

# M-AUDIO AXIOM 25

## MIDI CONTROLLER KEYBOARD

by Francis Preve



Oversized LCD is easy to read even on a dimly lit stage.

Sturdy construction. This thing could take a bullet at point blank range.

Sexy rubberized transpose, pitchbend and mod wheel controls are extra grippy for when you get extra sweaty.

Transport controls default to standard play and record operations but can be reassigned to any function you prefer.

Eight assignable pressure-sensitive drum pads can trigger sounds, act as toggles, or even apply proportional pressure to continuous controllers. Wow!

Semi-weighted keys with aftertouch are a welcome surprise in a super-portable controller.

Every once in a while, just when you think a type of keyboard has saturated the market, along comes something with features that make it distinctive enough to refresh the whole concept. Take compact MIDI controller keyboards, for example. It seems like everything under the sun has been done — slimline design, exotic controller options, built-in audio interfaces — so how does a manufacturer stand out in an increasingly crowded field? Well, M-Audio arguably rolled the first snowball down the hill with their Oxygen 8 controller, so it stands to reason that they're in a good position to take things to the next level, and their new Axiom line of controller keyboards tries to do just this.

I spent a couple of weeks kicking the tires of the two-octave Axiom 25, which adds a few new dimensions to their existing super-compact controllers. For one thing, the Axiom includes semi-weighted keys that also transmit aftertouch. That's rare for this type of product: M-Audio's Ozonic, which is a FireWire audio interface as well as a MIDI controller, is one of the only other super-compacts that does this. In addition to the piano-like keys, the Axiom also has eight velocity-sensitive drum pads on its control panel. They're similar in feel and appearance to the Trigger Finger pad controller, and they're awesome for triggering samples, as well as toggling MIDI assignable insert effects and the like.

Other welcome amenities include a set of labeled (but reassignable) transport controls, eight 360-degree rotary controllers, and rubberized pitch and mod wheels. You program all of this via a large backlit LCD that's a breeze to read under dim conditions, which should elicit cheers from the dance club and live laptop performance crowd. The

*MIDI controller keyboard with drum pads and semi-weighted keys.*

**PROS**

*Semi-weighted keys with aftertouch. Eight onboard drum pads can also be used as pressure sensitive controllers. Class compliant, no drivers. Nice array of preset templates. Built like a tank.*

**CONS**

*Doesn't fit into the M-Audio Studio Pack backpack.*

Axiom 25, \$239.95  
Axiom 49, \$329.95  
Axiom 61, \$379.95

M-Audio  
www.m-audio.com

# AUDITION

## M-AUDIO AXIOM 25 MIDI CONTROLLER KEYBOARD

### GIMME SOME ACTION

M-Audio has used a new semi-weighted action in all sizes of the Axiom line. Pianists will appreciate both the size of the keys and the piano-like lip on the front of them. If you happen to be familiar with the 76-key version of the Kurzweil K2500 or K2600 synth workstation, the feel is quite similar. This really is a new standard for super-compact controllers, and offers a “best of both worlds” scenario: The action is chunky and sturdy enough for a player with a pianistic approach, but unlike a fully-weighted action, perfect for blistering synth leads, too.

rotary controllers are sensitive to how fast you turn them (like the scroll wheel on an Apple iPod), and at first, I thought they changed parameters too slowly when turned at “normal” speed. Then, I found out there are three velocity curves for them, with the fastest being best for sweeps during live performance, and the slowest offering precision for sound design.

### MIDI CONTROL

The Axiom comes with 20 pre-defined presets for controlling a variety of plug-in software synths, including a selection of presets optimized for two of the most popular software composition programs: Ableton Live (Live Lite comes bundled with the Axiom) and Propellerhead Reason. See “Gory Details” on page 70 for the full roundup.

The two Live templates use MIDI controller assignments that are undefined in the universal MIDI control spec. This is a smart design move, as it reduces the risk of altering an existing MIDI controller by accident. Think of it this way: If you have Live alongside another software synth in your system — or a setup with multiple controllers — the Axiom won’t get in the way. Nice bit of forethought there.

M-Audio has set up further presets for General MIDI use, and a few general-purpose options for soft synths with MIDI learn functions. While it would have been nice to see more than 20 presets, especially if they’d included a few for other mainstream audio-sequencer apps, M-Audio made a good choice by focusing on Reason and Live, as these are two of the most popular products for modern laptop-based performers.

### VITAL STATS

#### KEYBOARD

25, 49, or 61 keys, transmits velocity and aftertouch.

#### PROGRAMMABLE ZONES

3 (Axiom 25), 4 (Axiom 49, 61).

#### ASSIGNABLE CONTROLLERS

Pitchbend, mod wheel, 8 endless rotary knobs, 8 pressure-sensitive drum pads, 6 transport buttons.

#### MIDI CONNECTORS

In, out.

#### USB CONNECTION

USB 1.1, bus power supported.

#### NUMBER OF PRESET CONFIGURATIONS

20.

#### INCLUDED SOFTWARE

Ableton Live Lite 4, Enigma (downloadable from M-Audio site).

#### CONTROLLER INPUTS

Sustain pedal, expression pedal (neither is included).

#### POWER

USB, AC adapter (not included).

#### DIMENSIONS/WEIGHT

18.8"W x 11.2" D x 2.6" H; 5 lbs.

*Francis Preve is an Austin, Texas, based keyboardist and producer. Recent projects include his Top 20 remix of Gabriel & Dresden's "Tracking Treasure Down" and producing "Solution," a track from Jacinta's latest album. Get the facts at [www.fap7.com](http://www.fap7.com).*

# AUDITION

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### CATEGORY DETAILS

#### Included software templates:


Reason (Dr. Rex, Malstrom, NN-19, Subtractor, Mixer), Ableton Live, GForce Oddity, GForce ImpOSCar, GForce Minimonsta:Melohman, Way Out Ware TimewARP 2600, Wizoo Darbuka and Latigo, Native Instruments B4, Linplug/Doepfer, General MIDI, and several product-neutral starting points.

### IN USE

Configuring your own templates is a bit fiddly, involving the use of the panel controls and the keys themselves in various combinations. Fortunately, the process is well explained in the PDF manual. That document also includes info on features that are not immediately apparent in casual use, like the fact that the drum pads also work as variable proportional pressure controls, meaning that the harder you press on a pad, the higher a value it sends out on whatever MIDI continuous controller you've assigned to it. Shades of the ARP Odyssey! Also, even the tiny 25-key model supports up to three simultaneous zones for exotic multiple-destination tricks. There's even a little section near the end of the manual that demystifies often mysterious MIDI stuff such as program and bank change commands, sys-ex, and non-registered parameter numbers, inviting you to get rather deep into programming. And if configuring presets via an LCD interface strikes you

as a bit quaint, you can always zip over to the M-Audio site, pick up a free copy of their Enigma configuration software and set everything up from the larger screen of your computer.

### CONCLUSIONS

With semi-weighted action, aftertouch, pressure sensitive drum pads, multiple zones and rugged construction, the Axiom 25 definitely sets a new standard for super-compact MIDI keyboards. If you need more keys, 49- and 61-note models are available for a modest increase in price. The two larger models include a few more amenities such as four programmable zones, numeric keypad, nine faders in addition to the eight knobs, and adjustable velocity curves. Taking all that into consideration, the \$379.95 list price for the 61-key version is quite the killer value. All in all, the Axiom will appeal to users looking for a controller that's a good deal more substantial than the Oxygen line, for only a little bit more cash. 

### CLAIM CHECK

M-Audio says "The Axioms extend the M-Audio keyboard controller legacy with a new feature set that makes them especially well-suited to both studio and stage use. We paired all-new components with tried-and-true technology to yield what we believe is the next generation of MIDI controllers. For the serious player, the Axioms feature a completely redesigned keyboard with piano-style fronts, semi-weighted action, and aftertouch. For advanced DAW control, we included multiple zoning options, a bright display, and a host of knobs and buttons. Velocity- and pressure-sensitive trigger pads facilitate drum programming and performance. And for the gigging musician, we built a robust, reinforced chassis that will stand up to frequent transport and use. By delivering all this at a more affordable price point than the competition, we believe the Axiom line is a home run for all software-based musicians."