

Korg ARP Odyssey | £898

The highly anticipated new ARP Odyssey is here.
Dan 'JD73' Goldman finds out if it's the real deal!

INCLUDES AUDIO

WHAT IS IT?

A miniaturised ARP Odyssey with USB/MIDI, Drive circuit and the three original filter revisions

CONTACT

Who: Korg
Tel: +44 1908 304600
Web: www.korg.com/uk

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 It sounds like an Odyssey – big, bold and beautiful!
- 2 The three filter revisions plus a drive switch/circuit make it more versatile than the original
- 3 USB/MIDI is included

Around a year ago, Korg took us all by surprise announcing the resurrection of one of the most iconic synth brands, ARP Instruments, and their commitment to build a new version of ARP's most popular synth, the Odyssey. Originally Launched in 1972, the Odyssey was

ARP's answer to the hugely successful Minimoog which appeared two years earlier and the 2800 series, (or Odyssey as it became known) was quickly adopted by many top players including Jazz-Funk-Fusion gods Herbie Hancock and George Duke.

There were five things that really made the Odyssey the synth of choice

for these legends. Firstly it was one of the first duophonic synths on the market (being able to play two notes simultaneously was a big deal in the days before polys), and second, the oscillators were very stable meaning the Oddy could be relied upon on stage (unlike the earlier Minimoogs which could be troublesome!). Additionally, the Odyssey's sound was hugely characterful with punchy envelopes, a nice high mid bump and juicy resonance, which allowed it to cut above almost anything (including loud electric guitars), yet it could be smooth and delicate too – such was its versatility. The Odyssey offered lots of sound-sculpting flexibility onboard too, including a low-pass and high-pass filter, wide ranging and stable oscillators (each with saw and square waves with fast warm up time), powerful PWM per oscillator, ADSR and AR envelopes (for assigning to VCA or filter), a powerful mixer with digital ring mod and sample and hold, white/

LFO And OSC1 Low Freq Switch

Though the Oddy only has one LFO it can be assigned to several key destinations. You can also defeat VCO1 from keyboard control and use it as a second audio-rate LFO.

Drive And Filter Revision

The new Drive switch distorts the VCA and boosts the output level, while the new three-position filter switch allows you to select from the Rev1, 2 and 3 filters.

VCOs

The Oddy has two VCOs with saw/square waves and PWM/FM/Sync. They are quick to warm up and also stay very stable which is great, especially when performing live.

PPC (Proportional Pitch Controller)

All the new Oddy models use the Proportional Pitch Controller found on the original Rev2/3 models instead of pitch/mod wheels. There are two pitch-bending pads and a vibrato pad.

Mixer

The mixer lets you dial in levels for the oscillators, noise and ringmod, while you can also send the LFO, envelopes and S/H level to the filter here.

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pink noise and a single but nicely-routable LFO (Osc1 could also be used as pseudo LFO). Lastly, the Oddy did away with cumbersome patch cords which were a hindrance on stage – it's easy to see why it became so popular and I'm happy to report that these important features are all present on

with ex-ARP president David Friend (who designed the original Odyssey with Alan Robert Pearlman and who has written the introductory note included in the documentation), the 2015 Odyssey arrived in a very nice hardshell black case carrying the ARP logo, with a foam insert inside that

too. All three editions use a single piece of tough/textured black plastic for the sides/chassis and a single sheet of textured steel that wraps around to form the front/rear panel. The build quality is solid overall and the orange/white silk screening looks excellent – in fact, everything looks spot on, right

down to the look of the font and the downsized sliders/caps, though I found these these did exhibit some sideways play.

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the new model! As a session player, I've used several different Odysseys over the years, many of which had seen better days (or didn't work at all!) and I've often thought how great it would be to have a brand new Oddy devoid of issues. It seems Korg have answered mine and countless others' prayers!

Designed by Korg in collaboration

closely hugs the new Oddy. This case is tough enough for regular giggers, but it's advisable to invest in a proper flightcase for more serious touring.

The first thing that strikes you is how compact this synth is – it's 14% smaller than the original, just like the MS-20 mini in comparison with its full-size brother. Unlike the original models which were pretty deep from back to front and much wider too, the new model easily fits into tighter spaces, plus it's significantly lighter and more portable, which is great for giggers. I'm also glad that Korg have eliminated the original Rev3's fragile overhanging keyboard and returned to a safer recessed design.

Although the new model revives the Rev3 aesthetics, there's also a limited number of white and black/gold models

The key debate

Since the new Odyssey's announcement, the keybed has been one of the most divisive points of discussion. You'll probably know that it uses the Slimkey keybed from the MS-20 mini/RK100's keytar and this has enabled Korg to keep the aforementioned size and weight down and save on production/shipping costs. However, bearing in mind the Oddy has always been a serious player's synth, it does miss a full-size keybed. Sure, the Slimkey keybed plays way better than any standard mini-key keyboard (and allows you to span greater distances too) but the smaller keys make it harder to play more complex bass, melody or solo lines accurately, especially as your fingers tend to slip between keys and hit other notes when

SPECS

Keyboard: 37-note (Slimkey, no velocity sensitivity or aftertouch), Maximum Polyphony: 2 voices (duophonic)

Controllers: Transpose: +/- 2 octaves, Proportional Pitch Control: +/- 2-3 octaves, Modulation Pad for vibrato, Noise Generator: white and pink, Portamento (2 modes)

VC01/VC02: Waves: Sawtooth, Square, Pulse (with PWM), FM

VC01: low freq mode, Warm Up Drift: 1/30 semitone from turn on (max), Oscillator Sync

LFO: Square and sine waves, Auto Repeat (for drones/rhythmic/evolving sounds), Sample and Hold

Filters: High Pass filter, Low Pass filter (Rev1: 12dB/oct, Rev2 and 3: 24dB/oct), Frequency Range: 16Hz-16kHz

Mixer: Ring Modulator/ Noise level slider, VCO 1 and 2 level slider/wave selection, Keyboard CV/ Sample and Hold Mixer/ Pedal level to filter slider, Sample and Hold/LFO level to filter, ADSR/AR level to filter, ADSR/AR level to VCA, Sample & Hold level

VCA: ADSR and AR envelope generators, Drive Switch

I/Os: Pedal jack, Portamento Foot Switch, LOW output, HIGH output: balanced XLR, Headphones, External Audio Input, MIDI In (DIN), USB Connector (Type B), CV IN/OUT Jacks, Keyboard CV (IN/OUT) 1 V/oct., GATE IN/OUT Jacks, GATE IN +3 V (minimum), GATE OUT +10 V, key down; 0 V all keys up, TRIG IN/OUT Jacks, TRIG IN +3 V pulse (min), TRIG OUT +10 V pulse on key depression

Dimensions:

502 x 380 x 120mm

Weight:

5kg



Slimkey Keyboard

The Slimkey keyboard is 14% smaller than a full-size keyboard and helps to keep the new Odyssey's size nice and compact. The same keyboard is found on the MS-20 mini.

Odyssey – The Three Revisions



Like the original model(s), the new Odyssey has three

versions in white, black/gold and black/orange, though spec/feature-wise all the new models are identical. Korg's inclusion of all three low-pass filter revisions (plus a simple high-pass) in each of the new Odyssey models is a great move – you're essentially getting a 'best of' Odyssey and it's almost like having three distinct instruments in one as the filter characters are pretty

different sounding from each other.

The Rev1 two-pole filter is the ballsiest of the three revisions and it keeps low-end intact up to extreme resonance levels. It's best described as sounding like a 'roughed up' SEM filter – it drives musically and has a juicy resonance character too. The Rev2 filter is a Moog-like four-pole design which, when compared to the Rev1 filter, sounds smoother and more refined. Like a

Moog LPF, as you turn up the resonance towards self-oscillation the low-end diminishes. The third filter onboard (Rev3) is more aggressive sounding and the resonance takes effect much lower on its fader travel than the other two revisions. It can be particularly piercing/sizzling and upfront sounding when required and its character changes radically depending on how much resonance is applied.

moving quickly. Note that on the MS-20 mini I didn't feel this was such an issue as the MS-20 mini is generally used more as an FX or experimental machine rather than as a soloist's instrument. This aside, many people will use the Oddy over MIDI, triggered from a bigger keyboard (or via a sequencer/DAW) and thus probably won't mind the smaller keybed, but virtuoso keyboardists will always prefer full-size keys. It's certainly worth weighing up whether you prefer a more compact unit with a slightly less

playable keyboard, or whether it's worth waiting for a full-sized version (if the new MS-20's roadmap is anything to go by).

What's new?

On the front panel there are just a few minor changes compared to the old Rev3. There's a little recessed dip-switch/window next to the transpose switch (set with a pen or sharp object) that allows you to tweak the behaviour of the transpose switch when portamento is engaged. When

showing blue, portamento is disabled when switching octaves but when the window is black, the Oddy will glide between octaves when octaves are switched and portamento is engaged. Next, there's a new red power-on LED (and auto-power-off to save electricity and the circuitry too). Then there's a new switch for flicking between the Rev1, 2 and 3 filter designs and, finally, there's a Drive switch which boosts the output level and imparts a gritty, yet musical distortion. Apart from these changes, the front panel is just like the original Rev3, though everything is of course 14% smaller!

While it's great that everything is very authentic to the original, one hangover from the original is that it's still pretty fiddly getting the tuning of the Oddy exactly in line with other gear without a tuner (the manual recommends using one too). Though the tuning is thankfully super-stable, the Oddy could do with either an onboard A=440Hz tuning reference oscillator (like the Minimoog) or a centre detent on the VCO1 'coarse' slider that corresponds to middle C, particularly as you'll probably want to tweak/reset these sliders when performing. As it stands, the midway position on the VCO1 coarse slider is only just off middle C when the Oddy is warmed up, but it's still hard to hit the exact sweet spot due to the sensitivity of the sliders.

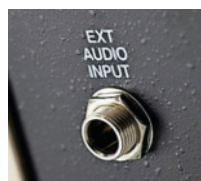
Around the back there's a solid complement of connections which help the Oddy integrate with most set-ups. There's CV and Gate In and Out for interfacing with other gear (Volt/Oct standard), Trigger In/Out, a headphone out with dedicated volume control (the sound appears on both sides in headphones) an external audio input that routes audio through the VCFs and VCA (which when fed from the

Using The Odyssey In The Real World...

It's a synth, an effects box and much more....!



> The Odyssey can integrate with most set-ups – it can send/receive MIDI note info over USB and it also integrates with Eurorack/modular systems via CV/Gate too.



> On stage, the Oddy can be used to perform solos, basslines and mono/duo leads, but it also becomes a great effects box via its audio input/foot pedal control.



> The Auto-Repeat feature turns it into a pseudo backing machine for playing drones and LFO-led patterns while you play another instrument on top.



Audio Input

Choose any audio source you like and plug it in here for processing through the VCF and VCA. Feed the main output or headphone output back into this input for feedback.

headphone/output socket will produce feedback with the headphone volume controlling feedback level), a volume pedal input (that works as a CV input when using Korg's new SQ1 sequencer), a MIDI In socket for controlling the Oddy from a MIDI keyboard/sequencer (note on/off only, no velocity) and USB for bi-directional MIDI communication with your DAW. Note that, as there's no multi/legato switch, if you want to trigger the oscillators legato-style, you'll need to run a mini patch cord from the Gate Out to the Trigger In and, thus, you won't be able to use the Gate Out or Trigger In sockets for other tasks.

Classic sounds

Now the all-important sound! The 2015 Oddy is very authentic to the original model(s). The Rev3 is the model I've used most over the years, and I know its sound well – with the filter in Rev3 position the sound was instantly recognisable and in a blind test you'd be hard pushed to distinguish old from new, except that, as with the new MS-20(s), there's a slightly more refined character to the new model's sound (perhaps down to improved component/tolerances). The acid test was recreating the complex

Sound Shaping With The Odyssey



It's great having punchy ADSR and AR envelopes and either can be assigned to the filter or VCA. The LFO has sine and square waves and, while it doesn't run into the audio range (and there's no MIDI sync), it can be assigned to the pitch of both VCOs for vibrato, to the filter and to Sample/Hold for more random/evolving sounds/FX – note that it has a red rate LED buried in the LFO slider channel too.

Although there's no arpeggiator onboard, you can latch the VCA for drones and use LFO Auto Repeat for cyclic rhythmic effects – it's great fun holding down one or two notes and moving them around the keyboard, almost like an arpeggiator/looper.

In addition, the white/pink noise generator sounds rich and full and it's superb for making analogue drums/sound effects, whilst the Ring

Modulator and FM on both oscillators help to add movement, life and edge to sounds. Finally, the Proportional Pitch Controller (PPC) is more expressive than standard pitch bend/mod wheels – the harder you press the pads (and you do need to press pretty hard!), the more the change in pitch. The left pad flattens sounds, the right pad sharpens and the middle pad adds LFO-driven vibrato.

Sound-wise it's stunning... It's very authentic to the original model and nails all those classic Oddy sounds!

bass sound from Herbie Hancock's *Chameleon* and I was able to pull it off exactly using the Rev1 filter – something which I've never achieved on any other synth. We were able to source a modified 'white face' Rev1

Odyssey with the Rev3 (4075) filter for this review, and the sound of the new model was virtually indistinguishable from the original

So what's the verdict? Firstly, let's massively commend Korg and David Friend for resurrecting ARP and the Odyssey and for nailing the sound of the original, plus going further with some welcome new enhancements. What's great is the Oddy is now even more versatile and it can easily make subs, screaming or rich leads, dirty noises, snappy drums and FX and having MIDI/USB is great.

Do keep in mind (and not to belittle Korg's efforts in any way) the new Oddy is around £400 more than its MS-20 mini cousin, at a street price of £799, and it still lacks some modern, practical features. I dare say some would gladly pay more for an Odyssey with full-size keys, integrated power

supply, aftertouch, an A=440Hz panel reference oscillator, a keyboard triggering/mode switch, full MIDI implementation

(with syncable LFO and MIDI CC transmission/reception) velocity to amp/filter and patch memory. Regardless, it's amazing to have a new, reliable and authentic Odyssey in our hands and I'm genuinely excited to see where Korg will take the ARP brand going forward. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT

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

The compact new Odyssey captures the mojo and sound of the original(s). **ARP is back!**

Case/Carry Case

The new Oddy is lightweight yet sturdy and features a plastic chassis/sides with a metal front and rear panel for rigidity. A bespoke hardshell case ships with it for gigging.

ALTERNATIVES



Original ARP Odyssey (Rev1 ,2 & 3)

Second-hand £1,500+

The original models don't disappoint and the bigger interface/full-sized keys are definitely appealing, though keep in mind the higher initial outlay, potential maintenance headaches and no filter revision/drive switches.

[eBay, Gumtree, etc](#)



GForce Software Oddity2

£139.99

The original Oddity software is rightly regarded as the most authentic software emulation of the Odyssey. Oddity2 adds a full poly mode, delay, sub oscillator, and extra mod capabilities.

www.gforcesoftware.com



Moog Sub 37

£1,189

The Sub 37 greatly expands on its Little Phatty predecessor adding a sub oscillator, sequencer, extra LFO, duo mode, loopable envelopes, a knob-per-function ethos, multitrack and more!

www.moogmusic.com