

Sequential Prophet-6 | \$2,700

The spiritual successor to the Prophet-5 is finally here! **Dan 'JD73' Goldman** checks out if it's the real deal...

INCLUDES AUDIO AND VIDEO

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WHAT IS IT?

Six-voice analogue polysynth built in the Prophet-5's mould with VCOs, VCFs, VCAs, poly-sequencer, arpeggiator, solid modulation facilities and high-quality effects

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 It sounds warm and silky, and has that vintage vibe we all love
- 2 Knob-per-function ethos and enough modulation facilities onboard to add serious movement and interest to sounds
- 3 Snappy envelopes, wide range and musical filters, tasty effects



Despite DSI undoubtedly making some fantastic synths over the last few years, there has been a conspicuous hole in their line-up left by the original Prophet-5. While the Prophet 08 was its nearest true successor, its DCO-based architecture meant that, although it could nicely emulate the vintage sound (and sound much more modern too), it was an altogether different beast. I dare say if you'd surveyed synth heads a few years back asking what synth they'd most like DSI to make, it would be a unanimous shout of 'a new Prophet-5 with VCOs'. Well, fast forward to 2015 (some 37 years after the Prophet-5 launched) and we now have the Prophet-5's spiritual successor – the Prophet-6.

To say I was a little excited about trying the P6 is something of an understatement; in fact it had me drooling in anticipation! The P6 arrived in a rather boring brown cardboard box but, once out of its temporary home, the P6 revealed itself to be a thing of beauty with its walnut end pieces and trim – it certainly looks like a legit Prophet-5 successor. One important thing to note is the Sequential badge. Most of you will know that before Dave Smith Instruments, there was Sequential Circuits which produced classic analogues such as the Prophet-5, T8 and Pro 1 (among others). In 1987, Sequential was sold to Yamaha and no more Sequential branded products were made and, up until a few months back, Yamaha still

owned the Sequential name. However, this changed when Dave's friend Ikutaro Kakehashi (founder of Roland) suggested to Yamaha president Takuya Nakata that Yamaha give back the Sequential name to Dave – Mr Nakata agreed! Hence, we now have a Sequential badged Prophet-6.

Small footprint

The P6 is a sturdy instrument weighing in at 20lbs, although it's surprisingly compact due to its shorter four-octave keyboard. The chassis is metal and also hinges at the back for easy access to the innards. Power comes in via a kettle lead, as you'd expect on a premium instrument. One great thing is that the voice cards in the P6 are all in separate sockets and can be removed easily

Effects

A new VCO polysynth with built-in, high-quality, 24-bit/48kHz effects is an enticing proposition! Two effects are available simultaneously per patch and can be tweaked in real time using the dedicated dials.

VCOs

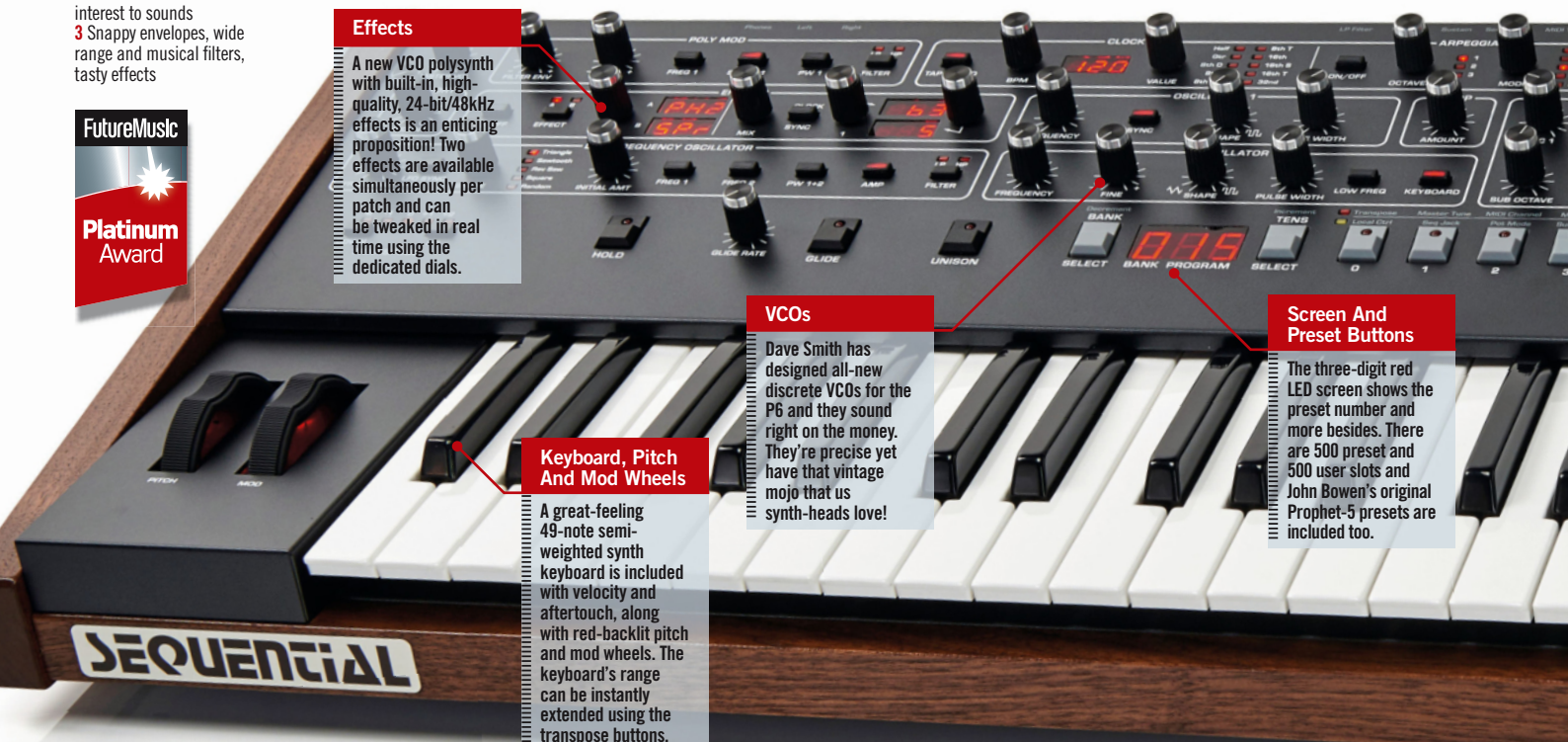
Dave Smith has designed all-new discrete VCOs for the P6 and they sound right on the money. They're precise yet have that vintage mojo that us synth-heads love!

Keyboard, Pitch And Mod Wheels

A great-feeling 49-note semi-weighted synth keyboard is included with velocity and aftertouch, along with red-backlit pitch and mod wheels. The keyboard's range can be instantly extended using the transpose buttons.

Screen And Preset Buttons

The three-digit red LED screen shows the preset number and more besides. There are 500 preset and 500 user slots and John Bowen's original Prophet-5 presets are included too.



down the line for replacement/service if necessary – a clever move by DSI which should help ensure the future longevity of the instrument. The top panel is laid out clearly in a P5-style with the graphics silkscreened directly onto the panel and the switches are a mixture of later-style DSI push buttons and P5-type selectors with LEDs. These all feel sturdy and should stand up to long-term abuse on and off stage. The plastic/rubber-coated/silver knobs will be familiar to owners of the Prophet 08, Pro 2 and P12, and feel good with a nice amount of resistance, though there is some play in them.

Back to the keyboard for a moment. The four-octave design keeps the footprint small which is useful for smaller spaces and makes the P6 easy to transport. Undoubtedly, some players will prefer a five-octave keyboard (and personally speaking I would have liked

The keyboard is massively playable and buttery, and the velocity and aftertouch response near perfect

an extra octave, as I think five is perfect for a performance synth) but most of the time, four octaves is sufficient and chances are the P6 will be part of a multi-board rig on stage at least, thus you'll not always require two hands on

deck simultaneously. When you do require that extra range you can use the very fast octave switches or connect an external MIDI board. For soloing and most two-handed duties, four octaves is fine and I've never had an issue soloing

semi-weighted synth-action keyboard is massively playable and buttery – it's perfectly balanced for playing fast and accurately. The velocity and aftertouch response is also near perfect allowing smooth and predictable modulation

Effects

The P6 features two 24-bit, 48kHz effect processors. The effects are newly designed and when off, provide true bypass so that the pure analogue signal path isn't adversely affected. Processor A provides bucket brigade delay, digital delay, chorus, and two phaser types, while processor B provides the same, plus hall, room, plate and spring reverb emulations.

The quality and musicality of the effects is impressive all round and they really enhance the already great tone of the P6, plus the delays can be



sync'd internally or to MIDI clock. You can also tap the sides of the P6 to get authentic spring reverb rattle! Further, each effect has a mix level control and two real-time dials, each with their own display where different parameters can be tweaked. For

example, the spring reverb has tweakable tone and decay parameters, while the chorus has rate and depth; it's all very intuitive too. Finally, there's a handy 'pan spread' feature that spreads the six voices across the stereo field. Lovely!

SPECS

Oscillators: 2 new discrete VCOs per-voice, Continuously variable waveshape per oscillator, Variable pulse width, Hard sync, Triangle sub-octave generator (oscillator 1) per voice, Low frequency mode (oscillator 2), Keyboard tracking on/off (oscillator 2), Oscillator slop

Mixer: Oscillator 1, 2 and sub-osc levels, plus white noise

Filters: Two-pole resonant, high-pass filter with velocity, Four-pole, resonant, self-oscillating low-pass filter, Velocity and bi-polar amount controls plus full and half keyboard tracking controls

Envelopes: 1x filter ADSR, 1x amp ADSR

LFO: Five wave shapes + noise source, Clock sync (internal or external MIDI clock), 5 Mod destinations

Poly Mod

Sources: filter envelope (bi-polar) and oscillator 2 (bi-polar), 5 Destinations

Aftertouch: channel aftertouch with bi-polar amount, 6 destinations

Clock: Tap tempo, BPM control, MIDI clock/internal sync

Arpeggiator: 10 timing divisions, Up to 3-octave range, Up, down, up/down, random, and assign modes

Polyphonic sequencer: 64 steps with rests/ties, Transposition when holding record/pressing a note

Effects: Stereo analogue distortion, Dual, 24-bit, 48kHz digital effects, Delay sync, True bypass

Performance controls:

Full-sized, semi-weighted, 4-octave keyboard with velocity and aftertouch, Backlit pitch and mod wheels, Transpose controls, Hold switch, Polyphonic glide, Unison mode with configurable voice count, Live panel mode, 500 user and 500 factory programs (10 banks of 100 programs each)

Connections: Left/mono and right audio outputs, Headphone output, MIDI in, out, and thru ports, USB, Low-pass filter cutoff pedal input, Volume pedal input, Sustain footswitch input, Sequencer start/stop footswitch input

Dimensions

813 x 323 x 117mm

Weight:

9.5kg

Modulation

Modulation options include an audio-rate LFO, two snappy envelopes, the mod wheel, aftertouch, pedals, velocity and a 'polymod' section with several destinations. Oscillator 2 can act as a secondary LFO.

VCFs

The P6 includes a four-pole resonant low-pass self-oscillating filter and a two-pole resonant (static) high-pass. They can be combined to form a band-pass filter, extending beyond the P5's original scope.



builds but response can be further tweaked in the global settings if needed. There are performance controls in the shape of standard mod and pitch wheels but alas no P12/Tempest style touch-sliders, though I can see DSI have chosen to keep this synth firmly in the P5's mould so there's nothing that strays too much from the original.

One of the biggest draws of the P6 is the aforementioned knob-per-function, zero menu-diving ethos. This is very much a 'use your ears not your eyes' board and I really welcome the lack of visual distractions which keeps you focused on the sound. However, the basic three-digit LED display means there's no patch naming and you have to remember your sound by number (much like a Nord Lead 4), though an

editor is available from SoundTower for a modest outlay which will help you organise, name and dissect patches. Finally, 'live panel' mode is accessed by turning off the 'preset' button. I hope the bank and 'tens' buttons become operational as patch up/down buttons (they are already labelled as 'increment/decrement') which will speed up patch selection greatly.

At the top left is the P5's famous 'polymod' section which has now been augmented to address the additional high-pass filter (the P5 had just a low-pass) plus there's an additional dial labelled 'shape' which modulates the waveshape of Oscillator 1 for adding movement to sounds. Below this is the new digital effects section and to the right, the great-sounding analogue

distortion that has become a feature of recent DSI synths.

Under the effects section is a single audio-rate capable MIDI-syncable LFO – yes there's just one LFO but with the polymod section and the fact that Osc 2 can act as a secondary LFO, there's enough in the way of modulation to keep things interesting. The LFO has five main shapes (plus a noise source selected by choosing 'random' and turning 'frequency' fully clockwise) and these can be sent to up to five destinations including the frequency and pulse width of both oscillators and to the amp, LPF and/or HPF. The 'initial amount' dial controls the amount of LFO modulation sent to these destinations and when set to 0, the LFO modulation is controlled by the modwheel, with the amount of modulation dictated by the mod wheel's position.

Vintage vibe

Now the sound! Dave has gone back to discrete VCOs, VCFs and VCAs for the P6 and they really sound excellent with that vintage vibe! The two newly designed oscillators are pretty much dead on pitch from the word go and stay solidly in tune (as you'd expect). If they do drift out due to sudden external temperature changes (unlikely), simply hold the preset button and 0 to run the calibration procedure. Unlike the P5, each oscillator now has a continuously variable waveshape from triangle through to square/variable pulse (much like current Moogs) enabling a wider range of tones than the P5's hardwired (though simultaneously available) waveforms. With such stable VCOs onboard Dave has included his famous 'slop' parameter which induces natural sounding oscillator drift – just a small amount can really liven up proceedings and add extra movement and vintage-style detuning to the P6's otherwise stable sound. I think this is a good compromise and I'd rather have

Who needs a P6?

Here are three situations where a P6 could come in very handy!



> If you already have an old polysynth or Prophet-5 that's unreliable. The P6 has that classic sound you love with modern functionality/reliability.



> If you're after the vintage polysynth sound for studio/live work but don't want to risk buying a vintage polysynth, the P6's killer sound will more than fill the gap.



> If you want a new polysynth that can cover a broad range of classic analogue tones authentically and reliably, including solid basses, drums/FX, pads and leads.



Connections

Round the back are a headphone socket, stereo outputs, MIDI ports, USB (for updates and MIDI) plus pedal sockets for sustain, volume, filter cutoff and for starting the sequencer.

super-stable (albeit still vibey) VCOs and be able to dial in any desired level of drift with 'slop', than have completely unstable VCOs that are a headache (like my Memorymoog for instance!). There's also a digital white noise source too.

Sonically, the P6 is to my ears the most authentically vintage-sounding DSI polysynth to date and it sounds nicely different to the P08, Pro 2 and P12 – it has a very wide sweet spot and it's pretty hard to get it to sound bad! It's definitely the legitimate heir to the P5 in many respects and it excels at present leads, punchy/deep basses, nicely defined yet warm evolving pads/atmospheres, sync leads, synth brass/comping patches and huge unison solo sounds. There's also chord memory, a great sounding four-mode portamento/glide function and a versatile mono-unison mode where you can stack up to six voices.

The LPF (taken from the Pro 2) and HPF sound superb and the envelopes are super-snappy – great for making punchy basses that can even give Moogs a run for their money (it's definitely easier to make great sounding

Sequencer And Arpeggiator

A step sequencer and arpeggiator are included and they come in very useful! Obviously as the P6 is monitimbral there's no splitting/layering available, and thus, the sequencer only has one track, although you can record polyphonically (up to six notes per-step) and you can add rests or ties too using the tens/increment button. Bear in mind that, as there's only one track, if you use up all six voices on a step, you won't be able to play over the top on that particular step, and further to this, there's no knob-movement recording, though there is keyboard-led transposition which is great.

There are 64 steps available in total and ten



timing divisions which apply to both the sequencer and arpeggiator (including 8ths, 16ths and 32nd notes, with triplet and swing settings). Both the sequencer and arpeggiator work great for making loops and backings and they really come into their own when synchronised to MIDI

clock as part of a wider live/studio set-up; there's also a trigger jack for triggering the sequencer (or arpeggiator) from a pedal/audio source.

Finally, the arpeggiator has five modes (including up, down, up+down, random and assign) and it can be latched by simply pressing the 'hold' button.

It is the most authentically vintage-sounding DSI polysynth to date – it's pretty hard to get it to sound bad!

basses on the P6 compared to the P08 and P12). Also, with the triangle sub-oscillator dialled in, you can really feel the extended lows. The P6's frequency range is huge, ranging from earth-shaking subs through to punchy high-mids, sizzling tops and piercing out of control warbles (especially when the filter resonance is pushed). Also, the high-pass resonant filter (though not self-oscillating) really opens up the sound sculpting possibilities and acts as a band-pass when combined with

the LPF. I should also mention that unlike the P5 (which had no velocity or aftertouch) you can send velocity to both the filters and amp too which is a big improvement.

A future classic

When you then add in the 64-step polyphonic MIDI (and audio) syncable sequencer, the great-sounding digital effects, MIDI control over most parameters, USB-MIDI communication, alternative tunings and above all that

killer sound, the P6 is surely destined to be a future-classic. Thankfully, there are very few downsides to report and, although an audio input and CV ins/outs would have been nice, the P6 certainly carries forward the torch of its vintage predecessor admirably. Obviously, as a premium self-contained discrete VCO/VCF polysynth it's not cheap, sitting just below the flagship P12 price-wise (and feature-wise it's more streamlined than the P08, Pro 2 or P12); nonetheless, it's surprisingly versatile and sounds a million dollars – I think for most of us, that's the bottom line! **FM**



Wood/Metal Chassis

The P6 is a solid piece of kit with a metal chassis, metal back and control panel – its design owes much to the P5. Walnut sides/trim complete the vintage look.

ALTERNATIVES



Nord Lead 4

£1,349

Yes it's virtual analogue but it impersonates real analogue very well indeed. 20-voice poly, two oscillators per-voice, 49-note keyboard (no aftertouch), arpeggiator, two LFOs, FX and extensive modulation/morphing options.

www.nordkeyboards.com



Roland JD-XA

£1,569

Roland's new synth combines a great sounding four-note polyphonic analogue engine with a 64-note polyphonic digital engine, plus comprehensive multi-effects, multi-track sequencing/arpeggiator and deep modulation facilities. A beast of a synth!

www.roland.co.uk



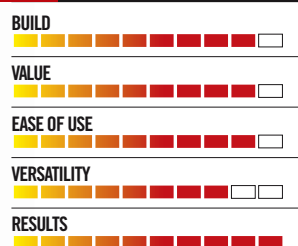
Sequential Circuits Prophet-5

Around £4,000+

The original is now a sought-after and expensive classic instrument! Try to find a Rev3 model and budget extra for servicing. Keep it safe in the studio!

[eBay](#), [Gumtree](#), [classifieds etc...](#)

FutureMusic VERDICT



Building on the P5's legacy nicely, it adds modern features but retains the all-important killer sound.