

Best MIDI Keyboard Controllers for Home Recording

Have you ever wondered what a home recording studio looks like? Do you know about those keyboards that producers use?

Usually, the keyboards are always in front of the person sitting at the computer. This person only needs to take action with a device connected to the computer to be able to play stuff that can record to the computer directly.

Have you ever wondered what that device is and how they possibly work? That device is called a MIDI Keyboard Controller.

A MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) is used to play sounds to other electronic devices (such as sound modules or software synths), and they do not generate sounds of their own.

These electronic devices which utilize the midi keyboard are installed inside your DAW (Digital Audio Workstation), and a series of messages are transmitted by the MIDI to other instruments to generate a certain sound.

The midi keyboard has several features such as the display screen, sliders, knobs, and they offer more than pads, keys, and buttons to make life better.

These keyboards act similar to the typewriter keyboard you attach to your personal computer. It transmits messages when keys are pressed.

These transmitted messages depend on which note is pressed, how hard it is pressed, and how long it is being held down. The information received is then used to drive the music software, and the sounds produced are made either by other sound modules, or the synthesizer in your sound card if you have installed them.

If you are a beginner and you want to set up a home recording studio for making music, you need only three things; an easy-to-use MIDI controller, a computer to connect it to, and a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) as the recording program.

The common digital audio workstations you can use include Pro Tools, Ableton Live, and Apple Logic. If you like cheaper ones, you can go to FL Studio or Garage band.

It is essential to get the right equipment for your home recording studio. MIDI keyboard controllers offer excellent features for your studio performances. These MIDI keyboard controllers are vital for every music production and it is a must-have for every producer.

Music production may not be productive without these controllers, and it doesn't cost a fortune to get the best choice from the market. Depending on your needs, the price ranges from low to medium level.

In this review, we have given you the 5 Best MIDI keyboard controllers for your home studio and few things to consider when you are ready to purchase one.

After careful consideration of the features including software, personal experience, price tag, and reviews from other users, we have been able to come up with these.

5 Best MIDI Keyboard Controllers for Home Studio

When setting up a home recording studio, the MIDI keyboard controller is one of the most important pieces of music production equipment.

Below are our Top 5 picks which come in different key counts with additional features. Go through them and see which one you prefer.

1. Novation Impulse 25|49|61-key

The Novation keyboard is one of our favorite and the most budget-friendly MIDI keyboard available today.

The 49 key counts cannot go unnoticed because of its value for money. The impulse also has 25 and 61-keys which you can purchase if you have available space in your studio.

It has a pitch bend and mod wheel on the left side, and the keys are semi-weighted with after-touch. Other features such as 8 knobs, 8 multi-function drum pads, are found on all the key count models, but the two larger keyboards also have 9 faders for a full DAW control surface.

The package comes with Ableton Live and two VST's which are Novation Bass Station Synth and a Loop masters Sample pack.

Pros

- Semi-weighted keys
- After-touch enabled
- Good selection of pads and knobs

Cons

- Drum pad triggering is not consistent
- After-touch on black and white keys is different

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2. Akai MPK2 25 (Pro & mini)|49|61-key

The Akai MPK2 is the best-seller of all MIDI keyboard controllers, and it is highly recommended. It is available in different key counts of 25mini and 25pro|49|61-keys, and all the key models are of premium quality.

All the key models have semi-weighted keys with aftertouch, and the keyboard also includes different performance controls. The 25-key model has 8 RGB-illuminated MPC-style pads, 4 switches, and 8 control knobs.

The 49 and 61-keys have 16 pads, 8 switches, 8 knobs, and 8 faders. Other features of this keyboard are the pitch bend and mod wheel, which completes a perfect MIDI keyboard for any studio.

This keyboard controller is compatible with all major DAW's, and the package includes the Hybrid 3.0 virtual synth, Ableton Live Lite, SONIVOX Twist 3.0, and MPC Essentials software. Though it has a plastic chassis that may look cheap, it is very tough.

It can be connected to the computer with a USB and has a control layout with a back-lit LCD screen to make jobs easier. This keyboard controller is a bit more expensive, but if you can afford one, it is highly recommended.

MPK2 mini is light, affordable, portable, and good for live performances.

Pros

- Compact
- The 4-way joystick is fun and easy to use.
- The drum pad is perfect.
- A well-rounded device, great value

Cons

- Keys may be too small for some users
- Velocity settings are not adjustable
- No DAW controls

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3. Arturia Keylab 25|49|61|88-keys

Arturia key lab has a semi-weighted action type keys with aftertouch, vintage design, and appearance. Apart from the basic 25|49|61-keycount models, the key lab is also available in 88 velocity-sensitive keys for a full piano experience.

There are also numerous performing functions on this keyboard, such as 10 knobs, 9 faders, 16 velocity and pressure-sensitive backlit pads for the three largest key-count models.

Though the build is solid, it is not good enough. A great advantage of this controller is the Analog Lab Synth software with almost 6000 pure quality synths sound taken from a range of their classic synths such as Prophet V, Jupiter, SEM V, and CS-80V.

This controller is recommended if you don't want to start spending big for synthesizers while building your home studio.

Pros

- Solid, well-built with specified MIDI controller
- Plenty of hands-on control
- Chord mode is useful
- USB powered and DAW control mode

Cons

- Best integrated with Arturia's own software
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4. M-Audio Axiom Air 25|32 (mini)|49|61-keys

Axiom Air is one of the higher-end models made by M-Audio. It is available in different key-counts of 25|32 (mini)|49 and 61 expressive synth-action keys with after-touch.

This keyboard has 12 trigger pads, and they are of better quality. All the key-count models have 16 velocity and pressure-sensitive pads. Apart from the 25 key counts, the rest have 8 knobs, 9 long-throw faders, and 3 banks for all assigned functions.

This keyboard controller has a better value with 128 memory locations to save your own presets. The M-Audio Axiom Air has an attractive appearance with solid construction and nice feel on the keys with pitch bend and mod wheels.

This keyboard is responsive to most DAW's, except the FL studio which is not compatible with Hyper Control X, and it has the inclusion of Pro Tools Express and Ignite by AIR, but does not come with any software plug-in or DAW unlike other MIDI keyboards on this list.

Pros

- Hyper Control DAW integration improved
- MIDI/Hyper Control switching really flexible
- Neat drum pad programming options

Cons

- Has no software plug-in
- Not compatible with Hyper Control X

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5. Nektar Panorama P4|P6

This MIDI keyboard is mainly for people who want top-quality tools that will last for a long time. The Nektar Panorama has two models, the P4|P6 models with 49 and 61 notes, respectively.

It comes with weighted and velocity-sensitive keys with after-touch. It also has 12 pressure and velocity-sensitive pads, 16 encoders, 9 faders, 10 assignable LED buttons, and a 3.5" TFT display.

This Panorama is a big and heavy tool with a loaded keyboard which can be difficult to move about unless you have a stable place to put it. It is a great tool with a build of high quality and an amazing experience on specific DAWs.

If you are using Logic Pro, Reason, Cubase, or Bitwig studio, then you may not find many keyboards with such a deep integration like this keyboard controller. On the other hand, if you are using any other DAW not listed here, or Ableton Live, it is possible that you will experience problems with integration.

Pros

- Motorized controls
- Seamless DAW integration
- Controls have a high-quality feel

- Attractive design

Cons

- No bundled content included

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Factors to Consider Before Buying the MIDI Keyboard Controller

There are various factors to take into consideration before buying a MIDI keyboard controller.

Number of keys

The first thing to consider is the number of keys you desire in your keyboard. MIDI keyboard comes in sizes of a 25-key, 37-key, 49-key, 61-key, and 88-keys. Your decision on which one to purchase depends on your budget and available space. The 25-key controllers are cheap, popular, portable, and perfect for small house recording studios. Other keys are also available for a fair price, but there is no need going for the higher key-counts unless you are a professional, or you are planning to learn advanced piano techniques.

Type of Action

The second most important thing to consider is the type of action of your keyboard. The different action-types include synth-action, semi-weighted, and the weighted-hammer action type. The synth-action type is not recommended for music production and semi-pro recording studio, and it is more of the electronic type. Semi-weighted is the best middle choice for more experienced keyboard players and beginners, and it is the most popular. The weighted-hammer action type is not common in the market and is for piano-oriented music.

After-touch

When a sustained pressure is applied after striking the key, it is known as an after-touch. The most common type is the monophonic type for beginners, while the polyphonic type is for skilled players.

Software Integration

Music software is always included in the best midi keyboards in the market. Some of these are very useful for pros and starters. Some sample banks, introversion of a DAW, and virtual synths will help you to start music production immediately.

Performance Controls

The midi keyboard can be used for more than just note entry. Some have control knobs and a range of faders for operating virtual controls, while others use pads to trigger drums and samples. If you want knobs, pads, or more faders on your keyboard, then the extra controls integrated automatically with your software, will give a more natural way of performance.

Durability

Every tool in your home studio should be sturdy with good quality to guarantee a long life. To some people, durability may not be an issue, but you wouldn't want to deal with a loose or broken key/button during recording, would you?

Size and weight

Some Midi keyboards have full piano-sized keys while others have mini-keys, but this does not affect the keyboard functionality in any way, and the mini-keys can save space. If you want to make music on the go, then the small portable mini keyboard which can go with your iPad or laptop is ideal, otherwise, choose the full-size keys. The weight and dimensions also matter so that the keyboard can fit in the space assigned for it.

Input/output

Many keyboards have input/output as USB-only. This type of keyboards can be used on a computer to control software, but if you want to use it to control other hardware synths, then a MIDI out-port is needed for the connection.

iPad/Tablet friendly

Some keyboards have been made to work with PC's, iPads, laptops, and Macs. If you would like to connect your MIDI keyboard to an iPad, then consider the one that is most suitable before purchase.

Final thought

Before you purchase any MIDI keyboard controller, consider the factors listed above so that you will be able to find the best one for your need.

We made the research, added with personal experience to give you everything you need to know.

With a wide range of price and features, we try to include different types and models of these products to satisfy your needs.

These 5 MIDI keyboard controllers listed here cover the need of every producer. They will fit in perfectly in any home recording studio, and you will not be disappointed no matter which one you choose.