



Arturia MiniLab MkII £89

Arturia's original MiniLab packed a big punch in a small form-factor. Dan 'JD73' Goldman investigates MiniLab Mk2...

CONTACT WHO: Arturia (Source Distribution) WEB: www.arturia.com www.sourcedistribution.co.uk **KEY FEATURES** I/O: 8 velocity/pressure-sensitive pads x 2 banks. Multi-coloured backlights, 16 encoders (2 clickable), 2-octave slim keyboard with velocity, pitchbend/modulation touchstrips, assignable footswitch, bundled with Live Lite, Analog Lab Lite, UVI Grand Piano Model D. USB 2.0 **DIMENSIONS:** 355 x 220 x 50mm, **WEIGHT:** 3.3lbs (1.5kg)

THE PROS & CONS



Compact and well-built with no onboard menu diving

Can be a great little hub for controlling all your software instruments

The amount of content included for the price is very generous and the quality is high



Keyboard is quite tough to play at lower velocities due to overly stiff springs

Has to be tied to your computer or iPad (via camera connection kit)

No DIN MIDI outputs, transport controls, arpeggiator or basic step sequencer



compactness means it's now even easier to transport and it'll fit on train/plane drop-down tables more easily too. There's still some wood present but this time in the form of wooden inserts in each end panel; these add a subtle air of quality to the look of the Mk2, despite the price being a ridiculously cheap £89!

Keeping in mind the compact size, Arturia have crammed in a fair amount control-wise but nothing has radically altered compared to the original (it's all very subtle which is a bit of a missed opportunity). However, there are still eight backlit velocity and aftertouch-sensitive pads with RGB backlighting and tweakable velocity curve (effectively 16 pads when using the bank control button) and these can easily be assigned to any duty you choose (ie drum kits or clip launching in tandem with the included Ableton Live Lite software). The pads feel solid, though they're not quite as sensitive as I'd like, but then you're not going to get Tempest quality pads for this kind of money.

Like the original MiniLab there are also 16 solid-feeling metal shaft equipped grey-capped knobs (Knob 1 and 9 are clickable for switch-type functionality) and these once again

can be assigned to any MIDI duty you like; they're also all handily auto-mapped to the most often-used controls within the included Arturia Analog Lab Lite software (filter cutoff, resonance etc) and they auto-map to the included UVI Grand Piano Model D software and Ableton Live Lite too, which is great as you don't have to map anything manually (though you can change assignments easily enough if you wish). The included MIDI Control Centre software (which works with most Arturia products) allows custom MIDI mapping to be done with ease and you can store a limitless number of templates in the software and recall/store them into the eight user slots in the hardware for your most often-used applications/DAW software or iPad apps. Note that Template 1 is hardwired to Analog Lab Lite, while 8 defaults to Ableton for convenience.

The 25-note keyboard is velocity-sensitive (no aftertouch) and feels high-quality, although for my liking it's way too stiffly sprung and this is especially problematic if you play with a light touch. In fact it takes a surprising amount of effort to get the keys down fully even for my well-trained sausage fingers (though

Today's market is flooded with compact MIDI controllers for producers on the go and you may wonder if we really need another one, but Arturia clearly think we do as they've released a Mk2 version of their MiniLab controller, originally launched in 2013.

First let's examine the hardware. It's typically Arturia in style with their familiar white casing, a new less flowery logo and subtle labelling. The unit feels solid and built to last and

it's made entirely from textured plastic which seems pretty tough. In order to make the unit even more compact and portable (and unlike MiniLab Mk1), Arturia have moved the touchstrips for pitchbend and modulation and the octave switches/pad bank selectors away from the left side of the unit to just above the keyboard and these work fine in their new position. The pitchbend can be set not to reset to zero if you wish, and Arturia have also removed the wooden end cheeks which makes a lot of sense – the resulting extra-

THE ALTERNATIVES



Akai MPK Mini Mk2 £59

The MPK Mini Mk2 has 25 mini keys, eight RGB pads, eight vs 16 knobs, plus a joystick controller and arpeggiator. Plenty of software bundled.

www.akaipro.com



Korg Taktile 25 £116

Korg's Taktile has 25 full-size keys, eight velocity-sensitive pads, a chord/scale function, an X/Y pad, touchstrip, eight sliders, DAW transport controls and includes Reason Limited and Strum Acoustic Session.

www.korg.com



Novation Launchkey Mini Mk2 £87

Launchkey has a 25-note mini keyboard and eight knobs, 16 RGB pads and scenes for capturing custom MIDI set-ups. Live Lite, Bass Station soft synth and Loopmasters samples are also bundled.

www.novationmusic.com



PADS Two banks of eight velocity-sensitive pads are accessed via the 'pad 1-8/9-16' button. Trigger loops, Ableton clips, one-shots or notes.

USB The MiniLab Mk2 carries power and MIDI over its USB 2.0 socket. Connect a USB lead to your DAW and you have a portable travelling set-up.

SUSTAIN SOCKET Use this as a standard sustain pedal/hold socket or you can assign it to control a MIDI CC with separate on and off values.

SOFTWARE Analog Lab Lite features a plethora of virtual instruments and presets. Live Lite and UVI Grand Piano Model D are also included.

choosing the exponential velocity curve improved sensitivity a little). Expect a finger workout and be aware that the keyboard is more suited to simple triggering than proper playing.

Finally, in terms of connectivity, there's USB 2.0 (mounted round the back rather than at the side as on the Mk1) plus a sustain pedal socket which is also assignable to MIDI CC duties in the MIDI Control Centre. Bluetooth MIDI and battery power would have been great this time around, plus a basic step sequencer,

arpeggiator and dedicated transport controls would have improved the hardware greatly; but for £89, the hardware does a respectable job and there's just enough onboard for most real-world studio situations. However, as there's no screen and no DIN MIDI output connectors, you are obviously tied to the computer/iPad at all times (including power).

To sum up, there are downsides but at this price, even if there were no included software instruments, the MiniLab Mk2 would still seem like a

bargain. The hardware and software work reliably and it's solidly built and portable. When you consider you have Ableton Live Lite, UVI Grand Piano Model D and Analog Lab Lite thrown in too at no extra cost (and with a very cheap upgrade route to the full version of Analog Lab), if you're in the market for a compact, well-built, portable controller to use with your DAW, iPad/iPhone or other music making applications, make sure you check out this little beastie. Most importantly, you can easily produce fully-finished tracks with just this controller, a computer and the bundled software. The MiniLab Mk2's no-nonsense, 'what you see is what you get', zero menu-diving ethos helps you focus on just making music. A good thing methinks! **FM**

SETTING UP AND INCLUDED CONTENT

To set up the MiniLab Mk2 for Mac/Windows, go to the Arturia website, set up a user account, enter your serial number and unlock the content. The only thing I found tricky was installing UVI Grand Piano Model D as the link to the software itself and sound banks were initially hard to find, plus it requires iLok authorisation.

The quality of the included content is high. There's Ableton Live Lite; then Arturia's own Analog Lab Lite includes slimmed-down (but upgradable) versions of Arturia's SEM, Wurli, Rhodes, B3, Modular, MiniMoog, Jupiter, Prophet and acoustic piano software instruments. The UVI piano sounds good (£79 on its own), though there are no drum instruments included.

FM VERDICT

7.5

It's only a subtle step on from the Mk1 hardware but it's a solid little controller and worth the price for the included content alone.