



# M-Audio Code 49

£175

PC

MAC

We get our paws all over the veteran manufacturer's latest controller keyboard, which features 16 drum pads and an X/Y touchpad

> M-Audio first unveiled their Code range of USB controller keyboards at the Winter NAMM show in January 2015. They're now available to buy in 25-, 49- and 61-key varieties, and here we're looking at the 49-key model.

The first thing you notice when you take the Code 49 out of its box is the squared-off styling – there's more than a hint of the Fairlight CMI in its flat, rectangular form factor, resembling, as it does, a sort of giant stick of chewing gum with piano keys and drum pads attached. It certainly cuts a dash in a studio setting, and the aesthetic appeal really ramps up when you turn it on, as its bevy of multicoloured, translucent LED buttons spring into life, making the whole front panel look like something out of *Blake's 7*.

Around the back, you'll find an on/off switch, a USB port for data and power, a pair of conventional five-pin MIDI I/O ports, a socket for the external PSU, and jacks for volume and sustain pedals. Completing the package are downloadable installers for Ableton Live Lite, and AIR Music Tech's Loom and Hybrid 3 virtual instruments.

## Key components

The keybed (an all-new design for the Code range) is of the quality you'd expect in an M-Audio board at this price level – ie, firmly sprung and pleasantly playable, with an action halfway between synth and heavily weighted.

The keys themselves are squared off at the front edge, enhancing the pianistic feel, and unusually, the case design allows the rear edges of the black keys to stand proud of the control panel – we didn't find that this adversely affected the playing experience at all. Build quality-wise, our only minor niggle was that the gaps between some of the keys were a little uneven on our review unit.

In terms of physical controllers, the Code 49 boasts the standard array – nine faders, nine buttons and eight continuous rotary encoders – all of which can be mapped to transmit the MIDI CCs of your choice, with up to 12 sets of assignments stored for recall as presets. The encoders, buttons and faders can also be switched to operate in Mackie/HUI mode, or you can configure the buttons and X/Y pad to send ASCII keystrokes in HID mode, for custom key commands (Cmd-C for 'copy', say).

The 16 colourful backlit drum pads to the left of the keyboard are responsive and feel great to play. Each one can be assigned one of 12 colours, making it easier to identify individual kit pieces when programming drums.

The large, bright orange six-character LED display momentarily shows the value or name of the parameter currently being tweaked or edited using the knobs and buttons. This even extends to aftertouch – press the keys and the aftertouch value is displayed, updating

constantly as you vary the pressure. The currently selected preset number is shown when nothing else is happening.

Add in other useful features such as dedicated transport controls and the ability to split the keyboard into four separate, overlapping zones for simultaneous control of multiple instruments, and you have an attractive, versatile controller worthy of the top spot on any studio desk. Definitely one code you won't mind cracking! **cm**

**Web** [www.m-audio.com](http://www.m-audio.com)  
**Info** Code 25, £135; Code 61, £200

## Alternatively

**Korg Taktile-49**  
N/A » N/A » £180

A lighter keyboard action, comparable features and an identical price point

**Novation Impulse 49**  
cm179 » 8/10 » £160

Novation's similar, if now slightly venerable, package only has eight drum pads but still packs a punch

## Verdict

**For** Fantastic looks  
Plenty of controllers  
Excellent keybed  
Useful X/Y controller  
Good software bundle

**Against** Trackpad mode a little clunky  
Some uneven gaps between keys

Attractive looks and plenty of features make this a fine option for anyone seeking a solid, workhorse keyboard controller

9/10

## X/Y marks the spot

Located at the top right of the control area, the Code 49's X/Y touchpad operates in three modes. In MIDI mode, it can be mapped to any two MIDI CC messages – handy for controlling two parameters simultaneously with one hand while the other remains gainfully employed playing the keyboard. You can set each axis to send absolute (mapped directly to pad position) or relative (adding the positionally generated value to the parameter's current value) data.

In Note mode, the touchpad outputs MIDI note values along both axes, generating some, err, interesting two-note chords as a result.

Finally, in HID mode, the touchpad can serve as a mouse or trackpad, enabling you to take control of your computer from the front panel of the keyboard. As it appears to the computer as a regular mouse/trackpad-style controller, the sensitivity can be adjusted in your system preferences.