

The keyboard of choice for modular synth nerds gets a proper sequel after 10 years

If you've ever watched a synth video on YouTube, there's a decent chance you've seen the Arturia KeyStep at some point. The affordable keyboard and controller has been a steady presence since its release in January of 2016, especially in DAWless circles. Now Arturia is finally releasing a proper successor, the KeyStep mk2, and on paper, it seems like a big upgrade.

The core of what makes the KeyStep beloved remains unchanged: 32 solid minikeys with aftertouch, a small footprint, decent connectivity options, and low price. The mk2 features USB-C for power and MIDI, five-pin MIDI in and out ports, analog sync in and out, a sustain / expression pedal input, plus CV and gate outputs for hooking up modular gear.

The headlining updates here are the new generative capabilities, Mutate and Spice, borrowed from the company's Freak line of synths. Mutate makes semi-random changes to an arpeggio or sequence, endlessly iterating on ideas. And if you find something you like, you can save it as a new sequence. With this ability to create happy accidents, transforming arpeggios into sequences and back again, YouTuber Loopop said, "a new benchmark has been set for what a keyboard can do as a compositional assistant."

While Mutate will shift notes around, creating entirely new patterns, Spice is a little more subtle. It changes gate length, velocity, adds ratchets, and at higher settings, will introduce octave jumps. It's focused almost exclusively on

rhythmic variation.

Synth influencer Starsky Carr said there's "loads of fun and loads of inspirational tools" inside the KeyStep mk2. But some reviews have been down on the build quality. While the original had a metal baseplate that made it surprisingly heavy for its size and helped it withstand long-term abuse, the mk2 has an all-plastic build. Will people still be playing their KeyStep mk2s in 10

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