

Arturia V Collection 7

NIGEL JOPSON re-visits past glories... in the box



The French software company are back with the latest version of their epic synth emulation bundle, V Collection 7, which comes with three new virtual instruments, plus an expanded version of Analog Lab. The bundle is available for around £340, or rent-to-own at \$25/mo from Splice.com. The emulations read like a compilation of track sheets from my era as a recording engineer: Farfisa V, ARP2600 V3, CMI V, Buchla Easel V, Piano V2, DX7 V, Clavinet V, Synthopedia, Synthi V, CZ V, Mellotron V, CS-80 V3, Jup-8 V3, Mini V3, Modular V3, Prophet V3, SEM V2, Wurli V2, Analog Lab 4, Vox Continental V2, Solina V2, Matrix-12 V2, Synclavier V, Stage-73 V and finally... B-3 V2 — the Hammond emulation has been totally updated.

Knives in the keys

The B3 sound engine has been improved, and now includes seven tonewheel organ models: 1960 A100, 1961 B3, 1962 C3, 1963 B3, 1964 A100, 1968 C3 and 1969 C3, along with five rotary speakers, four effect pedal slots (with twelve FX types), and a room convolution reverb. I must admit I find the mellower tones from this organ more attractive than the supposed 'rock' tones. However, it's simple to do what we used to do with the real thing: select a full tone and run the organ through an amp sim in the DAW. There is drawbar modulation that adds depth to sounds by automatically moving drawbars — a poor substitute for the maestro players who somehow fiddled with drawbars while holding down a chord — but useful nonetheless. Controls are there for adding tonewheel leakage, key click, and motor noise. This really is



/ Arturia Mellotron V with the lid flipped up to reveal additional control

one of the most adaptable replicas of the real instrument I've heard.

The three other brand new instruments are emulations of two classics, the EMS Synthi (Synthi V), the Casio CZ (CZ V), and the legendary 'dawn of man' sampler, Mellotron V. The Mellotron was a massive electro-mechanical device which played a (3-track) tape strip for each note. The strips were kept in ridiculously long plastic sleeves, and played by the Heath Robinson means of pressing a tape replay head (attached to each wooden key) on to a capstan which ran the length of the instrument. The Beatles famously used a MkII on *Strawberry Fields*, but it is the later 400 model depicted in the Arturia virtual instrument.

Many VI (virtual instrument) attempts at Mellotron 'sort of' get the wobbly "Aaaah" sound of the famous choir tapes, but the evocative timbre of the instrument — as used by Genesis, King Crimson and other prog bands — also came from a combination of mechanical sounds (caused by the repro head hitting, and the tape 'pinging back' into its long sleeve), amp distortion and noise from the dreadful replay system. Having fiddled many hardware Mellotrons, thankfully the Arturia V can be adjusted by simply flipping up the virtual lid to access a series of WEM Audiomaster-style knobs. Flutter, Tape Saturation, Mechanics and Noise Floor can all be adjusted, and an admirably subtle Amplitude Envelope allows control over the dynamics of how much of all this noise follows each note.

Best of all, Arturia has taken the trouble to offer the tapes from MkI and MkII Mellotrons as well as the 400. The MkII '3 Violins' is mega-evocative — *Watcher of the Skies*. Many Mellotron aficionados claimed the Mk2 sounds were best, and although I don't think Arturia managed to sample all of the originals (the Vibra is way too clean) there's buckets of character. The Arturia takes it to the max with realistic limitations (8 second maximum tape length), the ability to loop samples, forward-backward looping, and playing up to three samples concurrently from the 65 "original" factory samples with 66 presets. You can also add-in your own sounds simply by making short audio files.

Synthi V — silver machine

The new Synthi V (EMS Synthi/VCS 3) instrument was what drew me to this Arturia collection. Thanks to a meeting with EMS-founder Peter Zinovieff I had an early AKS (suitcase version) in my studio, and I once tried to persuade Roger Waters to 'lend' me his VCS3. I loved the device — and what engineer wouldn't? There's a patchbay on the front panel! In an effort to improve on the ridiculous dangling cables of other modular synths of the era, Peter mandated a pin-board matrix for patching oscillators to filters and so on. This was part of the charm of the original, as weird sounds were generated by crosstalk and interactions on the wobbly pin-board. Arturia has elegantly replicated this feature: a left-click places a white pin on the matrix, which sends 100% of the source's signal to the destination. On the Synthi hardware, sending an attenuated signal to the destination was done with different colour pins that offered attenuation — by dragging the mouse up, right, down or left before releasing, you place 100%, 75%, 50% or 25% signal strength pins. So fantastic!

I wasted just about as much time on this virtual version as I did with the original. The sound (apart from the spring reverb, which is way too nice) is as near-as-dammit what my memory cells recall. Fantastic, but often not musically useful. If you want useful, fire up the Mini V3. This is the richest re-creation of Moog's three-oscillator legend I've heard and, I have to admit, far more useful than my beloved Synthi. If you want all the keyboard sounds of 1975-1990, here they are all in one sweet package. 📌

resolution/VERDICT

PROS Some outstanding replicas. All have sufficient controls to adjust the timbre to fit in with your music. The best Mini Moog and Synthi AKS emulations I have heard. Prophet V is good too.

CONS None, but don't buy this bundle for the piano!

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