

Hugh Padgham Interview: Behind the Gates of the Hitmaker

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VOL. THIRTY-SIX  
NUMBER FOUR  
JANUARY 2023  
USA \$5.99  
CANADA \$5.99





# EFNOTE 3X & EFNOTE 7

*Next-level electronic drums for the studio and stage*



EFNOTE 3X

## EFNOTE 7



### Makes and Models

There are three models, or tiers, in the EFNOTE line, each with a choice of a standard or expanded configuration as denoted by the letter X.

Note that each kit's sound modules, sounds, shells and cymbal selection are custom tailored to each kit. You can mix, match and add kit pieces across the board, but the sound modules themselves (while upgradeable with new kits and firmware from time to time), are not interchangeable. For example, you cannot purchase an EFNOTE 3 and expand it into an EFNOTE 7X. You can, however, work in reverse and use a 7X module to control a 3 or 5-series kit.

### Three

The EFNOTE 3 is the entry point of the line. It comes with four white sparkle-finish Monocoque FRP (fiber-reinforced plastic) shells with a 12 x 4" snare, two 10 X 3.5" toms and a 12 x 4" tom. The kick is an 8 x 3" pad style kick with comfy strike-feel fabric. There are two 14" crash cymbals, a 16" ride, and this is the only set in the line to use a 12" single hi-hat controller with an included hi-hat sensor pedal. All cymbals and drums mount to four included Lambda Tripod stands.

The EFNOTE 3X adds an additional 12 x 4" tom to the mix, and its shells are finished in what EFNOTE calls black

### REVIEW BY PAUL VNUK JR.

**B**orn in 2018 in Japan, EFNOTE offers a line of six electronic drum kits in various shapes and sizes, with a host of options and extras. The primary focus is on the sound and feel found in standard acoustic kits reproduced in electronic form with trick-the-senses accuracy. On review today are the EFNOTE 3X and EFNOTE 7 models.

### Overview

All EFNOTE drums use double-mesh drumheads atop multisensor shells and come with a selection of the company's 360° rubberized cymbals and a compact drum module.

Each kit includes a full complement of custom and traditional off-the-shelf mounting hardware except for a hi-hat stand and kick pedal. Beyond that, everything you need is inside the box. This also includes all the cables you will need to wire up the drums and cymbals to the included sound module.

oak-ish. The 3X moves up to a pair of 14" Tru-Motion hi-hats, and you also get a couple of 16" crash cymbals and an 18" ride. Lastly, the kick, while still of the compact variety, is a 12 x 4" kick with a double-mesh drum head.

## Five

Moving to the EFNOTE 5 (and 7) series sets, they feature double-headed traditional shells made of 6-ply birch. The stock sets are wrapped in white sparkle, while the X models are again black oak-ish.

The EFNOTE 5 is a 4-piece kit. It has a 12 x 5" 7-sensor snare, a 10 x 7" tom, a 12 x 12" free-standing floor tom and a 16 x 12" kick. It comes with 14" Tru-Motion high-hats, an 8" splash, a 16" crash and an 18" ride, plus cymbal stands and mounting hardware.

The EFNOTE 5X adds a 13 x 13" floor tom and a second 16" crash.

## Seven

The EFNOTE 7 is also a 4-piece set with a full-size 14 x 5.5" 9-sensor snare, 11 x 11" rack tom, 15 x 15" floor tom and 20 x 15" kick drum. It has 14" Tru-Motion high-hats, a 16" crash and a 20" ride.

The 7X adds a second 13 x 13" floor tom, an 8" splash and the world's first stackable 17" effects cymbal. While I did not get one for review, I played it at the NAMM show stacked with the 8" splash, and it's a pretty wicked concept. Again all stands (minus the hi-hat and kick pedal) are included.

## The Module

A 7 x 4.5 x 1.5" compact sound module is at the heart of each kit. The sounds and routings of each are tailored to the series model. The unit is made of metal with a monochrome 90s-esque soft-touch screen and a single push-button navigation dial.

On the left side of the unit, you will find an 1/8" headphone output, 1/8" audio input and a power socket. On the right is a Micro USB port to connect to your computer as a MIDI controller and 8-channel audio interface (Mac and Windows). Further connections—1/4" stereo outputs, traditional 5-Pin DIN MIDI and all TRS drum triggers—are made via two D-Sub/ breakout snake connectors.

The drum module handles kit selection and drum tuning, panning, levels and tailoring. You can also tweak triggers and zones to fit your playing style and touch.

There is also a custom audio routing matrix, drum/cymbal routing matrix, a metronome, stroke analysis, practice tools, an internal groove recorder and a setlist function.

When adding additional or rearranging kit pieces, the module automatically adjusts to that drum (or cymbals) sensor and zone configuration.

## Wireless

The unit also works with Bluetooth. It allows you to jam by playing along with songs and sounds from your smartphone or tablet. If you download the free EFNOTE app, you can trigger kit pieces remotely, edit levels (while the module plays a groove), and quickly swap trigger/pad routings. You can also store your custom kits and trigger/playing profile, which is handy when multiple players might be playing the same kit. Additionally, it has Bluetooth MIDI In and Out.

## The Sounds

EFNOTE kits are entirely sample-based using what EFNOTE calls Tru-Aco™ sound technology. According to the company, you get high resolution, true-stereo raw sampled sounds with zero resynthesis or modeling.

Approximately 95% of the drum sounds are acoustic-based, with only the 3 and 3X containing some gentle old-school electronic/drum machine leanings.

As mentioned, you can tweak each drum's tuning, damping (decay) and EQ and add ambiance from one of eight reverb offerings. You can change the panning and levels of every drum and zone, and you can build custom kits from any available drum or cymbal.

If you are after alien sounds, electronic glitch, ethnic offerings, or the ability to model a 40" bass drum virtually, these may not be your cup of tea.

You get a cross-section of classic acoustic drums and cymbals in various styles spanning loose, booming big band, super-dry 1970s kits, arena rock, funk, jazz, modern pop and more, including a Metal Master kit with baked-in compression and pre-EQ.

The 3 Series kits come with 16 preset drum kits made up of 50 instruments with 34 user slots. The 5 Series offers 17 preset kits and 128 instruments with 83 user slots, and the 7 Series has 20 presets, 128 instruments and 80 user kits.

This may sound a tad limited, but the focus here is on playable, high-quality acoustic sounding kits, not deep-twisted sound design.

That said, I did find a few curious omissions. While there is a single snare's off option, no brush, rute or mallet offerings are available so far—all quite popular in jazz, contemporary worship and modern folk genres.

## ELISE™

The EFNOTE playing experience is brought to you by ELISE sensor technology. ELISE translates the nuances of your playing from the drums and cymbals to the drum controller with remarkable consistency, stability and low latency.

## Drum Notes

Each drum contains multiple sensors designed to eliminate hot spots on the playing surface. The drums all use traditional drum hoops and tuning lugs, so you can adjust the heads to physically respond to your playing style and get the best response from said sensors. Each tom is a two-zone drum. You can play the head and the rims, which are covered in a high-impact rubber.

The full-size snare drums are 3-zone offerings with head, rim (shot) and side stick. The side stick is implemented by a robust rubber-tipped metal plate attached to the snare.





# EFNOTE 3X & EFNOTE 7



## Cymbal Play

The cymbals set EFNOTE apart from most other electronic drum kits. Each free-swinging cymbal is a 3-zone, bow, edge and cup design (second input is required for the cup, and the 8" splash is 2-zone only). More impressively, they are a multisensor 360° design. Unlike many electronic cymbals, you can play and mute them at any point on their circumference.

The hi-hat takes this 3-zone design, adds a second (plastic) bottom cymbal, and uses an optical sensor array to make the hi-hat playing as normal and lifelike as possible.

EFNOTE is the first company to offer a full selection of cymbal options from the 8" splash up to the massive 20" ride. You can, of course, use any size EFNOTE cymbal to trigger any internal cymbal (or drum) sound you want. But, like a good 88-key weighted controller coupled with a great piano library is to keyboard players, so it is here as it relates to feel and a psycho-acoustic "fool the brain" playing response.

My initial reaction to playing an EFNOTE 7X kit at the 2022 NAMM Show was that these were the first set of electronic drums I had ever played that got me close to the feel and reaction of actual acoustic drums—I was drawn in by the ride and hi-hat articulation (and the sound).

## In Use: Live

In addition to my job as the editor of RECORDING, I'm also the tech director at Grace Church in Racine, WI, where I oversee live sound, technology, streaming, recording and more in a 2,000-seat sanctuary.

Typically we use real drums (no drum cage) in a traditional, modern worship setting (2-3 guitars, bass, keys and 3-6 singers). Drums can be problematic when we wish to add a choir, a 3-piece horn section or delicate instruments like violin and cello—all of which is the case for the Christmas season.

The idea of adding an electronic kit option is to eliminate the cymbal bleed in these scenarios, plus I was excited to explore some new sonic options.

We have four drummers (myself included) with varying tastes and playing styles. Working with Artesia Pro, the U.S. distributor, we decided to go with a kit closest to the acoustic set used week in and week out—a 4-piece 22", 12" and 16" set with a 14" snare. The cymbal configuration is 14" hats, 16" and 18" crash cymbals, and a 22" ride. As such, we opted for the EFNOTE 7 and added a second 16" crash.

Our drummers have all spent some initial time on the kit, and three of us have used it during multiple rehearsals and services. Playing reactions have ranged from, "Ewww, mesh heads," to "These feel pretty good," and "These cymbals are weird," to "Wow, they react better than I expected."

## Perspectives

From a sound standpoint, each drummer's enjoyment of the set was tied mainly to what they put into them, balanced with expectation. If one is to sit down and just "have a bash" and expect them to sound and feel indistinguishable from an acoustic kit, there will be frustration and disappointment.

There is a learning curve, not only in how to navigate the tech but how you play them. If you find 2-3 kits you are initially drawn to and then tweak them to taste, the enjoyment factor improves significantly—especially as you start forming personal attachments to the selected kit. In tweaking the kit, you will get a feel for how it reacts and how it is best played.

Most of our drummers prefer deeper-toned, thick snare sounds and floor-rumbling toms, all possible with the tone, damping and EQ controls. Also, many of the sets were a tad too dry, which was easily remedied by adding some more ambiance—I liked Hall 2 the best.

The second step is to tweak the trigger reactions, if necessary, in small increments until things feel right. For instance, the kick triggered more consistently for me when I adjusted the playing curve up slightly.

While there was almost zero cross-talk across the board, one drummer got some false triggers of the snare rim at the bottom of the snare head. This was remedied by tightening the mesh head and adjusting the X-Talk parameter.

While the hi-hats sound fantastic, they can be tricky to set up and get used to. There is a hi-hat calibration feature and settings for all three zones, but things also depend on your physical hi-hat stand and your playing touch. One thing I found curious was that the hats always default to a loose/open upon changing kits, and you need to open and close them once to get them to be a closed tone.

A thing that stood out to all of the drummers was the broad range of the drums' sensitivity and volume. I found the EFNOTE sets play best with a moderate to light touch to pull off very sensitive, finessed passages; however, many sounds will crack and jump pretty aggressively if you lay into them. Again, practice and building muscle memory are essential here.

Another observation is that fast snare and tom rolls can produce a machine-gun effect. Much of it is largely masked in a mix, but something which to be aware.

## In the Mix

Beyond the drummers, I received quite a few comments from congregants, including, "The drums sound different," "The drums sounded great, what's with the funny looking cymbals," to "I couldn't hear the cymbals," and "Wow, new kit? It looks great!"

The kit sounded well produced at front-of-house and on the stream, and I loved the drummers creatively changing kits from song to song. One thing that did take some getting used to was that the acoustic cymbals are typically the loudest thing in the room and add a crisp top end to the mix.

In contrast, initially, the mix sounded a tad dull, and I found myself wanting to boost the cymbal volume...but I couldn't without asking the drummer to do so from the stage. I didn't want to adjust the volume at the expense of their mix. A great solution here is that the headphone output can be reassigned as a second set of outputs. For example, you can assign the kick to 1, the snare to 2 and the rest of the drums to stereo 3/4. In the future, I plan to use the headphone outs, with the drums in stereo in 1/2 and the cymbals in stereo in 3/4.

## In Use: Studio

I was also sent an EFNOTE 3X set for use in my studio and home. Here the smaller sizes were much more manageable and configurable, and I did like having the two extra toms on hand. I thought I might be disappointed with the smaller pad-style kick. While yes, the 20" kick does feel more solid and real, it was no problem acclimating to the 3X model. Similarly, while the small 12" snare contains fewer internal sensors, I never felt or heard it be an issue.

As a studio tool, the kits sound great. Having them be dry, non-compressed and even reverb-free made it easier to add such processes later in the DAW, similar to if I had tracked a real kit. Tracking 8-channels of audio out was a breeze over USB, and I especially liked using the kit as a MIDI controller for many of my various VST drum programs. It's much faster than searching for and programming MIDI grooves.

I liked the addition on the 3X of the electronic kit sounds for variety and also found my favorite overall set to play—Maple Shells. The drums from this kit are available in the EFNOTE 7 as Maple King with some different cymbal selections, tuning and muffling choices.

## Final EF-Notes

I am impressed by the marriage of sound, feel, looks, build and response contained in both EFNOTE kits. Will it make a true believer out of all of the drummers on my team? That is a split proposition and more a matter of "I just don't dig electric drums" rather than "I don't dig these electric drums." Either way, I think the worship director is leaning toward not simply replacing the acoustic drums, but adding the EFNOTE 7 set as a high-quality electronic option.

For me, I could easily see a set of EFNOTE drums in my studio, adding yet another creative percussive option, and despite the EFNOTE 7 being a great playing and feeling kit, I also like the compact size and the added versatility of the EFNOTE 3X.

## It's a Wrap

If you are thinking about adding an electric drum kit to your live or studio setup, you need to check out the EFNOTE line. The cymbal technology alone might blow your mind and your perceptions. ➔

Drummer Alex Picchietti shows off that you can even set up the EFNOTE 7 left-handed.



**Price:** \$2,899.99 EFNOTE 3X; \$4,199.99 EFNOTE 7  
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