



FutureMusic



Erica Synths Bassline DB-01 €460

As **Si Truss** discovers, Erica's new Bassline is more than just another 303-alike...

CONTACT WHO: Erica Synths **WEB:** ericasynths.lv **KEY FEATURES** Analogue monosynth with Polivoks-inspired filter, analogue drive and BBD detune effect. 64-step sequencer with arp, modulation track, slides, accents and per-step pitch envelope.



Latvian brand Erica Synths have proved quite prolific in recent years, delivering modules, systems and standalone hardware at a pace that's tough to keep up with at times. What's impressive though, is that despite the volume, the quality has remained high. What Erica do especially well is analogue grit – from their Polivoks-inspired filters to their tube-equipped Fusion modules and last year's impressive

Ninja Tune collab Zen Delay, Erica are responsible for some of our favourite go-to tools for raw, edgy sounds. Naturally, the idea of a standalone Erica-branded bass synth has got us rather hot under the collar.

At first glance, you'd be forgiven for thinking the Bassline DB-01 was another 303 clone. It does certainly bear many of the hallmarks of its near-namesake; the single oscillator, resonant filter and simplistic envelope controls are pure acid-machine. But beyond this

THE PROS & CONS

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Meaty, punchy sound with lots of grit!

Surprisingly deep sequencer

Built-in pattern memory

-

Master volume is hidden amongst settings menus

We would have loved an audio in

effect of multiple detuned VCOs by using a pair of BBD lines as frequency shifters. The effect is pretty convincing, adding a nice thickness to sounds that I particularly like when using the DB-01 as a drone machine (more on this later).

The oscillator has a frequency modulation control too, which dials in modulation from the LFO. The LFO itself has a broad frequency range and a selection of five waveshapes, meaning the effect can range from subtle pitch drift through vibrato and into audio-rate pitch modulation.

The DB-01's filter, meanwhile, is the same Polivoks-inspired VCF found in Erica's excellent Acidbox effect units. It's switchable between two modes, 12db low-pass and 6db band-pass, with a resonance control capable of going into self-oscillation. It's gritty and can sound nicely aggressive – with a resonant LPF rolled down low over a sub bass sound, the DB-01 can create some serious low-end weight.

Modulation

Modulation of the amp and filter is provided by a pair of simple envelope generators. The amp envelope is sustain-release design with just a single control for adjusting the decay time of the release stage. Turn it fully open and the release becomes infinite, letting the DB-01 act as a drone synth, which it's surprisingly adept at, particularly once you throw in some slow modulation from the LFO and BBD detune effect. The filter envelope, meanwhile, is just a decay stage, with attack and sustain fixed at zero. Limited though they may be – and there were times, when using the DB-01, that I did miss having some direct control over the attack stage of the sound – these simple, punchy envelopes certainly suit the DB-01's USP. This is a great source of percussive, hard-hitting bass and lead sounds designed to cut through a mix and add maximum impact. The LFO can also be used to modulate the filter cutoff, and being syncable to the sequencer tempo offers an interesting tool to offset those punchy envelopes.

The final element to the sound engine is an analogue drive circuit, with a chunky front panel rotary

there's a lot of unique stuff going on that makes the DB-01 very much its own instrument.

Oscillators/filters

On the oscillator front, the DB-01's single VCO is switchable between square, saw and triangle waveshapes. This comes paired with a sub oscillator, fixed at tracking one octave below, and a noise generator, both of which have their own level controls. The oscillator section also has a Detune control that emulates the unison

THE ALTERNATIVES



Behringer TD-3

£129

For a more straightforward analogue 303 emulation, it's pretty tough to beat Behringer's wallet-friendly version.

behringer.com



Korg Monologue

£229

A simpler mono synth than the DB-01, Korg's Monologue also packs a sequencer with microtonal capabilities.

korg.com



Moog DFAM

£539

Like the DB-01, the DFAM features percussive envelopes and some handy tools for creating both percussive and bass sounds.

moogmusic.com

acting as a dry/wet control, blending the driven output with the clean signal. As you'd expect from Erica Synths, it's a nicely gritty effect and, when coupled with the already aggressive filter resonance, can result in some brilliantly rough-edged sounds.

Sequencer

The sound engine itself is only one half of the whole story here though, as much of the DB-01's distinctive character comes from its sequencer. Programming is handled via the 16 buttons along the unit's lower edge, with a pair of bar selection buttons allowing 16-step patterns to be easily copied across 32, 48 or 64-steps. Notes can be recorded live, making use of the sequencer as a keyboard or input step-by-step, using the two central selection rotaries to adjust pitch and gate length. The sequencer can do a bit more than just note-sequencing though, with individual

channels for programming slides, accents, pitch envelope sweeps and filter modulation.

Accents and slides work as you would expect them to, offering up nice tools to add a little emphasis and movement to spice up simple bass patterns. Pitch envelope sequencing is possibly the most interesting sequencer feature. Using the two central rotaries to adjust the level and length of a pitch sweep for each step, which is a really handy tool for programming

percussive sounds [see *More Than Bass*, below].

The modulation track lets users program CV changes to the cutoff position for each step. Like with sequencing notes, this can either be input step-by-step or recorded live by hitting record and tweaking the cutoff knob. Any sequenced modulation works in conjunction with the other modulation inputs and in relation to the current position of the cutoff rotary, meaning it's possible to, for

The marriage of analogue oscillators, Polivoks filter and gritty detune and drive make this an absolute beast

MORE THAN BASS

While it might clearly say Bassline along the top of the synth, there's more to Erica's latest instrument than just bass. Much like Moog's Mother instruments, there are handy tools here for sequencing percussive parts as well as bass sounds. As well as the punchy envelope generators, the really handy tool here is the sequencer's pitch envelope track. This allows users to program and fine-tune pitch sweeps on specific sequence steps, which is great for creating patterns that alternate between punchy kick drum sounds and more traditional bass notes. Throw in some white noise and



modulation of the filter cutoff, and the DB-01 can do a decent line in electro-style snares and hi-hats too.

The DB-01 is a lot of fun to use as a drone machine too. Fully opening up the amp decay creates an endless sustained note, and engaging detune, plus LFO modulation of the cutoff and pitch is a great tool for experimental tones.

example, program a modulated cutoff pattern, while also slowly modulating the overall cutoff level with the LFO, or manually. An overall modulation depth rotary affects the cutoff modulation coming from all sources.

The sequencer also features an arpeggiator, with options to adjust the pattern, range gate length and direction of arpeggios. What's particularly cool about it is the ability to program arpeggios within a sequence, ie engage the arpeggiator for a few steps on top of a pre-programmed pattern. This is a really nice little tool for adding complexity to riffs and basslines. It also has a secondary Step Roll feature whereby users can repeat selected steps within a sequences as the pattern plays back, which is a nice little performance tool.

The DB-01 has a selection of scales onboard, allowing users to create patterns around one of eight preset scale types. There are also 16 user scale slots for defining your own scales, which can be programmed with microtonal scales removed from the usual chromatic scale. A transpose function allows users to change the root pitch of sequences on the fly too.

Randomisation

The final tool in the sequencing arsenal is a well-equipped randomisation tool. This allows users to randomise elements of their pattern based around set conditions – ie, just note, just modulation – and, in some cases within a preset range. It's another string to the DB-01's bow that makes it a deceptively deep and flexible creative tool.

Hardware-wise, along with its primary ¼ inch audio output, the DB-01 has multiple CV ins and outs. There are inputs for pitch, gate, modulation and clock, as well as outputs from the clock and sequencer pitch/gate. There are also standard MIDI in and out ports rounding things off.

Overall, the Bassline DB-01 is an excellent little bass machine that more than lives up to our expectations. Sound engine-wise, the marriage of analogue oscillators, Polivoks filter and gritty detune and drive make this an absolute beast when it comes to full, gritty bass and lead sounds. If we're being



DRIVE: Blends the raw signal with the overdriven one, great for adding extra harmonic weight.

FM LVL: Driven by the LFO, this can do everything from subtle pitch drift to audio-rate pitch modulation.

SEQUENCER: The 16-step sequencer can program accents, slides, cutoff modulation and pitch envelopes.

FILTER: Like the filter in Erica's Acidbox, this is Polivoks-inspired with both low-pass and band-pass modes.

picky there are a few minor gripes: for one thing, the master volume is hidden in the settings menu, which is a bit fiddly, particularly since the drive and resonance can make levels ramp up pretty quickly. I would have liked to be able to set different sequence lengths for the note and modulation tracks too, to achieve polyphonic filter movement. As it stands, the Last Step tool lets users change sequence lengths on the fly, but the modulation and note track lengths are always linked. Finally, it's a bit of a shame there's

no audio input included too, since it would really add to the instrument's appeal if you could run external sounds through that excellent filter and drive circuit.

These are pretty minor complaints and feature requests though, none of which detract from the fact that this is one of the best specialist bass synths going. It doesn't come cheap, relatively speaking, but the deceptively deep sequencer and top-notch sound should more than justify the purchase for you. **FM**

FM VERDICT

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A powerful sequencer and plenty of unique features make this much more than just another Bassline-clone