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Real reviews of useful recording products to fit any budget

Reviews by Mike Metlay, Paul Vnuk Jr., Darwin Grosse, Gary Eskow, and Salo Loyo

Yamaha Montage

\$3499/\$3999/\$4499; usa.yamaha.com

As a touring keyboardist with Latin recording artist Luis Miguel, I was privileged to be among the first field-testers of the Montage, Yamaha's newest keyboard workstation. Like the Motif XF before it, the Montage is available in three sizes: the Montage 6 with 61 notes, the Montage 7 with 76 notes, and the keyboard I reviewed, the 88-key Montage 8 with hammer-action keybed. All models have 128-note polyphony and up to 16 multitimbral parts.

Some of the biggest changes are obvious on the front panel. The Montage now organizes its sounds into Performances, which can contain up to eight different sounds. Slight (or drastic) variations on each Performance's parameters can be stored and instantly recalled from eight front-panel Scene buttons. I love this, as it lets you quickly tweak your sound within a song and add variation and life to your parts without a lot of knob turning.

Speaking of knobs, the most obvious new part of the Mon-

or effects processing of whatever you had been playing before.

The Montage sports a built-in sequencer that allows you to quickly capture your playing and export it to your DAW for further tweaks. While you can quantize your performance and punch in for overdubs, there's no event-level editing, a function Yamaha believes is best left to your DAW (I agree).

The Montage's built-in USB interfacing lets you play up to 16 stereo audio channels directly into your DAW! There's also 16-channel MIDI, of course, and a stereo A/D converter for external sounds to be processed by the Montage's effects.

While the Montage continues the AWM2 technology of the Motif (Advanced Wave Memory, synthesis based on an internal sample library), it now has a 5 GB onboard sound library, almost ten times what was available on the previous Motif XF. This library actually includes the full Motif XF sound set, making patch import to the Montage very simple, but the new sounds are incredible... my fa-



tage is the Super Knob. This huge dial with color backlighting can be assigned to multiple parameters, all of which can be controlled simultaneously with a single turn during a live performance. For example, you could adjust reverb time up and turn part of your EQ curve down when a song reaches a more intimate part, or assign multiple parameters to change in all directions, morphing one tone into something completely different as you play. The Super Knob can also be turned using an expression pedal. It's the most fun addition to a keyboard I've played with in a long time.

The front panel also features a full-color touch display and eight backlit parameter adjustment knobs, making the Montage easy to navigate and use in a studio session or on a darkened stage. Another performance-friendly addition: Seamless Sound Switching, which lets you change Performances without cutting off the sounds

vorite is the Bösendorfer Imperial Grand Piano Premium, the best acoustic piano sound I've ever played on a synthesizer. 1.75 GB of flash memory lets you add your own samples.

Yamaha is of course famous for FM synthesis, and the Montage now includes Yamaha's new 8-operator FMX engine available side by side with the AWM2, which I find has more sonic "weight" than the traditional DX7 6-operator FM. The two engines are tied together via a Motion Control Synthesis system that lets you morph and change many parameters over time with the Super Knob or the built-in Motion Sequencer. You can even use an envelope follower for external audio as a control source!

The Montage sounds fantastic, and is very rewarding to use whether you like to use presets or dive deep into complex sound programming. Yamaha has revolutionized the industry again. Now excuse me, I'm going back to playing! —SL