INCLUDES AUDIO

FutureMusic **Platinum** Award

Arturia V Collection 5

€499

The latest iteration of Arturia's emulation bundle adds a digital powerhouse to the mix. **Si Truss** gets his upgrade on

CONTACT **WHO:** Arturia [Source Distribution] **WEB:** www.arturia.com www.sourcedistribution.co.uk **KEY FEATURES** Bundle of 17 plug-in emulations including synths, organs and multi-mode piano instrument. New additions for version five are Synclavier V synth, B-3 V organ, Farfisa V organ, Stage-73 stage piano and Piano V. Several other instruments have been upgraded with new sound engines **FORMAT:** Standalone or VST, AU, AXX plug-in. NKS

Given the success of their Mini and MicroBrute hardware, their excellent BeatStep sequencers and our excitement at the forthcoming MatrixBrute, it's almost possible to forget that Arturia are, first and foremost, software developers. Long before they ever 'plugged-in' to the realms of CV and analogue circuitry, the French brand were already widely respected for their impressive digital emulations of a host of classic instruments. While the company's remit may have widened in recent years, they haven't been neglecting their roots, as demonstrated by this latest iteration of their flagship software bundle.

Version 5 sees the V Collection bundle beefed up to a total of 17 instruments, adding a new synth, several organs and a multi-mode piano instrument. A number of 'classics' from the collection have had an overhaul too, refining their sound engines and tweaking the interfaces. There's also one notable omission compared to version 4, however, in the shape of Arturia's software drum machine Spark. While it does seem odd to ditch a software instrument from the package that is neither outdated nor irrelevant, it does make the V Collection feel like a more straightforward proposition; whereas version 4 seemed to be trying to offer a complete software studio, version 5 is purely focused on synths and keys. Naturally, those upgrading from version 4 to 5 will still keep their access to Spark.

Digital delight

Certainly the most exciting of the new additions is the Synclavier V, a software recreation of New England Digital's hugely powerful digital synthesizer from the late-'70s/early-'80s. The original Synclavier was a direct competitor to the Fairlight CMI, which combined sampling and sequencing with additive and FM synthesis into a huge proto-workstation that required a rack-mounted CPU and its own (at the time hugely-powerful) 16-bit operating system. Unsurprisingly the

Synclav was very expensive – and is even more so vintage – but it still made its way into the studios of many notable Pop producers and soundtrack composers. As a result its sound is quintessentially '80s, instantly bringing to mind classic soundtracks and the bold, polished sound of early Synth Pop.

Arturia's take on the Synclav focuses purely on the synth elements of the original, foregoing the more workstation-like features in favour of replicating the full FM and additive engines and expanding on the capabilities of both. NED co-founder Cameron Jones – who wrote the original's OS – has been brought on board to assist with creation of the emulation. The resulting plug-in is a triumph. While I've not been lucky enough to spend sufficient time with an original Synclavier in order to judge how close the plug-in's behaviour is to that of its forebear, there's no doubt that sonically the Synclavier V is absolutely on point.

Even the most cursory scroll through the plug-in's presets demonstrates the huge range of rich and sonically complex sounds the synth can create; from retro-sounding leads to gorgeous digital strings, glistening pads and ominous, soundtrack-ready drones. The combination of additive and FM synthesis approaches opens up a world of timbral complexity, and the Synclav's deep editing capabilities allow for the creation of highly detailed sounds with a whole lot of movement.

Whether the Synclavier is faithful to the original or not is almost beside the point here anyway. Even if you were to strip it of all historical context and remove the nostalgia factor, you'd still be left with a powerful, multi-engine digital synth capable of going toe-to-toe with any of its contemporary plug-in rivals. The already powerful FM and digital engines have been beefed-up for this plug-in version too. The number of Partial Timbres (individual synth engines) that can be layered together

> ## Sonically the Synclavier V is absolutely on point and can create a huge range of rich and complex sounds

ORGANS AND PIANOS

Version 5 also adds two organs, a stage piano and a multi-mode acoustic piano. The organs are emulations of the Hammond B-3 and Farfisa Combi Organ. Each replicates the interface and feature set of the original, along with a speaker emulation (guitar amp for the Farfisa, rotary speaker for the B-3) and virtual pedal board. Plus, the B-3 features customisable drawbar modulation, while the Farfisa adds a variety of new waveforms that push its sound into more synth-y territory. The Stage-73 V, meanwhile, emulates several incarnations of the Fender Rhodes Stage Piano, offering Suitcase and Stage versions, with '73 and '74 variations for the latter. The interface can be opened up, offering a

virtual 'custom shop', along with an amp and effects. Finally, Piano V, features nine acoustic piano types, each with editable tuning and sound parameters, plus a variety of mic, room and EQ options.

All four instruments are high-quality and very usable emulations. The balance of simplicity and flexibility of Piano V impressed me, but the Farfisa is my favourite here, thanks to its gritty, vintage sound and well chosen effects.

to create a full patch has been increased from four to 12. Each of these can be assigned up to 50 Times Slices too, which are essentially parameter snapshots that can be used to sequence animation within sounds across a duration of up to 300 seconds.

If it all sounds quite complicated, that's because it is; the Synclavier's multi-layered, endlessly editable sound engine is a deep rabbit hole that many producers will likely find too daunting to venture down. Fortunately, Arturia's interface does a good job of making the synth seem significantly more approachable. The standard 'surface level' window gives access to a truncated selection of master parameters, such as envelopes, polyphony mode, effects and the arpeggiator. An expanded view, meanwhile, adds an additional panel for tweaking the major parameters of each Partial Timbre. Finally, an additional window offers a pleasingly retro replication of the original's operating system, offering full graphical editing of the harmonic content of each Partial Timbre. The broad range of presets helps considerably with finding and editing sounds too, with a very usable selection of quality leads, basses, arps and esoteric sounds providing a solid base for tweaking and editing. Those who are willing to dive below the surface will get the most out of the Synclavier V, however; with so many layers of editing on offer, it's a real sound designer's dream.

Revamped and refined

Upgrades for version 5 go beyond the new additions, however, as the collection's legacy plug-ins have been given a UI overhaul and various sound engine improvements. Visually, the main change comes in the shape of fully resizable UI for all instruments. This makes quite a difference; Arturia's hardware-aping interfaces look great but, particularly in the case of some of the organs and bigger synths, they can be tough to read. Being able to enlarge and zoom right in on a specific area of a plug-in's UI makes deep editing much easier on the eyes.

The sonic improvements are a little less straightforward to put your finger on, but the upgraded emulations do generally sound better than their predecessors. I focused my tests mainly on the Mini V, that

ANALOG LAB Version 2 of Arturia's sound hub offers simple, surface-level access to 5,000 presets with easy controller mapping and several performance-friendly features.

PRESET BROWSER The upgraded preset browser uses a streamlined system of categories and descriptive tags to make finding appropriate sounds a smooth and easy process.
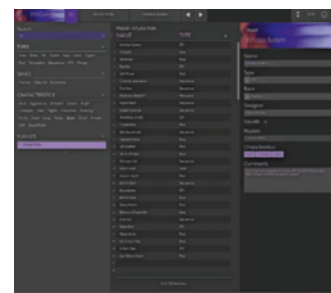
SYNCLAVIER V A pleasingly retro recreation of the original Synclav's attached monitor and operating system offers deep editing of the multiple Partial Timbres available for each sound.

IN THE LAB

Arturia's Analog Lab hub has also been upgraded to version 2. It offers surface-level control over a selection of 5,000 presets from across the V Collection. Its UI is based around a sleek photorealistic image of the full range of keyboards, paired with a virtual controller based on Arturia's own KeyLab range. Each preset features several pre-assigned macro controls and KeyLab and MiniLab users will find these automatically assigned, although they can easily be mapped to any controller via MIDI learn. It also offers performance-centric features including splits, sound layering and preset playlists.

being the plug-in from the range I'm best acquainted with, and the new version tended to have a slightly rounder and fuller sound. The upgraded sound engines seem to be a bit friendlier on the CPU too.

Another major upgrade is the improved preset browser, which has also been rolled out across every plug-in in the V Collection. The new browser uses a streamlined system of categories for organising sounds, but also features a well implemented tagging system, which allows presets to be searched not only by type (ie

bass, lead, etc) but also by clicking descriptive characteristics such as hard or soft. It's a well-designed system that makes browsing sounds a speedy process across the board, but it's Analog Lab users and those who are less well-versed on the unique characteristics of the V Collection's individual synths that will feel the most benefit.

Along with the new instruments, tweaked sound engines and polished UIs, it all adds up to make this latest V Collection feel like a very satisfying package. Some may bemoan,

entirely legitimately, the lack of any beat making capabilities due to the removal of Spark, though personally I feel this slight shift in emphasis makes it a more straightforward and focused bundle. As a whole, the V Collection cements its reputation as a good value, well-rounded package of quality vintage emulations. For synth-focused producers who need a little piano action on the side, this latest V Collection pretty much has all your bases covered. It's the Synclavier V that is the real highlight here though – a completely on-point digital revival and simply one of my favourite new synth plug-ins I've played with in some time. **FM**

FM VERDICT

9.2

Synclavier V is essential. The rest of the V Collection remains an impressive and good value package of classic emulations.