

Roland A-30

MIDI Keyboard Controller

Photo: James Company

Text by
Chris Jenkins

Big on octaves, heavy on keys, the new A-30 from Roland makes light work of accessing all those Sound Canvas voices...

After a few years out in the MIDI wilderness, master keyboards have now become an essential part of the well-equipped studio. In terms of economy, space-saving or efficiency, it no longer makes sense to have a Wakemanesque stack of boards when one well-specified instrument could handle your entire MIDI setup. But Roland's latest effort along these lines, the A-30, has another task too – to sell us the concept of their GS format.

If you have encountered GS through the Roland Jv30 or SC55 Sound Canvas, you'll no doubt be familiar with the basic concept. While MIDI makes instruments from different manufacturers compatible, GS makes them interchangeable. The sound types, drum sets and architecture of GS instruments follow strict guidelines, so that, given a sequence or drum pattern in GS format, you can depend on an appropriate set of voices being available on your GS sound source.

So far, GS has been aimed largely at the amateur market; this may change with the advent of the A-30. A spectacular 6½ octave (76 key B-D) instrument, the A-30 is nonetheless light in weight (around 8kg), so it's ideal for stage or studio. The case is dark grey, with a pleasingly rounded design. The

keyboard itself is safely recessed into the case, the front edge of which provides some support for the wrists. It's also weighted, and transmits note-on velocity and channel aftertouch. Though the plastic keys are still a little clicky, it's certainly a step up in quality from the average budget synth keyboard; I can't see anyone finding it unpleasant to use.

Power can be supplied by six 1.5V batteries, or the external 9V power supply. There's an on/off switch on the back, but (sadly) no cable retainer next to the power socket. The rear panel also plays host to MIDI In, Out and Thru sockets, and a 1/4-inch jack socket for a sustain pedal.

On the left-hand side of the keyboard is the familiar expression lever combining pitch-bender and modulation – similar to the design of the DS – and above the main panel you'll find sockets for a music stand. You remember music?

The interesting bits, of course, are on the main panel, where there's a single data entry slider and two rows of patch/program buttons, all of which have a reassuringly positive click.

The A-30 operates in two basic modes: Patch and Free Panel. In Patch mode, you can select any of the 32 programmable memories, using the 16 numeric buttons and the shift key. In Free Panel mode, the numeric and function buttons are used to access and edit control parameters. The 16 numeric buttons select the 16 GS sound groups, which are helpfully labelled on the keyboard – Piano, Percussion, Organ, Guitar and so on. Two more buttons, CC00 and CC32, are used to select variant sounds within GS sound groups.

Experimenting with the default settings in the 32 patch

Roland A30 A 30 Complete Service Manual

RJ Alexander



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