

Korg Minilogue | £435

Korg's Minilogue analogue polysynth has arrived and there's a lot to be excited about! **Dan 'JD73' Goldman** checks it out...

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WHAT IS IT?

Versatile four-voice polyphonic analogue synth with multiple voice modes, audio input, delay, sequencer, and more!

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

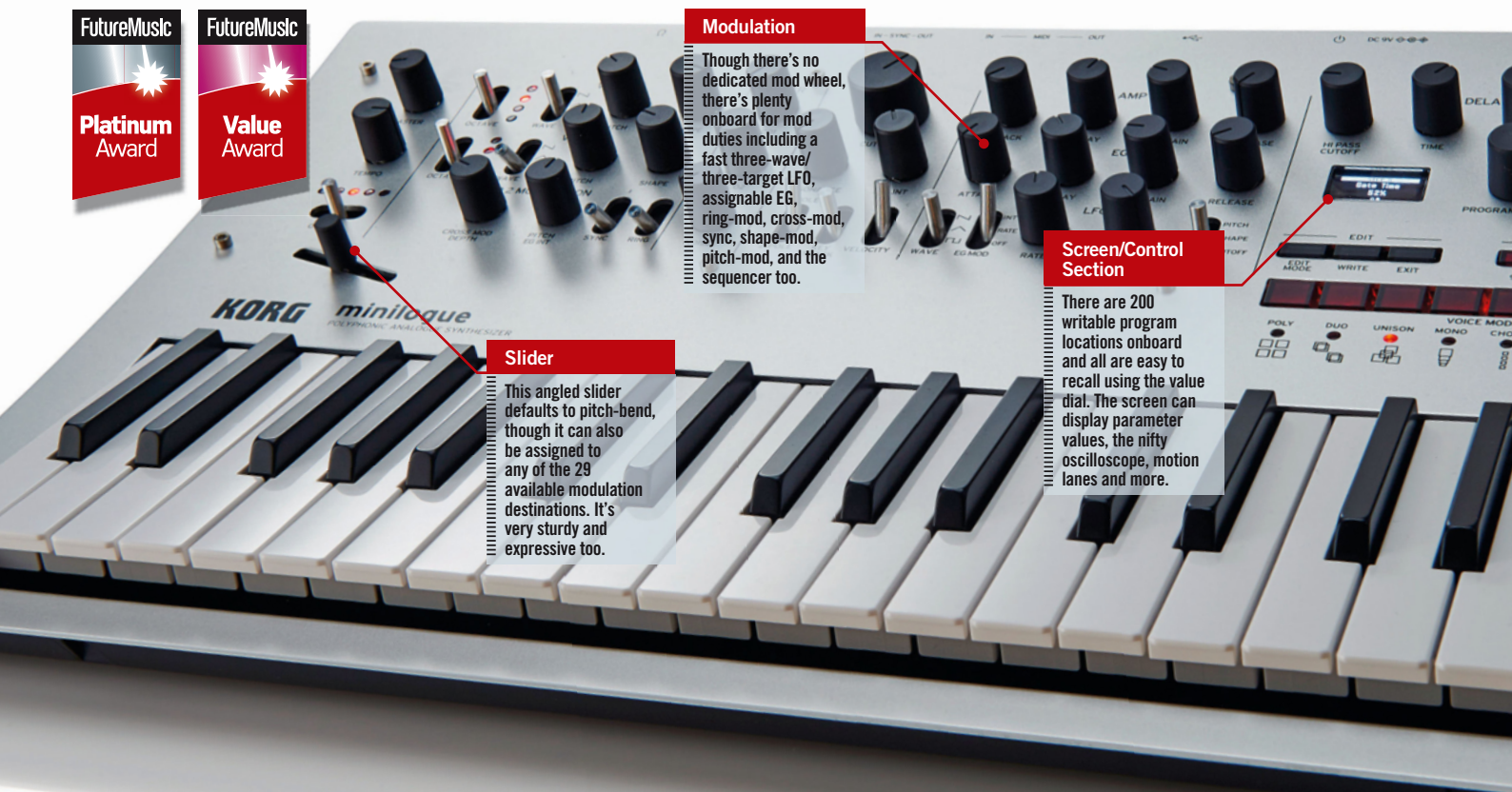
- 1 An absolute steal!
- 2 Well-built with intuitive hands-on control panel
- 3 Versatile analogue engine with powerful-sounding VCOs and filter plus built-in delay and arp/sequencer

Believe it or not, Korg haven't released a keyboard-equipped analogue poly since 1985's DCO-driven, Poly-800 MK2. With the current resurgence of all things analogue, it was only a matter of time before a new analogue poly keyboard emerged from the Korg camp. While Korg have been perfecting their analogue tech with the re-release of the ARP Odyssey (duophonic) and their super-cheap Volca Keys desktop module (three-note polyphonic), many of us have been trying to predict what Korg would do next. Well, now we have the answer and it's the Minilogue, an all-new, four-voice analogue polysynth priced at just £435.

By now I'm sure you're salivating over this new beast so here's the lowdown! As already mentioned, it has four voices, so you can play up to four notes simultaneously but, notably, this price-point is bereft of keyboard-equipped analogue polys except for Akai's two-octave, four-voice Timbre Wolf at £299. Then there's a significant jump in price up to DSI's Mopho X4 at £730, the Elektron Analog Keys at £1,035 and the Roland JD-XA at £1,549 (all DCO, not VCO). Consequently, the Minilogue now owns the lower-midrange poly-analogue keyboard market – let's see if it delivers!

Straight out of the box, the build and looks are impressive. The front

panel is fashioned from 2mm sand-blasted anodised silver aluminium which feels tough and is nicely contoured/textured, while the chassis is constructed from tough yet lightweight plastic with a Pyinkado wood back panel (a South Asian tree known to have very durable properties) – this finishes off the Minilogue's future/retro vibe nicely. There are 14 metal 'paddle' switches (like a '70s music centre/'80s video recorder!) and 29 black plastic dials on the panel. These all send/receive MIDI and feel very sturdy indeed due to the metal shafts, underlining that Korg have designed the Minilogue to last going forward and not just to a price-point; interestingly, the Minilogue feels more 'premium' than many of the more-expensive synths I've tested recently! (And you can remove and swap the dial caps for something a little more blingy if you so desire). You'll notice there's a small, perfectly-formed OLED display on the right; this displays patch names, parameter values/changes, four sequencer 'motion' lanes and a handy real-time oscilloscope so you can 'see' your sounds. It also helps you navigate program, sequence and global settings in combination with the eight red-backlit function/Voice Mode buttons (underneath) – these also double as sequencer steps and editing/page buttons. Reassuringly, for general sound-making and sequencing you



Modulation

Though there's no dedicated mod wheel, there's plenty onboard for mod duties including a fast three-wave/three-target LFO, assignable EG, ring-mod, cross-mod, sync, shape-mod, pitch-mod, and the sequencer too.

Slider

This angled slider defaults to pitch-bend, though it can also be assigned to any of the 29 available modulation destinations. It's very sturdy and expressive too.

Screen/Control Section

There are 200 writable program locations onboard and all are easy to recall using the value dial. The screen can display parameter values, the nifty oscilloscope, motion lanes and more.



don't need the screen at all, just your ears and fingers!

Connection-wise, the Minilogue runs off a wall-wart (expected at the price point) plus there's a full-size mono-jack output (use the headphone out to run split-mono/pseudo-stereo) a mono audio input which runs through the filters, envelopes and delay too (fantastic news!) plus USB (MIDI only), full-size DIN MIDI In and Out and Sync In/Out minijacks for interfacing with other Korg Sync-equipped gear, along with other third-party equipment that can read or send 5V pulse signals.

Great for gigging

Two of the Minilogue's strongest assets are its small footprint and 2.8kg/6lbs weight, made possible largely due to the use of Korg's familiar SlimKey keyboard as found on their ARP Odyssey, MS-20 mini and RK100S keytar. However, unlike the Oddy, the Minilogue is velocity-sensitive, though it doesn't receive or transmit aftertouch. Whether

Voice Modes

The Minilogue features eight Voice Modes with a Voice Mode Depth dial (VMD) which unlocks functionality specific to the selected mode.

Poly allows four-voice chords with VMD dialling in inversions of the chord you're playing – great for instantly spicing up chord sequences. **Duo Mode** turns the Minilogue into a two-voice poly, with two oscs per key played and detuning via the VMD dial. **Unison** stacks all the

voices together for a massive sound (great for Trance/Electonica), again with detuning via the VMD dial. **Mono Mode** is a classic monosynth mode, with VMD acting as a sub-oscillator level control for adding low-end, weight and growl to your monophonic sounds. **Chord Mode** turns the VMD dial into a chord selector where chords are triggered by a single key press – very handy for quickly coming up with

chord sequences. **Delay Mode** allows each voice to be triggered in turn, with VMD varying the delay between voices. **Arp Mode** turns on the 14-mode Arpeggiator (MIDI-syncable but currently not latchable). Finally, **Sidechain Mode** lowers the volume of any already-played voice when a new one is triggered.

There's plenty to work with and it's fun switching between the modes during live performances too.

SPECS

Keyboard: 37 keys (slim keys, velocity sensitive)
OLED Screen
200 writable preset spaces

Maximum polyphony: four voices

Sound generating system: 2 VCO (square wave, triangle wave, sawtooth wave), All waves with variable shape, 1 VCF (2-pole, 4-pole modes), 2 EGs (EG 2 is assignable), 1 VCA, 1 LFO, 8 Voice Modes, 16-Step polyphonic sequencer with 4 Motion lanes, Delay effect with pre/post filter placement, High-Pass Filter

I/Os: Headphones jack, Mono output jack, Audio In jack, SYNC In jack, SYNC OUT jack, MIDI In, MIDI Out, USB B, AC adaptor (DC9V)

Dimensions:

500 x 300 x 85mm

Weight:

2.8kg

you're a fan of downsized keybeds or not, it's fast and enjoyable to play and, when you consider that the Minilogue will fit into a very compact case that you can easily take onto a plane as hand luggage, any reservations are soon firmly quashed – this will likely be the perfect form-factor for many gigging and touring synth players.

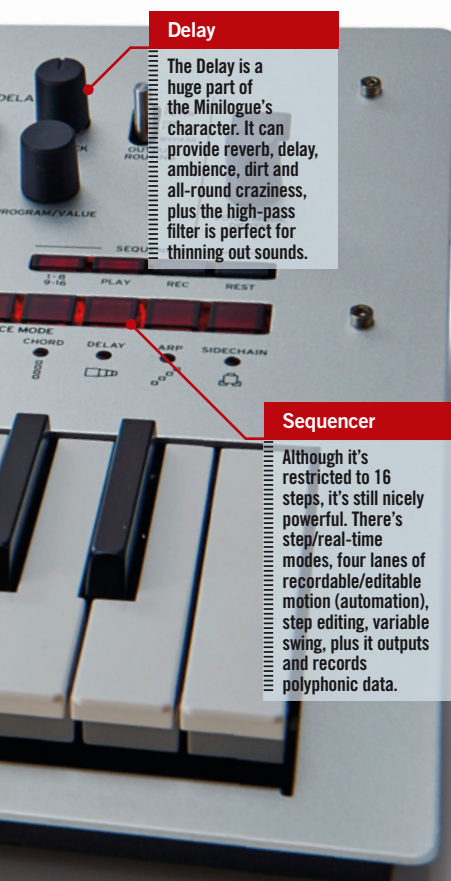
You'll also notice that there are no pitch and mod wheels. Instead there's a sprung and centre-detented angled slider which can be assigned to 29 destinations including pitch-bend, filter and LFO (though only one destination at a time). I hope Korg can implement an OS update as soon as possible so that you can assign a separate destination to each side of the slider's centre position for quick-flipping between pitch/mod duties. Regardless, the slider is very expressive, the bend-range can be set independently either side of centre and you can easily perform fast, accurate pitch wobbles and bends with it.

Power on the Minilogue and you're greeted with a 'tuning' screen while the oscillators warm up and the Minilogue is ready to go in about ten seconds (you can even play a little game of onscreen bat and ball as you wait)! At its heart are eight lively-sounding analogue oscillators (two VCOs per voice), each with saw, triangle and square waves. There's also a square wave sub-oscillator

available in Mono Mode (via the Voice Mode Depth dial) which sits one or two octaves below Osc 1.

All the oscillators sound rich and full and you can really hear that these are VCOs and not more controlled-sounding DCOs. In addition, each wave has a continuously variable (and modulatable) shape, making the Minilogue a surprisingly powerful and versatile sonic toolbox. You can go thin, fat, evolving and anywhere in between and I was seriously impressed by the huge range of timbres that are available using the eight available Voice Modes and some shape modulation. I made deep, subby and growling basses, a great Wurliizer EP impression, wah claws, rich evolving pads, cutting leads, huge stacked unison sounds and MS-20-style FX and bleeps – in fact it's scary how so many different types of sound just drop out of the Minilogue with little effort and it's a good job there are 200 locations to store your patches and sequences, as the Minilogue is so inspiring!

The presets are also decent and there are eight 'favourite' locations for quickly recalling patches too. Also available is a chunky-sounding white noise oscillator (which comes in handy for making sound effects and snares) and a single, MIDI-syncable LFO capable of audio-rate modulation. Having a dial-per-function and such a



Delay

The Delay is a huge part of the Minilogue's character. It can provide reverb, delay, ambience, dirt and all-round craziness, plus the high-pass filter is perfect for thinning out sounds.

Sequencer

Although it's restricted to 16 steps, it's still nicely powerful. There's step/real-time modes, four lanes of recordable/editable motion (automation), step editing, variable swing, plus it outputs and records polyphonic data.

