Roger Linn Design LinnStrument £1,011

LinnStrument offers a unique approach to MIDI control, with a three-dimensional touch panel at its heart. *Dan 'JD73' Goldman* explores...

WHAT IS IT?

Innovative, MIDI performance instrument, featuring 3D touch panel

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Built to a very high standard, and wear it like a guitar or play it on your lap/desktop
- 2 Three-dimensional touch really brings sampled/ virtual/MIDI instrument sounds to life
- 3 Inspiring and addictive to play with a very well thought out, open source OS

oger Linn's influence upon the electronic music world and beyond is nothing short of legendary. I've always been a big fan of his designs and I currently own an MPC3000 and Tempest. Roger's latest instrument, the aptly named LinnStrument, is a 'threedimensional' MIDI control instrument. built with expressive performance in mind. It's very sturdily built with a metal chassis, 200 3D-sensing RGB-backlit pads, eight RGB-backlit switches (two of which are assignable) and it's topped off with lovely cherrywood side panels. The feeling of high quality pervades throughout and the all-important three-axis, multi-touch surface is made from translucent silicone rubber, which is inviting to play and feels great under the fingers. It's grippy enough so you can play accurately but smooth enough so you can perform slides easily.

All the connections are found on the right-hand side. From left to right you have a multi-voltage power connection for an external supply, standard MIDI In/Out connectors, USB for receiving power from your computer (and for

simultaneously transmitting/receiving MIDI data) and a footswitch jack that can work with standard single/dual footswitches and which is assignable as a sustain pedal or to other functions. There are also four strap connectors included, so you can wear the LinnStrument on stage – it's always nice to have instruments you can wear and, with all the glowing multi-coloured lights on the panel, it will certainly turn

heads on stage too! LinnStrument feels nicely balanced when wearing it but it'll sit atop your studio desk comfortably too, though it does have a fairly large footprint. I found it was best placed on my knees, at an angle on a sturdy music stand, or strapped on.

The LinnStrument is eminently configurable using the provided OS/ firmware, which is open-source and based on the Arduino platform - great for folks that enjoy getting their programming hands dirty! It also means the LinnStrument should stay very relevant well into the future. As a rule, LinnStrument's functions are selected and changed by simply choosing a parameter from the printed panel lists and selecting the pad/column that corresponds to the chosen parameter/ function. Across the panels' top you'll find 'per-split' settings (the touch panel can be split at a user-definable point) and at the bottom are global settings.

Applications For LinnStrument

LinnStrument is particularly versatile as a controller. You can use it as a standard controller with one or two hands on deck to perform duties such as playing melodies/ chords and inputting data into your DAW, but it's a superb drum controller too. Loading up a kit in Logic and using the touch surface/pads for timbre, velocity and pitch changes added a

new dimension of realism to kits I've used for years.

The Strum and Restrike modes are great for authentic guitar-like performances (strum one side of the split while playing the other) and the bottom row of pads can also perform its own functions including sustain, MIDI CC, Strum and Restrike. Using Split works great for playing a bass on one side and a

piano on the other, or for dual-device control.

Further, you could use LinnStrument as a clip launcher for Ableton and there's a handy MIDI CC fader mode, where eight virtual faders pop up on the display for controlling virtually any MIDI gear/ parameters. Finally, there's a useful onboard arpeggiator and its note data can be transposed easily via the pads.





While the default power-on settings work well, you can go in very deep. You can send all notes over a single MIDI channel or for fully polyphonic three-dimensional expression. LinnStrument can send each new touch over a unique MIDI channel, rotating through a block of user-chosen channels. The Channel Per Note mode is particularly practical and allows you to hold down one note while bending or affecting the timbre/pitch of another against it - this is especially hard to pull off on a standard MIDI keyboard

Roger has included all the features/ configurability most users will need, plus CCs can be assigned/sent from the panel too.

The 8x25 pad performance panel defaults to a standard guitar layout. However, Roger states he didn't use the standard piano note layout, "because it doesn't permit the intuitive note-to-note pitch bends and slides that the stringedinstrument note layout does". I think this was a wise choice and, although it does take some time to adjust to if you're a keyboardist, you'll soon develop default setting, the natural notes are lit green, with all the accidentals unlit. All the Cs are lit up blue too, so you always have a point of reference (you can also customise the panel colours).

Performing with LinnStrument is a unique, addictive and inspiring experience! The OS is rock-solid (as is the hardware) and LinnStrument is simply refreshing to use and the results are great. As a keyboardist I tend to resort to the same old chords/shapes but LinnStrument made me search for (and pointed me towards) new ideas. something which standard keyboards don't generally push me to do. I really enjoyed being able to slide across the panel or strum it in split mode and it's amazing how you can transform a sound using variance of touch with just one pad. Subtle velocity, timbre and pitch changes are easy to pull off convincingly and real fingered vibrato and slides are a breeze (as on a guitar/violin/bass etc).

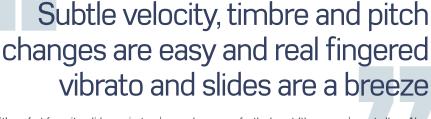
> For playing string or woodwind/ brass samples. LinnStrument also brings a new dimension of realism that's sorely missing from keyboard

much closer together than on a keyboard, you can span larger intervals easily within one hand too.

To sum up, I really dig LinnStrument. It opens up a whole new world of MIDI-controlled performance in internal sound engine, it still feels like a 'real' instrument. If you are looking for a try for sure! FM

controllers. Also, as the pads/notes are

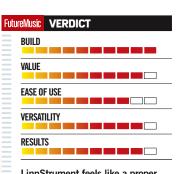
an elegant/intuitive way and, although it's basically a controller without an new way to perform musical gestures that simply aren't possible on a MIDI keyboard (or using a piano-note-layout), then LinnStrument is definitely for you and it's pretty affordable too - a must



and it's perfect for guitar slides against a drone note. You can also set the range of bends between pads (notes), set various pitch quantising options so that you can stay in tune without affecting your pitch slides or vibratos (X-axis), set Timbre (Y-axis), which is changed by sliding up and down on any pad, and finally set the Z-axis (pressure) settings.

muscle memory for the layout (the learning curve is shallower if you're a guitarist/string-instrument player). Each note in the default setting is always a 4th away from the note directly above or below it and each note within a row is a semitone away from each other, but you can also offset the rows to fit your playing style and display scales too. In





LinnStrument feels like a proper instrument and really helps to bring sounds to life. It's inspiring to play.

SPECS

General

200 x 3D RGB backlit pads (8 rows x 25 columns) Velocity plus continuous pressure X-axis (left-right) pitch Y-axis (forward-backward) timbre

Z-axis for pressure 4 guitar strap buttons Included soft case for transporting LinnStrument

Connections

USB Type B jack (data/buss power) MIDI Input and MIDI Output

Footswitch jack: 1/4" TRS, for dual or single footswitch

Dimensions:

570 x 209 x 25.4mm Weight: 2.2kg

ALTERNATIVES

ROLI Seaboard Grand (61-note model)

61-note MIDI controller, using the basic form factor of a keyboard but, instead of plastic keys, it uses a 3D flexible touch surface for slides, pitch changes and more.

www.roli.com

Haken Continuum (Half-size model)

\$3,390

The Continuum (like LinnStrument and the ROLI Seaboard) features a 3D (continuous) touch surface for playing and controlling MIDI instruments and it also has its own sound engine onboard.

www.hakenaudio.com



Eigenharp Tau £2,395

The Eigenharp Tau features 72 keys, 12 percussion keys, a strip controller and optional breath pipe for triggering brass/woodwind sounds - it's truly a unique multi-dimensional MIDI controller. Stroke, hit and blow!

www.eigenlabs.com