



Polyend Seq Step Sequencer

£1,099

Bruce Aisher drags himself away from the mouse, to take a standalone sequencing journey with Polyend's new hardware

CONTACT WHO: Polyend **WEB:** polyend.com **KEY FEATURES** 8 tracks with 32 steps each, 256 pattern memory, On-the-fly track parameter Randomisation, Live Sequence recording with external device via MIDI, Step parameters: Note, Velocity, Length, Modulation, Roll, Independent track play mode (Normal, Reversed, Pingpong, Random), Track parameters: Length, Velocity, MIDI Channel, MIDI out, Pattern chaining

THE PROS & CONS



Simple and elegant design that strips the user interface down to easy to access basics

Independent track length and multiple playback modes make programming complex evolving patterns easy to achieve

Updatable firmware allows new features to be added



Connectivity is restricted to MIDI and USB. In the absence of CV/Gate, analogue modular freaks will need to resort to Polyend's Poly Eurorack unit or something similar

There's no hiding from the cost of this sequencer



The ability to easily tweak step lengths allows more interesting and fluid patterns

mode you get root note, track transpose, MIDI channel and output. The Velocity page configures the MIDI velocity range and MIDI CC number for modulation messages. The Move knob slides all of a track's notes forwards or backwards in full steps, with smaller shifts made using the Nudge parameter. Each track can utilise a different track length (up to 32 steps) and play forwards, backwards, both ('ping pong') and completely random.

There are 256 storage slots for complete patterns (and the ability to link patterns), with additional buttons on the far left of the panel for selecting or duplicating them, quick clearing of randomising tracks and taking care of playback/record duties.

Seq still allows real-time recording via MIDI or USB. Although each track is monophonic, selecting more than

one track when recording allocates any polyphonic playing between the available tracks (ie a four-note chord will need four tracks). The ability to then tweak the tracks individually makes for some very interesting experimentation possibilities. Incoming MIDI notes can also be used transpose tracks in real time by holding a track button when in playback mode.

I tested Seq with my Vermona PERfourMER MkII using both the MIDI and CV/Gate connectivity (via the Polyend Poly) and both worked extremely well. Initially I created a simple analogue drum rhythm using three tracks to trigger separate synth engines. The grid for these is largely similar to the classic XOX programming methodology, though the ease of adding and customising individual note rolls up the ante

Eschewing any references to fashionable analogousness, the Polyend Seq is an 8-track MIDI sequencer, and a rather beautiful one at that. Made of painted black aluminium and oak, and laden with over 270 backlit momentary switches, six continuous knobs and an OLED screen, this is an engaging box from the start.

Each of the monophonic tracks has 32 available steps. Each step can

be turned off or on via the front panel buttons, which are pressed to move through multiple onscreen parameters. Holding a button and adjusting one of the parameter knobs allows you to adjust pitch, velocity, modulation amount and length. Additionally, steps can be set to roll notes in one of seven time division increments or subtly allowed to rush or drag against the beat using the Nudge parameter.

The parameter knobs perform additional features when pressing the numbered track buttons. In Note

THE ALTERNATIVES



Arturia BeatStep Pro £225

A good value, multipurpose controller, sequencer and MIDI to CV/Gate connectivity box.

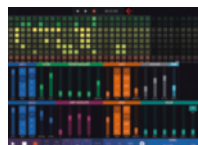
www.arturia.com



Koma Komplex €1,699

Huge four track 16-step sequencer with MIDI and CV/Gate outputs. Adorned with sliders, pots and numerous outputs, this beast certainly lives up to its name.

www.koma-elektronik.com



Xynthesizr £6.99

A 32-step matrix pattern sequencer/synthesizer with generative features for iPad and iPhone that supports MIDI and Audiobus 3.

www.yuriturov.com



BUTTONS The myriad buttons are all backlit momentary switches and the primary way to access tracks, steps and core functions.

KNOBS The six parameter edit knobs connect to switchable rotary encoders. After pressing a step/track button these adjust one of four parameters.

DISPLAY A monochrome OLED display is used for visual feedback when editing steps and tweaking track parameters.

CONNECTIVITY Each track's output can be routed to either of the two MIDI outs or to an external sequencer via USB.

here. A fourth track was used to add simple monophonic bassline. The ability to easily tweak step lengths made for more interesting and fluid patterns – something that is not so easy to achieve using a basic analogue step sequencer.

It would have been useful to have included an undo button, and the ability to select from different scales (something that makes Arturia's BeatStep Pro more musically intuitive). Also, although going against the clean design aesthetic, I wonder if coloured LEDs might have

aided programming and visual feedback (of which there is little, other than the off/on status of a step).

The final potential issue is one that may put off some users in the modular and/or analogue communities, and one that stems from the MIDI protocol itself. MIDI is a serial communication system, and as such becomes less tight in the timing department the more notes that are played. Seq helpfully includes two separate MIDI Outs as well as USB, but CV/Gate enthusiasts may balk.

The Polyend Seq is an undoubtedly lovely looking piece of kit, and one that has been designed and built with great care. While writing this review I was informed that Polyend will be releasing a major firmware update for Seq which will add scales, chords (per step), different time signatures for each track and more randomisation options as well as some workflow optimisation. Many of these were on my list of functional shortfalls, so it's great to see an active improvement system in place.

Seq provides an engaging, and tactile, solution to a specific sequencing need in an attractive package. However, there is no shying away from the cost of buying into the Polyend universe. £1,099 is not an insignificant amount of money to spend on a relatively simple device that could feasibly be replicated in iPad or other computer-based form. But this would be missing the point of a box such as this. If your pockets can take the strain, then the Seq is well worth a look. **FM**

POLYEND POLY EURORACK

Poly is an 8-channel MIDI to CV converter. It converts MIDI data received via the USB, USB Host and MIDI DIN ports (or all at once) into switched and continuous voltage outputs. Incoming MIDI Notes are mapped to the Gate and Pitch (V/oct) ports. MIDI Velocity and MIDI CC (CC number set on the back panel) go to the Velocity and Modulation outs respectively. The default mode allocates each of the eight 'voice' channels to its own

incoming MIDI channel, but Poly includes modes for allocating incoming polyphonic playing between the voices.

Poly has more outputs than many other MIDI to CV conversion boxes, and is an ideal partner to Seq if you need to interface to a wider range of gear.



FM VERDICT

8.0

Polyend's Seq is a great sequencer that should see an improved feature set in the coming update. It isn't cheap though.