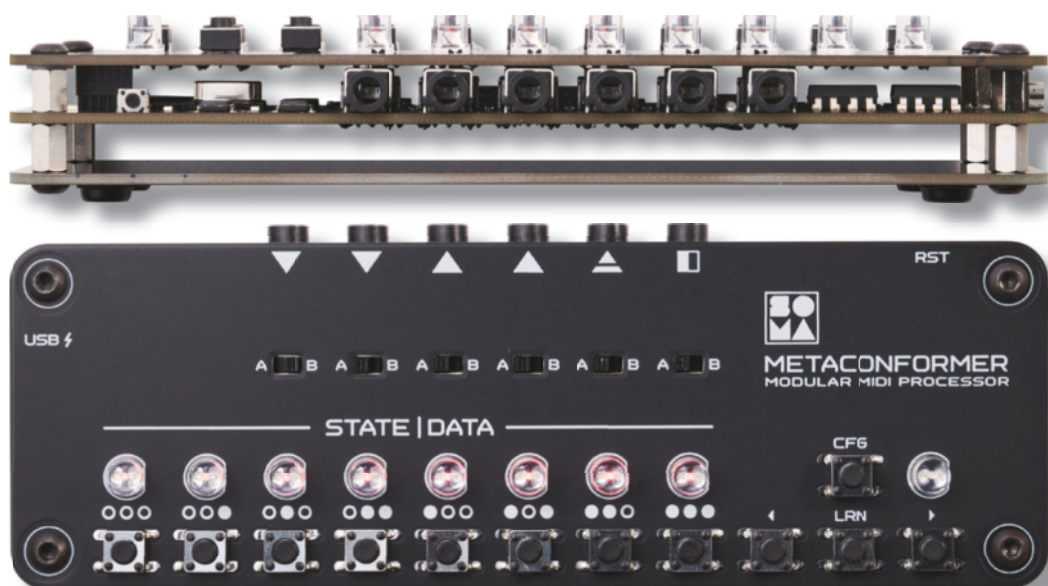# SOMA Labs Metaconformer

£175

As **Si Truss** discovers, SOMA's latest is more than just a basic MIDI thru box

CONTACT **WHO:** SOMA Labs **WEB:** somasynths.com **KEY FEATURES** **I/O:** 2x MIDI in, 3x MIDI out, 1x hybrid MIDI/sync out (MIDI to TRS adapters required). USB for power only

SOMA is best known for esoteric instruments such as the Lyra-8 'organismic' synth, Pulsar-23 drum machine and Terra, a microtonal synth built into a solid block of wood. Compared to these, the company's new device Metaconformer is fairly conservative.

Metaconformer is a MIDI router and thru box. It has two MIDI inputs and four outputs. In typical SOMA style though, Metaconformer does more than simply route MIDI.

The device functions in three modes, each making use of eight MIDI 'cells'. The first of these modes is a Splitter function. This lets the user set up keyboard splits in order to play two or more instruments from a single input. In this mode, each of Metaconformer's cells is assigned a set range of MIDI notes and outputs them to a specific MIDI channel with one of a variety of transposition options applied. At a basic level, this lets the user play multitimbral parts from a single keyboard, as you might a stage piano or multitimbral synth. However, since the assigned ranges can overlap with differing transposition settings, it also opens plenty of interesting options for layering multiple instruments.

The Combiner mode can be similarly creative. This allows for multiple hardware instruments to be controlled like a single polysynth. This works by assigning each of Metaconformer's cells as an

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individual voice, which then output to an assigned MIDI channel. Playing chords causes Metaconformer to route each new note to the next available cell, as a polysynth would with its available voices.

The final mode is named Translator. Here Metaconformer changes incoming MIDI notes into CC values. Each cell is assigned to output to its own MIDI channel and CC number. By connecting two MIDI controllers – or two Metaconformers – it's possible to 'play' both the notes and parameters of a synth at once.

Usefully, aside from these creative uses, Metaconformer can also act as a simple MIDI thru box. The final output can double up as a sync out too, allowing Metaconformer to be used as a clock divider.

In this sense, Metaconformer can be a useful little studio utility, and its creative capabilities can be very inspiring. While each mode is superficially straightforward, you can happily lose hours to pondering the many ways it's possible to make the device interact with your favourite hardware synths.

That being said, there are a few functional annoyances. The biggest

of these is the fact that the device requires a USB connection for power but doesn't accept MIDI over USB. This means that you'll need to make use of a USB port (or adapter/power bank) in order to use Metaconformer, but don't have the convenience of also using that connection to route MIDI from a DAW. The unit also ships without any of the necessary MIDI/TRS adapters or a USB lead for power, which uses the increasingly less-common mini USB-B. All of which feels a little tight given its relatively high price compared to some other MIDI routers. **FM**

FM VERDICT

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Despite being a slightly niche device with a few functional annoyances, Metaconformer remains unique and inspirational