

Novation Bass Station II | £399

20 years on from Novation's original, the Bass Station is back. **Jono Buchanan** witnesses the second coming...

INCLUDES AUDIO

WHAT IS IT?

Version II of Novation's original analogue, bass-oriented monosynth

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Extended filter options dramatically increase sonic potential
- 2 Powerful Arpeggiator and Step Sequencers onboard
- 3 Clear control set enhanced by 'keyboard function' controls



Novation's original Bass Station was launched an incredible 20 years ago. It proved enormously popular and it's worth remembering why. The music tech landscape was very different in 1993; all-conquering DAWs didn't exist, few people understood the term 'software instrument', and more importantly, high-tech shops were full of the tail-end products of the synthesizer 'S+S' revolution. These were producing lush polyphonic tones built from digital waveforms glued to short samples. Into this landscape was launched Novation's analogue monosynth, its name suggesting it was a niche product for bass. Years earlier, the TB-303 showed us that such ideals were worth pursuing and, sure enough, the Bass

Station sold by the bucket-load. To an extent, it helped launch the current appetite for all things analogue. But with synths from Moog, Arturia, DSI and others now competing directly with the Bass Station, does Version II contain the sonic ammunition to do battle?

Bass in the place

The specifications of the synth would certainly suggest so. The fascia recalls the original, with its blue and black livery but the all-dial and rocker-switch combination is now replaced by a more tactile control set including sliders alongside the pots and switches. The Cutoff dial in the top right-hand corner is sensibly placed for immediate tweakability and is afforded a bigger dial for increased performance control.

The architecture of the synth is as follows: whilst there are two main analogue oscillators, these are digitally controlled (DCOs, not VCOs), featuring four main waveforms, which are further enhanced by a Sub Oscillator which offers three. The Sub's pitch is 'locked' to that of Oscillator 1 and can play either one or two octaves below it. Editing each oscillator involves selecting either 1 or 2 from a rocker switch and then adjusting Waveform, Coarse and Fine Tuning controls, Modulation Envelope Depth, LFO1 Depth and Pulse Width, which can be controlled via the Mod Envelope or from LFO 2. To the right, a Mixer section allows you to blend volumes of the Oscillators and the Sub, whilst a fourth dial here can be toggled between controlling external input volume, Ring Modulation, or a Noise Generator source.

Then comes the Filter section, which has been significantly revamped. The Classic option here evokes the Bass Station's original filter, which was a key part of its appeal – raspy, powerful and capable of real spit. Its tone-shaping capabilities have now been expanded to break away from the original's low-pass shape alone; now you'll find high-pass and band-pass options too, all available with 12dB or 24dB slopes. There's also a brand new filter option, Acid. As its name suggests, it's capable of tones which evoke the 303 and its relationship with resonance will have synth lovers drooling.





Modulation station

Below these key sound-shaping modules, the lower panel offers modulation control. There are two LFOs with variable waveshapes, plus Speed and Delay dials, as well as two envelopes (Amp and Modulation), which share ADSR sliders and are selected independently (or together) via rocker switches before changes can be made. Finally, an Effects section is included, which features just two controls – a post-filter Distortion and an 'Osc(illator) Filter Mod' dial, which toys with level, using Oscillator 2 as its source.

Those expecting Delay or Chorus might be disappointed but both dials offer an impressive sonic flavour and significantly beef up the Bass Station II's personality. To the left, you can add Portamento, with variable Glide Time,

ARP and Sequencer

The synth engine can be driven from onboard Arpeggiator and Sequencer engines which are capable of some great results. The Arpeggiator, once activated, will cycle round held notes (you can press the Latch button to keep them sustained), using a combination of playback modes; Up,

Down, Random etc. The Tempo control lets you set a bpm (this can be clocked over MIDI too), whilst the Rhythm dial allows you to step through a range of musical patterns to vary playback.

The onboard Sequencer allows you to record your up to four sequences of your own, in step-time. To

do this, turn the relevant dial to Record and, prompted by the screen, play a note for each step of the Sequence, using the Latch button to enter rests. Turn the dial to Play and your sequence will be triggered accordingly. It's huge fun and brilliantly, MIDI data is exported over USB too.

whilst further to the left you can access the Bass Station II's Arpeggiator and Sequencer options (see above).

All of which would suggest a capable synth in its own right but the

show whether a parameter's value is higher or lower than its preset value. Again, whilst this is a compromise, it does encourage you to use your ears rather than your eyes and is therefore no

bad thing.

Programming the Bass Station II is hugely rewarding and, like its predecessor, it's capable of much more than bass sounds. Sure, it

excels in this area, with the enhanced filters producing a wider selection of throbs, stabs and thick, beefy, bottom end, and in this sense, with EDM tastes current enjoying a bass renaissance, its release is timely. But with the inclusion of the Arpeggiator and Step Sequencer, this synth is ready to appeal to a wider range of producers. The Bass Station is back and Version II is a worthy successor to the original. **FM**

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feature set is actually dramatically expanded by a series of Function buttons, which can be enabled/deactivated by pressing Function and then pressing one of the keyboard's keys. These functions are usefully sub-labelled into separate areas; Mod Wheel and Aftertouch assignments, for instance, as well as 'further' options for the synth engine, including sync'ing oscillators 1 and 2 and setting a Swing value for the Arpeggiator engine, to name but a couple of examples.

These kinds of Function-key parameter changes are always a bit of a compromise but a few hours with the BassStation II should find you reaching for them with confidence. It will be interesting to see how Novation include them if, like the original, the keyboard Bass Station II spawns a rack-mount brother.

When programming, don't expect to be overly aided by the display, which is of the numerical, three-digit LED type, only adorned with > and < lights to

SPECS

Oscillators:

1, 2, Sub, Noise Generator

Waveforms:

Sine, Triangle, Sawtooth, Square/variable pulse width

Features: Sync 1 & 2, Detune, Octave range, Pitch bend, Pitch modulation from Mod Envelope and/or LFO 1, Pulse width modulation from Mod Envelope and/or LFO 2, Sub Osc (3) which is tracked to Osc 1

Effects:

Distortion send, Oscillator filter mod amount (FM effect created by Oscillator 2 modulating filter freq)

Inputs and Outputs

USB MIDI, Mono output – 1/4" TRS jack, Headphone output – 1/4" TRS jack, External input – 1/4" TRS jack, Sustain pedal input – 1/4" TS jack, MIDI IN/MIDI OUT ports

Dimensions

530 x 370 x 140mm

Weight

4kg

ALTERNATIVES



DSI Mopho Keyboard

£565

Dave Smith's yellow power-synth is aptly titled. With an all-analogue signal path and modulation options aplenty, it's a great-sounding alternative with an extra half-octave keyboard range too.

www.davesmithinstruments.com



Arturia MiniBrute

£429

All those software emulations clearly proved too much for the engineers at Arturia, whose straining at the hardware leash has produced a powerful, capable analogue monster.

www.arturia.com



Moog Minitaur

£489

When Moog's Taurus line spawned the Minitaur, many were instant converts. Rich sounds, tone-shaped through the ever-popular Moog filter.

www.moogmusic.com

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD

★★★★★

VALUE

★★★★★

EASE OF USE

★★★★★

VERSATILITY

★★★★★

RESULTS

★★★★★

They say 'never go back' but Novation have and we're all the better for it. Cheers!

