# Dave Smith Instruments Prophet 08 | £1,499

It's been 30 years since the release of the legendary Prophet 5. Can the new Prophet 08 live up to the hype? **Dan 'JD73' Goldman** finds out…

**WHAT IS IT?**

An eight-voice polyphonic analogue synth with flexible mod routings, sequencer, stack/split modes and huge sound

**CONTACT**

**Who:** Turnkey
**Tel:** +44 (0)20 7419 9999
**Web:** turnkey.co.uk

**HIGHLIGHTS**

**1** Eight-voice, all-analogue signal path with two oscs per voice and dual-mode low-pass filter.

**2** Very portable with solid build and plenty of hands-on control

**3** Comprehensive onboard modulation and sequencing possibilities

For the synth geeks among us, Dave Smith's name is synonymous with some of the best analogue synths ever made. The Prophet range of synths, including the Prophet 10, 5, T8 and Pro One made under Smith's company Sequential Circuits, are the stuff of legend due to their ballsy sound and great feature sets, and were the mainstays of many a pro keyboardist in the '70s and '80s.

In a time where analogue synthesis is having a great renaissance and Smith's current company is doing very well with the Evolver range of hybrid analogue/digital synths, it makes sense that the Prophet range is revisited to bring it into the here and now and to introduce a new generation to the sound of polyphonic analogue synthesis…

The first thing that strikes you about the Prophet 08 is how compact it is, and this makes it perfect for those with space-strapped studios or even for slinging in the back of the car for gigs. By moving the pitch and mod wheels above the keyboard (they work surprisingly well in this position) and

by using the (dreaded) external 'wall-wart' power supply, Dave Smith Instruments (DSI) have enabled the main body of the Prophet 08 to be only a little longer than the five-octave keyboard it contains.

## Classic good looks

The overall look immediately harks back to the classic Prophet 5 design, using a few clever design cues. The most notable of these include the recommission of the original 'Prophet' font for the logo, the silver topped dials and of course, the now obligatory



**Envelopes**
A freely assignable extra envelope allowing more complex and time-evolving sounds

**FutureMusic**
**Value** Award

**FutureMusic**
**Platinum** Award

wooden-end cheeks! These are really nice touches and instantly transport you back to the land of the Prophets. Another welcome surprise is how light the Prophet 08 is – only 9.5kg (21lbs) – which again makes it perfect for gigging with.

The keyboard is semi-weighted, which is nice to play, and allows for very fast and accurate playing. Compared to my Memorymoog's clacky unweighted affair, it's like playing a Steinway! It's also great that the keyboard incorporates aftertouch and this is very well implemented here. Often aftertouch can be all or nothing, and quite hard to control but here it's very smooth and reacts musically and predictably.

## Layout

The interface is well laid out and it's great that the filter controls are slap bang in the middle of the panel – although it would have been better if the cutoff and resonance controls had been placed on the bottom row of dials nearer the keyboard for easy reach. The Prophet 5-style dials are the continuous type and feel sturdy, though there's a little sideward play

## The Modulators



The modulation section on the Prophet 08 has been very well thought out, although it's only possible to send one source to one destination at a time.

There are four modulation slots and each can be sent to one of over 40 possible modulation destinations. Setting up modulations takes a while

to master but it's worth persevering with.

Basically, you press the desired mod slot button (1-4), select the source with the source dial, destination with the destination dial and amount with the amount dial. Hey presto, you can be bubbling away within seconds! If this section

isn't enough for you then there are four freely assignable IFOs as well.

Each can be assigned to one of over 20 sources and 40 destinations and can also be synch'd to reset with a key press. When the Prophet 08 is set to receive MIDI clock the IFOs can beat-synch'd with your sequencer.

**Parameters**
Includes independent voice volume, keyboard tracking, sound naming and Osc Slop modes

**Modulation**
Four mod slots for assigning modulation to IFOs, envelopes, sequencer and arpeggiator

**Filter and Amp**
These both include delay control for delaying the onset of the attack stage

(and whether these hold up for 30 years remains to be seen!). One thing that concerns me though is that you can't just look at the front panel and immediately know where your settings – a major change from the Prophet 5.

In fact, it's not until you turn the dial that its corresponding value comes up in the display. In an ideal world, each dial would have its own ring of LEDs – like the Nord Lead 3 or the Moog Little Phatty – but this would add to the price considerably so it's a fair compromise.

The selector switches seem very sturdy and are all lit with red backlighting, as is the small two-line display. While the red looks nice and ties in with the overall look, I don't feel it was necessarily the best choice

for this display. As it's not angled upwards (and because it's a little dark) it's sometimes quite difficult to read. It's also a shame that there are no Direct Program and Bank buttons for quick sound changing. Instead, this has to be done with dials – which isn't as easy.

The sound architecture and sound shaping features are very comprehensive. This is an eight-voice (eight-note polyphonic) polysynth with two oscs per voice (16 oscs total), which also allows splits and layering of sounds, and at this price point that's quite unique.

Prophet 08 has a 100% all analogue signal path that uses stable and drift-free DCOs (the same as in the Evolver range). Available wave shapes include saw, triangle, saw/triangle mix, pulse (which, at a setting of 50, becomes a square wave) and noise. The Oscs have a wide ten-octave range from 8Hz to 8kHz, which allows any type of sound from deep and bassy through bright and cutting.

The Oscs also use Curtis chips that have been tweaked by Smith for maximum analogueness For those of you screaming, "DCOs? They don't sound as good as VCOs!" I massively disagree in this case. These sound huge, raw and phat-as-you-like.

## The good and great

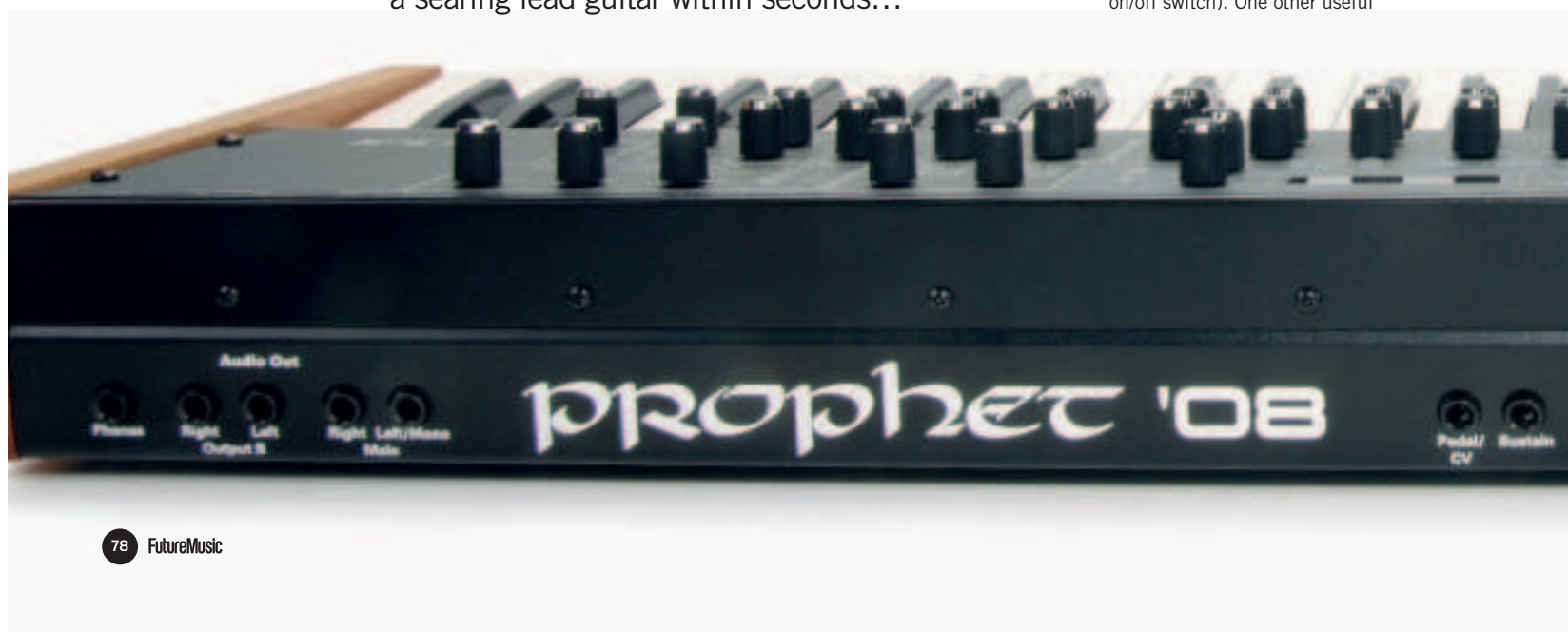### There are lots we like but here are our top three Prophet 08 features

**>** The flexible structure of the Prophet 08 allows for endless sound-shaping possibilities. With four IFOs, voice panning/spreading, low-pass filter, arpeggiator, aftertouch, four mod slots and even a 4-track 16-step sequencer – to call the new Prophet 'fully featured' would an understatement!

**> You can create a 16-voice, 32-Oscillator, all-analogue monster using the Polychain function to connect another Prophet 08, or just MIDI it up to another sound module.**

**>** Using the Stack and Split modes, several different sounds can be layered, zoned-off and accessed within one patch – great for live use. Plus velocity and aftertouch can be used to quickly turn a flute into a searing lead guitar within seconds…

### Catch my drift?

For those that want to simulate the drift associated with VCOs there's an 'Oscillator Slop' parameter that subtly shifts the frequency of the Iscillators. Other notable features in the Osc section are the Single Mix dial for mixing the oscillators together (this is much quicker than having two separate controls) and separate glide controls for each oscillator (although it's a shame there's no dedicated glide on/off switch). One other useful

## The arpeggiator and gated sequencer

The Prophet 08 features a useful arpeggiator and a versatile 16-step 4-track gated sequencer. The arpeggiator has four modes (up, down, up/down and assign). Its clock can be sync'd with MIDI and has several beat division options ranging from half-note through eighth note swing, up to 64th note triplets if you so desire!

The gated sequencer is a great addition to the Prophet 08 and is pretty easy to use once you've got your head around it. The sequencer controls are written in yellow on the front panel. Each of the four tracks in the sequencer can have 16 steps and be assigned to over

40 mod destinations. Once the edit sequencer is turned on, the dials in the filter and amp section switch to sequencer mode. Each dial has a yellow LED above it that corresponds to one of the 16 steps.

To set off a sequence you hit a key or give the Prophet 08 a MIDI clock signal. Then you just pick a sequencer track, and assign a mod destination in the mod section. Once this is done, each of the front panel dials in the filt/amp envelope section control the amount sent to the mod destination during each step. It sounds complex but it's quite simple in practice and a really inspiring feature.

control is the Audio Mod dial that allows Osc 1's audio output to modulate the cutoff. For simulating classic monosynths such as the Pro 1 or Minimoog, Prophet 08 has a very comprehensive unison option that puts it into monophonic mode. This is great for leads and basses where all

Further, there's the powerful Stack mode, where two sounds can be stacked with independent control over unison, arpeggiator and sequence controls for each layer (more about these modes later).

The Stack mode assigns voices 1-4 to Layer A and 5-8 to Layer B. To

in the same way, but this time you could have a string pad to the right and a mono bass to the left.

### Split and polish

The split points are set by simply pressing and holding the Split A/B switch and hitting the desired key on the keyboard for each side of the split. I love the fact that you can access several different sounds from within one patch using these

> " I love that you can access several different sounds from within one patch using these various modes "

eight voices can be stacked for massively powerful sounds. For more simple monophonic sounds, Prophet 08 can be put into One-Voice Unison mode. There are also various de-tuned modes to fatten-up the sound and the obligatory Osc sync, which is great for searing and cutting leads and basses.

edit Layer B. It's as simple as pressing the 'Edit Layer B' button and as long as it's lit you know that the front panel is referring to Layer B. You can also edit both layers at once by holding the Edit Layer B switch until it flashes. The Split mode is also well implemented and assigns the voices

various modes in combination with controllers such as aftertouch or the mod wheel to fade in different layers or modulations (for more on this, see 'The Modulators' box on page 77).

The filter is a fixed low-pass design based on the Curtis chip and it sounds great. It has a huge frequency range

and can turn a soft bass into a hard lead with ease. There's a four-pole mode (which allows self-oscillation and sounds warm and phat) and a

staple analogue sounds from pads through to leads and basses.

The envelopes are also very versatile and snappy sounding (but

come in very useful both on stage and in the studio. The MIDI options are also very comprehensive with most controls able to send and receive MIDI CCs, and you can even chain two Prophet 08s together to make a 16-voice monster!

> **"I'm going to have to buy one myself. This will be the answer to many a keyboardist's dreams"**

two-pole mode, which doesn't self-oscillate and has a more subtle character. It would have been good to have a high-pass as well but it's not included here. It's also a shame that there's no filter input either.

The filters are lush and precise, yet nasty. Sounds can get pretty grungy with high resonance/low cutoff levels, although you need to watch out for clipping. I also love how bright the filters open up as this allows sounds to really cut through a dense mix.

For bass sounds, the Prophet 08 doesn't get quite as round or phat as a dedicated monosynth but it's very respectable all the same. For gigging, this synth could easily cover all the

maybe not snappy enough for some bass sounds) and both the filter and amp envelopes have a useful delay parameter that delays the onset of the attack stage. There's also a third freely assignable envelope (with over 40 destinations) which is a nice addition.

### Classy performance

All in all there are very few drawbacks with this synth, especially when you consider what you're getting for your money. It sounds classy, has very flexible (though sometimes confusing-to-set-up) mod routings and the eight-note polyphony allows several sounds to be stacked and split within one patch, which is a godsend and will

I love this synth that much I think I'm going to have to buy one myself. The Prophet 08 is going to be the answer to many a keyboardist's dreams. **FM**

**FutureMusic VERDICT**

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|---|---|
| BUILD | |
| VALUE | |
| EASE OF USE | |
| VERSATILITY | |
| RESULTS | |

**A worthy, classy sounding successor to the original Prophet 5. These will fly off the shelves!**



**Arpeggiator**
Four modes and MIDI sync-able for maximum flexibility

**LFO**
Four MIDI sync-able independent LFOs with several waveshapes including the much-loved Random mode

**Oscillation**
Mix, blend and tune the two Oscs for maximum phatness. Also assign Glide and Unison modes here

**Sequencer**
16-step, four-track analogue step sequencer with several trigger modes for time-locked evolving sounds