

Creamware MINIMAX ASB

MusicTech
RECOMMENDED
★★★★★

Creamware's latest synth is more real than virtual and aims to faithfully re-create a much-loved classic. **Hollin Jones** takes it to the max...

KEY FEATURES

- Virtual analogue synth
- Modelled on minimoog
- 6 voices
- 128 factory, 128 user presets
- USB MIDI connection
- Remote control software for Windows XP

MINIMAX ASB

Manufacturer **Creamware**

Price **£599**

Distributor **Sonic8**

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Minimum system requirements

Windows XP (SP2 for remote control software)

There are some instruments and sounds that we just can't seem to get enough of, and as a result a growing number of classic synths and keyboards have been emulated many times – all with varying levels of success. One of the most highly sought-after synths of old has to be the Moog minimoog. As iconic a synth as you'll find, it has featured on thousands of hit records and soundtracks, from the 1970s to the present day. And, like the Rhodes, Hammond and ARP 2600, it's more popular now than ever before.

Heavyweight German software and DSP specialist Creamware has thrown its cards on the table and produced the Minimax ASB. Better known for creating plug-ins and computer hardware interfaces, the Minimax ASB and its sibling – the Profit-5 ASB –

minimoog was designed to do away with wires and plugs and simply be an instrument you could play and transport without a team of roadies (not that the Minimax isn't hands-on, sporting all the requisite real-time knobs). What's more, the look of the

IT'S PRETTY HARD TO GET ANYTHING OTHER THAN A GREAT SOUND OUT OF THE MINIMAX ASB.

represent something of a departure for the company, as they are hardware rather than software instruments.

Small is beautiful

Compact and sturdily built in wood and metal, the Minimax ASB is modelled to precisely re-create the layout of the minimoog. Curiously, the name Moog is never actually mentioned in the Minimax's documentation, and it is referred to only as 'the original'.

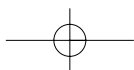
Unlike the patchbay monsters that prevailed at the time of its creation, the

front panel is near-identical, right down to the layout and familiar typeface.

The rear panel is straightforward, with audio outs and ins (for processing external signal), MIDI connectivity and a USB port. Despite its portability, the unit cannot draw its power via USB and it lacks a headphone port, so you'll need to keep a few cables handy.

Mini monster

The Minimax ASB has three oscillators, with the third doubling as an LFO. Mixed with noise and an optional



Measuring Up

There are few minimoog clones around, but plenty of synths that claim to have Moog-like sounds in their arsenal. One inexpensive route to the Moog sound is Arturia's Minimoog V, just €199. Very well-regarded, it is powerful and will sit unobtrusively in your plug-ins folder. It's not a real, tactile piece of kit, though. Moog recently re-released the minimoog in a variety of flavours, although the prices reflect the exclusivity of owning one. The new Minimoog Rack Edition is \$2,395, the impossibly beautiful Electric Blue special edition is \$3,395, while the more regular Voyager Performer Edition is \$3,095.

METHOD SPOT

Although the Minimax doesn't have a built-in keyboard, it's still very much a hands-on instrument. The original minimoog eschewed the modules and patch cables popular at the time for a much simpler approach. You could carry it somewhere (by yourself!) switch it on and start playing. What's more, creating new sounds was as simple as turning knobs rather than having to comprehend the complexities of signal flow. To this classic formula the Minimax ASB adds an effects section, with delays and chorus that really add sparkle to the already excellent sounds.

external signal, their outputs are passed to the Filter section, which features attack, decay and sustain controls. Finally, the output stage enables you to control velocity. There's one knob for the amp envelope and one for the filter envelope.

Unlike the synth it emulates, the Minimax ASB has an additional effects section, featuring chorus/flanger and delay. You can choose from five modes for these two effects. Each program's effect parameters are different, so you will be pleasantly surprised by the way the effects change your sound. Overall, the effects are very helpful, adding depth to the sounds and giving them a lot more room to breathe. If you prefer to use your own, however, you can bypass them at the touch of a button.

In use

The Minimax doesn't have a built-in keyboard, but a control strip along the bottom provides access to its major functions. It's refreshingly easy to use, as there are no key combos or multi-function buttons to contend with. As such, the three-digit LCD – restrictive in some other synths – is sufficient. A data wheel cycles you through presets or values depending on which button you've pressed, and the effects section is a doddle to navigate.

Connect a MIDI keyboard or a sequencer via MIDI and the fun begins. The classic Moog sound is brilliantly

re-created, full of analogue warmth and character. Apparently, great care has been taken to remodel all the original components, and in the process Creamware has also managed to eliminate the aliasing that was sometimes heard in other Moog emulators. This authenticity is down to newly developed algorithms, which help to accurately re-create the sound.

There are also a couple of other tweaks that distinguish this from the original synth: Low Note Priority can be changed to Last Note Priority; and the synth can be switched between mono and polyphonic (the original had only a single voice).

Classic sounds

The 128 presets are – for the most part – immediately usable, from phat basses and piercing, evolving synths to snappy leads and soundscapes. Activating Glide and playing with the oscillators' waveforms and noise levels gets you very quickly into new territory. In fact, it's pretty hard to get anything other than a great sound out of it. Creamware has even managed to inject a little of the inherent wavering and slight instability of the original minimoog. Imagine *Dawn Of The Dead*, any John Carpenter film or an episode of *Doctor Who* for an idea of how it comes across. More recently, bands such as Portishead and The Crystal Method have made these sounds their own. Further real-time manipulation of the sound is possible using the filter and Loudness Contour controls, so you can get some really great results.

The USB port mentioned earlier enables the Minimax to interface with a PC. Install the supplied software and you get a graphical version of the synth on-screen, so you can control the hardware and also play it using a virtual MIDI keyboard. As you'd expect, user patches can be saved both on the synth and in the software and transferred over USB. (You must have a MIDI connection active at the same time, though. With Windows XP SP2 or later, your PC should see the Minimax ASB as a MIDI port with just

the USB connection active.) Notably lacking at the time of writing is any Mac software, although we understand that it is in development.

To the max

Considering that there still seems to be a demand for the legendary sound of the minimoog – and that you're as likely to be hit by a speeding dinosaur as actually find a real one in good condition that you can afford – the Minimax ASB represents a very fine alternative. There is something so much more gratifying about having hardware as opposed to software when it comes to synths like this, and the layout won't disappoint those with experience of the real thing.

It does appear that Creamware really has taken a great deal of care while developing the Minimax ASB, and the results are wonderful. Crucially, it's also very easy to use. The software element probably won't be a deal-breaker, but it's a handy extra in today's computer-centric studio. It's a little disappointing that the Minimax can't carry audio streams via its USB port (which would have made it friendlier for laptop musicians), but ultimately it's geared more towards re-creating that classic minimoog sound than anything else. **MTM**

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- Fantastic sound
- Layout nearly identical to minimoog
- New effects section
- USB connectivity
- Very easy to use
- Inspiring to play

WALK ON BY

- Manual needs some attention
- Lacks USB audio capabilities

VERDICT

A great-sounding instrument and a realistic way of getting the sound and feel of a real minimoog without breaking the bank.



The Minimax ASB ships with only a Windows XP-compatible version of the remote control software. A Mac version is expected soon.



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