

M-Audio Oxygen Pro 49 £189

M-Audio's Oxygen controller keyboard range now has a Pro division. **Jono Buchanan** enjoys some fresh air

CONTACT WHO: M-Audio **WEB:** m-audio.com **KEY FEATURES** 49 velocity sensitive semi-weighted keys (with aftertouch) and pads (with Note Repeat), 8 assignable knobs, 9 assignable faders, Preset and DAW buttons for auto-mapped DAW and plugin controls, Smart Chord and Smart Scale Modes, Arp with Type, Octave, Gate and Swing controls, USB bus power and MIDI connector, plus MIDI Out





For years, M-Audio's Axiom Pro-61 was my controller keyboard of choice. It blended cost-effectiveness with immediacy and, at the time, its design and functionality felt fresh and slick too. Time passes and the Axiom Pro is long gone – replaced by M-Audio's Oxygen range. So successful has this series been that the current Oxygen line-up is the fourth iteration of the brand. However, having checked out the features and design of some of Oxygen's competitors, M-Audio have now returned to the drawing board and now offer a 'Pro' range to sit atop the Oxygen tree. These new keyboards don't replace the current line-up but instead offer a more feature-rich alternative.

Immediately, the design feels classy; gone are the slightly rounded edges and amber backlights of Oxygen's keyboards and in comes a more square-edged, sleekly-designed front panel. The 49-key review model manages to pack 16 back-lit pads, eight rotaries, nine short-throw faders, an OLED display, a swathe of buttons, plus pitch and modulation wheels into its frame, without anything feeling too cluttered. At the back, the USB/MIDI connector doubles as the bus power source, alongside a regular MIDI Out port and a Sustain pedal input. The Oxygen Pro 49 is immediately plug-and-play but to experience deeper integration, follow the specified steps to connect it to your software of choice to enjoy the benefits of auto-mapping, transport

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control and more. The keyboard is both velocity and aftertouch sensitive and feels pretty good; a little too springy for my taste, but perfectly playable. The pads, however, are excellent – they respond musically to varied playing pressure, with the display updating to provide the most recent velocity setting when tapped.

Pro-formance

But what really sets the 'Pro' apart is its array of performance controls. First come two new modes – Scale and Chord – which switch the keyboard out of a regular 'chromatic' piano voicing to facilitate performances within particular keys and scales. For instance, choose 'Chord Mode' and select C major and you'll find playing the note 'C' triggers C, E and G – all three notes of a C major chord. Press 'D' and you'll hear the chord of D minor, which keeps the notes used (D, F, A) within the scale of C major, making it a complementary chord. Scale Mode deliberately limits the notes you can trigger to a scale of your choice, eradicating 'wrong' notes. You can choose one of M-Audio's voicings, or customise your own. The onboard Arpeggiator generates MIDI sequences at the rate, gate and

swing of your choosing whilst the pads feature 'Note Repeat', which is a lot of fun. You can trigger repeats and rolls as long as you keep a pad depressed or, in Latch Mode, indefinitely. The Oxygen Pro's feature-set is rich and you'll need time to recognise just how deeply it can integrate with your DAW.

Both as a front-end for extended functionality (accessing Pan dials and Auxiliary sends, as well as triggering key commands like Save and Undo) and as a performance instrument with tricks to inspire new ideas, the Oxygen Pro fully deserves its status as M-Audio's new top-end controller keyboard. **FM**

FM VERDICT

8.9

The 'Pro' breathes new life and inspiration into the Oxygen range. Plus, despite some neat tricks up its sleeve, it's still affordable

THE PROS & CONS

+

Chord and Scale Modes for 'foolproof' musical alternative playing styles

Arp and Note Repeat Mode bring sequences to life via real-time performance

Deep DAW integration for all leading DAWs and generous software suite included

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The keyboard feels a touch 'light' to play

Takes some getting used to; lots of great features will require familiarity and plenty of time with the 'Shift' button