

Polyend Perc Pro

£1099

Acoustic drum triggering via MIDI sounds too good to be true. **Simon Arblaster** finds out if it's bad news for drummers.

CONTACT WHO: Polyend **WEB:** <http://polyend.com>
KEY FEATURES I/O: 1x MIDI DIN in, 1x MIDI USB in, 3x Drum Gate in, 3x CV Velocity in, 1x MIDI DIN thru, 1x MIDI DIN out, 3x PERC Ball out



THE PROS & CONS



Amazing creative potential

High-quality materials deployed throughout

Easy to set up



Despite the high-quality materials used, the price feels somewhat prohibitive

Would love more 'balls' included in a larger setup

Perc Pro from Polyend is designed to turn any surface into a MIDI-controlled drum machine. The package consists of three machined-aluminium driver modules, three multi-position clamps, a footswitch controller, and three Perc balls, housed in a flightcase. Each module, or 'Perc ball', houses a motor that drives a small beater (wooden in this case, but silicon and aluminium variations are optional extras), that delivers a highly accurate, velocity-sensitive strike, controlled via MIDI. The included pedal controller acts as the 'hub' for connection things together. On the rear you have MIDI In, Out and Thru (5-pin DIN), a MIDI USB port, a power socket, and ports for the three Perc balls. On top of the unit are three non-latching footswitches, three Drum Gate inputs and three CV Velocity inputs.

Setup is mostly painless. As the travel of the beater is around half an inch, placement over the striking surface is key, and achieved with the supplied clamps. These offer a high degree of movement and positioning. Thankfully, fiddling with the clamps is the trickiest part – Perc Pro is plug and play, so once you've connected up all the cables and positioned the Perc balls, it's a case of selecting

your MIDI channel in your DAW or hardware sequencer, then holding the footswitch of the corresponding Perc ball for a couple of seconds. The unit has now learnt the channel and you're away, nice and easy.

In a strict 'drumming' environment, the Perc balls are at their best when hitting snares, toms, hats, rides and small percussion (tambourines, blocks, cowbells and so on). They can't quite achieve the force needed to strike a kick drum or crash cymbals effectively. However, it is not impossible. We found that a well-tuned kick drum can be struck with enough force in isolation to be useful, while reducing the velocity on the hi-hat and snare, for instance, allows the kick to be far more audible. In fact we found ourselves having to roll back on the hi-hats quite a lot in the velocity department, and there was a fair amount of adjustment to find the sweet spot.

While triggering acoustic drums from within your DAW via MIDI may seem like a niche idea, once it's been made a reality, the mind opens up to all manner of possibilities: recording entire stems of isolated drum tracks, creating drum samples or adding a few extra pairs of hands to your playing, and the drumkit is just the beginning. Any kind of surface can be used to create a more esoteric acoustic drum machine.

Polyend has hit on a perfect combination of labour-saving device and mind-opening creative tool. It's one of those products that you didn't think you needed until you saw it for the first time. It does come at quite a cost, however, and therein lies the problem. It's very easy to say that if you can afford one, go buy it, because it will bring you endless joy. It's a product that you will know whether you want or not straight away. It fulfills such a specific need and is the only product of its type available right now, that if you can't afford one, our advice is "Save, save, save". Perc Pro will enhance your playing, unlock your creativity, and bring another dimension to your productions – it's that simple. **FM**

FM VERDICT

9.0

Perc Pro is straightforward to set up, can handle most 'human' drumming tasks, and also delivers a hefty dose of creativity to your music-making life