

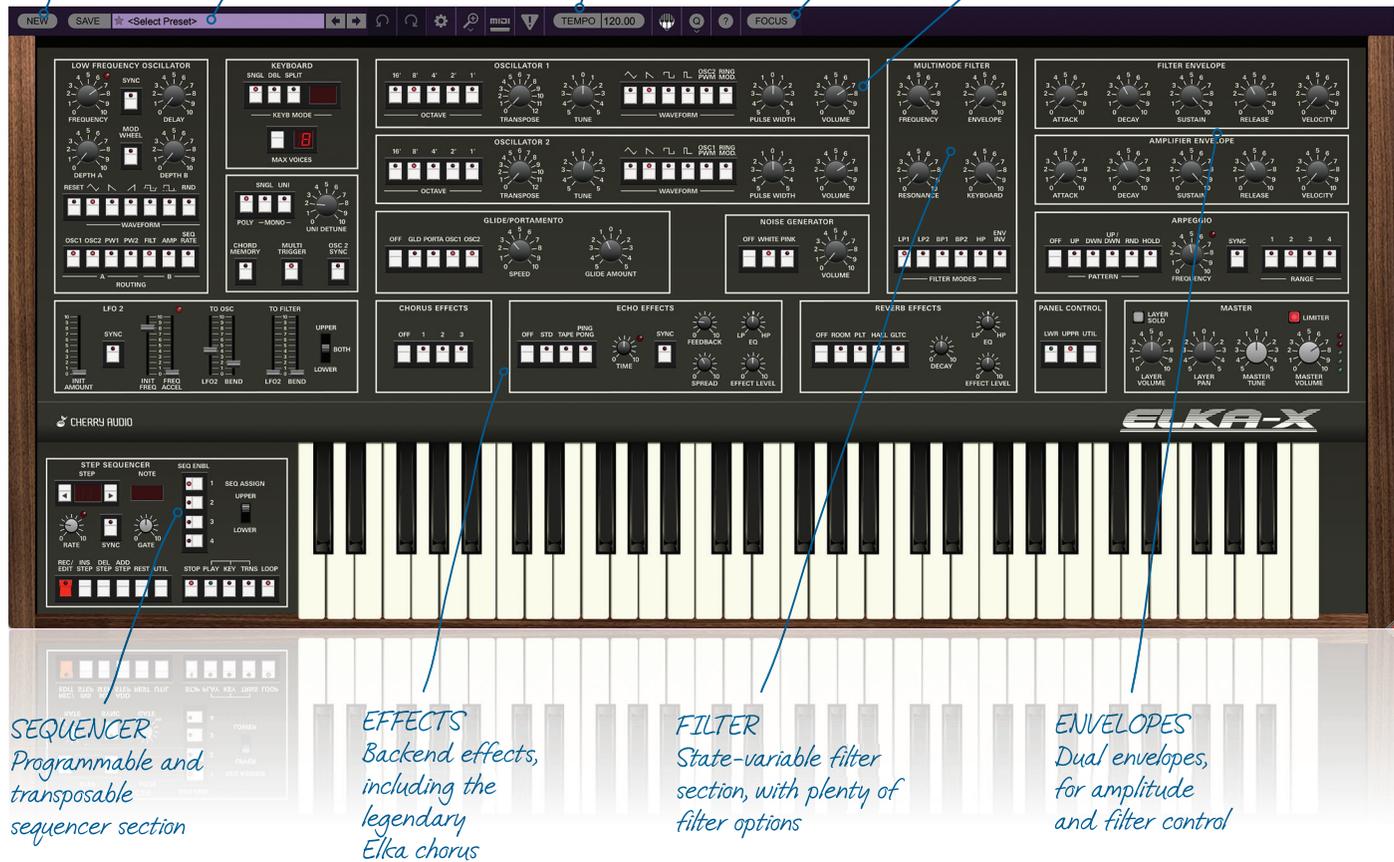
NEW PATCH
Hit the New button to initialise your patch

PRESET MENU
Access to the Preset menu, perfectly organised by category

TEMPO
Even in standalone mode, you can still sync tempo-centric elements

FOCUS
Focus mode zooms in on the detail of the panel

OSCILLATORS
Two modelled oscillators per voice



SEQUENCER
Programmable and transposable sequencer section

EFFECTS
Backend effects, including the legendary Elka chorus

FILTER
State-variable filter section, with plenty of filter options

ENVELOPES
Dual envelopes, for amplitude and filter control

Cherry Audio Elka-X \$59 PC MAC

The latest vintage synth re-model to enter Cherry Audio's lineup revisits an oft-forgotten European classic from the early 80s, the legendary Elka

> There have been some fine examples of synths over the last 50 years that have been created by smaller companies. Brands such as the Oxford Synthesiser Company and EMS produced models away from the American and Japanese spotlight. Staying with European underdogs, Cherry Audio now visit the heart of Italy, where Elka became respected producers of keyboards, organs, and the odd synth.

The 'X' factor

The Elka Synthex was Europe's answer to the large polys of the early 80s; while it was

intrinsically analogue, it garnered a number of features, such as state variable filtering and cross modulation, which meant that it gave the early digital machines a good run for their money. It's a difficult and expensive machine to find as a secondhand prize, which makes the appeal of a good plugin version all the more enticing.

Cherry Audio's impressive roster of analogue remodels in plugin form, boasts both synthesisers and effects. The all-new Elka-X embraces the very spirit of the Synthex, while making a few enhancements and improvements

along the way. The first immediate enhancement comes with polyphony; the Elka-X doubles the original's voice count to a full 16 notes, while also offering split/multitimbral operation, like the original.

The architecture provides two oscillators per voice, originally DCOs, which initiated 80s tuning stability as a consequence. Reliability of tuning is included as standard here, but the feel and sound of the oscillators is exemplary. Even with a single DCO in play, there is a beautiful depth to the lower-mids which feels entirely natural. The filter continues this tradition, with a

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further enhancement; all the original options are included, from low to band and high-pass filtering, but with the addition of a grittier 12dB low-pass filter, to accompany the original 24dB.

Getting started

The Elka-X is packed with some really great presets. These are immediately accessible from the browser, and take full advantage of the Elka's complexity, right down to the inclusion of a programmable sequencer and separate arpeggiator.

However, one of our favourite features is the New button, found nestling right next to the browser area, which initiates the synthesiser to a default state. This is important, because it makes the building of new patches very easy and instantaneous, and frankly with a beautiful interface laid before you, as we have here, why wouldn't you want to create your own sounds?

Cherry Audio have catered for all the usual plugin formats, but there is a particular enjoyment to be had by just opening the standalone version, and losing yourself in synth nostalgia. While the Elka-X will immediately sync-lock to your DAW, there is inclusion of an onboard tempo function, which in turn synchronises elements such as the sequencer, LFO and delay effects. You will also find onboard reverb and chorus, the latter being particularly classic and effective, and a calling card from the original.

Final output

Cherry Audio are attracting a serious reputation for creating highly usable and great sounding re-imagined versions of some of the most desired synths from our history. The Elka-X slides gracefully into that arena, with a depth of

sound that inspires creativity from the first note. Don't be fooled by its highly attractive price point; it's a bargain for sure, but with no sense of sonic compromise. If this doesn't shake up the market, you're not playing your saw waves low and loud enough! **cm**

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The standalone version is a particular joy, with easy zooming in and clear navigation

MIDI control

One of the elements which we particularly enjoyed with this plugin is its standalone operation, allowing you to get creative away from the DAW. With the Elka-X grabbing the majority of your computer's screen space, it's the closest thing you will get to a hardware experience in plugin form, at least until we have the complexity of touchscreen that we all yearn for.

Until that day, we can make do with the facility provided by Cherry Audio,

that allows the easy assignment of any of the GUI controls to MIDI hardware faders. This also extends to MIDI CC control from within the DAW, but it's nice to have the easy option to assign the filter cutoff to a hardware fader or pot. Of course, we don't all have large computer screens at our fingertips, so the Focus Mode will zoom right in on the area that you are working with, providing plenty of detail and fine control.

Alternatively

UVI Synthex 1.5
€79

Inspired by the Synthex and the FM-based Elka EK-44, UVI's homage appears here in a sampled form

XILS-lab Syn'X 2
\$169

Full multitimbral version of the synth with eight layers of lovely Elka-ness to play with

Verdict

For Beautiful reimagining of a classic
The GUI is a total pleasure to use
Complete MIDI control through real time or DAW
Nice enhancements over the original
It's a total bargain at this price!

Against We can't find any downsides!

The Elka-X stands head and shoulders above other similar products and feels very analogue. It's a total joy to use!

10/10



The beautifully crafted layout of the Synthex, zoomed in using Focus mode for finer detail