

ROLAND TD-12S V-DRUMS

LOTS OF OPTIONS WITHOUT BREAKING THE BANK

by Norman Weinberg

DETAILS

MODEL: Roland TD-12S

PRICE: \$4,299

BRAIN: TD-12

DRUM PADS: PD-85 (3), PD-105 (1), KD-85 (1)

CYMBAL PADS: CY-12R/C (2), VH-11 (1)

RACK: MDS-12

MAXIMUM POLYPHONY: 64 Voices

DRUM KITS: 50

DRUM/PERCUSSION SOUNDS: 560

BACKING INSTRUMENTS: 262

CHAINS: 16 (32 steps per chain)

EFFECTS: Pad EQ, compression

DISPLAY: 64 x 240 backlit graphic LCD

FADERS: 6

SEQUENCER: 250 (150 factory, 100 user patterns)

CONTACT: Roland, 5100 S. Eastern Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90040. 323-890-3700. rolandus.com.

It's not right to call the TD-12S cheap, but it is inexpensive



Though I don't support trickle-down economics, I do buy trickle-down technology. Roland's TD-20S set the bar for electronic drum kits, but it came with a hefty price tag to match. Offering many of the TD-20's playability, programming, and sonic features, the new TD-12S sports a svelter MSRP that weighs around 2K less.

PADS. Essentially a scaled-down version of Roland's top-of-the-line kit, the TD-12 includes three toms rather than the TD-20's four, two cymbals rather than three, and overall smaller pads than its big brother's. The review kit came in a white finish that looked very hip with chrome brackets. When adjusted to the proper tension, the pads responded extremely well

and offered very low room noise. The craftsmanship and the design are quite good. The pads should be able to survive years in even the roughest performing environment.

If you don't like the feel of rubber under your sticks, you're going to love the TD-12: All its drum pads have mesh heads. Each pad is also stereo, so rim

strokes can be programmed to fire individual sounds. I experienced no crosstalk between the head and rim surfaces – absolutely none. The PD-85 tom pads are only 8" in diameter, but unless you're a pretty wild player, you shouldn't have much trouble hitting a great-feeling spot. The PD-105 snare pad is the same used for the small mounted toms on the TD-20. The traditional-style shell and tension casings offer a more conventional look than do the tom pads, but they complement each other nicely. The KD-85 bass drum pad is also constructed well, doesn't creep away from you, and is large enough to host a double pedal.

The cymbal pads are the CY-12R/C. Although a bit small, they share similar technology with the other V-cymbals in Roland's line. The ride has three-positions (bell, bow, edge), and the crash has two. Both are capable of all the tricks that we've come to expect from Roland's electronic cymbals. The VH-11 hi-hat pad is a one-piece design, but it is still capable of reading pedal movements with a separate motion sensor unit. You can perform open

stroke, closed stroke, and foot stroke sounds. When used in conjunction with the TD-12 brain, the pedal also offers gradually changing colors as you move between closed to open, perform foot splashes, and change striking spots from the edge to the top. The VH-11 hi-hat stand is designed to fit on just about any standard hi-hat stand.

Supporting the snare, three toms, two cymbals, and the brain is the new MDS-12 stand. I found that just a few quick and easy adjustments put the pads right where I wanted them and there they stayed. All cables ran inside the stand's tubing so that the unit sets up and tears down quickly and cleanly.

BRAIN. The unit gets a "10" for looks alone. Its sleek black shell has a raised chromed surface that surrounds the back-lit display. The logically organized buttons, knobs, sliders, and LEDs give you all the information you need in order to see what you've got called up at any given moment and to help you find your way through the editing process.

The back of the TD-12 is clear as could

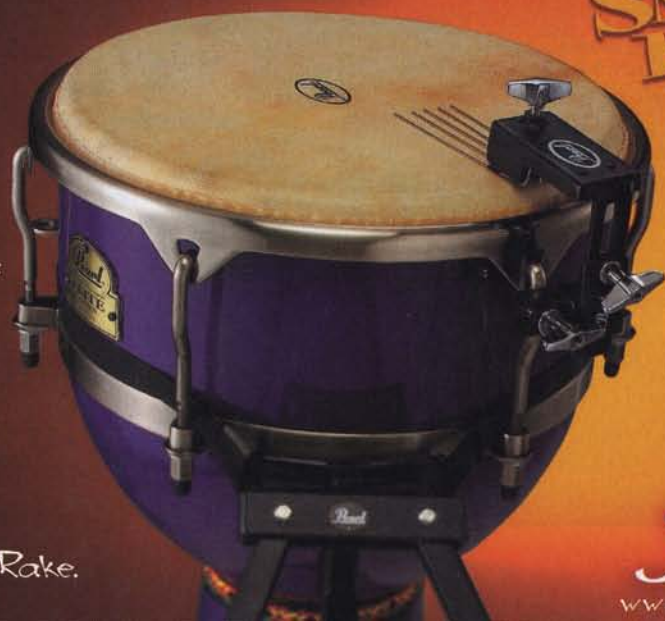
be. Along the top are the power switch, the power input, MIDI-In, MIDI-Out/Thru, and the connections for the mix input, the main outputs, and the direct outputs. Along the bottom are the 12 trigger inputs along with the hi-hat controller input. All inputs and outputs are clearly labeled.

SOUNDS. Except for the ability to handle a memory card, the TD-12 is nearly identical to the TD-20. It holds 50 drum kits in memory, and each of the locations has information about the settings for individual pads and the kit as a whole. It's a snap to call up any of the instruments inside the brain – and there are plenty of them. Sounds are grouped into a number of different categories including kick, processed kick, electronic kick, snare, snare brush, processed snare, electronic snare, tom, electronic tom, hi-hat, crash, splash, China, ride, percussion, analog percussion, sfx, and "other." All in all, there are 560 sounds that cover just about any but the most esoteric instruments.

Many of the sounds are capable of

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additional functions. "Position" sounds change their color depending where stick contact is made on the head. These sounds make it possible to hear the difference between playing the head near the center or near the rim. If you use these sounds on the rim itself, the color will change depending on the depth of the stick on the rim (using the neck or the shaft of the stick). "Interval" sounds recognize how quickly notes are played to slightly modify the attack portion of the sample. This is perfect for creating a suspended cymbal roll without having all of those fresh attacks for each stroke. "Xstick" sounds make it possible to use both the rimshot and the cross stick sound on the same rim. Brush sounds can be fired by using brushes on the head in a sweeping motion.

EDITING. When you're ready to tweak, the TD-12 is right there with you. Because the brain is based on Roland's V-Drum technology, several sounds are editable as true virtual instruments. For example, bass drum editing includes shell depth (normal, deep 1, deep 2), head type (clear, coated, Pinstripe), muffling (off,

tape 1, tape 2, blanket, weight), and snare buzz (on, off), and tuning over an eight-octave range. Tom editing includes the same features as the bass drum (but without the blanket or weight muffling options). Snare choices include shell material (wood, steel, brass), shell depth (1" to 20"), head type (clear, coated, Pinstripe), muffling (tape 1, tape 2, doughnut 1, doughnut 2), strainer adjustment (off, loose, medium, tight), and the eight-octave tuning range.

Hi-hat cymbals can be programmed by size (1" to 40" in diameter) and, if you prefer, by one of four different fixed positions. The other cymbals can also be programmed between 1" and 40" in diameter and may include rivets. Decay is adjustable between -31 and +31 values.

Keep in mind that V-Drum editing isn't available for every single sound, but most of the acoustic instruments can be edited. Instruments that don't can be programmed for pitch and decay time. For further adjustment to any sound, the TD-12 offers both a compressor and a three-band equalizer. Both are fully programmable and offer all the control you might need.

MIX IT UP. The mixer functions offer a great deal of flexibility and variety. Using the 12 on-board faders, you can quickly adjust each trigger in terms of volume, pan, minimum velocity, the hi-hat foot closed volume, the cross-stick volume, and the overall kit volume. You can also turn the 12 faders into group faders that control the ambient send level and the multi-effects send level.

Ambience can be applied to the entire drum kit at once. Using the ambience controls, you can select a room type. Each of the ten types gets progressively wetter: from beach, living room, bathroom, studio, garage, locker room, theatre, cave, gymnasium, all the way to a dome stadium. In addition to the room type, you can also choose between five different room sizes, wood, plaster, or glass wall material, high and low microphone positions, and the shape of the room.

In much of today's music, passing drum sounds through multi-effects processors is becoming widespread. The TD-12 makes this easy by offering a multi-effects processor that includes delay, delay panning, a flanger, a phaser, and a chorus.

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PLAY ALONG. It's fun to play drums. But it's even more fun to play drums with music. If you can't have musicians jamming in your home at 4:00 A.M., you can use the mix input to play along with songs on your iPod, minidisk, or similar device. If you'd rather jam solo, play along with one of the TD-12's 250 patterns (150 are factory programmed; 100 are user defined). Simply call a pattern up and hit the play button, or trigger it from the pads. You can set the pattern velocity to play in response to your dynamics or at a consistent volume regardless of the strength of your strokes. You can also have the patterns routed to one of eight groups to control muting or layering.

TRIGGER FINGER. My experience with the TD-12 was pretty straight-forward. In all honesty, I set the thing up and started playing with only the most minor physical adjustments. Depending on your individual playing



Looks are everything

style, you might want to tweak the feel and response of the pads to better suit your touch. Roland has always offered a thorough selection of controls to make these adjustments. On the TD-12, you'll find controls for pad type, pad sensitivity, threshold, velocity curve, and crosstalk (both individually and in crosstalk groups).

If the basic commands don't do the

trick, you can enter the Advanced Trigger Parameter mode, where you can adjust the scan time, retrigger cancel, and mask time for each input. You can also individually modify the settings for the rim triggers, cross-stick strokes, and the three-way ride cymbal.

In addition to all the settings for drum pads and rims, the VH-11 hi-hat controller has its own menu screen to regulate offset, foot splash sensitivity, noise cancel, and continuous controller maximum and sensitivity. There is also a physical VH offset adjustment screw on the VH-11's clutch. Getting the hi-hat to respond in a comfortable manner may take a little experimentation, but it doesn't take long, and it certainly pays off in the expressivity department.

VERDICT. Close your eyes and you'll feel like you're playing on Roland's flagship TD-20 – as long as you don't reach for the second floor tom or third crash cymbal. Bottom line: The TD-12S sounds fantastic, plays like a dream, and will save you a fistful of dollars. Go give it a test drumming today.



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Pattern A 3 Band Rainbow

Pattern D 3 Band Swirl



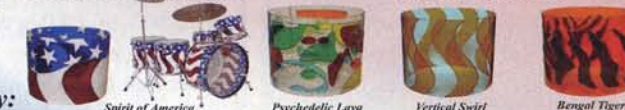
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