



XLN Audio

Addictive Keys £129 PC MAC

They surprised us all with the simplicity and sound of Addictive Drums, but can they do it again with their keyboard emulations?

> Addictive Keys is the latest plug-in instrument (VST/AU/RTAS) from Sweden's XLN Audio, featuring three multisampled classic keyboards: Fender Rhodes Mark I, Yamaha U3 Upright Piano and Steinway Model D Concert Grand. Each one can be bought individually (€99 each for the two acoustics and €79 for the Rhodes) or bundled as 'The Studio Collection', and they all load into a common interface.

Just like Addictive Drums, the aim is to provide excellent source sounds with plenty of customisation (EQ, dynamics, effects and so on), but with a small disk footprint (4GB for the whole lot). AD users will note some visual and functional similarities - in particular the Edit page, which includes pitch, filter and volume envelopes, as well as per-mic insert processing (EQ, chorus, compression) and two 'Delerb' (delay plus reverb) send effects. However, keys concerned have very different requirements to drums, so the specifics are rather different. In particular, you get seven flavours of noise (eg, tape and vinyl), five types of distortion and three modulation effects (Chorus, phaser and tremolo). The aforementioned Delerb units combine delay and reverb processors in one module, with a neat visual balancing window.

One of the key features of Addictive Keys is that each instrument has been captured using a number of mics in a number of positions (see boxout), enabling you to mix and match three

stereo channels, complete with combined panning and width controls.

Totally addicted

The browser and preview pages (called Gallery and Explore) make it easy to get up and running. Presets are divided into three categorised pages aimed at producer, 'purist' and creative needs respectively. Every patch has a preview MIDI performance that can be dragged into the host DAW. Unfortunately, though, that's it in terms of MIDI - there's no loop library included.

Sonically, AK's core sounds tick all the right boxes, and although you're limited to the tonality of the three source instruments, the mic options provide an enormous palette even before you touch the EQ. On the downside, you don't get individual control of constituent sounds, such as pedals, or much say in the instruments' setup (lid position, for example).

XLN have put a lot of work into creative patch design. The likes of Prepared Horror (grand), Reverse Attacks (upright), and Glow Sticks (electric piano) show off the insert effects as much as the source samples, to great effect.

The rather clever X-modulation implementation enables the mod wheel, one selectable MIDI CC and aftertouch to be concurrently routed to one or more suitably receptive parameters, including filter cutoff, vibrato depth, tremolo pan and chorus mix. It's

basic but very effective.

Also handy is the Memo feature. This enables one-touch recording directly into a dedicated browser - great for quickly noting down phrases, which can then be dragged out as MIDI. On the subject of the browser, user patches can be shared and synced via XLN's cloud server.

Addictive Keys successfully sidesteps the complexity of more detailed piano libraries, delivering a genuinely useful palette of core sounds and excellent processing. Like Addictive Drums before it, it wholly deserves to be a runaway success. **cm**

Web www.xlnaudio.com

Alternatively

Scarbee Vintage Keys
N/A » N/A » €149

This bundle covers plenty of electric piano ground, including both the Mark I and Wurlitzer 200

Cinesamples Piano In Blue
N/A » N/A » \$99

If you're after an affordable piano, this is one to check out

Verdict

For Great sound and mic options
Flexible channel editing and processing
Sensible cross mod implementation
Small disk footprint and quick loading
Preview for all patches

Against Unnecessarily graphics-rich
No library of MIDI parts

Great-sounding and easy to use, Addictive Keys successfully brings quality keyboard tones to the mid-budget software studio

9/10

Mics, mics, mics

One of Addictive Keys' headline features is its multiple microphone setup. If you've ever tried to record a piano, you'll appreciate just what an influence on the sound mic choice and positioning can have.

The grand piano comes with six options, including two stereo mics at the keyboard end (Coles 4038 and Neumann M269), an ambient pair (M269) and a close pair (M250), and two close-up mono choices (T25 and 6203 Ribbon). Similar mics are

used for the upright, which includes top and rear positioning, as well as floor-positioned PZMs and an ambient stereo mic (SM69).

The mic'ing requirements for the Mark One are slightly different, as it's been amped up via a 1x12" combo amp (MusicMan 112 RD Fifty). You get three mono mics (SM57, 4038 and U47), one stereo ambient (SM69) and spaced floor PZMs. There's also a DI (mono) channel option, and one that was routed via a Roland Dimension-D echo (stereo).