

"How to Get the Most out of Your Electric Piano – Keyboard Options Galore"

(not my title :)

Chantry Nelson of St. Michael's Catholic Church, Hermosa, SD
National Pastoral Musicians' Spring Meeting, 6 April 2019, held at St. Michael's, Hermosa

In your home church, who here has what kind(s) of keyboard(s)? – acoustic piano, digital piano, organ w/ pedals, organ w/ AGO pedals - ?

Want to get the most out of your "electric piano"? Read the manual. Experiment. Listen.

Digital piano is DIFFERENT INSTRUMENT than acoustic piano (in my opinion).

Will get into pros/cons (digital vs. acoustic) later.

Haggerty's is authorized dealer for: Yamaha, Roland, Nord, Korg

- low-end 88-key keyboard w/ weighted keys: \$500-\$600 (the \$100 buys you the split keyboard option)
- cost of St. Michael's Yamaha Clavinova CPP 565 GP: \$5,500 + tax, Aug. 2016 from Haggerty's
- Hermosa United Church of Christ church bought new "Kawaii Digital Piano" (that's the label on it) new from Batchelder's ca. 2016; when I briefly played it, Thurs 4/4/2019, I didn't like the sound options, etc. on it, but their pastor seemed to think it was great, which just shows that you want to buy the digital piano that suits YOUR congregation.

KEYBOARD DISPLAY TODAY:

1990s Roland EP-09:

- pros: portable, DURABLE, non-weighted keys (good for fast passages on organ setting)
- has the basics: volume control, sustain pedal, earphone jack, MIDI, built-in metronome
- MIDI – I'll get to that later
- so old has no USB connection; all later ones should
- * Demo: portion of Bach/Kuhnau "Alleluia" (A min.) from Bach Christmas Cantata

2009 Yamaha Digital Piano P-85: 88-key keyboard w/ weighted keys:

- has the basics: vol. control, sustain pedal, earphone jack, MIDI, built-in metronome, self-recording
- again, so old has no USB connection; all later ones should
- few sound options, but all are easy to access
- modular setup allows for stairstep upgrades
- display: 2 types of modular keyboard stands.
- * Demo: "Amazing Grace" (G) on CFX (Steinway) piano setting, 1) using keyboard speakers; 2) using auxiliary amp
- re amps: Haggertys has them; I was shown 1 for \$700: 1100 watts, "nice clean projection, a beautiful clean sound that you can hear all over the room" – Haggerty's salesman Bruce Neubert, 3/22/2019

2016 Yamaha Clavinova CP 565-GP

- "classy" looking (as in: no blinking lights; not red like Nord keyboards)
- lightweight: cheap/easy to add castors and raise bench
- only one lid setting, but volume/timbre can be controlled in multiple other ways
- NOT an acoustic piano.
- Story: playing acoustic – this Yamaha – acoustic – this Yamaha.

Pros/Cons of electric pianos

- sound production differs, but for most churches, bottom line is probably: electric pianos are MAINTENANCE FREE until they stop working.
- Online searches indicate that yes, you can sometimes get them repaired, esp. by the manufacturer, but sounds expensive/cumbersome/prob. not always available.
- * Demo: "Amazing Grace" (G) on CFX (Steinway) piano setting. Note differences between this sound and that of an acoustic piano.
- * Demo: play low chord, add missing overtones.
- * "Resonance" options: "Chamber," "Cathedral," "Club," etc.

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St. Michael's Yamaha Clavinova

Heavy on piano/organ/harpsichord settings

- has 8 acoustic piano settings + 7 electric piano settings
- has 5 organ settings: 2 pipe organ, 2 "jazz organ," and one "mellow organ"
- has 2 harpsichord settings

Piano settings:

- touch: light/heavy
- resonance, reverb
- while we're at it: transposition, tuning and pitch bending functions.
- * Demo, "CFX Grand" setting: "One Bread, One Body" (G)
- value of different piano types:
- * Demo, "CFX Grand" setting: "Rain Down" (F)
- * Demo, "Rock Grand" setting: same ("Rock Grand" is brighter, and has more "front" on the attack)

Organ/harpsichord settings:

- * Organ settings: "Principal Organ" (?) and "Tutti Organ."
- * Demo: "Principal Organ": Bach/Kuhnau "Alleluia" (A min.)
- snags: weighted keys, single keyboard (we'll talk about "split keyboard" later, but it's a kludgy alternative), only TWO "church" organ sounds, no pedals...
- result: can't hear the bass
- but works for some things
- * Demo, "Principal Organ" setting: Elgar (D)
- * Demo, "Principal Organ" setting: Forty Days and Forty Nights (Monk arr., OCP) (D min.)
- * Demo, "Principal Organ" setting: Forty Days and Forty Nights (attrib. J.S. Bach arr., *We Celebrate* hymnal)
- * Demo, "Principal Organ" setting: same, with pedal. The "beefalo" solution.
- * Demo, "Harpsichord 8" setting: same, sans pedal.
- * Demo, "Harpsichord 8' + 4'" setting: same.
- * Demo, "Principal Organ" setting: "At the Lamb's High Feast" (D) (J.S. Bach arr., OCP)
- * Demo, "Harpsichord 8' + 4'" setting: same.
- * Demo, "Harpsichord 8" setting: "Amazing Grace" (G)

Some other "church-possible" settings:
vibraphone and nylon guitar

- * Demo, "Principal Organ": "Bread, Blessed and Broken" (D)
- * Demo, "CFX Grand": same.
- * Demo, "Harpsichord 8'": same.
- * Demo, "Nylon Guitar": same.
- * Demo, "Vibraphone": same.
- * Demo, "Vibraphone": "Hail Mary: Gentle Woman" (D)
- * Demo, "Nylon Guitar": "Amazing Grace" (G)

Yet more settings:

- * Demo, "PX Bright" or "Tremolo Vintage": "Goodbye Stranger" (Supertramp, sorry) (Ab)
- * Demo, "Phaser EP": same

DUAL/SPLIT KEYBOARD:

- * Demo various.
 - can pair two sounds over whole keyboard,
 - OR
 - can split two sounds between high/low sections of keyboard (split point can be set between any two keys),
 - OR
 - can make 3-way: two sounds on top and 1 sound on bottom (= dual keyboard + split keyboard),
 - BUT
 - can't make 3-way with two sounds on BOTTOM and one on top (as with solo melody + mixed backup)
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- * split keyboard Demos: "Amazing Grace" (G)
 - "Jazz Organ 1" on top, "Bass + Cymbal" on bottom.
 - "Steel Guitar" on top, "Fretless Bass" on bottom.
 - Note bass part sounds wrong as, on the keyboard, your hand can't seamlessly reach the widest intervals.

 - nature of "Slow Strings" and "Slow Chorus" settings
 - need to be paired with another stop (one with a sharper attack/more "front")

MIDI:

- MIDI = Musical Instrument Digital Interface
- it's what allows you to record yourself from this piano (the "controller") on multiple tracks; each track will play back just as you played it in (same touch, dynamics, etc.)
- with it, you can connect your keyboard to your computer, call up Finale/MakeMusic/other music software program, and "play in" your part. If you practice the technique (so the rhythms print right) it can save you a ton of time.
- with it, you can connect your "controller" keyboard to other keyboards (which you can set to other timbres, creating your own digital ensemble).

RECORDING:

- can create sound file, play back, sing over, and record that with your phone. I use Hi-Q MP3 Recorder.
- can create sound file, then play back on this piano WHILE playing this piano's keyboard. Thus can have piano/organ on top of one another.
- * Demo: Bach/Kuhnau "Alleluia: it plays, I direct choir. Used in dress rehearsal only.
- could have recorded this at any tempo, in any key, then played back at any different tempo or key.
- but preferred to do 30 takes and actually learn to play it, as I'd have to learn it eventually anyway.

The slippery slope:

- can record background music, then solo on top of it.
- could record your mass music, then leave town. (There's a "repeat" function for multi-verse songs.)
- could use instrumental settings to avoid using live players because
- free players sometimes play poorly
- good players may charge money
- it's just simpler to do it yourself

Bill Evans (emeritus, Stephens HS): "It's cheapening things when you can push a button [and replicate something that used to take effort to master]. It's demeaning to musicians..."

Bruce Neubert of Haggerty's: Won't stock "riffing" guitar pedal.

Sing to the Lord, p. 28, no. 93-94:

Recorded Music.

93. **Recorded music lacks the authenticity provided by a living liturgical assembly** gathered for the Sacred Liturgy. While recorded music might be used advantageously outside the Liturgy as an aid in the teaching of new music, it should not, as a general norm, be used within the Liturgy.

94. Some exceptions to this principle should be noted. Recorded music may be used to accompany the community's song during a procession outside, and, when used carefully, in Masses with children. Occasionally, it might be used as an aid to prayer, for example, during long periods of silence in a communal celebration of reconciliation. However, **recorded music should never become a substitute for the community's singing.**"

– United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship; Updated to reflect the Roman Catholic Missal, Third Edition.* Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, c. 2007.

St. Michael's experience with a capella singing, and the possible result of that.

Miriam-Webster online (accessed 4/5/2019); corrob. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1977 ed.:

"Performance (noun): 1a : the execution of an action / b : something accomplished : DEED, FEAT / 2 : the fulfillment of a claim, promise, or request : IMPLEMENTATION / 3a : the action of representing a character in a play / b : **a public presentation or exhibition** (e.g., a benefit performance) / 4a : the ability to perform : EFFICIENCY / b : the manner in which a mechanism performs (e.g., engine performance) / 5 : the manner of reacting to stimuli : BEHAVIOR / 6 : the linguistic behavior of an individual : PAROLE / also : the ability to speak a certain language / — compare COMPETENCE sense 1c

My two cents' worth:

- Avoid "trick pony" keyboard settings. If/when you want to acclimate your congregation to a new sound (e.g., "Nylon Guitier"), start small. The goal is always to facilitate worship. If everybody's listening to YOU during mass, you're doing something wrong. Perhaps you could incorporate new sounds in preludes or postludes before using them in the mass proper.
- Avoid using technology to replace a human skill. Every time you consider doing it, think: What will I gain? Is that gain worth the long-term cost? Sometimes the answer may be Yes. But hopefully, sometimes it will be No.