

Korg Legacy Digital Edition

'Classic digital'? You'd better believe it. Anthony Touma revisits the sounds of the '80s and '90s in all its big-hair glory.

One of the hardware moguls of the audio world, Korg, has released its second software virtual instrument along with a suite of its classic plug-in effects. The aptly named Legacy Collection Digital Edition is comprised of two synths: the Korg M1 and the Korg Wavestation, as well as the MDE-X effects suite. For those unfamiliar with this Korg hardware, the M1 was released in 1988, and was based on Korg's AI (Advanced Integration) synthesis system which combined PCM waveforms and digital effects processing. The synth became a Korg best-seller and figured significantly in the sound of the late '80s and '90s. In 1990, another Korg synth was released – the Korg Wavestation – which was based on a new Korg engine, dubbed the 'Advanced Vector Synthesis System'. This synth layered and blended waveforms together while synthesizing their sounds.

and yet another bit of Syncrosoft licensing kit. There's gotta be another way... I'm running out of USB ports as it is!

M1 Anyone?

After opening up the M1 in Cubase SX, I immediately struck my Midi keyboard and was greeted with a swoopy, fat pad. My immediate reaction was: 'oooooh, nice'. Randomly clicking on presets (some 900 of them), I came across the general array of cheesy '90s sounds that one would expect, as well as many an '80s retro sound which seems to be the flavour of the month at the moment (lots of classic Prince and Madonna). There was also a ton of great sounds that are totally relevant to today's electronic genres. There are many Combination sounds (which utilise several presets layered together), as well as many single voice sounds. There is an eight-part multi-timbral tone generator featuring up to 256-note polyphony, but some of these Combination sounds will chew up the eight-part multi-timbrality quite quickly. Back in the hardware days this would be a serious restriction on your creativity. Now? Just load up another M1. The M1 also comes with the original 34 built-in effects. There's a great variety in the soundsets that includes everything from pianos and keys, to basses and leads, drums and percussion – inspiration is never far away and it's all easy to tweak... nothing hidden behind tiny menu screens! There is a resonant filter [*Now they give the M1 a resonant filter! – Ed.*] with rich and full cut-off frequency patterns along with VDA modulation which allows great control over sustain volumes. Each of the eight voices allow for two insert effects to be added to their chain, and there's also a built-in compression effect; all features added to the software version which weren't available with the original M1. Additionally, the M1 allows you to see each of these parameters in a mixer view separated into rows for each voice. This makes for quick and logical editing of sounds allowing you to get to each parameter of each sound easily, while they're all playing back. The M1 is also a workstation, whereby you can generate sequenced patterns. What's more, if you own the original hardware loaded with finely-tuned patches you spent 15 years programming, yes, you can transfer all the SySex data over to the Digital Collection. Very cool.



The Legacy M1 synth with its 900 PCM waveforms and 34 original effects (available in VST, AU and RTAS formats). It's faithful to the original, but hardware M1 owners will cast an envious eye over the software version's resonant filter.

As many an audio fanatic would be aware, Korg doesn't often let the side down with its hardware synth releases, and similarly, this software package is an incredibly solid effort. The Digital Collection faithfully repackages the sounds of the M1 and Wavestation and turns them into something relevant and way more user-friendly to the current crop of musicians and producers. But before I get too carried away, one word about installation: it's an easy process but does require you to plug in *yet another* USB dongle

Wavestation Nation

The Wavestation synth appears to play second fiddle to the M1, as there's no quick guide for it and doesn't attract the same sort of reverence the M1 enjoys on the Korg site. Having said that, don't be fooled – the Wavestation is a powerhouse. The Wavestation features four layered oscillators which range from lush sweeping pads and screaming lead lines to 250 complete song ideas (called Performances) mostly comprised of beats, basses, keys and leads. The Wavestation includes all six of the optional ROM cards that were available for the synth at the time. Some of these ROMs have become real collectors' items and having all six on board is a real draw card. There are also 55 built-in effects, all of which were available on the original hardware synth. The Wavestation packs over 1400 presets (an amazing feat in itself), and the vast majority of them are winners – there are very few 'passengers' and anyone making electronic/pop music is going to have a field day with these sound banks.

Wavestation keyboard fans will be pleased to hear that there's a virtual joystick for achieving real-time vector moves between the four oscillators. Personally I've never been a Wavestation owner so the joystick was a revelation – great for adding dynamics to long passages of pads and sweeps; maintaining interest without losing too much of its original character and tone. In fact, the way Korg has presented Vector-based synthesis in general proved to be quite an eye opener. For those unfamiliar with the older Korg gear but have given Steinberg's Vector-based Xpphrase a listen, then there are obvious similarities. Personally I'm more impressed with Korg's results. Also, anyone who's ever owned one of the various hardware Wavestation incarnations will be gob-smacked by the graphic-based editing possibilities. Previously, programming a Wavestation was like working with a three-dimensional abacus, while the Legacy Collection variant offers far more possibilities. But editing the Wavestation is still not for the faint-hearted. There are an enormous number of parameters and graphs and it takes considerable patience to make a sound truly 'your own'. Again, thank heavens for the 1400 excellent presets.

MDE-X Effects Me

The MDE-X effects suite is reminiscent of the Korg Triton effects. The 19 effects include items like a compressor, multi-band limiter, overdrive, EQ, exciter/enhancer, modulator, reverbs and delays. The compression plug-ins have a digital crispness about them (no surprise given they're part of the Digital Collection), the EQ can be a bit crunchy but is more than useable; and the reverbs are classic Korg – a good thing when that particular flavour is required. The upside here is that all of these effects have been designed as standard VST plug-ins, so their usefulness extends way past the confines of the instruments themselves.



The groundbreaking Wavestation synth with 700 waveforms, 55 effects and all without the original's tortuous 'letter box' interface that made editing the preserve of the masochist.

Hard Where?

If you're about to embark on electronic music making, get this package. If you're already making music, get this package. If you own an M1 or a Wavestation, sell it, and get this package. You really won't be disappointed on any front. This is the most comprehensive hardware recreation I've ever seen and, what with the quality of the instruments and effects (as well as the additional suite of VST effects and all of the Wavestation optional ROMs), you'll be hard pressed to find a better software instrument.

But they still sound like plug-ins right? Wrong. Plug-ins are notorious for never quite emulating the hardware equivalent – whether it's because they're specially coded for underpowered Native systems, or the patch programming is different, or simply because it's not using the same wires and componentry, there always seems to be something 'not quite right'. The Digital Collection is different, the sounds are on par with their hardware ancestors and the quality of these sounds really cuts through and holds their own against hardware synthesizers from any era.

This collection would have to be the best set of Korg soundware that has been released to date. The amount of music that has been made with these sounds is legion and legendary, and Korg has extended the shelf life of its M1 and Wavestation well into the future. This time Korg has really hit the musical bull's eye.

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