

Kurzweil PC2X

Christopher Holder finally finds himself in control.

It's peculiar... physical modelling has allowed us to happily play an accordion with a violin bow (with almost believable results); sampling improvements and increased hard drive space has allowed us to download a \$200,000 Bosendorfer into our PC; yet the interface to most of us, the humble keyboard, remains resolutely humble. I know it's a cost issue, but surprisingly few of us decide to fork out for better keyboard control.

This Kurzweil PC2X is one of those keyboards which makes us all see the errors of our ways. This 'performance controller', as they call it, is an 88-note (that's right, just like a piano) fully-weighted keyboard. It feels great. Sitting down to it and playing it is a delight. No need to hit an octave changing button, no need to press the keys till they bust to get some tonal varying aftertouch, no cheap-skate clicking of keys, this is real luxury.

So before I get into the rest of the review let me say this: if you play keys, don't put up with crappy keyboard actions. You owe it to yourself to have the real thing – well, as close to the real thing as you can get with Midi sockets. If you're setting up a studio or playing live you'll be amazed the difference a controller like this can have on your creativity and your ability to feel the music. Think about it. End of sermon.

At 23kg, this synth brings new meaning to the term 'fully-weighted'. Given its dimensions (it's 138cm long) and combined with its mass, it really is a two man lift. I'm not sure how this impacts on its 'gig-ability' (if you're a one person act you'll really need a friend to give you hand) but in the studio you'll need to put it on a rugged mounting, and check the floor boards for white ants!

As with all good controller keyboards, the PC2X bristles with I/O. Around the back you'll see everything you'd expect and some things you won't – I certainly didn't expect the coaxial digital output (supports S/PDIF and AES/EBU), while the breath controller and ribbon controller (which comes as an option) inputs were welcome. The control surface is nicely functional. There's four multipurpose sliders which prove their worth. Everything else knob and button-wise does its job well – Kurzweil could have got away with a more Spartan set of controls, so credit to them for the extra ease of use.

The on-board sounds are broken up into single performances, multilayered patches and a KB3 section (more on that later). The overall Kurzweil sound is a mixture of the dazzling and the more workman-like. Piano sounds are a matter of taste, and for me the Kurzweil sound is a tad too bright (although I know many people rate the

Kurzweil piano very highly, and a tweak of the on-board three-band EQ and filter can tailor the sound to individual requirements). Elsewhere the sounds are very solid (the orchestral percussion and vocal sounds stand out for me). There's not a tremendous range of sounds to choose from – in a world of thousands of patches and unlimited options Kurzweil are probably going to be seen as a little stingy in this department. Saying that, there's room for expansion via two internal 16MB ROM cards.

The on-board effects and processing won't necessarily bowl you over. The range of reverbs and modulation effects are nicely solid but not particularly imaginative. But given the emphasis is on orchestral sounds, feeding a ring modulator and 'trans-grungulating' it through a distorted 12-stage 'vintage' phaser is not really the point – a little reverb, and steady as she goes thank you very much. There's also an arpeggiator with a number of nice options.

What the PC2 and PC2X has over its competition is the KB3 mode. If you're into your Hammond B-3 sounds then the KB3 'tone wheel synthesis' emulations will make the PC2X very attractive. But it's not just the sounds that are rather good, you get full drawbar control – eight drawbars in two banks from the four multifunctional sliders while the ninth drawbar is controlled from the mod wheel.

Unfortunately the PC2X is another casualty of the poor Aussie dollar. At around \$6000 this is an expensive bit of kit (the 76-note, semi-weighted PC2 is some \$1000 cheaper). It's not intended to be a 'supersynth' along the lines of a fully-optioned Korg Trinity or Kurzweil K2600, and its selling points are not in its multitude of sounds, in its banks of on-board effects etc. This is an instrument that principally aims to sit at the very heart of a professional (or professionally-minded) Midi-based studio. Apart from the control features, the KB3 mode is the biggest selling point and will indeed be quite a drawcard. But, regardless, if you derive a living from scoring, composing (and indeed, recording or live performance for that matter), then a top quality keyboard like the PC2X is a must.



Distributed by

• Music Technology
Phone: (02) 9369 4990
Kurzweil on WWW: www.youngchang.com/kurzweil/

Price

• PC2X (88-note, fully-weighted): \$5995; PC2 (76-note, semi-weighted) \$4995; PC2 rackmount: \$2795.