



IK Multimedia iRig Keys 2

€159



The sequel to the world's first genuinely iOS-friendly mini keyboard takes things up a notch in terms of both MIDI and audio

> Way back in February 2013 (**cm187**), we scored IK Multimedia's iRig Keys mini keyboard 9/10 in our review, citing its unique-at-the-time combination of onboard iOS connectivity and regular USB for Mac/PC, and decent playability, as worthy selling points. The £60 asking price was very reasonable, too.

In 2019, the market is awash with options for the mobile producer in need of a backpack-friendly 'board, so IK have rebooted their take on the concept with the iRig Keys 2. This three-octave mini keyboard improves on the original in pretty much every department – as it should, given that the price has almost doubled, too. There's also a bigger version with full-size keys – the iRig Keys 2 Pro (€183) – but we're only looking at the regular iRig Keys 2 here.

Small but mighty

The iRig Keys 2 feels more sturdy and is easier on the eye than its predecessor, and although it's significantly larger in all three dimensions – at 518x139x54mm versus 503x120x40mm – it's still eminently portable.

A cut-out in the back panel houses five physical connections. The micro-USB port outputs data and/or draws power from a connected computer, USB charger or USB battery pack. Lightning- and USB-A-to-micro-USB cables are included, and the computer-free powering options enable the iRig Keys 2 to be

juiced for use with hardware synths, drum machines, etc. Catering to that particular scenario are two MIDI ports on 2.5mm jack sockets, into either of which the single included adapter cable can be plugged for conversion to a 5-pin DIN MIDI port. The unit appears as a class-compliant MIDI interface (no driver installation required) in any host DAW, but if you want to take full advantage of it as such – ie, using the input and the output at the same time – you'll need to splash out another tenner or so on a second adapter.

The remaining two holes comprise a 1/4" pedal input and 1/8" headphone socket that can also feed a powered monitoring setup. Yes, the iRig Keys 2 is also a class-compliant stereo-out audio interface, which owners of iOS and Android devices lacking in headphone jacks will certainly appreciate. Countering that somewhat, though, is the inability to power/charge said phone or tablet while the iRig Keys 2 is connected. Once again, the lack of dedicated power supply socket with pass-through via the micro-USB port is disappointing.

The 37 velocity-sensitive mini-keys are quite firmly sprung in terms of resistance, and exhibit no lateral travel whatsoever, giving them a solid, consistent feel. As before, you're not going to be giving any solo recitals with it, but for on-the-go production duties, they're perfectly adequate – as are the equally robust and solidly seated

pitch and mod wheels.

The final – and, arguably, most important – functional upgrade is the addition of a bank of control knobs. See *With knobs on* for the lowdown on these.

'Rig society

As you'd hope, given the inflated pricetag, the iRig Keys 2 is a serious step up from version 1. It's wonderfully compact, it plays as well as can be expected, and the new knobs are very useful. A great option for the roving muso, then, albeit a comparatively expensive one. **cm**

Web ikmultimedia.com

Alternatively

Native Instruments M32
cm270 » 10/10 » £99

If you're invested in NI's Komplete ecosystem, this could be the mini keyboard for you.

Korg microKEY 2, 37-key
NA » NA » £69

Doesn't have anywhere near the functionality, but costs almost half as much.

Verdict

For Compact and solidly built
Keys feel good and play well
Pitch and mod wheels
Four knobs and an encoder for MIDI CCs
MIDI I/O and audio output

Against Only one MIDI adapter cable
No phone/tablet charging pass-through
Quite pricey

With its premium build quality, audio and MIDI I/O, and assignable knobs, the iRig Keys is a fine portable controller keyboard

8/10

With knobs on

While the integration of an audio output brings a new (and necessary, with iOS and Android devices increasingly audio jack-free) angle to iRig Keys, for many, the four freely assignable knobs (v1 had just the one) and assignable rotary push encoder will hold greater appeal. And actually, it's effectively eight knobs, as the '5-8' button switches them between two banks of four MIDI CCs.

The iRig Keys 2 has no software editor, so assigning MIDI CCs to the five controls – as

well as changing MIDI channel, velocity sensitivity and more – is done directly on the unit itself, old-school style. Holding down the two Octave buttons enters Edit mode, in which the MIDI keys are used for parameter selection and data entry.

The other controls on the top panel comprise headphone Volume, Octave Up and Down, Program Change Up and Down, and a button for saving and stepping through four complete setup states.