

Mellotron®

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Mellotron Sound Library

Some of the Sample Instruments in the Nord Sample Library comes from the legendary Mellotron, a classic keyboard instrument that changed the music history. We are very proud to be able to incorporate the Mellotron Soundbank for the Nord Sample Library compatible units.

Please visit our website at www.nordkeyboards.com for further news on the release of additional sound banks for the Nord Sample Library.

What about those sounds?

The original sounds from the various Mellotron models could be called the very first sample library, before anyone even knew what these words were going to mean. These sounds have a very distinct and wonderful quality to them - earthy, organic and different are words that come to mind.

The sounds in the Nord Sample Library originates from the master tapes that Clavia has licensed. These tapes were then used to create original sound banks for a brand new Mellotron, manufactured with original tape heads. And from this brand new, exquisite instrument, the sounds were recorded using state of the art technology.

After many hours of editing and looping with the Nord Sample Editor, the samples finally made it to a Nord Library, and then to this CD.

The idea of using the vintage master tapes instead of sampling a vintage instrument is to faithfully recreate the original sounds the way they used to be, and is a natural step in Clavia's long striving effort to make the sounds of classic keyboard instruments available to keyboard players once again.

Condensed Mellotron Story

Tape replay keyboard instruments were invented in the late 1950's by Harry Chamberlin. In the early 1960's one of his employees took a Chamberlin Musicmaster 600 (a dual-manual machine with 36 sounds) to the UK. This became the blueprint of the Mellotron Mkl. It had the same basic layout as the Chamberlin 600 with 2 manuals, the left one having rhythm tracks to be played as a background, and the right one having lead sounds like strings, flute and lots of organ sounds.

It was basically intended to be a home organ, like a home entertainment center where someone without music skills could sound like an orchestra. Unfortunately it was very hard to play rhythms like that, even for trained musicians, and together with some technical flaws and bad engineering it wasn't too much of a success - many of the first series of instruments had to be taken back to the factory and upgraded from Mkl to MkII. Luckily young and creative professional musicians had become interested in the Mellotron, and the MkII became extremely popular amongst pop/rock groups in the late 1960's: Manfred Mann, Beatles, Rolling Stones, Moody Blues, King Crimson and others.

The Mellotron company later created the M400, a smaller instrument very similar to the one used in this presentation. This instrument was used on the road and in the studio during the 1970's by Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Genesis, Yes, Deep Purple, Aerosmith, Wings, David

Bowie, Kraftwerk and others. During later years it has been used by Oasis, Primal Scream, Radiohead, Smashing Pumpkins, Red Hot Chili Peppers, U2, Nelly Furtado, Air, REM, Manic Street Preachers etc. Through the extremely successful music of these groups and artists the Mellotron sound has been widely spread, and even though most people don't know that it's a Mellotron, they've heard it's sound.

History of the Mellotron sounds

The Mkl instrument had two 35 key manuals, the left one having 6 banks of rhythms and fills and the right one lead sounds. The tapes were 3/8" 3-track just like the Chamberlin 600. The recordings for the Mellotron Mkl were made during 1962 and 1963 and were supervised by big band leader Eric Robinson, who also had substantial involvement in the Mellotron company. They consisted of 18 rhythms and fills sounds and 18 leads sounds. There were also some more rhythms and fills recorded that were not used for the Mkl.

When the Mkl was upgraded into the MkII the decision was made to re-record many of the sounds. The only lead sounds that were kept were the Flute, the Vibraphone and the French Accordion. Also the 3 Violins sound from the Chamberlin 600 was used in a slightly eq'd form, and ironically this became by far the most widely used Mellotron sound. Among the rhythms the Afro Cuban was replaced by the Cuban, the Slow Fox Trot and the Samba was re-recorded, the rhythms 6/8 tempo in F and Twist in C were added and numerous of the fills were changes.

During 1966 the decision was made to create an entirely new single-manual instrument that was named the M300. It had a 52 key A-C keyboard making another re-recording of all sounds necessary. The left 17 keys mostly had rhythms and fills and the remaining 35 lead sounds. The machine had 2-track 1/4" tape and 6 banks.

These recordings were made during 1966 and 1967. The only sounds that covered the whole keyboard were the strings, the piano and the organ sound. The M300 was produced between 1968 and 1970 and towards the end, some of the sounds were replaced. The string sound was changed and the Bossa Nova, the Medium Foxtrot and the low part of the strings were replaced with Pop1 and Pop2 rhythms and a 6/8 tempo rhythm. The leader of these recordings was also in this case Eric Robinson.

In 1970 the M400 Mellotron was created. It had a single manual 35 key G-F keyboard, meaning that the Mkl and MkII sound libraries could be used. The machine used 3-track 3/8" tape and had interchangeable tape frames. That meant that the sound library could be expanded according to taste. This instrument was also the first Mellotron specifically made for professional musicians.

The new sounds for the M400 library were recorded during the 70's, but of course some MkII sounds were still used, most notably the 3 Violins, the Flute and the MkII Brass. The most well known sound introduced with the M400 was the 8 Voice Choir, even giving the Mellotron company a sales boost.

Use of the Mellotron Sounds

Although the Mellotron had been used earlier by some British bands, the song Strawberry Fields Forever by the Beatles (Flute) and Nights in White Satin by the Moody Blues (3 Violins) in 1967 became the first Mellotron 'hits' both in Europe, the US and the rest of the World, forever making a mark in popular culture. The Rolling Stones used the 3 violins it in the song 10 000 Lightyears from Home, David Bowie in Space Oddity and numerous British pop and 'Progressive' rock bands started using the Mellotron.

Among those were King Crimson (3 Violins, MkII Brass and Cello) Yes (3 Violins, 8 Voice Choir, Vibraphone, Flute etc) and Genesis (3 Violins, MkII Brass, 8 Voice Choir etc). It was also widely used in German 'Electronic' music such as Kraftwerk's Trans Europe Express (3Violins) and Tangerine Dream, who used not only the standard Mellotron sounds, but also Oboe, Bassoon, Saxophone and different string sounds.

Led Zeppelin also used it live on Stairway to Heaven, in Kashmir and The Rain Song. Even ABBA used it on Another Town, Another Train.

During the 80's the Mellotron remained virtually unused. Most notable exceptions are Talk Talk in Life's what You Make it and OMD's Enola Gay and other songs by these bands.

The Mellotron experienced a renaissance during the 1990's when numerous bands and artists like Red Hot Chili Peppers, Lenny Kravitz, Oasis, Radiohead, Air, Monster Magnet, REM and Manic Street Preachers. After 2000 the Mellotron is gaining even more popularity and has been used on hits by Dido, Nelly Furtado, Daniel Powter, Robyn, The Black Eyed Peas and The Strokes to name a few.

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Soundlist with comments

Mk I Lead sounds

15 original sounds, 18 total:

MkI Clarinet

MkI French Horn

MkI Marimba

MkI Trombone *Very different from MkII*

MkI Hammond Organ

(MkI French Accordion *Same as MkII*)

(MkI Flute *Same as MkII*)

MkI Acoustic Nylon Guitar

MkI Piano *Very different from MkII*

MkI Tenor Sax *Very different from MkII*

MkI Harpsichord/Trumpet+trombone split

MkI Reverb Organ

MkI Mandolin *Mandola-like*

MkI Organ

(MkI Vibraphone *Same as MkII*)

MkI Trumpet

MkI Tibia Organ

MkI Church Organ

MkII Lead sounds

18 sounds:

MkII Flute *Beatles, Stones, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, ABBA, Chili Peppers, etc*

MkII 3 Violins *Led Zeppelin, Moody Blues, Stones, etc, etc*

MkII Acoustic Steel Guitar

MkII Trombone *Beatles*

MkII Organ 1

MkII French Accordion

MkII Rock Guitar

MkII Brass *Genesis, King Crimson, Moody Blues, Stones, Beatles*

MkII Piano

MkII Muted Brass *Moody Blues*

MkII Harpsichord

MkII Accordion *Genesis*

MkII Organ 2

MkII Tenor Sax

MkII Vibraphone *Gracious*

MkII Mandolin *Beatles*

MkII Tibia Organ

MkII Church Organ

M300 Lead sounds

7 sounds:

M300 Strings *David Bowie*

M300 2 Violins *Barclay James Harvest*

M300 Solo Violin

M300 Slow Vibraphone

M300 Bass Flute

M300 Clarinet

M300 Celeste

M400 Lead sounds

25 sounds:

M400 Solo Cello *Oasis, King Crimson, Chili Peppers etc.*

M400 Solo Viola

M400 16 Violins *Air*

M400 String Section I

M400 String Section II

M400 8Voice Choir *Radiohead, Genesis, Chili Peppers, Tangerine Dream etc.*

M400 4Voice Female Choir

M400 4Voice Male Choir

M400 Mixed Custom Choir

M400 Male Solo Voice

M400 Boys Choir

M400 Pipe Organ

M400 Oboe *Tangerine Dream*

M400 English Horn

M400 Bassoon *Tangerine Dream*

M400 Alto Sax *Tangerine Dream*

M400 Clavichord

M400 2Brass

M400 2Saxes

M400 Recorder

M400 Wine Glasses

M400 Vibes w/o Vibrato

M400 Tubular Bells

M400 Celeste

M400 Hammond C3

A total of 65 different sounds.