

SoundLab Nº.3

Yamaha DTXtreme II by Norman Weinberg

Details, Details

Model: Yamaha DTXtreme II

List Price: \$3,195

Pads: TP120SD, TP100 (x4), PCY130, PCY130S, PCY150S, RHH130, KP65

Hardware: R150 rack, HS740 hi-hat stand, SS652 snare stand

Extras: All necessary cables, 2-meter spiral tube (cable management), drum key

Sounds: 2,171 drum and percussion, 128 General MIDI

Polyphony: 64-voice

Drum Kits: 130 (90 factory, 40 user)

Songs: 133 (101 factory, 32 user)

Chains: 32 (each with 32 steps)

Tempo Range: 30-300

Resolution: 1/96 ppq

Trigger Inputs: 16 (8 stereo, 4 dual-mono)

MIDI: In, Out, Thru

Computer Port: USB

Other Inputs: footswitch, aux in

Audio Outputs: 6 assignable individual outputs, digital output (S/PDIF), headphones

Effects: 4 (2 global 2 insertion)

Sampling Memory: 8MB (94 seconds mono)

Storage: 3.3v SmartMedia Card

More Brain Features: Tap tempo, groove check, 3D localizer effect, MIDI drivers.

More Pad Features: Three-zone snare and toms, three-zone ride, pad controller knobs on snare and toms, output level adjustments on all pads.

Fine-Tuned And Ready to Roll

Since the very early days of MIDI and electronic percussion, Yamaha has produced machines that consistently improve upon the feel, features, and fun factor that electronic drum sets can offer. Their newly-upgraded flagship DTXtreme II isn't a "from the ground up" rebuild, but there are several significant improvements over the previous version.

The II is a six-piece kit with hi-hat and three cymbals. The big news: all the drum and cymbal pads (including the hi-hat) are newly designed. The II brain now features the ability to create samples, and a selection of physically modeled voices from Yamaha's popular Motif product line.

The Pads. The kit's pads include: the TP120SD 12" snare pad with a floating head surface and two distinct rim triggers; four TP100s (a 10" version of the triple-trigger snare pad); and the new KP65 kick. For cymbals: the PCY130 and PCY130S are 13" single and double-trigger pads that are designed as crashes; the PCY150S is a 15" three-zone pad for the ride; and the RHH130 is a 13" stereo hi-hat pad.

The tom and snare pads feel a little softer than previous models, and the built-in pad controller knobs are a great idea. Rather than reaching for the brain to adjust, you can control



Yamaha gets even more Xtreme

certain musical parameters (like snare tension and tom pitch) from this knob in real time.

The two different rim pads can select between three different note-on modes, which include: single (which will cut off a sound assigned to the head, perfect for cross-stick rimshots), hold (used to start or stop loops or any other voice), and withpad mode (fires →



Bird's eye view of the brain's panel



The II's has 12 input jacks

both the rim and head sounds with a single stroke). With different instruments assigned to all three trigger areas, that's a lot of sound at your disposal.

The new round cymbal pads feature a dimpled playing surface that gives them a slick "hand-hammered" look, and include anti-swivel braces that attach to the mounting rods and allow the cymbals to swing in a natural manner. While the PCY130 is mono, the PCY130S has a rim-style trigger so that you can assign another crash (or any other sound) when you strike the edge of the pad. And after you strike, grab the cymbal's edge to get that "choke." The PCY150S has all the aforementioned features with the addition of yet another trigger on the bell.

The kit's most noteworthy advance is that the RHH130 hi-hat pad can sit on top of a normal hi-hat stand. The pedal action feels like your favorite hi-hat pedal because ... well ... it *is* your favorite hi-hat pedal. The HS740 stand is included with the kit, but you can use any other model or brand.

By way of a special clutch/pad/lever system, the pad "knows" if you're playing the surface of the cymbal, closing the hat with your foot, or even playing a splashed note. The pedal can also serve as a MIDI continuous controller, so its position can be programmed to send control change messages routed to aftertouch, pitchbend up or down, or any other continuous controller number. The RHH130's playing surface has a trigger under the edge – even more flexibility. You may have to tweak the "hi-hat offset" values to fine-tune your foot "splash" responses, but all in all, it's a pretty complete solution for an electronic hi-hat.

While first playing the RHH130, I noticed a slight delay from the time I played a foot splash to when I heard the sound. Turns out that the "hi-hat offset" value needed a little adjustment to fix the problem. Also noticeable, whenever I played a splash, I also heard the sound assigned to the foot-closed note. According to Yamaha, the system detects the foot-splash by measuring the time-duration that the pedal

is down. The instant the pad detects the minimum pedal point, the foot-closed voice fires. If the pedal is then released within a certain time, the splash voice fires. This is one of those sticky issues that could either be a problem or a feature depending on how you look at it – foot-closed note, one sound; splash, two sounds at once.

The KP65 kick pad has an additional input so that another single-trigger pad can be connected via a stereo cable. While the bearing surface is large enough to accommodate a double pedal, it's not too bulky. The pad includes both a Velcro strip on the bottom of the pedal and a pair of spurs for stability.

The entire kit was responsive – the kick pad was particularly impressive. The snare and tom pads are fast without being too hard or too soft, and the cymbal pads have slightly less give than the tom pads. My favorite was the ride, which felt very comfortable and responded well to my touch.

There wasn't any crosstalk between the pads' head and rim triggers (even the triple-trigger pads), but some adjustments had to be made to specific pad rejection settings when playing with a very heavy hand. Some vibrations traveled through the rack between the two mounted toms and between the two floor toms. This was fixed with a simple tweak.

Speaking of the rack, the kit's RS150 frame features slightly arched center pipes, uses two center pipes between each vertical pillar for added stability, and the pad and boom cymbal holders are mountable anywhere along the center pipes with newly-designed clamps. It's easily adjustable, plenty solid, and good-looking to boot.

The Brain. The top panel of the II's is nearly identical to the original DTXtreme. The II's brain is organized in a logical manner with each button, knob, and slider within easy reach. Ten faders adjust all of the volume parameters, and above the faders are four buttons that can be used to mute or activate the rhythm, bass, "others," or click tracks during song playback. Editing is achieved primarily by five data entry knobs under the LCD screen. The playback section of the II's contains five transport buttons used to control songs: reset (also used for groove control), rewind, play/stop, forward, and record. It also contains the click/tap tempo button.

The II's also has 12 input jacks that can handle a maximum of 16 trigger inputs (eight inputs designed for stereo pads and four designed to accept two mono pads connected with a Y-cable), a hi-hat controller jack, and a footswitch jack. To connect with the external world, the II's has MIDI In/Out/Thru along with a USB port for connecting the brain directly to your computer. Audio outputs include the main L/R, six individual audio outputs, and a S/PDIF digital output. The back also sports 16 small input attenuation DIP switches used to boost individual trigger signal levels.

Under The Hood. The II's can keep 130 different drum kits in its internal memory at one time, and ships with 90 kits pre-programmed by the factory and 40 user-programmable kits. Up to 99 more user kits can be stored on an external memory card. For you "music-minus-one" fans, the II's comes with 101 factory pre-set songs and room for up to 32 user songs. The included 11 demo songs cover everything from hard rock to salsa to blues to drum 'n' bass.

Want sounds? You get 127 acoustic and 87 electronic kicks; 249 acoustic, 125 electronic, and 105 "other" snares; 267 acoustic and 96 electronic toms; 126 cymbals and 102 hi-hats; 227 percussion sounds; 308 effects; 80 loops; 76 voices; and 34 melodic fragments. Oh yeah, there's also a complete General MIDI sound module thrown in for extra measure. A majority of the new voices fall in the acoustic drum

category. In the simplest terms: the new sounds are great, especially the new kick drum, rimshot, ride, and tom voices. However, some of the sounds, especially from the percussion and effects sound sets, are getting dated.

The DTX has always included a sequencer, and the new IIs is no exception. Two tracks hold data for 16 MIDI channels each. Recordings can be made in replace, overdub, or step-time modes. There are plenty of controls that let you edit and tweak individual events from note numbers, program change messages, control change messages, pitch bend, channel aftertouch, poly key pressure, tempo, and pad song events. If you don't want to create your own songs from scratch, the IIs will read standard MIDI files from the SmartMedia card.

With four completely separate effects sections, the brain has a lot of audio flexibility. There's a reverb and a chorus that are global system effects, as well as two separate insert effects that can be applied to individual voices. Each insert selects from 44 different effect types covering the gamut from basic reverbs to more sophisticated rotary, distortion, auto wah, and amp simulations. In each effect, one pre-determined parameter (such as wet/dry balance or LFO speed) can be controlled in real time using the internal MIDI EG function or an external MIDI controller.

It's cool that the brain can sample, but you shouldn't consider it to be a replacement for a full-featured sampler. The IIs samples the signal coming into the auxiliary input. You have the choice of sampling the left channel, the right channel, or the left and right channels combined together into a mono

signal (that's right, no stereo). If you want to record a sample that has movement within the stereo field, such as a pad or special effect, you're out of luck. There's a way around this problem: create a sample on a computer, copy it over to a SmartMedia card, and then load it into the IIs. The brain will read both .wav and .aiff stereo files and play them back in true stereo.

Editing. There are 17 edit pages to the trigger settings area of the brain. This may seem like a large number of editing options, and it is. However, getting control of a complex instrument like the IIs requires a pretty deep operating system. For those of you who may use the kit for acoustic drum emulation and practice at home, you'll rarely need to go into these settings. But, it's great to know that this level of control is available if you want to experiment.

The unit comes from the factory with six pre-defined "trigger sets." If you purchased the brain with a recommended pad set, one of these settings should work perfectly. If you want to use any other types or brands of pads, there are plenty of options. The trigger functions control the pad type, gain, velocity curve, pad controller, level, velocity, trigger rejection (self rejections and specific rejection), trigger function, key-on mode, note on event, velocity crossfade, trigger copy, MIDI envelope generator, hi-hat controller function, footswitch function, kit common settings, and kit name.

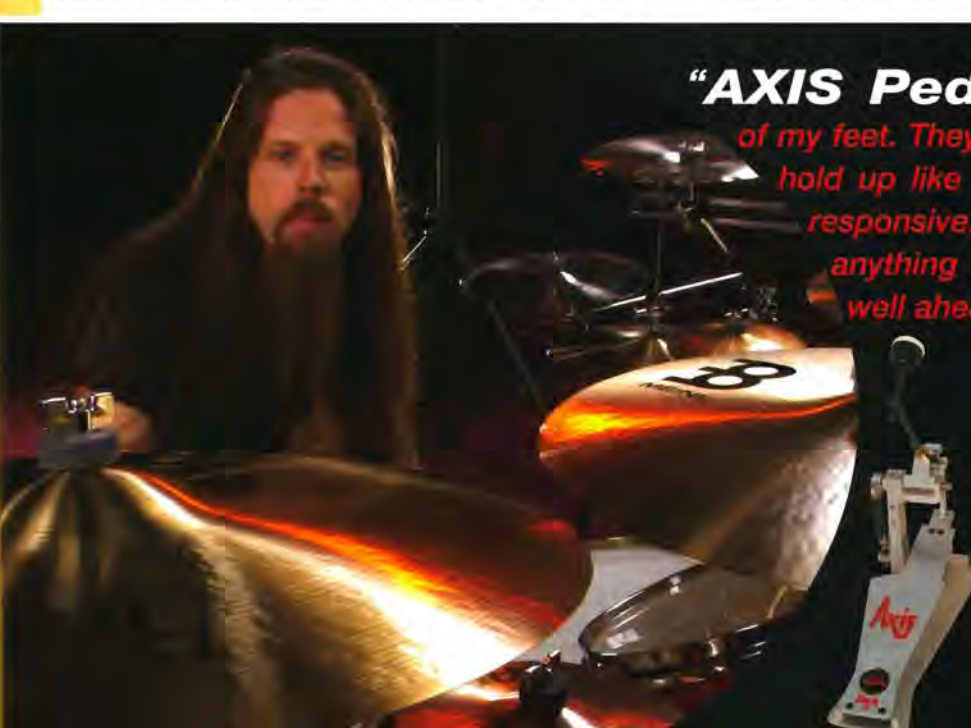
Inputs 1-6 can be assigned to stack up to six notes simultaneously, or alternate between up to nine notes. Each alternate note can have its own MIDI note number, MIDI channel,

and gate time. This is perfect for interfacing with the on-board GM sounds, or external hardware or software sound modules. Each of these modes can be either monophonic (cutting off previous sounds) or multiphonic (allowing all notes to continue sounding). The hi-hat controls let you program unique sounds for the following physical actions: open, closed, foot closed, splash, closed on the rim, open on the rim, and open on the rim 2.

The IIs gives you everything you might need for voice editing. Parameters include: voice, output volume, tuning (over a four-octave range in one-cent increments), pan position, layer balance (when a voice is comprised of two separate layers), low-pass filter, Q, envelope attack, envelope decay, note polyphony, alt group, receive key on and off, output routing, reverb send, and chorus send.

Test Drive. The DTXtreme IIs is a blast to play. After the first hour, you might think, "I can sell my acoustic kit on eBay and buy this." I thoroughly enjoyed playing along with the factory songs and triggering the outstanding sounds. Interacting with the kit got my creative juices going with new groove patterns, soloing ideas, and song concepts.

Sure, there are some things about the IIs that are a little disappointing – no on-board stereo sampling, minimal sample editing features, and double triggers on hi-hat splashes. But there are enough major improvements to make the kit a winner in the bang-for-the-buck department. The new sounds are fresh and hip, the new pads and rack feel just fine, and the whole package is a joy to play. 🎵



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