The Korg Wavedrum MIDIfied

History

In 1994 Korg released their first *Wavedrum*, an electronic percussion instrument. Unlike most other electronic drums this was not just a drum pad used to trigger samples. It was rather a physical modeling synthesizer, where the actual signals from the pickups were used as stimuli for various algorithms generating more or less drum-like sounds. Nevertheless, the *Wavedrum* had a MIDI interface, so it could be used to trigger external drum modules too. This *Wavedrum* was very expensive and only few were made.
In 2009, Korg had stopped making Wavedrums a long time ago, a new *Wavedrum* came out, the *WD-X*. It is more capable of reproducing existing instruments' sounds than the 1994 model, since in addition to physical modeling also samples are used. Still, the *WD-X* is way less expensive than its predecessor. In the following years Korg released several developments, the *Wavedrum Mini*, the *Wavedrum Oriental*, and, most recently, the *Wavedrum Global*.



To keep the price low, Korg had to cut cost wherever possible. All newer Wavedrums came with a very limited user interface (no text let alone graphics - only a 3-digit seven segment display! 😳), and they had no MIDI or other computer interface at all! I felt the urgent need to do something about that.

MIDIfying the Wavedrum

Hardware

Signals from the wavedrum

The *WD-X*, the *Oriental* and the *Global* all (as far as I know) have one piezo pickup for the drumhead, two piezo pickups (just connected in series) for the rim, and a force sensor in the middle of the drumhead that can be used for instance to pitch up the drum sound by pressing down the head by hand. A Wavedrum patch can sound very different, depending not only on how strong the drum head is hit but also if it is hit at the centre or close to the rim, or if it is hit with a hard or a soft object. My goal is to transmit this information via MIDI as accurate as possible.

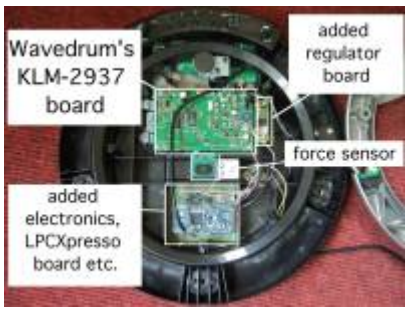
Interfacing the LPCXpresso board

The LPC1769 microprocessor on the LPCXpresso board has an on-chip 12 bit A/D converter. Sampling both the head and the rim pickup at a rate of 10 kHz each, their waveforms can be captured quite

accurately. While it would be possible to get the signals from the piezos directly, I decided to take them from the outputs of the buffer amplifiers located on the Wavedrum's KLM-2937 board:

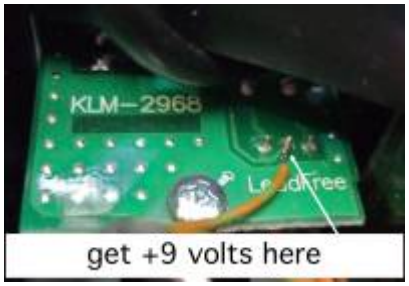


Here the signals are centered around 2.5 volts. After a few experiments I found that these signals are too weak to be fed directly into the LPCXpresso board's ADC inputs, they need some gain.
The output signal of the force sensor is captured too, of course the timing requirements are much less demanding here. Here the voltage is taken directly from the force sensing resistor, just via a simple RC low pass filter to suppress noise.
I placed the LPCXpresso board along with a dual opamp and some other components for amplifying the head and rim piezos on a piece of pad-per-hole board which fits nicely into the Wavedrum. The opamp circuitry centers the signals properly around 1.65 volts (half the supply voltage), so that they can be fed into the ADC inputs of the LPCXpresso board. It also does some low pass filtering to suppress noise. I did not solder the gain setting resistors R1, R2, R3 and R4 directly to the board but put them in sockets (similar to DIL IC sockets) instead. This way it is easier to find the proper values.

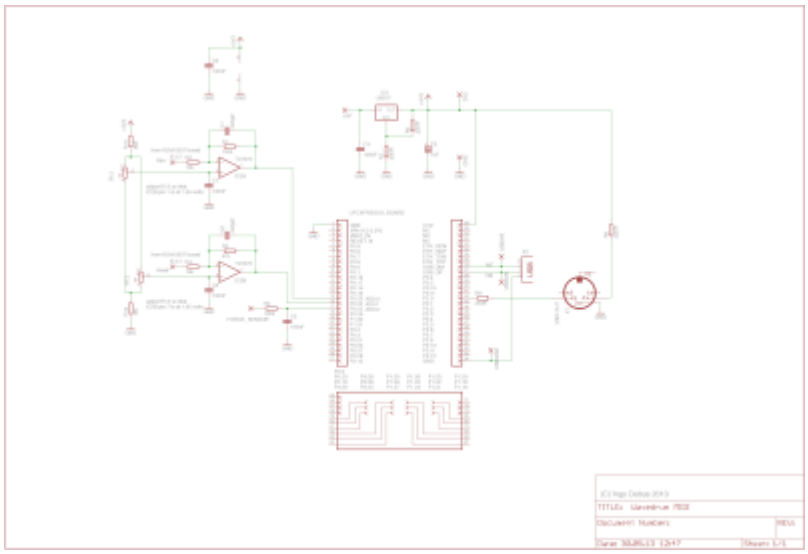


Power supply for the LPCXPresso board

The Wavedrum is powered from an external 9V/1.7A wall wart supply. Since the Wavedrum draws much less current than 1.7 amps it is possible to power the LPCXpresso board from the wall wart too. I use a simple linear regulator to get 3.3 volts from the 9 volts. The LPCXpresso board is quite a current hog, so the LM317 runs rather hot and needs a small heat sink. I placed the regulator on an extra board, but with a clever layout perhaps it would be possible to fit it onto the board carrying the LPCXpresso and the preamp too.
The Wavedrum is a quite noisy (electrically) environment. There are several DC/DC converters in there. The ground connection to the extra circuitry is critical. After a few experiments I found that noise is suppressed best with a single heavy wire ground connection from the sheet metal that holds the KLM-2739 board to pin 1 of the LPCXpresso board. The 9 volts are taken from the small board with the power supply jack and the on/off switch. Maybe there are better options.



Schematics





User interface

Sorry, no user interface yet. At the moment all user-alterable parameters can be edited via MIDI Sysex only.

Software

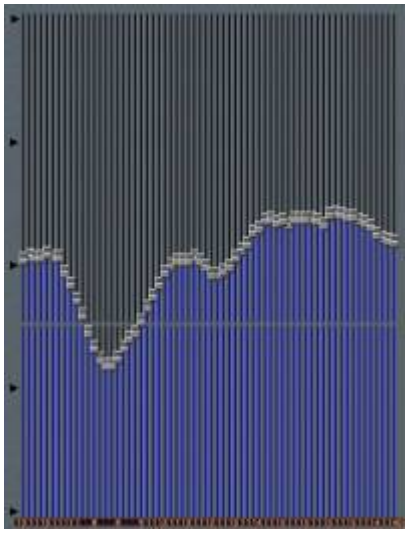
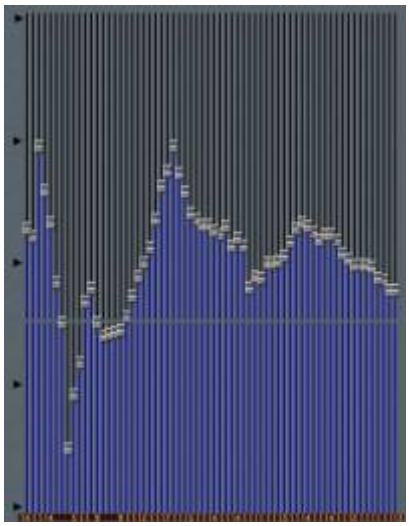
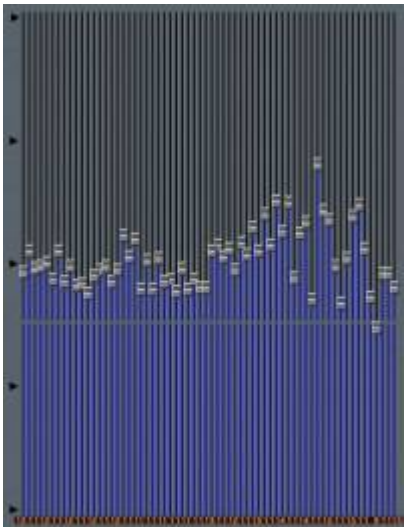
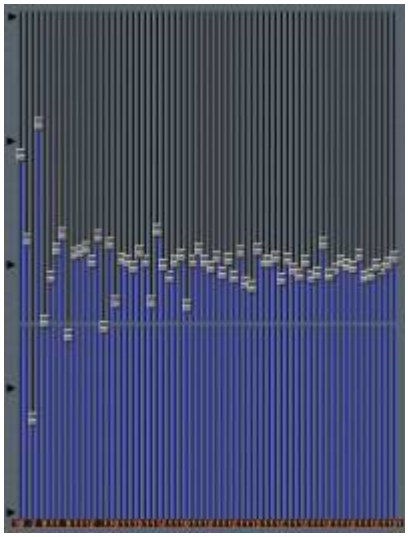
Capturing the head's and the rim's signals

The ADC takes a sample every 50 microseconds. When idle, the head piezo, the rim piezos and the force sensor are sampled in turns. When a trigger on the head or on the rim is detected, i. e. a threshold is crossed, the force sensor is temporarily not sampled until 64 samples on the triggered

channel (head or rim) are recorded and the event is processed. During that time the non-trigered channel (i. e. head if rim is triggered and vice versa) can still be triggered, so “simultaneous” triggers on head and rim are possible. Because the force sensor is not sampled while the head or rim signal is recorded, the sample rate here is 10 kHz.

Processing the signals

When hit, a MIDI drum usually generates a Note On message with a fixed note number and a velocity value depending on how strong the drum was hit. To determine the strength I use the maximum deviation from idle level at the moment. Because the whole signal (64 samples) is available, many other ways are thinkable. Optionally all 64 samples are output via MIDI Sysex, so the recorded signal can be viewed. Here are a few examples recorded this way:

(The screenshots are taken from SoundDiver. I'm still using Apple's ancient patch editor 🙂. The waveform display is made from 64 slider objects side by side.)

Auto-zero

There are two trimpots to adjust the zero level for the head and the rim signal (see schematics

above). However, to determine the zero level more precisely the levels at the three ADC inputs are measured on startup (after waiting for a few seconds, to allow for things to warm up). The zero levels of the head and the rim signals are also adjusted dynamically while waiting for trigger events.

Crosstalk suppression

On the Wavedrum there is always crosstalk between head and rim. In some situations it may be desirable that only one MIDI message is generated when a trigger is detected on both pickups at the same time. When recording the head or rim signal is completed while on the other channel there's also some recording going on, the program waits until that recording is finished too and then outputs only one MIDI message for the stronger of the two signals.

Processing the force sensor

When the voltage at the force sensor changes, a MIDI Control Change, Aftertouch or Pitch Bend message can be generated. It's thinkable that the note number of drum trigger events is varied depending on pressure, but this is not implemented yet.

MIDI

When hit at the head or at the rim, a Note On message is sent. The note number and the MIDI channel can be set individually for the head and for the rim. If there's a pending note with that number and channel, a Note Off message is sent first. As mentioned above, the force sensor is able to generate Control Change, Aftertouch or Pitch Bend messages. The various user-settable parameters can be transmitted to the software via MIDI Sysex messges. The bulk dump format is as follows:

$F0 $7D $57 $44 $4D $49 $20 $02 $00 $00 dd….dd $F7

Future plans

Replacing the force sensor

It's sometimes mentioned that the rebound of the Wavedrum is not great (playing with sticks, rebound helps when playing snare rolls etc). Some say this is because the force sensor pushes against the bottom side of the drum head. I think it should be possible to replace the mechanical sensor with a reflective optical sensor like the CNY70. This would not be in touch with the drum head at all, hence no impact on rebound. The sensitivity of the head pickup might be improved too. Regarding the Wavedrum's internal sounds, it might become tricky to get the same response as with the old sensor, but for the MIDI extension any desired response can be realized in software.

Separating the two rim sensors

As mentioned, there are two sensors attached to the rim, but these are just wired in series.

Interpreting the two sensors' signals seperately, probably the position where the rim was hit could be detected. Of course the sum of the two signals still needs to be available for the Wavedrum's original electronics.

User interface

At least a text display and a few buttons. Unfortunately there isn't much room for this in the Wavedrum.

Improving the Wavedrum's own user interface

At the moment everything is coded into three digits or letters (letters that can reasonably be displayed in a seven-segment digit, that is). It's impossible to edit the Wavedrum's patches without looking at the user's manual all the time. With a text display the Wavedrum's user interface would vastly be improved. Software had to monitor the Wavedrum's own six pushbuttons and its rotary encoder to keep track which parameter is edited.

Yes, I'm aware that this is a huge programming task. 😮

Position sensing

Unlike the Roland HPD, the Wavedrum cannot sense *where* the drum head is hit. There are application notes from NXP on capacitive touch sensing with the LPC processors (AN11023, AN11095). I have no idea if this is feasible, but maybe regions of the drumhead can be covered with some conductive paint (from the bottom side perhaps), and, with hand playing, the region that was hit can be detected.

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