



Arturia MatrixBrute

£1,879

After several intriguing teaser videos, Arturia's beastly-looking MatrixBrute is shipping! **Dan 'JD73' Goldman** enters the Matrix...

CONTACT WHO: Arturia (Source Distribution) TEL: 020 8962 5080 WEB: www.arturia.com / www.sourcedistribution.co.uk **KEY FEATURES**
Analogue engine featuring 3 VCOs, 2 LFOs, (VCO 3 with LFO option) mixable waveshapes, 5 input mixer, 4-octave keyboard, velocity and aftertouch, 16 x 16 matrix for preset selection, modulation routing and sequence/arp, 5 effects, 12 CV ins/outs, gate/sync, audio in/envelope follower, ladder and Steiner filters



THE PROS & CONS



Built like a tank, no menu diving, has extensive MIDI and CV/gate features, and a great external analogue processor

Sounds like nothing else out there currently; can deliver smooth, warm, edgy nasty – you name it!

An inspired design making sequencing, mod-routing, patch selection a breeze



The E-Ink screen is basic and only displays the four assignable matrix mod routes

There's no click for the sequencer

Only a handful of the controls display their values onscreen

Known first for their software recreations of vintage classics, Arturia went on to launch the compact MiniBrute in 2012 and the MicroBrute in 2014, which featured all-analogue signal paths, a Steiner-Parker filter and the 'Brute Factor' control which feeds the synth back into itself, creating anything from subtle to insane distortion/thickening and harmonic driving/feedback. Of course, us synth heads are hard to satisfy and

we always want bigger and better. Low and behold, Arturia have now seemingly answered our prayers, delivering the beastly-looking MatrixBrute. Funnily enough, the MicroBrute (with its basic semi-modular patch panel) was a clue to the future and consequently, the MatrixBrute features a flexible and futuristic 16 x 16 matrix.

The hardware design/quality is really impressive and the MB (as I'll call it from now on) is an imposing and unique looking machine, designed by industrial design guru

Axel Hartmann (he's responsible for the Andromeda, Voyager XL, Little Phatty, Waldorf Wave, Pulse 2 and many more). You can really see the Minimoog/Voyager heritage with its similar profile in solid walnut, lovely '70s-styled Tolex sides and a huge flip-up steel control panel with aluminium sides and sturdy metal chassis with zero flex. There's a Voyager-style flip-up panel support with a huge Arturia logo for holding up the weighty panel but the MB can also be used flat and a metal clip holds everything in place when

transporting (it weighs 19kg/44lbs so it's just about portable!).

Everything oozes class, from the inset front panel Arturia logo to the tactile MIDI controllable knobs (which feel particularly solid) and switches with slick horizontal white lights to denote status. Unlike the plastic-wheeled prototypes, the production model features two aluminium wheels on the left-hand controller panel (and rejoice – a front mounted headphone socket!). Finally, I have to sing the praises of 4-octave velocity and aftertouch enabled semi-weighted

THE ALTERNATIVES

**DSI Pro 2**

£1,399

The MatrixBrute's closest competitor uses digital waves routed through dual analogue filters with digital character effects, a powerful sequencer, mod matrix with 50 sources and 140 destinations, 4-voice paraphonic capability and more!

www.davesmithinstruments.com

**Roland JD-XA**

£1,499

The JD-XA features a four-part analogue synth and four-part SuperNatural digital synth with powerful sequencer/arpeggiator, effects, lots of hands-on control and a great vocoder.

www.roland.com

**Moog Sub 37 Tribute Edition**

£1,264

Sounds great and has plenty of features onboard including two VCOs, a sub oscillator, 2-note paraphony, an arpeggiator and a 64-step sequencer.

www.moogmusic.com

keybed. It has a high-quality feel with a positive action that beds out softly, yet can be played fast – the aftertouch response is also spot on.

Perhaps the most mysterious feature is the 'E-Ink' screen which remains 'on' even when the MB is powered down. It resembles paper with typewriter lettering but it's used only as a reference for the four user-assignable slots in the matrix. The caveat is, while it looks great under optimum lighting conditions, it can't be viewed in the dark (there's no backlight). A backlit LCD (with a utility menu) would have been viewable in the dark and likely negated the need for any external MIDI configuring software, (though the included MIDI Control/librarian software is very slick). Regardless, the basic screen choice fits with the zero menu-diving-ethos and works fine for occasional reference. 'Hands-on' and 'zero menu diving' are essentials for creativity and inspiration – two things the MB has in bucketloads!

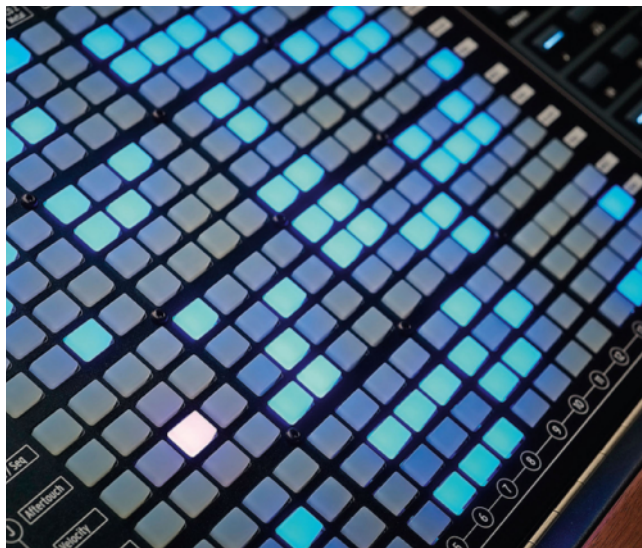
Now onto the sound engine. This is not just a MiniBrute on steroids but rather an 'inspired by' re-design from the ground up to facilitate digitising of the analogue control CVs so that the panel settings can be saved into the 256 preset slots and be MIDI controlled. The core sound production is achieved via three super-versatile (and stable) VCOs which echo the MiniBrute's but with further additions and improvements – these take a short time to warm up from cold and there's a very quick autotune routine if needed (Panel + Keytrack). VCO1 and 2 both feature a variable shape sine sub oscillator plus sawtooth,

square and triangle waves. VCO3 is a linear multi-function oscillator with four waveshapes but can be used as a mod source too (LFO). There's also a versatile noise oscillator featuring four types of noise (including white, pink, red and blue). All waves on all VCOs sound very solid, organic and earthy, yet well-defined and edgy, and can be added into the mix individually or simultaneously (with osc sync) for a very wide range of tones and textures; these are then fed into the five-input mixer (alongside noise and external input levels) where you can push the levels further for more grit and dirt – this is before we even add any

It's so versatile you could spend years with it and not exhaust the possibilities

ENTER THE MATRIX

The Matrix features three modes. Preset lets you use the 256 buttons as patch select buttons for the 256 writable preset slots (and 256 writable sequencer slots/patterns which can be linked/unlinked to/from patches) and Mod mode lets you set modulation routings – simply pick from the 16 sources on the left and select a destination at the top (set up to 16 destinations per source!). It's all very easy to use and you can work methodically thinking out your modulations carefully, or drag your hand across the buttons/turn the dial and see what happens! There are also four user modulation slots that can be set by holding any user mod-slot button and moving a front panel control to assign.



Seq mode turns the Matrix into a 64-step sequencer (add steps manually or record on the fly). You can then add accents, glides and modulation per-step. It's an absolute ball using key trigger to start and transpose sequences (and a great compositional tool too), plus the sequencer sends/receives CV/Gate and MIDI. Sequencer modes include swing, variable gate, forwards, backwards, forwards/backwards and random.

onboard drive or 'Brute' factor. I love the fact you can add character/drive at so many points in the signal path!

The MB has also retained the other Brute's versatile waveshaping for each of the waves, so Ultrasaw for the sawtooth, PWM for the square and Metalizer for the triangle, all of which can of course be modulated via the matrix. There's a lot of power available when combining the waves/waveshaping together and then modulating things and it's an absolute pleasure to get lost in the possibilities. Some folks have been worried that the MB can only do more edgy sounds but rest assured it can do smooth, warm and woody too; just be sure not to add any drive or Brute Factor (though driving the mixer levels adds some lovely thickening/saturation without getting too gritty).

Getting back to the mixer, the design is very flexible and you can add more character by pushing the oscillator levels. You can level volumes then route all three VCOs (plus noise and external sources) through the Steiner or ladder filter (or both together) in series or parallel (for wildly different sonics) by simply hitting each oscillator's Filter button. Filter 1 is a diode-base Steiner filter which has LP/HP/BP and notch modes and 2/4-pole slopes; it has a more edgy/less linear/wilder sound compared to Filter 2 and has a more vocal-like/human quality. In 24dB Steiner mode, the MB reminds me a lot of my Korg MS-20 (but fatter!) and has a similar throaty distortion/overdrive when pushed.

Filter 2 is a modified Moog-style ladder filter that retains low-end at high resonance settings. It also has LP/HP/BP modes and 2/4-pole slopes but to my ears (and when comparing to my Moog Source and Voyager) it's definitely rawer and more textured. It has some Moogy character but it's its own thing (an asset, not a downside). I also love the big bi-polar global filter cutoff dial so you can sweep both filters simultaneously relative to their individual cutoff settings, plus each filter has a drive control for thickening or gently saturating the sound and the infamous Brute control for bolstering or destroying. As you can see, there's a lot of versatility here and what seems like an almost infinite palette of combinations/colours/sweet-spots (and that's without using any modulation)! Despite all this awesome power, the MB remains



ARPEGGIATOR No modern day synth is complete without an arpeggiator! The MatrixBrute's has four modes: up, down, up/down and random and you can add as many steps as you like via the keyboard. It sends/receives MIDI and CV/Gate too.

EXTERNAL INPUT Plug in any external sound source and process it through the signal path/FX. There's also an envelope/gate follower that triggers the envelopes/filters in time with your playing. Try plugging in a guitar/drum machine for endless fun!

INTERFACING There are 12 CV inputs and outputs for interfacing with other CV equipped gear which is nicely comprehensive. There's also Gate in/out and Sync in/out, MIDI In/Out/Thru, two expression pedal inputs and a sustain pedal input.

ANALOGUE EFFECTS The effects are all analogue and beautifully enhance (or destroy) the MatrixBrute's sounds. The effects can be matrix-modulated, sync'd to the sequencer/int/ext clock and you can control parameters in real time or over MIDI.

surprisingly intuitive, (though it would be nice if the display showed the value of every pot when turned and displayed a dot to show the stored value like the Prophet-6).

There's also a lot on offer performance control-wise besides the matrix. Legato, Glide, Legato-Glide, Mono, Duo/Split and 3-note Paraphonic modes are also available. Yes – you can play standard leads but also 3-note chords with envelope articulation (and the MB sounds great in this mode). Plus in Duo/Split mode you can run the arpeggiator to the left of the user-definable split-point and a lead to the right. Add in the four Macro knobs that can be assigned to multiple destinations simultaneously in the matrix and you get the picture – uber flexible!

Talking of modulation, the MB is a powerhouse! For more 'out there' sounds, VCO1 can be modulated by VCO2, VCO3 can modulate 1 or 2, VCO3 can modulate VCF1 or 2 and

noise can modulate VCO1 or VCF1 (all bi-polar too); there are also three envelopes (they're snappy enough, although not as punchy as a Minimoog/Voyager). Env1 goes to the filter(s), 2 to the VCA and 3 is freely assignable via the matrix. The aforementioned three LFOs go nicely fast into audio range/overdrive and are all MIDI-syncable too. Once you've designed your sound and basic modulation, hop over to the brilliantly designed matrix (see left) to go in deep with mod routings, then design a simple or complex sequence and/or arpeggiation and send the info out over MIDI or CV/Gate. To top things off, you have five unique modulatable bucket-brigade delay-based analogue effects which sound wonderful blended with the VCOs (mono/stereo delays, chorus, flanger and reverb).

If there's any synth that deserves the title of most well-featured analogue monosynth then this is it! It's rock-solid, capable of a genuinely

mind-blowing array of sounds and it's so versatile you could spend years with it and not exhaust the possibilities. At an RRP of £1,879 (£1,659 street currently) it's a significant outlay but still seems like a bargain considering the features and its competition. Arturia have really made something special here. Future classic? Absolutely! **FM**

FM VERDICT

9.6

It oozes personality and can go from a warm/twisted monosynth to dirty/ambient chord machine and powerful sequencer – mind blown!