

NEW GEAR

EXCLUSIVE

ESSENTIAL SPEC

Roland

PRICE

£629

SOUNDS

670

KITS

50

PADS/PLAYING SURFACES

Eight

FEATURES

Phrase Loop, multi-effects, ambience effects, V-Link for video control

CONNECTIONS

USB MIDI, USB memory slot, phones, stereo L/R out, Mix In, ride, hi-hat, snare, kick and hi-hat control inputs, foot switch input, MIDI In/Out

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ROLAND SPD-30

£629 Twenty-five years in, can the Octapad still impress as it did on its release? Jordan McLachlan gets hands on with Roland's latest trigger pad offering

It's hard to believe, but it's a quarter of a century since Roland introduced the original Octapad (the Pad-8). First embraced by flouncy-trousered New Romantics gaily triggering the fizzing snares and brash handclaps of contemporary drum machines, the Octapad has grown from a soundless trigger-surface-only pad to a fully fledged music-making tool in the last 25 years. Designs don't stick around that long unless they're fundamentally solid, so it's testament to Roland getting a lot of things right from the off that the eight-padded wonder is still with us.

surrounding a generous 2½" square backlit LCD.

The rear of the unit is equally impressive - assuming you're fascinated by the interconnectivity offered by hi-tech musical production tools, of course. MIDI in/out is to be expected, as are L/R stereo and headphone outs and Mix In socket for iPods etc; but there are also five ¼" sockets to allow for use with V-Drum ride, hi-hat, snare and kick pads (so you could potentially use the Octapad as a super-compact e-kit), plus USB MIDI connection and a USB memory slot for storing user-created data. In all, it's a

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Build

One of the things that immediately hit the mark in 1985 was the size and layout of the Pad-8. Eight well-proportioned pads gave decent target areas for live performance, and the number of pads meant access to 'full kits' of hi-hat/snare/kick and toms or good arrays of ethnic percussion tones all at once. Sensibly, Roland has never strayed from the original blueprint.

The new Roland SPD-30 reviewed here, however, is a little slinkier than the tea tray-simple styling of older models. The pads are slightly recessed into a nicely curved ice-white plastic chassis, while the control area on the right of the unit is reassuringly Roland. By which I mean everything's laid out neat as a spinster's pantry, with a smattering of rubbery tactile buttons and continuous data pots

thoroughly modern package that's been well conceived to meet the demands of both studio and live use.

Internally, things continue in much the same vein. Fifty kits made up from nearly 700 sounds, 30 multi-effect types, seven ambience settings and the ability to create up to 50 phrase loops are just some of the SPD-30's highlights. In short, it's a powerful little package.

Hands On

Even without delving into the complexities of creating loops or editing sounds, the new Octapad is impressive. The wonderfully responsive pads are lovely to play and the stock of preset patches serves up an endlessly satisfying selection of full-bodied tones. The acoustic sounds (both drum kit and ethnic percussion) are involving and

realistic, while the electronic offerings are chunky and have that lovely 'produced' depth that is typical of all that Roland has turned out, from the JV synth series on.

The great thing about a company so steeped in electronic music production as Roland is that the R&D resources lavished on top-end synth engines permeate through its disparate ranges, and the Octapad benefits hugely from decades of heavy-duty programming and sound creation. In short, it sounds ace.

But Roland also has a track record of managing to balance functionality with ease of use - of prime importance to demanding users working on stage and studio. While there are compromises to be struck with a unit like the SPD-30 (its compact nature means a certain degree of menu navigation

LIKE THE ORIGINAL PAD-8, eight good-sized pads give decent target areas for live performance



PADS ARE SLIGHTLY recessed into a nicely curved ice-white plastic chassis



RUBBERY, TACTILE
buttons and continuous data pots surround the LCD

SPD-30 FEATURES
a generous 2½" square backlit LCD

THERE'S SCOPE FOR
tweaking everything from tuning to sound-layering to sensitivity

OCTAPAD HAS FIVE
¼" sockets for use with V-Drum ride, hi-hat, snare and kick pads

via the on-board LCD), the operating system is such that everything is as logical and easily accessible as it can be. Editing parameters rarely involves more than half a dozen button/control pot actions, and there's a good deal of scope for tweaking everything from tuning to sound layering to sensitivity.

The Phrase Loop function is also a great addition. Recording loops is straight-forward and these can then be saved (internally or onto USB memory stick) to be recalled in performance. With a phrase looping round, you can then use the pads to play over the top for some super creative, layered action.

Verdict

Combine predictably gorgeous sound with better-than-ever functionality, the ability to connect external pads for an extensive playing set-up and the Phrase Loop feature for creativity on-stage and you're on to a winner. For drummers or percussionists looking to add electronic sounds to an acoustic set-up with the minimum of fuss, the SPD-30 is a great choice. And the fact that it's the latest in a line of well-proven tools allows for real confidence in its long-term abilities. **R**

Rating ★★★★★

TRY IT WITH...



ADD-ON
V-Drum pads for a real compact-but-playable 'full kit' experience.



AN EXTERNAL
synth module or soft synths - USB MIDI opens up limitless sonic possibilities.