

Roland Jupiter-8 – the grand master of synth-pop

Roland Jupiter-8 Synthesizer: The name alone is magic to many musicians' ears. And as much a desired object today as in 1981. Next to the Sequential Prophet-5, this synthesizer represents one of the milestones in the history of polyphonic analog synthesizers.



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Listening to the Jupiter-8 these days may impress you, while at the same time you could deem it a tick less spectacular than others of its famous contemporaries.

Whether it's the [Moog Memorymoog](#), [Sequential Prophet-5](#), Rhodes Chroma, [Yamaha CS-50/60/80](#), Oberheim OB-X/Xa or [Oberheim OB-8](#): They all sound a little more alive and – depending on one's own judgement – a little more “analog” than the Jupiter-8, possibly because of their lively, while slightly unstable, tuning, their special filter design, or their myriad modulation routings. There are many reasons why musicians *could* find them more exciting than the Jupiter.

And yet: Ask *any* random keyboarder around the globe about his dream of dreams, and he will probably whisper ...

JUPITER-8



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... with that reverent plea in his voice: *“That ... that ... well, that ... would be ... would be ... would be ... a ... R o l a n d ... J u p i t e r ... 8.”*

Allowing for the fact that the story of this 8-voice flagship could fill whole books, let’s concentrate on 5 of its most remarkable aspects.

Aspect No. 1: the Roland money maker

Looking back: After its founding in 1972, Roland fought against financial uncertainty for years. The company was too small and too little-known to convince Japanese banks to grant them the sizeable credits necessary to finance electronic components. So, how to get the company off the ground?

Roland-founder Ikutaro Kakehashi did get his credits, in due, but from his suppliers, not from his banks. And they granted him time, rather than money. 90 days, to be exact, in which to transform those components into instruments, to get those instruments out onto the market, and to sell them.



LFO with indicator for both (LOWER / UPPER) onboard LFOs.

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In the end, the projected five years of financial recovery turned out to be eight - long - years. But by 1979/80, the gamble had paid off. Roland had established itself on the international market and was now a *Global Player*.*

With the Jupiter-8, Roland entered a long-term phase of financial security. Although this new Japanese synth was staggeringly expensive (980.000 YPN, 4000 GBP in 1981), it was also staggeringly good. As such, it was soon an object of desire for pro-musicians all over the world.

[* Although, for a split second, Roland was nearly forced into bankruptcy in 1980. The official foreign exchange rate (Yen - European currencies) shifted dramatically, drastically increasing the prices for Japanese imports to Europe and forcing *Brodr Jorgensen* (Copenhagen), European Roland distributor, out of business.



VCO compartment with continuously variable VCO-2.

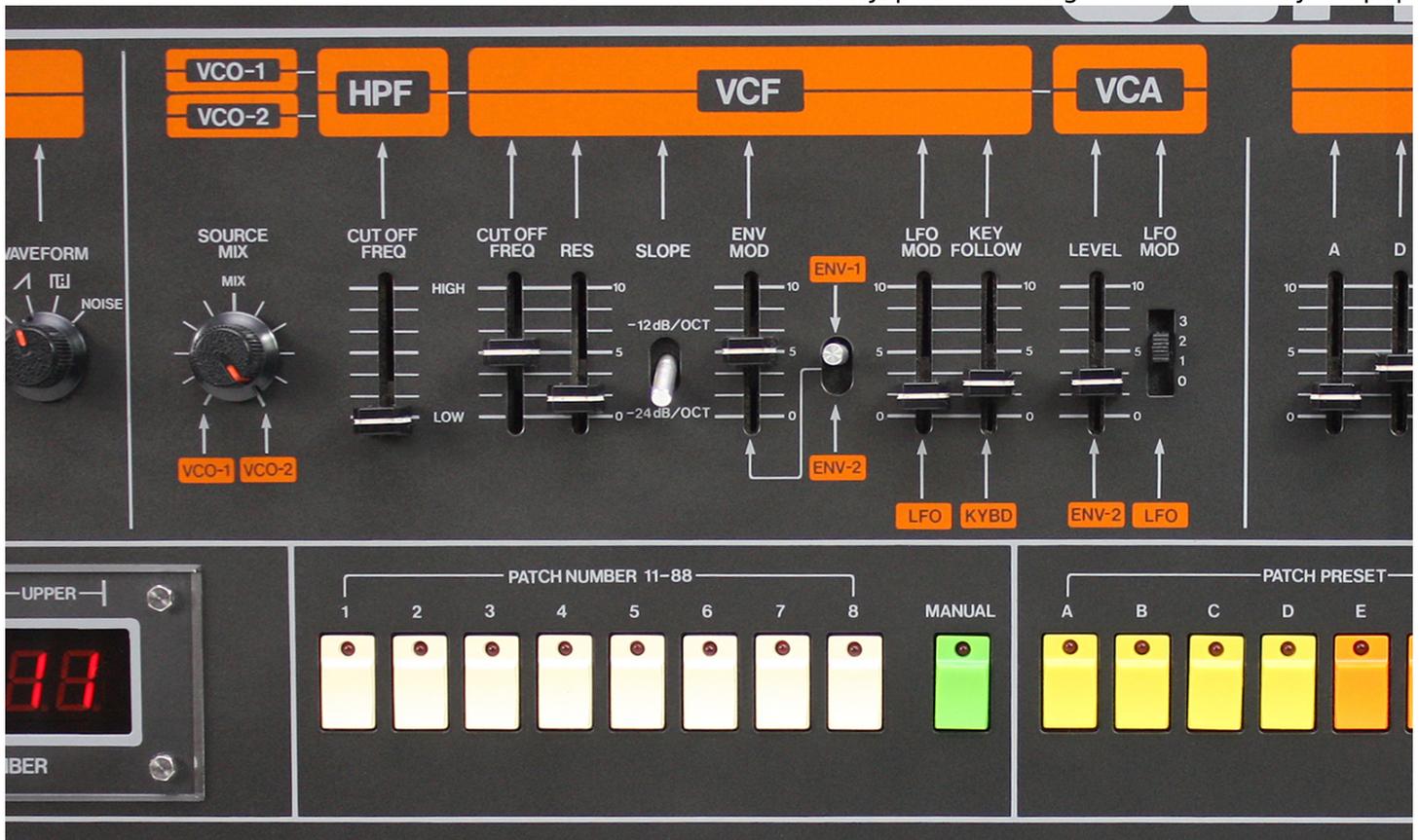
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In consequence, Roland not only lost its access to the European market, but also threatened to lose goods already on their way to Europe - worth 1 Million USD - as well. That would have meant financial ruin for the company. At the last minute, Kakehashi managed to call the ships back. And a Japanese bank (third and last choice!) saved the day by providing a huge credit, enabling Roland to continue European distribution. Big scare, happy end.]

Aspect No. 2 High-End-Technology, or: best of the best

As an ambitious company, the Roland of the 70s and 80s was determined to give its customers only the best. In relation to instruments, this meant satisfying a target group and its special financial possibilities. SH-1, SH-2 and SH-3 were produced with students (and their budgets) in mind, whereas Jupiter-4 and Jupiter-8 were meant for the more elite market of established musicians looking for "solo voice orchestration" (key word: polyphony).

Be that as it may - take *any* Roland synthesizer from way back then and give it a good look. Its high construction quality is still evident.



Manual HighPass Filter and VC 12/24dB LowPass Filter.

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It's a simple rule of thumb: Speaking of reliability, Japanese polyphonic analog synthesizers are "good", American polyphonic analog synthesizers are "problematic". Even if the above-mentioned classic instruments (Moog Memorymoog, Rhodes Chroma, Sequential Prophet-5, Oberheim OB-8, etc.) might be far superior in terms of flexibility and musical expression, none of them can compete with the high-quality craftsmanship of the Jupiter-8.*

[* Whereby, Yamaha's CS-80 is an exception to this rule. Its inner life is far too complex and elaborate to qualify it as a "reliable" instrument.]

Even today, the Jupiter-8 ranges technically among the top synths of all times. It's the most reliable polyphonic analog (pro) synthesizer of the synth-pop era. A piece of technical mastery.

Aspect No. 3: well-balanced, timeless design

Short and to the point: The Jupiter-8 stands for the most elegant synth design ever. This is my humble opinion, of course, but ... Roland's flagship is still without a doubt the best-designed polyphonic (analog) synthesizer around.



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Everything where it belongs, nothing where it shouldn't be.

Nick Rhodes: "... the best designed synthesizer I've ever seen. It's so streamlined, and everything is in the right place." (Source: [Peter Forrest - The A-Z of Analog Synthesizers](#), Part Two, p. 109)

A well-maintained Jupiter-8 is just as breathlessly beautiful today as it was in 1981.

Aspect No. 4: ANALOG with a bit of DIGITAL flair

I've been wondering for years why the Jupiter-8 is so coveted the world around. Ok, ok, of course it sounds good, but ... isn't the vivacious Memorymoog much more inspiring? And what about the Rhodes Chroma with its endless modulation possibilities? And the stunning Oberheim OB-8 with its lovely stereo voice-panning?

Let's stop comparing, since this won't take us anywhere. The Jupiter-8 came onto the market in 1980/81 and eliminated with one stroke most of the weaknesses associated with its competitors. Its sound was not only very stable, but also futuristic, anticipating the digital era then appearing on the horizon.*



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Futuristic: Not only *precise* and *reliable*, but with a revolutionary *slim line*. Characteristics that also distinguish a Yamaha DX7 (although we're far from wanting to make a comparison between the Jupiter-8 and DX7).

[* Admittedly, the Jupiter-8 had its problems with voice stability in the very beginning. That was quickly solved by replacing the internal 12-bit-converter with a 14-bit-converter.]

The Jupiter-8 sound generally gets by without those irritating voices drifting out-of-tune, a sound that is reliable, a sound that enables 8-voiced-chords (and those harmonically *exact* and *precise*), finally, a sound that can be re-tuned in a split second (14-bit models of the Jupiter-8), all in all: The sound-ideal of a professional instrument (and of a whole generation).

In addition to these musical aspects, the Jupiter-8 also boasts a digital hardware speciality: Roland released the DCB (*Digital Communication Bus*) in 1981 - a fore-runner of MIDI, if you want - and then released the Jupiter-8 and Juno-60 with DCB in 1982, alongside with the JSQ-60 DCB-sequencer.



So, starting with Ser. No. 282880, the Jupiter-8 was equipped with that DCB port. But in order to connect it to MIDI, you still needed the Roland MD-8 (MIDI-DCB) interface.

Aspects No. 5: the grand master of synth-pop

True, the Jupiter-8 is about more than just synth-pop. It was by no means just an instrument for that new genre that featured the synthesizer as dominating instrument, but also a major factor in film music, a major factor, actually, in professional music applications all around the globe.

But it came out in 1981, at the time when synth-pop was at its zenith:

“Synth-pop reached its commercial peak in the UK in the winter of 1981–2, with bands such as Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark, Japan, Ultravox, Soft Cell, Depeche Mode and even Kraftwerk, enjoying top ten hits.

In early 1982, synthesizers were so dominant that the Musicians Union attempted to limit their use. By the end of 1982, these acts had been joined in the charts by synth-based singles from Thomas Dolby, Blancmange, and Tears for Fears. The proliferation of acts led to an anti-synth backlash, with groups including Spandau Ballet, Human League, Soft Cell and ABC incorporating more conventional influences and instruments into their sounds.”

(Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synth-pop>)

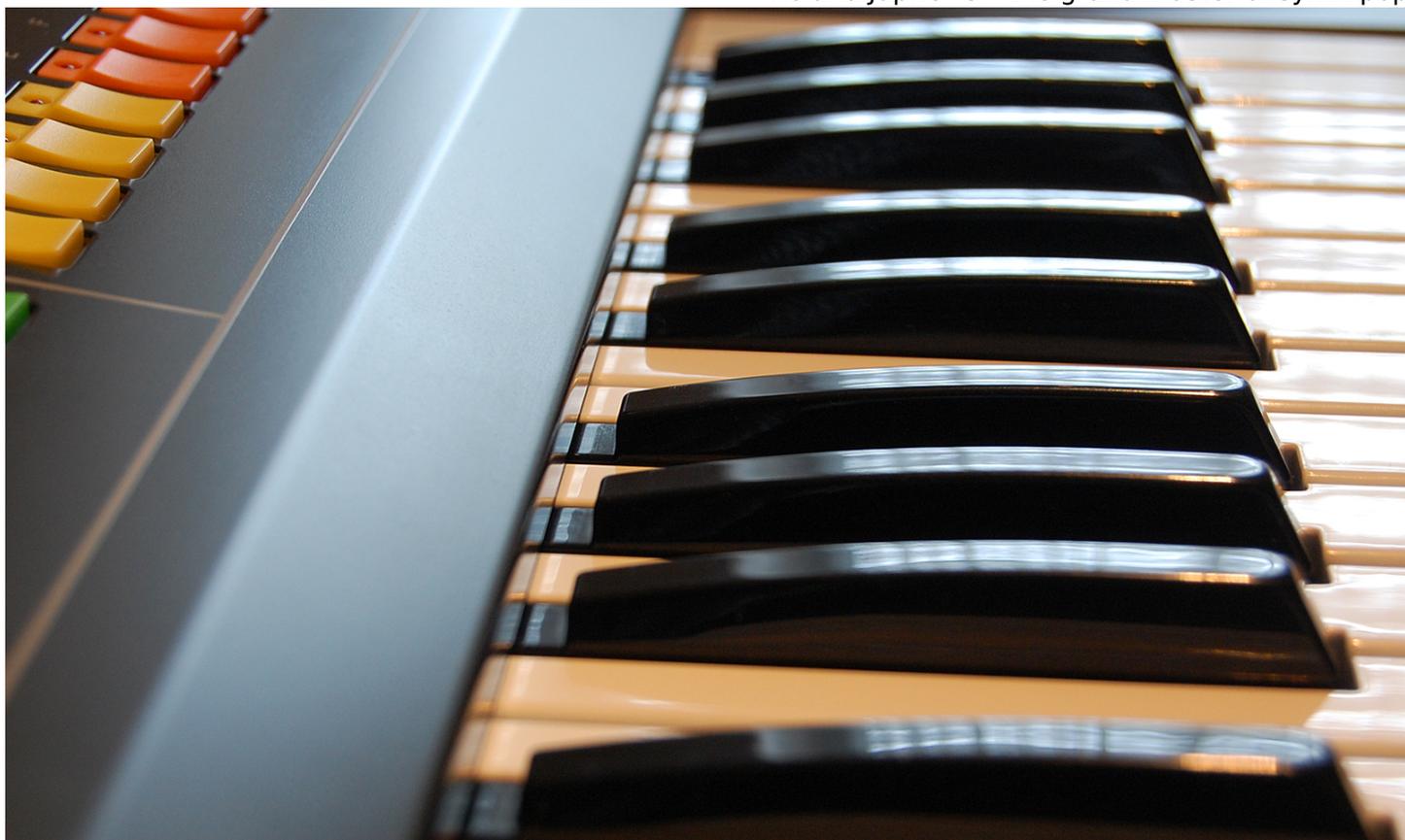


Rarely - then and now - has there been a pro-musician who didn't call a Jupiter-8 his own. Even though, in 1981, this instrument of instruments was very difficult to come by. Harold Faltermeyer explains:

"When the Roland Jupiter-8 first came out, it was the most desired instrument on earth - so, needless to say, you couldn't get it. There was a waiting list for it. We had a very good relationship with Roland, though, due to the fact that I worked with Jeff Baxter from the Doobie Brothers. He was under contract with them, so he had access to the instruments. He put in a word, you know, so I definitely got a deal.

The Jupiter-8's particular sound comes from the structure of the two oscillators of each bank - of each voice - so you can actually layer them. This makes for a very fat, good sound. The Jupiter-8 was my main instrument for melodies - all the "Axel F" melodies were made on it."

(Source: [Harold Faltermeyer's Favorite Synths](#), RedBull Music Academy)



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Julian Colbeck even compares the Jupiter-8 with the Yamaha CS-80:

"[...] the JP-8's range of unbeatable synth/brass patches quickly established it as the only real rival to Yamaha's CS-80, the previous undisputed world champion in the heavyweight division."

(Source: [Julian Colbeck - Keyfax Omnibus Edition](#), MixBooks, p. 105)

Although the modulation possibilities of the Jupiter-8 are modest - to say the least (just a single LFO, cross modulation and noise ... and that's it) - the instrument's range of sounds can be increased by utilizing its exemplary array of control voltage inputs. In the attached soundfiles "Ext LFO (1)" and "Ext LFO (2)" we used an external (wide frequency) LFO for filter modulation.

Another important fact: The Jupiter-8 blends well without getting lost in (and without dominating) a mix. Unlike the Moog Memorymoog, for example. *That* synth is an excellent solo-synthesizer, but might adversely affect your mix, as Memorymoog users attest.



Nothing against the Jupiter-8 and its high-end analog sound. But that high-end analog sound may get it into a bind. Many modern (virtual analog) instruments are acoustically similar. An Access Virus, for example, is an ideal instrument for soft pads, something that a Jupiter-8 can do, too.

So, since the Jupiter-8 rarely goes out-of-tune, and since it boosts such a brilliant, stable analog sound, it may be difficult to distinguish its sound from modern (virtual analog) synths. Of course we're talking about bread-and-butter sounds. A soft sawtooth-pad, for example. When it comes to screaming, vivid sync-lead-lines, no virtual-analog competitor can hold a candle to the Jupiter-8 - we have to admit.

Whether or not the new desktop JP-08 boutique synthesizer is a real substitute, remains to be seen. The toothpick-sized faders are a strong indication of the current Toys'R'Us-synthesizer-culture. So, using such an instrument (if you want to call it that) in a studio is - at least to us - No-Go.



JP-08: The pocket-size Jupiter. Photo (c) Roland.

And yes ... and what about the new [JUPITER-X](#)? Well ... read our review (if you like to), listen to various Jupiter-X sound files and voilà: Judge for yourself.

“JUPITER-X combines classic Roland design and premium build quality with a powerful new synth engine. It faithfully recreates sought-after instruments from our long history of genre-defining sounds. And with multiple layers, loads of polyphony, and deep hands-on control, you can craft huge, spacious sounds that have as much sparkle as they have warmth and punch.”
(www.roland.com)

We partially agree with that. Jupiter-X construction and design are both very good. It's a modern Sample+Synthesis and VA-based workstation with lots of musical potential. And then it's by no means a successor to the Jupiter-8, nor to the Juno-106, SH-101 or whatever. Instead, it's a high-quality instrument that includes innumerable classic Roland sounds based on a modern-technology synth engine.



JUPITER-X - the latest member of the Jupiter family. Photo (c) Roland.

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Those of you on the look out for the *real* vintage Roland sound, reminiscent of the Jupiter-8, should keep a lookout for a [Roland Juno-60](#). Thanks to its integrated stereo-chorus and sub-oscillator, the Juno sounds full and warm, similar to the Jupiter-8. In terms of arpeggio- and sequencer-pattern-sounds, standard lead-lines, warm organ-sounds and soft strings, the Juno-60 delivers just about everything we associate with that classical *Vintage Roland Sound*. Highly recommendable.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, the **Jupiter-8 – the grand master of synth-pop** – is still one of the brightest stars in synthesizer heaven. Several aspects characterize it as a flagship synth: The extremely high craftsmanship (resulting in top reliability), its well-balanced and timeless design, its powerful (if somewhat steril) analog sound.

So it remains up to you to decide whether you place your priorities with the powerful, yet clean and stable Jupiter-8 sounds, or not.



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The value of the instrument on the used market remains high. While in 2019 top prices of 12,000 to 18,000 Euros/USD were demanded for a Jupiter-8, the level dropped slightly in spring 2020, then rose again end of 2020 / beginning of 2021. Current auctions range between 20,000 and 30,000 Euros/USD, as of 2025, which is an incredible amount of money.

The unique selling point of 1981 (that highly reliable sound) is not necessarily a top goal these days. Quite to the contrary: It's those synths with their one or other weaknesses (poor tuning stability, etc.) and strong sound characteristics (special filter design, etc.), that might be seen as the cream of the crop in terms of exciting *vintage* analog sound today. All considerations aside: The Jupiter-8 remains one of the great classic synthesizers of all time. Its sounds are warm, powerful and massive.

And it's still an eye-catcher.



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Appendix: Approx. 3300 Jupiter-8 were made. Production run started in February 1981 (Ser. No. 030100) and probably continued until end of 1984. The highest Jupiter-8 serial number we found on the [web](#) is Ser. No 453338 (date of production: August 1984).

We have attached 25 minutes of audio material in which you hear the Roland Jupiter-8 exclusively. With the exception of the soundfile “The Roland Family” (by Luis Debon), which is a mix of the Roland Jupiter-4, Jupiter-6, Jupiter-8, JD-800, VP-330, SH-101 and CR-78.

1. [Dual Modus](#)
2. [Massive Pad 1](#)
3. [Massive Pad 2](#)
4. [Massive Pad 3](#)
5. [Massive Pad 4](#)
6. [External LFO Mod 1](#)
7. [External LFO Mod 2](#)
8. [Pop](#)
9. [PWM Pad](#)
10. [Roland-Jupiter8-Arpeggio2020-1](#)
11. [Roland-Jupiter8-Arpeggio2020-2](#)
12. [Octave Ranges Solo Play](#)
13. [Simple Split / Arpeggio Lead](#)
14. [Roland-Jupiter8-LuisDeBon](#)
15. [GRP-R24-Roland-Jupiter-8-01](#)
16. [GRP-R24-Roland-Jupiter-8-02](#)

Roland Jupiter-8

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with 8 Voices, Split/Double Mode
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Links:

[Vintage Synth Explorer](#)

[Wikipedia Article](#)

Comparison:

[Roland Juno-60 Review](#)

[Roland Jupiter-X Review](#)

[Korg Trident Review](#)

[Elka Synthex Review](#)

[Oberheim OB-8 Review](#)

[Moog Memorymoog Review](#)

[Sequential Prophet-5 Review](#)

[Yamaha CS-50/CS-60/CS-80 Review](#)

Open / Download:

[Roland Jupiter-8 Front I](#) (4500 x 3000px)

[Roland Jupiter-8 Front II](#) (4500 x 3000px)

[Roland Jupiter-8 Back](#) (4500 x 3000px)

The Story of the Roland Jupiter-8 (by Johnny Morgan):