maschine and other DAWs is utterly transformed by the two screens and revamped knobs and buttons. Let’s not forget the chunky pitch and mod wheels, either, which feel superb. On the down side, as with Maschine Mk3, we could take or leave the 4D controller, which never feels quite right for accurate navigation; and non-Maschine users might feel a bit glum about the five redundant buttons to the left of the screens.

Powerful, luxurious and genuinely assistive, Complete Kontrol Mk2 is the ultimate controller for the Complete instrument range, and the perfect partner for Maschine. **cm**

Web www.native-instruments.com

Alternatively

Nektar Panorama P4
cm182 » 9/10 » £440

Take control of a range of popular DAWs with this flexible keyboard, and plugin/mixer control surface

Novation Impulse 49/61
cm179 » 8/10 » £239/£299

With its Automap plugins wrapper, the Impulse makes plugin parameter assignment a snap

Verdict

For Dual screens change everything
Mod and pitch wheels!
Deeper Maschine and Host integration
Light Guide is still awesome

Against Certain buttons are going to gather dust if you don’t have Maschine
Not many DAWs supported as yet

Delivering total NI/NKS instrument control, and solid DAW and Maschine integration, Complete Kontrol Mk2 is so good it hurts

10/10