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## Five-Finger Exercises

Musicians pass judgement on some of the new keyboards on the market

### Korg klass: real value for money

REVIEW: Korg Poly Synth Ensemble 1000 (Price: £867) by Morgan Fisher

**T**HE FIRST thing that strikes you about the Korg Ensemble 1000 is that it's built into a tight fitting case with a very classy red felt lining. As it is this almost doubles as a flight case and all you'd really need to give complete protection would be to buy a fabric cover to keep the surface of the casing tidy. The whole look of the machine is very professional and very functional.

Details are very important and I noticed that they'd included things like long leads on the three pedals which come with it. All very impressive.

Talking in general terms I like the ideas behind this instrument. For example, they've given you the choice of adding imperfections to the sound which stops it from becoming too clinical and perfect, a common failing with string synthesizers. The charm of any acoustic instrument is that it's never perfectly in tune, that applies on a larger scale to an orchestra of course, and with this Korg you have the chance to de-tune it.

This extends so far that you can get a really good honky tonk piano sound from it if you want or, at the other extreme, just have it very slightly de-tuned to add a more convincing sound to a string part.

There are a lot of details about this instrument like that which show that either a musician or someone with a musical mind have been involved at the design stage.

As to whether or not it's polyphonic, well, it does depend on how you choose to define the word. In one sense it means that every note should have its own quality which, of course, the Korg doesn't offer, but if you take it to mean that every note can be played with every other — ie making it capable of playing chords — then this is polyphonic.

The Ensemble has seven pre-sets which offer strings, reed/wind, brass and four different percussion pre-sets. They actually give very impressive sounds but it's a mistake to assume that a synthesiser should actually sound the same as the instrument it's supposed to sound like. If you take the string effect, for example, it's not really like a string sound but if you put it through a good PA and use it in a big hall then you'd get pretty close. It's on strings that one of the three pedals really comes into its own — the traveller which gives a very impressive sounding fade-in and fade-out to chords.

One of the most important things about getting a good string sound is that you should always remember that string parts are commonly written for violin, violas, cellos and basses. To get a good sound then you should always try to spread your voices

out to give it a more realistic feel. The reed/wind voices are very much like an organ and could be used very effectively.

The four different percussion pre-sets are also very good. There's percussion electric which has a sort of clavinet sound, percussion middle which is like a piano (not bad) percussion alto, which is a good harpsichord effect, and percussion treble, which is noted in the book as being like a clavichord and does, in fact, have that plucked sound to it.

Apart from these pre-sets, there is also a control switch which cuts out the pre-sets and brings into play a wide range of variable controls.

You have four basic different wave shapes which actually sound pretty similar until you start to add the other effects which give a lot of subtlety. You also have attack and delay controls and a very good amount of sustain, which allows the notes to carry on after you've taken your fingers off the keys. That's a long sustain and is one of the best features of the Ensemble. This doubles with one of the pedals which also works as a sustain and is particularly useful because it leaves both hands free to play.

The other pedal is a glide unit which allows you to use a pitch bending control which you pre-set to give the amount of note bending that you want. It has a range of about a fifth either up or down. This is a good effect for single note playing but also for



KORG: Poly Synth Ensemble 1000

have asked for a slightly wider range of wave shapes but it's all quibbling really because this is a very good machine.

In many ways it's very much a piano player's instrument, very easy to set up and with no tuning problems. It should prove to be reliable and would seem to be an excellent buy for someone who wants a Mellotron, Clavinet, and an organ but couldn't afford the lot.

As I said earlier, details are very important and one of the things I liked a lot about the Ensemble was its vibrato and the way in which it acted slightly out of phase on each note. With some instruments you find that the vibrato is exactly in phase on every note because it's added to the master oscillator. With a real string orchestra, each player gives a slightly different vibrato and so this does sound more real in that respect. This effect even works on the octave coupler which gives you the basic note plus an octave up or down. These too are out of phase and that's a distinct advantage. It's details like these that make this a very good instrument, well worth £867.

REVIEW: Korg Polyphonic Orchestra 2000 (Price: £994) by Morgan Fisher



KORG Polyphonic Orchestra 2000

chords which, with the sustain, can be pushed up or down a fifth while you switch to another instrument — very handy.

The range of the Ensemble is five octaves, from F to E. Personally I would have preferred the extra note, another F, but it's just a personal thing. I'd also have liked a headphone socket which wouldn't have been very expensive to add, but you could do it yourself later if you wanted to. It would just help for setting up between numbers. I could also

three which are all slightly differently tuned from each other. What you do is 'callibrate' it first by using the pitch controls to tune the three oscillators together by pulling the two controls out and turning them till you get what you want. Although you can tune them perfectly together if you want, it's better to have them just slightly out to give a fuller and more natural sound.

Another good thing about the Orchestra is that it has 48 envelopes, one for each of the 48 keys, which is a very desirable feature.

On the pre-set side, you have four pairs. The first is called reed/wind which gives you a sort of organ sound. There's also a chorus which I like a lot, especially with a slow attack on it, and gives a sort of Mellotron sound. That's where having the 48 envelopes helps because you can hold a chord down and have the next one fading in over it.

The next group of pre-sets is brass and these are the only ones which the traveller foot pedal effects other than as a volume control. Here it sort of performs the function of a filter. The string sound isn't bad and you can apply the de-tuner to get either an accordion or harmonium sound.

All these pre-sets can be used in combination, which gives you more variation in your sound and you can vary it even more by using the bass and treble controls which are provided.

One of the best aspects of the Orchestra is that it has a very good phaser built in, one of the best I've ever heard.

It's a lot less versatile than the Ensemble but if you were in a band that wanted a classical feel then it might be what you'd use instead of a Mellotron to give atmospheric effects and make use of its fuller sound.

The orchestra had the advantage over the Ensemble of having a headphone socket and that excellent phaser. What it lacks though is sustain. It may well be that there was a fault on mine because it hardly had any sustain at all.

I liked both of these Korgs. If I were to make a choice, I'd probably have the Orchestra because I already have other instruments but if I were just able to afford only one I'd go for the Ensemble. Both are very good value and I like the way they had been obviously thought about. They both seem a lot better than the average string synthesiser, not necessarily because they sound any better in terms of realism, but I think that most people who use strings use them for an atmospheric effect which is why I would prefer the Orchestra with its chorus. Both offer excellent value at the price.

**T**HIS, A MORE expensive instrument than the Ensemble 1000, is also very solidly finished, being covered in teak or teak veneer. An amusing aspect is the Japanese 'English' used on the printing on the panel which gives you a "Callibration" control — great!

In many respects, this is a more specialised instrument which you wouldn't use on its own. Instead of having one oscillator working when you press a key, as is the case with the Ensemble, you have