



ROLAND E-A7 Expandable Arranger

BY JERRY KOVARSKY

IT'S ALWAYS COOL BEING THE FIRST KID ON THE BLOCK TO HAVE A NEW TOY, and this month we were lucky to get our hands on one of the first E-A7's to land in the U.S. Billed as an Expandable Arranger, the unit falls into the low-mid price range, yet it offers a wealth of features.

Overview

The E-A7 is compact and lightweight, with powerful-sounding speakers. Its 61 velocity-sensitive keys are noticeably shorter than my other keyboards: The white keys measure 5.25" in length compared to 5.5" to 5.87" for the others. The key width is roughly the same and I felt comfortable playing them, but I certainly noticed the difference. However, I had no trouble playing towards the back of the keys, a common problem on low-end units. Overall the keys feel solid, with no wiggle to be found.

The front panel is logically laid out with sounds on the right, mixing in the center, and accompaniment to the left. In a unique design twist, the E-A7 offers two displays, one dedicated to sounds, the other to the accompaniment. This design, which was handed down from their flagship BK-9, has many benefits, though the displays are small. Moreover, the top panel is less deep than other products in this price range, so the E-A7 uses mostly small rubber switches that are tightly arranged. Given its small size and onboard speakers, I wish it could also run on batteries.

Sounds and Styles

The E-A7 boasts over 1,500 sounds, and they are a compilation of Roland classics. Every sound category is deep in choices, easily selected using a labeled nu-

meric keypad. Ten sounds are selectable using soft keys to the sides of the display, with multiple pages available. Fifty Favorites can be stored for easy recall.

The sounds are typically Roland—bright, and very playable. There is good use of velocity switching to introduce variation to acoustic sounds, but no advanced "articulation" technology like you find in the competing Korg and Yamaha models. But there is plenty to like in every category.

The 600 Styles are well-programmed and cover plenty of genres. And all the right tools are available—four Intros, Variations, and Endings; a Break; Sync Start and End; and Fade-In/Out. Six sliders in the center of the unit provide quick mixing control. Styles also remember four One Touch settings for the right-hand parts (1, 2, 3, and Lower).

Styles can be configured with Intro and Variation status as well as other settings as a User Program to create a library of ready-to-play songs (there are 50 available). A grouping of twelve front-panel "keys" can be used as Phrase Pads or for scale tuning. You can create your own Styles, and a function called Makeup Tools provides easy tweaking (via parameter offsets) of Styles and SMF songs.

Final Thoughts

Expandable? The E-A7 can sample, load WAV files,

Snap Judgment



PROS Lots of great Sounds and Styles. Dual-display design. Compact and portable.



CONS Small displays. Small buttons. No battery power.

Bottom Line

A fine affordable arranger, with more sounds and style content than its competitors. Its compact size affects display size, panel layout, and even key length. That may (or may not) be just what you're looking for.

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and create multisamples to make new sounds, though it doesn't read sampler formats. However, it can record your playing as a WAV file. All of these are welcome features.

Overall, the E-A7 is a fine arranger that delivers a lot of content for a reasonable price, in the most compact, yet playable footprint available. 🎵