

REVIEWS: IN BRIEF



YAMAHA TYROS2

The Tyros 2 is a no-holds-barred digital workstation offering just about every advance in instrument design since the inception of the PS range in 1980. Aside from the wealth of prearranged patterns, beats and sequences the Tyros is capable of, Yamaha has shoehorned countless professional features into the Tyros2 chassis. Try two separate sets of Midi I/O and connection to a standard VGA monitor or RCA video output – the screen output can even be used to display chords and lyrics – and USB connectivity for either connecting external storage devices or a personal computer.

There are four audio outputs for splitting instruments out to a mixing desk or multi-input soundcard, and a true stereo effects send and return for integrating external effects processors into the system. This auxiliary processing loop offers its own gain trim control, as does the microphone/line input. Unlike many of its predecessors, the Tyros2 doesn't provide built-in speakers – an optional set of speakers comprising of two stereo satellite monitors and sub-bass cabinet can be provided with the Tyros2 sporting dedicated outputs for the monitor set. Wave importing is possible via USB for bespoke sound creation with waveform storage to an optional internal hard drive – the unit can even accept up to 1GB of RAM.

Interacting with the Tyros' sound banks is an easy affair when you see the large positional LCD display. Plenty of screen real estate for large, easy to read editing and sequencing. The actual keyboard has a very nice semi-weighted feel to it and provides velocity and aftertouch functionality. With 128-note polyphony the Tyros2 will handle most compositions you can throw at it. It sounds very schmick and thoroughly blurs the line between the domestic and professional instrument world. Brad Watts

Price: \$5999

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DIGIDESIGN MBOX MINI

Yet another MBox! This time it's the infinitesimal MBox2 Mini. Built for the travelling ProTools warrior, the Mini is the smallest ProTools LE interface available (4.4 x 12.7 x 15.2cm); small enough to hurl into your backpack/handbag/dufflebag. The unit weighs a piffling 503g, even though the casing is built entirely from metal and looks like it'll take good degree of bashing. But surely there's a catch – what does one forfeit when acquiring a ProTools interface that's so small?

Well, firstly, the MBox Mini goes without any digital I/O, which is fair enough. It's strictly an analogue affair with two inputs and outputs on the back panel. All the I/O is unbalanced 1/4-inch jack, with the Channel 1 input doubling as an XLR microphone input. This preamp input offers 48V phantom power and a 20dB pad. Connection to your computer comes via USB 1.1. The USB cable also bus-powers the unit (with no provision for an external PSU). And there's a Kensington security lock port for the educational facilities (which I'm sure are ecstatic with this release) – it'll take up way less room on students' work surfaces and cost far less than purchasing say 30 standard MBox2 units.

The front panel houses four MBox2-style level knobs, including a Mix control for balancing between recorded and monitoring signals to avoid any latency issues. There's a 1/4-inch headphone output, of course, and a 'monitor mute' button to kill the external monitor outputs at a moment's notice. Extras included on the software front include the usual ProTools Ignition pack, which contains plug-ins such as BFD Lite, Amplitube LE and Reason Adapted V3. Digidesign also chucks in the XPand! sample playback instrument and the usual set of complementary Bomb Factory plugs. In short, there's more than enough to get your material edited and on its way to world exposure – or at least into the car stereo and your iPod.

The Mini will obviously sell bucketloads. People would even be queuing up if there was *no* I/O whatsoever. Why? It's ProTools. And it's cheap. The Mbox2 Mini is very hard to fault. Brad Watts

Price: \$495

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KORG KP3 KAOSS PAD

Ever since my eyes and ears witnessed Radiohead's guitarist, Jonny Greenwood, violently messing with Thom Yorke's voice on stage, a penchant quickly developed for my own manipulative chaos. So when the chance arose to test Korg's latest addition to the Kaoss Pad range, the KP3, I immediately put Thom through his paces (well, a few tracks of *Kid A* at least) and it soon became clear that extreme audio manipulation is a doddle with this device.

If you haven't messed with a Kaoss pad before, it's basically an X/Y touchpad that can control a number of built-in effects to manipulate throughput audio, a sampler as well as a Midi controller. But 'basic' is inappropriate when describing the third-generation Kaoss Pad.

The first noticeable difference between this machine and its forefathers is the way the touchpad lights up in a grid fashion (giving it a Battleships-like appearance). This is no minor tweak, but rather, a total enhancement of both the accuracy and visual feedback of the interface. Each time you select a new program, a description scrolls across the touchpad. Wherever your finger goes, a target of four surrounding squares follows. With EQ effects, the touchpad shows dynamic representations of your curves as you draw them; the hold function retains that curve until you scrawl your finger across the touchpad again. Adding to the interface adjustments, the Mute switch has been replaced by a button, making it more drum-pad-like for rhythmic effects.

Korg has also added more effects to the KP3, taking the total to 128. The number of sampling keys has also risen from two to four, allowing up to 16 beats of sampling on each key. If more samples are needed, the SD slot has got it covered. The KP3 is now more powerful than ever, with the ability to hot-swap up to 2GB of samples, sounds and setting data.

The Kaoss pad is targeted primarily at DJs and producers, but if automating your effects in a more musical and intuitive way is what you've been looking for, maybe you should check out this pad. With Midi ins and outs, you can automate just about anything using the X/Y interface. Here's to feeding your slightly narcissistic desires. Mark Davie

Price: \$799

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