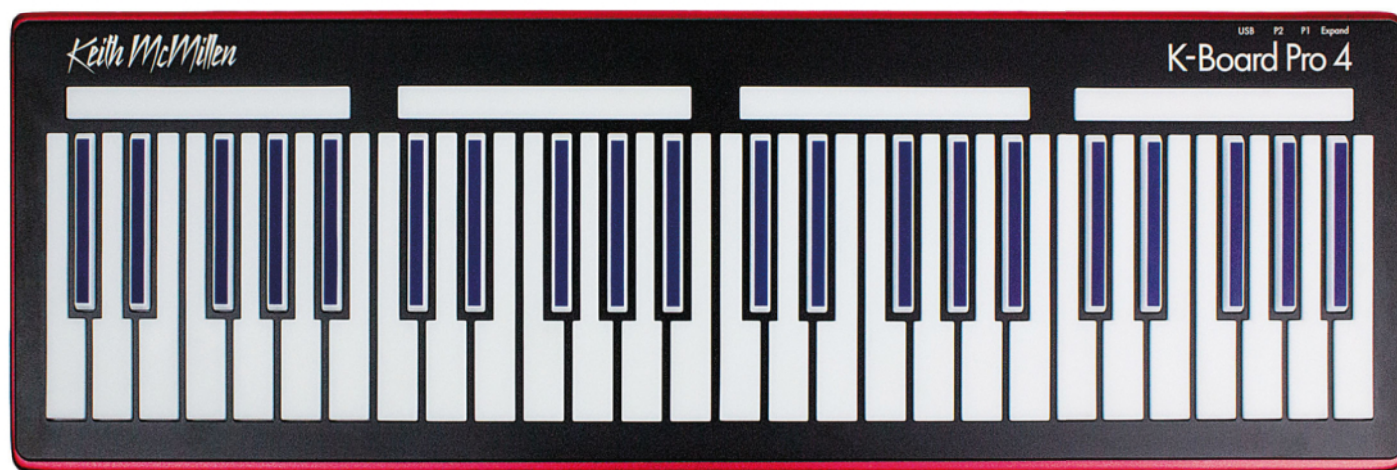


# Keith McMillen K-Board Pro 4 \$895

With MPE gaining wider acceptance, more manufacturers are getting involved. **Jon Regen** checks out KMI's offering

**CONTACT** **WHO:** Keith McMillen Instruments **WEB:** [keithmcmillen.com](http://keithmcmillen.com) **KEY FEATURES** Four-octave MIDI keyboard controller, USB powered, Smart Sensor Fabric technology  
**DIMENSIONS:** 325 x 84 x 11mm **WEIGHT:** 0.345g





I'll admit it: as a 'meat and potatoes' piano, Wurlitzer and organ guy, I've never been particularly drawn to alternative keyboard options. But as many of my fellow keyboard journeymen have been swayed to add MPE controllers to their touring rigs (like Andy Burton from Little Steven and the Disciples of Soul), I've become more and more intrigued. And then, as fate would have it, the KMI K-Board Pro 4 showed up on my doorstep.

KMI first announced the K-Board Pro 4 with a Kickstarter campaign back in 2017. The current model has changed slightly in design, and the price has risen from an 'Early Bird' rate of \$400 to the new retail of \$895. But the specs of this controller are impressive indeed. You get a four-octave MPE MIDI controller with a myriad of touch options, from standard velocity sensitivity, to horizontal, vertical and pressure control. If, like me, you're accustomed to playing traditional controllers and keyboards, these new vistas of control are eye-opening.

My K-Board Pro-4 arrived well-packed in its optional hard case. Right out of the box, it made quite an impression, with its red aluminum frame and backlit slide controllers. I connected it quickly and painlessly and was up and running in minutes.

If like me, you're accustomed to traditional MIDI controllers, offerings like the K-Board Pro 4 can take a minute to get used to. It has no moving parts in its 4-octave silicone keyboard, using what KMI calls Smart Sensor Fabric technology to map a

myriad of available touch parameters. The MPE MIDI standard that KMI (and others like Roli) employ, allow the player to control both attack and release velocity, use pressure for polyphonic aftertouch effects, slide his or her finger up and down to control things like filters opening and closing, as well as use horizontal movements for adding vibrato to a performance. This is a daunting array of new aural options. I was overwhelmed at first. But as I dug in, my playing began to adapt to them as I investigated the K-Board Pro 4 across a sampling of soft synths.

The keys don't really depress like a standard MIDI controller. There is a bit of flex on them, though, so you eventually adjust to playing more traditional keyboard-centric passages easily. But harnessing the power of MPE control is the point here, and that's when the Pro 4 shines.

At first power-up, I tried the K-Board Pro 4 with Arturia's Jupiter-8V, an emulation of Roland's venerable polyphonic analogue synth, the Jupiter-8. I know my way around that softsynth, but using the K-Board with it was a completely new experience. I found gradations of touch and control I'd never known possible before; String patches sprung to life with human-like vibrato. Pads shimmered and mutated while using the K-Board's slide controllers to control the filter. Plucked presets evinced an eerie, almost space-age quality when played using attack and release velocity. Ditto when using other virtual instruments by Arturia, Synthogy and AIR. Piano plugin patches that once appeared ordinary

now took on an entirely new aural atmosphere. And playing sustained synth and string sounds using the K-Board Pro's polyphonic aftertouch was a revelation, with each note of a chord getting the chance to sing out on its own. We often associate control like this with expensive vintage keyboards like the Yamaha CS-80, or Kurzweil's MIDIboard. The K-Board does it without the vintage price.

KMI's free, downloadable editor software unlocks even more. You can program the four slide controllers, map the pedal jacks, customise touch parameters, and more, letting you mold the K-Board to your own personal preferences. It also ships with Bitwig's Studio 8-Track.

This is one impressive MIDI controller. Even if you're unfamiliar with the additional touch options it affords, a quick intro is all it takes. The possibilities are truly endless – from live shows to film/TV scoring work. And if it can teach an old dog like me new tricks, who knows what it can do for you! **FM**

## FM VERDICT

# 8.8

**A well-designed and relatively affordable MPE controller with the power to breathe new life into your library of plugin synths**

## THE PROS & CONS



Rugged build quality

**Affordable ...in the world of MPE controllers**

Compact

**Opens a new world of sonic options**

Free editor and DAW software included



**You may never play your old MIDI controller the same way again!**