

# The Story of Chroma

In 1979, a group of pioneers at ARP Instruments began researching and developing one of the most ambitious synthesizer designs of that time: the Chroma. The Chroma was a 16-voice polyphonic marvel, controlled by a microprocessor, with aftertouch, advanced signal routing, and modulation. In 1981, the R&D team and the synthesizer design moved to CBS, where Rhodes pianos were produced, and the Chroma was finally released under the Rhodes brand. While it was a feat of engineering, the flat panel interface of the Chroma wasn't entirely sufficient for accessing its immense sound and feature set. Nevertheless, the Chroma was a monumental final achievement for its visionary engineering team. Explore the heritage of the Chroma synthesizer in our video documentary *The Story of Chroma*, featuring exclusive interviews and insights through the firsthand accounts of those who stood at the forefront of its creation.

Produced between 1982 and 1984, the Rhodes Chroma is a rare and exceptional synthesizer, with only around 3,000 manufactured and as few as 150 keyboardless Expanders. Synth luminaries highly regard it, and it is still cherished for its unique sound. The Chroma was famously used by musicians including Herbie Hancock, Joe Zawinul, Jethro Tull, and Oscar Peterson. It's also the source of the signature "wah-wah" chords heard throughout Spandau Ballet's smash 1983 hit, "True."

Rhodes introduced the Chroma in 1982 at just over \$5,000 and the Expander for \$2,500. Today, either of these fetch between \$8,000 and \$16,000 on the used market!

Cherry Audio's Dan Goldstein demonstrates the original 1982 Rhodes Chroma programming method with its notorious "tapper" and simple digital display.

A Chroma - Expanded! - for Everyone

Rhodes Chroma is a stunning virtual instrument that meticulously revives the essence and sonic capabilities of the legendary original. This endeavor has been one of Cherry Audio's most ambitious projects, presenting a formidable challenge due to the original's complexity and the vast array of parameters it comprises. The result is an instrument that not only matches but elevates the original's experience, offering an unmatched level of innovation and authenticity worthy of the original.

Rhodes Chroma faithfully reproduces every nuance of the Chroma with astonishing accuracy. Remarkably, it allows direct import of SysEx patch data from the original instrument and even WAV-format cassette tape data, bridging four decades of sound design into a modern workflow. Cherry Audio has painstakingly recreated each component of the original Chroma hardware, from its 16 oscillators, filters, VCAs, and LFOs to its 32 envelope generators. These highly modular elements can be selected from 16 distinct preconfigured signal paths, ranging from straightforward VCO-VCF-VCA setups to intricate configurations involving oscillator sync, filter FM, ring modulation, and variable or serially connected filters.

Central to Cherry Audio's design is an improved user interface that dramatically simplifies programming. Intuitive pop-up elements and real-time displays integrated directly into parameter buttons make sound design an effortlessly rewarding experience. All of the original Chroma's unprecedented modulation capabilities have been precisely replicated to create a powerfully flexible modular synthesizer-like programming experience. Modulation paths are configured quickly and easily using comprehensive modulation pop-up menus.

A glimpse at what was: a small portion of Chris Ryan's complex Parameter Chart that allowed users of the original Chroma to translate the hardware's numeric values into synthesizer parameters. Cherry Audio's Rhodes Chroma interface dramatically simplifies programming by making all of this data considerably more accessible.