



Intellijel Cascadia £2,025

With this coast-crossing, platform-hopping, semi-modular synth, Intellijel aims to win a torrent of new fans. **Rob Redman** gets into the flow

CONTACT WHO: Intellijel **WEB:** www.intellijel.com **KEY FEATURES** Two Precision Analog VCOs, Six Channel Waveform Mixer, 4-Pole Multimode Filter, Dual Digital Envelopes, MIDI > CV Interface

THE PROS & CONS



Compact but
feature-rich

Mix of East and West
Coast synthesis

Versatile and varied
tonal possibilities



Expensive

No onboard effects
or sequencer



An awful lot to offer before you even reach for your first patch cable

strip, housing some of the IOs, as well as labels for the back panel. The rear itself is where you find the 1/4 inch sockets for outputs (line and headphone), the effects loop and MIDI in, out and through, alongside power and USB C port. The rest of Cascadia is laid out in clearly defined sections.

The features on offer cater to pretty much everything you'd ever need in a synth, with a couple of notable exceptions. Firstly there are no onboard effects. At first glance this omission feels off but it turns out that Intellijel has made the right call. Rather than cluttering the front panel with effects that may, or may not be used, this approach means you can use your favourite pedals and outboard gear, tailoring patches to fit your workflow and, let's be honest, outboard effects are generally of a much higher quality

than built-in. Having effects in a send/return loop with controls for levels and mix makes it easy to dial in too. That said there are features here that could be considered effects, such as ring mod and drive, both of which sound glorious.

Secondly, there is no built-in sequencer. Again, it would be nice to see but considering the real estate of the Cascadia, something would have had to make way to include this. Again, Intellijel has made the right call here and one of the joys of this synth is its ability to fit into a wider workflow. The options for connecting with other gear are just right, with excellent MIDI to CV options, that include clock divisions, gates, CC and even a MIDI LFO. Every patch point is Eurorack-compatible, making it simple to integrate with other modules, so sequencing can be handled elsewhere, freeing up

Cascadia is something of a departure for Intellijel, being its first foray away from Eurorack where it has earned legions of fans. That said, it can fit into a Eurorack workflow with ease, so brand loyalists won't feel alienated. The semi-modular synth is smaller than it looks in photos, at just under 35cm across, yet doesn't feel at all cramped, even considering the number of features that have been

crammed in. Intellijel has always excelled at clean, clear labelling and Cascadia is no different. The layout is crisp, with simple colour coding helping you find your way around, from in and out ports to pre-wired/normalled circuitry. Which is a fine time to mention that Cascadia has an awful lot to offer before you even reach for your first patch cable.

Although not Eurorack format, Intellijel has kept to a familiar design language, so those with one of their Palettes will feel at home. There's a top row, which is similar to the 1U

THE ALTERNATIVES



Erica Synths Syntrix £1900

A semi-modular dual VCO mono synth with plenty of modulation, controlled by a matrix. It's a beautiful synth, well crafted and sounds wonderful. The joystick control is a nice addition

ericasynths.lv



Moog Matriarch £1600

For an instantly playable semi-modular synth you can't go wrong with the Matriarch, with its excellent keyed, module style layout and a beautiful stereo delay

moogmusic.com



Behringer Neutron £350

A very capable semi-modular synth. Like Moog's Mother 32, it has all the patch points in one block, making it easy to get at the controls while you're setting up a patch

behringer.com

space for features that are more beneficial to a standalone synth.

The top down view of Cascadia is as a dual oscillator mono synth, with two filters, wave folding, modulations galore and VCAs to help refine a patch. That massively undersells Cascadia however, which is one of those rare devices that is far more than the sum of its parts. Every module (if that's what we're calling the features) is well thought out, most of them having a toggle switch here, or a patch point there, that opens them up for experimentation and allows for near limitless patching and sound design. Some are more obvious and clearly go beyond commonly found options.

The filter is a prime example of this. It's a multimode filter that has eight modes, is self resonant, as well as having slider controls for FM. It's a wonderfully wet-sounding filter with plenty of character and demonstrates Intellijel's focus on offering that little extra.

Sound design starts with the two VCOs, both of which output a number of wave shapes, including PWN on VCO A, with a slider and patch point for pulse width. VCO A is the more complex of the two and is where a lot of modulation takes place. There's also a toggle for hard or soft sync and TZFM (through-zero frequency modulation), making for further tonal variation options. VCO B is a simpler affair but still outputs four wave shapes, as well as having a toggle to switch it to LFO rates. Both VCOs have pitch controls alongside an octave selector, covering eight octaves, which track perfectly.



I/Os Housing the IOs on the back panel keeps everything clean and helps for a tidy setup when used in a broader system

COLOURFUL CHARACTER Clear colour coding really aids in navigating Cascadia, including pre-wired paths

LOOP THE LOOP An effects loop is a fantastic addition for introducing outboard gear and rare to see on a synth

Envelopes are a similar deal, with one being a traditional East Coast type, although it has an assignable hold function, as well as a speed toggle. The second is less of an envelope and more a function generator, that can be used for all manner of shaping, with options for rise and fall. Options for speed, burst and shape, amongst others, again showing Intellijel's thoughtful design. It would have been easy to throw in two ADSRs and be done but, much like the rest of Cascadia, the options are useable in a multitude of ways.

All of this, along with the sample and hold section, the wavefolder and the VCAs would be great but managing everything is key to the success of any synth so, unsurprisingly, you'll find a strip of utilities across the middle section of Cascadia. These run from Multi and unity mixer to Slew and Envelope Follower, controls for expression, and everything is labelled for ease of following the signal path.

Intellijel has diversified here and it was a decision well made. It's a simple device on the face of it but marries East and West seamlessly, is capable of a wide variety of great tones. It may be a hefty initial investment but soon becomes a rewarding one. **FM**

EAST VS WEST

Synths generally fall into one of two camps; East or West. Moog-type instruments fall into the East Coast and feel somewhat more tradition and linear when it comes to sound design, where West Coast, most notably those made by Buchla, tend toward the wave-folding style. Cascadia implements both in a way that feels perfectly natural. More synths are doing this recently, which can only be a good thing, as it offers musicians more versatility and prevents the whole 'which camp do you fall in' debate.

FM VERDICT

8.0

A bit of a master stroke. Cascadia merges different synthesis types wonderfully and houses them in a format that works extremely well