



FutureMusic



# Novation Circuit Mono Station £479

Circuit's intuitive sequencer meets the Bass Station II's analogue synth engine. **Si Truss** takes another lap around the Circuit...

**CONTACT** WHO: Novation **WEB:** [uk.novationmusic.com](http://uk.novationmusic.com) **KEY FEATURES** Paraphonic analogue synth with three-channel sequencer. **MEMORY:** 64 preset sounds, 16 preset Sessions and 16 empty Session slots. **I/O:** 1/4-inch audio out, mini-jack headphone out, 1/4-inch audio in, CV out, gate out, aux CV out, MIDI in, out and thru, clock in and out, USB



**THE PROS & CONS**

Flexible modulation matrix including auxilliary CV out

**Deceptively deep sequencer, capable of paraphonic and polyrhythmic sequencing**

Most parameters can be automated

**Good range of analogue and digital ins and outs**



Without a screen, editing can get a touch confusing



between low-, high- and band-pass, with -12dB and -24dB slopes. There are resonance and cutoff rotaries as well as an overdrive control, allowing the signal to be pushed hard into the filter. A bypass switch allows either, or both, of oscillator 2 and the noise oscillator to dodge the filter completely, which is handy for creating percussive sounds.

Beyond this is a distortion section, switchable between three modes: one offering the distortion circuit from the Bass Station, one offering a new fuzz circuit, and a third option that blends the two. There's a decent amount of tonal variation and, coupled with the filter overdrive, it allows for some pleasingly gritty, aggressive sounds.

Modulation-wise, Mono Station deviates more dramatically from the BS II. Here, the envelope and LFO count is reduced to one of each, but both feed into a modulation matrix, which also allows velocity and the sequencer to be used as sources. There are seven internal destinations: pitch and pulse width for each oscillator, filter cutoff, amp and distortion level – plus a CV output.

The other major difference from the Bass Station II is that Mono

Station – despite its name – operates in a paraphonic manner, meaning its two oscillators can play two distinct notes, albeit fed through the same signal path. This is controlled using the sequencer. As with the original Circuit, the sequencer and playing interface is laid out across 32 backlit pads, with multiple channels selected via a row of buttons above. Where Circuit's sequencer channels controlled separate synths and sample tracks, here the first two sequencer sections control the individual oscillators with a third channel for modulation.

In practice, if a note sequence is only played or inputted via oscillator 1's sequencer, both oscillators will follow that pitch, but as soon as a note is triggered from oscillator 2's sequencer, that oscillator will switch to following this second pitch. Pressing Shift can toggle between two different paraphonic modes, dictating whether or not oscillator 2's sequencer also triggers the amp section. A 'dual' sequencer window lets users play both oscillators simultaneously, with osc 1 controlled via the upper half of the sequencer grid and 2 controlled by the lower, allowing two-note chords.

**C**ircuit Mono Station is, in loose terms, a hybrid of two of Novation's best instruments: a combination of the meaty analogue synth engine of the Bass Station II, and Circuit's excellent sequencer.

Housed in a chassis similar to – but slightly taller than – Circuit, Mono Station's interface is roughly divided in half, with the upper section housing the synth controls and the lower portion controlling the sequencer.

The synth itself is like a remixed version of the BS II. At its heart are a pair of digitally controlled analogue oscillators – switchable between sine, triangle, saw and variable-width square waves – accompanied by a sub oscillator, which tracks osc 1's pitch, and a noise generator. These can all be dialled in via the mixer, which also features a gain control for an external audio input, and a rotary for dialling in ring modulation.

Mono Station loses the multiple filter types of the BS II in favour of a single multimode filter, switchable

## THE ALTERNATIVES



### Novation Bass Station II £359

An update to Novation's '90s classic, offering a similarly spec'd synth engine with mini key control, priced at around £100 cheaper.

[novationmusic.com](http://novationmusic.com)



### Novation Circuit £264

The original Circuit's two digital polysynth engines shouldn't be underestimated, particularly at this price. There are four sample channels onboard too!

[novationmusic.com](http://novationmusic.com)



### Korg ARP Odyssey module £540

The Odyssey is probably the best known paraphonic synth. This module version for Korg's re-issue is faithfully gritty, but offers nothing in the way of sequencer or keyboard control.

[www.korg.com/uk](http://www.korg.com/uk)

As with the original Circuit, the sequencer itself is a highlight here, offering a depth and flexibility that belies its simple appearance. Much of Circuit's functionality is carried across wholesale, such as the individual tabs for per-step gate length and velocity control, preset scales, the ability to chain multiple patterns into lengthier sequences – up to 16 for osc 1, eight each for osc 2 and the mod sequencer – and the option to vary the lengths of individual patterns, allowing for creative polyrhythmic sequencing. A new Pattern Settings tab adds yet more functionality too, letting users change the note division for each 16-step pattern as well as direction – switchable between forward, backward, ping-pong and randomise.

The new modulation sequencer functions in a similar – although simplified – manner to the melodic ones. Rather than offering individual note and velocity tabs, here each step is simply assigned a 'level', which is sent into the mod matrix. There's a 'smooth' function available too, for rounding off the edges of these stepped sequences.

This flexible modulation system already makes the Mono Station a powerful sound-shaper, but it's worth noting that almost every front panel control can record automation too. It all adds up to a hugely powerful way to interact with the synth engine.

The flipside to this is that it can be easy to get lost when designing patches. While colour-coded LEDs indicate parameter states under each control, with no screen it can sometimes be tough to keep track of modulation routings. Novation are



**INDICATOR LEDS** Coloured LEDs below each control indicate parameter depth. These turn red when recording automation.

**SEQUENCER** Despite its simple appearance, Mono Station's 32-pad grid is capable of some deep sequencing tricks.

**DISTORTION** There are three flavours of distortion: that found in the Bass station II, a new fuzz circuit, and a blend of both.

planning on adding a quick way to clear both mod routings and synth settings in an upcoming firmware update, which may well be out by the time you read this.

On the whole, the workflow is Mono Station's trump card. Sonically it's impressive – capable of gritty leads, resonant basses and great percussion and FX – but there

are other, cheaper synths that can do similar territory (the £350 Bass Station II, for one!) But the deep, multi-channel sequencer, flexible mod matrix and automation all add up to a workflow and creative experience unlike anything else on the market, combining the best of digital flexibility with a classic analogue synth design. This might look like a hybrid of two existing instruments, but the result is much more than the sum of those parts. **FM**

## ANALOGUE AND DIGITAL I/O

Mono Station is equipped with a decent array of ins and outs. On the audio front, there's a main 1/4-inch jack out along with a mini-jack headphone out along the front edge. There's a 1/4-inch jack audio in too, allowing an external signal to be fed through the filter, amp and distortion circuits. Feeding the headphone out into the audio in can create a nicely gritty feedback loop. There's a selection of analogue control outs too – offering CV and gate, along with an auxiliary CV out fed by the mod matrix. There's also pulse clock in and out, along with MIDI in, out and thru, and MIDI USB for DAW sync.

## FM VERDICT

# 9.2

The combination of a solid analogue sound engine, uniquely powerful sequencer and competitive price point make this a must-try synth



# Polyphonic and paraphonic synth sequencing...

Mono Station's three-channel sequencer can create surprisingly complex patterns. Let's take a look

## 03 >

Shift pressing 'Scales' toggle the sequencer's two paraphonic modes, controlling whether or not the Osc 2 sequence triggers the synth's amp. Effectively, this dictates whether the second sequence has any rhythmic impact, or whether it merely blends into the pattern created under Osc 1.



## 01 >

Mono Station features three sequencer channels – two offer separate control over the oscillators, and the third acts as a modulation source. The Osc sequencers can have note, gate length and velocity levels set for each step, the latter providing a further mod source.



## 04 >

The modulation sequencer is a little simpler, with each step featuring just a level value to be sent to the mod matrix. Shift pressing 'Mod Seq' will smooth out the sequence, avoiding abrupt parameter jumps.



## 02 >

Inputting a sequence only via Osc 1 will cause both oscillators to follow the same pitch. As soon as separate notes are added under Osc 2, the second oscillator will deviate and follow this new pitch.



## 05 >

Under the Pattern Settings tab, we can control length, note division and direction of each individual pattern. This can allow us to create complex polyrhythms across the three sequencer channels. For example, try a 16-step melodic sequence from osc 1, a 6-step pattern of notes on osc 2 and 12-step modulation sequence routed to the filter.



## 06

Pattern chaining allows the creation much longer sequences. Under the Patterns view, up to 16 patterns can be chained for Osc 1, and up to 8 can be chained for Osc 2 and the mod sequencer. Holding down Shift and Clear gives us a duplicate function, which is very handy for extending sequences.

