

# M-Audio Code Series Controllers | from £135

M-Audio is no stranger to the keyboard controller market but is its latest model the best yet? **Jono Buchanan** cracks the Code

## WHAT IS IT?

A new, comprehensively spec'd keyboard controller range featuring 25, 49 and 61 key models

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Oodles of pads, sliders and rotary options onboard
- 2 The lights! MIDI controllers have rarely looked so vibrant
- 3 Configurable X-Y pad a real bonus

**M**-Audio's name is synonymous with keyboard controllers, with the company being one

of the first out of the blocks when it became apparent that computer-based musicians would need controller-packed surfaces from which to interact with and drive their host software. M-Audio's existing controller line-up contains instruments in several categories – including the long-serving Keystation, Oxygen and Axiom ranges – and to these, the Code series is now added. Across 25, 49 and 61 key models, these keyboards promise a range of features designed for greater playability and more flexible control.

## Unlocking codes

All three Code models are bus-powered, using USB as their

communication protocol, though they offer traditional MIDI In and Out ports as well. The largest model, the Code 61, offers a five-octave playing surface and a predominantly white front panel. If this sounds like a slightly vanilla colour choice, don't worry, you'll soon discover that Code is awash with colour elsewhere.

To the left of the keyboard, you'll find a four-by-four pad array, with all 16 pads offering velocity sensitivity. The middle panel of the main surface offers a slider bank with illuminated buttons below, while the screen to the left offers yet more light and colour. The effect is reminiscent of other keyboard controllers including Native Instruments' light-tastic Komplete Kontrol S-Series range. The feature

line-up for the Code 61 is concluded by a pitch bend and assignable modulation wheel in the top left-hand corner and by an X-Y pad on the far right-hand side, which are equally configurable to the control parameters of your choice.

Special mention must go to the keyboard itself, which has been revised to produce a more 'playable' action. It certainly offers a much more expressive and responsive feel to that of my original Axiom Pro and, as it provides aftertouch as well as velocity sensitivity, it's a powerful control surface in its own right. The keyboard can be split into four independent zones, which is great if you want to access multiple plug-ins at once. Of course, with all of this potential, the burning question will be how well these options translate into practice. Is the Code series so bogged down in possibility that its learning curve is too steep to inspire creativity?

## Code red, Code green

Well, there is certainly sufficient depth here to make reading the quick-start guide (and downloading the more extensive user guide) essential. To understand why, let's take the pads as an example section of the depth of capability Code provides. By default,





the pads will trigger MIDI notes upwards from C1, with the pads illuminated in different backlit colours changing again when pressed into action. To edit and assign a pad to a different note target, you need to press Edit, then press one of the pads, then a Ctrl Assign key (the keyboard's C1 key), then the Data 1 Key (F#1) and then use the Up/Down keys to move the note assignment to the key of your choice.

A similarly long chain of button presses is required if you're reassigning pads to become MIDI Control triggers instead and, while these chains do become more familiar over time, they don't start out that way. That said, with

## Codes 49 And 25

While the Code 61 is the big brother of M-Audio's new controller range, two smaller models are just as likely to appeal to your needs. The four-octave Code 49, despite its shorter keyboard, packs an otherwise identical feature-set into its frame to that of the Code 61.

The two-octave Code 25 has to compromise more on features, as you'd expect, but it retains all

16 trigger pads to the left of the keyboard and the X-Y pad above it, making space-saving compromises elsewhere. These come in the form of five sliders (rather than nine) and four rotaries (rather than eight) but across MIDI CC and HUI modes, there's still masses of control available here.

The rear panel of all three keyboards provides

the USB-connector, with an on/off power switch, connectors for both Sustain and Volume pedals, a connector input for a DC power supply (if buss power isn't available) and traditional MIDI In and Out ports. All three Code models also come with a software suite of Ableton Live Lite, plus Air Music's Hybrid 3.0 and Loom virtual instruments.

There's definitely something of the 'light fantastic' about Code. But there's plenty of real substance too

M-Audio's reputation as a developer of feature-packed controller keyboards is further enhanced with the release of

plenty of presets onboard, the Code keyboards do make life very easy for those looking to have 'expected' controller needs covered, with sensible and helpful assignments offered by default. Indeed, as well as allowing you to work with 'regular' MIDI assignments within each controller section, the Code keyboards also provide HUI mode, if your DAW supports that protocol. If so, the impressive light show, which glows at the heart of each section, switches to green to illuminate your choice of mode

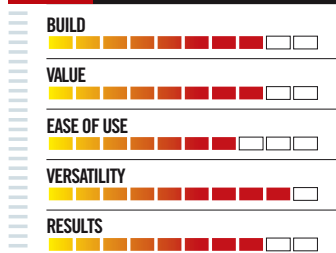
change. This is reflected from one section to the next, with the Fader and Encoder banks featuring dedicated buttons to allow you to slip from 'onboard' controller assignments to HUI-based ones. You'll soon associate the colours with their modes, making this part of the Code's operation pleasingly slick.

## From X to Y

Perhaps the standout control feature offered on the surface of all three Code models, however, is the inclusion of an X-Y pad. As with the Code's other control options, this is fully configurable so that your chosen parameters can be paired to the X and Y axes. There are further options too; the adjacent X and Y buttons instantly send the maximum value for the mapped control number, to facilitate parameter resets or creatively dramatic 'jumps', while there are separate colour-defined modes for the X-Y pad too. In Red mode, you're working with MIDI Controller assignments, while in Pink mode, you can use the pad to generate notes. Lastly, when in Yellow mode, you can use the X-Y pad as a mouse track-pad for your computer.

Code. There's no doubt that the slew of multicolour control surfaces for Ableton Live and for systems like Maschine have impacted into the design offered here and there's definitely something of the 'light fantastic' about Code. However, there's plenty of real substance here too. Yes, the learning curve is perhaps a little steep for editing the raft of controllers if you want to get busy under the hood. That said, there are enough options here to ensure that might not be necessary. If you're looking for an in-depth controller for the studio or for the stage, Code is a keyboard controller happy to bask in the limelight. **FM**

## FutureMusic VERDICT



Not the most intuitive editing system but more control than you could shake the proverbial stick at.

## SPECS

**System requirements**  
**PC:** Windows 7 (32 and 64); Windows 10 Compatible  
**Mac:** OSX 10.7.5

## Features

61 full-size, velocity-sensitive keys with aftertouch and four assignable zones for splits and layering  
 Fully assignable XY pad for HID control and for controlling multiple parameters in virtual instruments

**Controls:** 16 assignable velocity-sensitive trigger pads, 8 assignable rotary encoders, 9 assignable faders, 9 assignable buttons, Mackie/HUI transport control, LCD display, Sustain and Volume pedal inputs, USB-powered, MIDI In/Out

**Bundled software:** Ableton Live Lite, Hybrid 3.0 and Loom by AIR Music Technology

## ALTERNATIVES



**Native Instruments Komplete Kontrol S-Series keyboards**

from £339

Designed as the ultimate 'driver' for NI's Komplete software, the S-Series keyboards are shortly to gain an 88-key big brother. Good news if you're an NI devotee, particularly.

[www.nativeinstruments.com](http://www.nativeinstruments.com)



**Novation SL MkII range**

from £237

Lacking a little in the pads department but making up for it with impressive DAW integration capabilities and oodles of controls.

<http://uk.novationmusic.com>



**Akai Advance 25**

£299

Also available in 25, 49 and 61 key versions, the Akai Advance range prides itself on integration with plug-in synths, using a hi-res onboard screen.

[www.akaiapro.com](http://www.akaiapro.com)