So far, 2016 has been a particularly strong year for electronic percussion gear. All-new kits, brains, accessories, and even new paradigms have made their way to the marketplace. In the following pages, we’ll offer an overview of the newest hardware and software that has entered the scene so you can make more informed choices. And we’ll also give you a preview of new gear that barely stuck its head above ground in recent months, but is more likely to make a full launch in 2017.

NEW KITS

Long known for high quality and reasonably priced electronic instruments, Alesis has really stepped up its game with the release of three new kits: The Forge, Command, and Crimson. All share the company’s new Advanced Drum Module, a new brain that sports 50 factory preset kits covering a very wide range of musical styles with contemporary as well as traditional sound sets. In addition, there are 20 user-definable kits. User kits can be individually tweaked by editing each pad in the areas of voice, volume, stereo pan position, reverb level, decay length, playback mode (poly, mono, loop, stop, tempo set, and click on/off). Along with the individual edits per pad, each kit has its own parameter settings of volume and a three-band EQ with high, middle, and low frequencies.

If you’re interested in play-along songs, the new Alesis brain comes with 120 preset songs — you can easily adjust the volume of the drum part and the accompaniment separately. Alesis has included all the necessary controls to make certain that the brain and pads respond to your individual playing style. There are parameters for head sensitivity, rim sensitivity, rim/head crosstalk reduction, pad-to-pad crosstalk reduction, threshold, retrigger cancel, velocity curve, and splash sensitivity for the hi-hat control.

Other technical specifications include 64-voice
polyphony with 628 drum, percussion, and effects sounds. And, with the addition of a USB stick, you can load in your own samples (99 maximum with a 15MB total), save and load kits, and save and load songs (99 maximum).

Each kit comes with five drum pads along with hi-hat, crash, and ride cymbal pads. The differences between the Forge, Command, and Crimson kits are primarily in the pads. The Forge ($999 MSRP) uses all-rubber pads with an 11” dual-zone snare and mono tom pads. Cymbals are all 10” in diameter and include a crash with choke capabilities. The Command ($1,299 MSRP) offers up a 10” dual-zone mesh-head pad for the snare, an 8” mesh-head kick, and three stereo tom pads. The flagship Crimson ($1,699 MSRP) includes mesh heads all around with a 12” dual-zone snare, 8” kick, two 8” dual-zone rack toms, and a 10” dual-zone floor tom. The cymbal package on the Crimson includes 12” hi-hat and crash, along with a 14” three-zone ride cymbal.

In terms of support, all three kits come with a chromed four-post rack and free-standing bass drum tower. The Command and Crimson kits include boom stands for the ride and crash, and the Crimson includes a double-braced snare drum stand.

ddrum introduced the 5-piece, entry-level Beta XP electronic kit.

The kt4 from KAT includes the newly designed kt4 Pro hi-hat, which uses a pressure system to read how hard the upper pad presses down.

An entry-level kit with a dual-post rack, the Beta XP ($698.99 MSRP) is ddrum's newest addition into the world of electronic kits. The 5-piece kit comes with a dual-zone snare, three single-zone tom pads, and a single-zone kick tower. Ride and crash cymbals offer choking capability, and the hi-hat can be fully open, fully closed, or move between those two extreme positions.

The Beta XP brain has inputs for all the pads in the kit along with a 3.5mm stereo line-in jack and headphone output. The outside world can be accessed with either the Micro USB connector or the MIDI-Out jack. There are 33 factory preset kits along with four user kits that reside in memory, and the unit comes with 170 16-bit sounds. A special feature of the Beta XP is the ability to make your own recordings on two tracks with a total of about 30,000 notes, but in case you aren't inspired to write your own material, the brain also includes 12 play-along songs to help with your practicing.

If the editing capabilities of the Beta XP brain seem somewhat limited, the new DDI-M Plus brain ($799 MSRP) is an available upgrade. This unit adds quarter-inch master stereo output jacks along with a larger sound set (335 sounds), more user kits (11), more play-along songs (60), and greater control of the touch and response of the triggers.

KAT's new entry into the electronic kit market is the new kt4 model. The brain includes 780 different drum, cymbal, percussion, DJ, and special effects sounds and holds 99 total drum kits in memory at one time. These are divided into 55 preprogrammed factory kits with 44 user-programmable sets. It also includes 142 different play-along tracks and a seven-track sequencer for making your own recordings. Effects settings offer a bit more flexibility than many kits you'll find in this price range.
($2,844.99 MSRP). There are eight different types of reverbs and a 4-band EQ (high, high mid, low mid, and low frequencies).

While the kt4 is a 5-piece kit, the module includes an additional input expansion jack in case you’d like to add one more tom. Speaking of add-ons, the kt4 includes MIDI, USB 3.0 compatibility, and an SD card slot for loading MIDI files and backing up custom user kits. All of its pads are 11” dual-zone, and the kick tower features an 8” pad with a Mylar drumhead. Cymbals are mounted on boom arms and are three-zone (bell, bow, and edge).

Editing pads is pretty straightforward, with parameters for voice, voice group, volume, pan position, pitch, decay, reverb level, MIDI gate time, and the pad’s start volume. You can also use a pad to play a song with a number of variations. The kt4 has a more sophisticated set of controls for dealing with songs than many other brains in its midprice category. There are song record settings that cover the part, the time signature, tempo, looping, loop length, overdubbing, quantize resolution, and more.

Trigger settings have all the usual bells and whistles, with settings for each pad’s sensitivity, threshold, trigger curve, retrigger cancel, cross-talk, rim sensitivity, and splash sensitivity for the hi-hat. You should be able to get the pads to feel great under your hands without much hassle. Of special note is KAT’s new kt4 Pro hi-hat ($333.99 MSRP), which comes with a Drum Workshop 3500 double-braced hi-hat stand, and uses a pressure system to read how hard the upper pad presses down. The kt4 kit comes with a chromed four-post rack stand that has center posts, which helps to make the rack very steady and solid.

NEW DIRECTIONS

The idea of hybrid instruments that blend acoustic and electronics together has been around for a while. But Roland has taken an entirely unique turn with the new ELCajon EC-10 ($399 MAP). A perfectly natural acoustic cajon is paired with electronic components that read strokes at the center and the edge of the instrument. The ELCajon then generates sounds that can be mixed to expand and enhance the cajon’s normal sound.

A number of things make the ELCajon special, but the one I like best is that its 3W-rated power amp and 6.5” speaker make the instrument totally self-contained and portable. Six AA batteries offer up to 12 hours of power for the entire unit. All of this in a package that weighs less than 14 pounds!

You can easily control the balance between the acoustic and electronic sounds with a dedicated volume knob. There’s also a dedicated knob to adjust the balance between the head and edge sounds. In addition to these two knobs, the back of the cajon has jacks for DC input (when you don’t want to run on battery power), a mix input, and an electronic sound output.

There are 30 different combinations of electronic sounds in three classifications: cajon sounds, percussion sounds, and special effects sounds. The top of the instrument has a pair of buttons that selects among the three different instrument classes and another pair of buttons to pick among the ten kits within each class. The position of the buttons makes it easy to change on the fly.

One of the most forward-thinking electronic percussion companies in the market, Alternate Mode’s new DITI (Drum Intelligent
PLUGGED IN

MIDI Interface, $499 manufacturer direct) is poised to make another big splash in the e-percussion pool. The DITI will handle up to 24 triggers in combinations of FSR pads (along with providing power), single-zone, dual-zone, membrane switches, cymbals with switching and chokes, and more.

Adjusting the DITI to your own personal playing style can be as easy as telling the machine which pads you have plugged in to each input. The DITI will automatically load in a predefined set of parameters that, more often than not, will be all you need to start playing. If, for some reason, you want to tweak the preset, you’ve got all the controls you might need: velocity ranges, dynamic curves, dynamic range, gate times, threshold, mask time, along with automatic training if you prefer to use that.

Alternate Mode’s drumKAT Turbo is the most sophisticated and flexible drum controller on the market, and the new DITI has just about every feature you’d find on the drumKAT: alternate notes, chords, transpose functions, MIDI velocity controls, links, sequencer transport controls, pitch bend, program change messages, and more. Even with all this power, Alternate Mode has made a very conscious effort to make the DITI easy to understand and easy to program.

Along with the DITI, Alternate Mode has released the jamKAT ($399 manufacturer direct), a MIDI hand percussion controller. The jamKAT connects to the DITI via a special 15-pin-to-quarter-inch jack cable, and offers 12 FSR surfaces laid out in a pattern designed to be played with your hands. When paired with the DITI, the jamKAT provides an amazingly powerful percussion controller.

ACCESSORIES

If you practice late at night or have downstairs neighbors, you’ll want to check out Roland’s new electronic bass drum and hi-hat pedals. Both are designed to reduce the amount of acoustic sound made by the pedal in the practice space and in the floor below the kit. The KT-9 ($162 MSRP) is a beaterless kick pedal with a patent-pending linking mechanism that, according to Roland, reduces the noise of operation by 85 percent in a practice space and 63 percent in the rooms below. The FD-9 hi-hat controller ($162 MSRP) is spec’d out to offer 50 percent less noise in the practice room and 15 percent less in the rooms below. Add to these the NE-10 Noise Eater Isolation Boards, and your friends, family, and neighbors will thank you.

Back in the days when hardware synths ruled the earth, there were two types of software programs that made the tedium of programming and library organization tolerable for the average human. “Editor/librarian” programs let the user see and edit almost all parameters using the massive visual real estate of a computer monitor, rather than scrolling up and down, or in and out through pages and pages of information on the device. Since many of today’s synths exist entirely in software, these programs have all but disappeared.

Yamaha has resurrected this idea, updated the concept to work with the Apple iPad, and applied it to its electronic percussion systems. Called Touch Apps, these new iOS apps are available for the DTX700 series, the DTX400 series, and the DTX502 systems, along with the DTXM12. Each Touch App requires a slightly different version of iOS, but all are compatible with the iPhone, iPad, and the iPod touch. If you have the newest iOS version, you should be just fine.

Because each series has a slightly different set of features and programmable parameters, each Touch App is somewhat different. However, they all work in a bidirectional manner. Changes made in the app are sent to the brain, and changes made in the brain are updated in the app.

The DTXM12 Touch app, for example, displays the pad assignments and shows how voice layers and functions are set up on the pad. It’s also possible to change the programming of the sounds and functions as well as transfer .wav, .aiff, or .mp3 files that have...
The ATV aDS adds emotional nuance through low latency and an exceptionally expressive set of sounds. This is especially true with cymbals, which are a challenge for all electronic drums because of the complex range of sounds they can create, from soft to loud, from choked to wide open sustain, and thousands of possible stick and brush attacks. In its sample-based sound design, ATV has done a great job of recreating authentic cymbal performance.

The 8" x 6" x 3" module has a cool, somewhat Apple-esque design, and is small enough to carry conveniently in a gig bag or case. It includes five drum kits that were sampled by ATV and is fully expandable to accept more. The rotary knob on its graphical interface lets you quickly scroll through kits and options. Cancel and back buttons promise to keep you from getting lost.

There's a multitrigger input with dual quarter-inch aux inputs for connecting multizone pads, and dual quarter-inch outputs for premixed stereo output. The aDS is equipped with pad inputs for kick, snare (two zones), three toms, hi-hat (two zones), hi-hat control, crash (two zones), ride (three zones) and two auxiliary two-zone inputs. It works well with most other drum kits and triggers.

Rare Earth Dynamics' DST-1 Magnatrack triggers can be used on regular or mesh drumheads.

Pearl is planning to unveil a new e-drum brain called the Mimic Pro. The brain features a touch screen rather than knobs, sliders, or buttons (thank you!). It is loaded with sounds from the 24-bit library of Steven Slate Drums 5 on a 120GB solid-state hard drive. And it will offer 16 trigger inputs and 16 audio outputs.

A number of other product launches are warming up in the batter's box, including Sensorpoint's Jambe drum, which combines a sophisticated hardware controller with a powerful iOS-based sound engine architecture. It's been shown at the NAMM show for the past two years, but is still in preorder. The same seems true for a series of triggers from Sensory Percussion, which feature XLR out and software that captures the full dynamic range of the drum. And we've heard that a new hi-hat controller may be on the horizon from Pintech.

So will 2017 be the year when all these new e-goodies bust out? We can feel it in our bones.