

KEY POINTS

*Andrew Gilbert and John Bates
respond to your questions and views*

STAGE PIANO FOR CLASSICS

I'M a pianist who performs contemporary classical music. Right now I'm setting up a tour where I'll be performing Debussy and Messiaen at art galleries, museums and other venues (I'm also speaking about music and colour, hence the connection with museums).

I own a Kurzweil 2600 which is a terrific keyboard, though it's very heavy and I've been told that some music stores no longer sell Kurzweil keyboards because they are easily damaged when you travel with them. Also, the sustain pedal is an on-off switch, and though the piano sound (with a CD-Rom of a 9 foot Steinway) is superb, I wish it had a more acoustic piano touch.

I bought this five years ago, and five years later there doesn't seem to be (at least in the States) a keyboard that can hold up well with touring, has a sustain pedal with half-pedal effects, and feels a little more realistic. Is there a portable keyboard out there that is designed for classical musicians?

I don't need 800 amazing sounds, just a terrific electronic alternative to a grand piano, and I'm willing to pay a fair amount of money for it. Any suggestions?

**Claud Brown
United States**

Andrew Gilbert replies: As far as I'm aware, there are no instruments on the market that are specifically designed to meet the needs of the 'gigging classical musician'. It seems that what you really need is the best digital piano sound coupled with the best digital piano action. Well, that's the aim of all digital piano manufacturers, I guess, but not all of them succeed when foraying into the portable or stage piano market.

One that most certainly has is Kawai. Its stage pianos have received almost universal praise over the years and the current top



model, the MP8, may be just what you are looking for. It was fully reviewed by my colleague John Bates just a few months ago, and you can find his review in Issue 298, or download it via our site, www.keyboardplayer.com.

Having now had a chance to try it myself, I'm mightily impressed with its looks, feel, piano action (with real wooden keys) and, of course, the sound. It has Grand Piano sounds in abundance, many of them sampled from the hand-built Kawai EX Concert Grand, and you can almost always find one that will exactly fit the mood of the piece you're playing. You can add in damper and sympathetic string resonances to your taste, as well as DSP effects like reverb, should you need it.

You get plenty of other good sounds too, but they are definitely not there at the expense of the quality of the main piano sounds. Obviously, you're going to need a good sound system to appreciate how good the MP8 is, but I assume that you already have this for your Kurzweil.

Other manufacturers, like Roland, Korg and Yamaha, also make very good stage pianos, but this one stands out so far in front, at least for me (and many of my colleagues), that it has to be my sole recommendation. It fits all your criteria, including the half-pedal requirement. Go try it, I have a feeling you'll be more than impressed.

I'll also suggest a more radical alternative. Get a really good controller keyboard, a powerful laptop PC or Mac, equipped with a separate Cardbus II soundcard like the Echo Indigo I/O, and run Synthogy's stunning Ivory virtual piano. The Indigo's ASIO drivers should let you get latency down to almost zero for live performance. All of these items have also been looked at in my Computer Music series here in KP. The only thing is that my recommended controller keyboard would be the very same Kawai MP8, as it performs that function as well!

TAKING TO THE STAGE

AFTER reading your comprehensive review of the Kawai MP4 stage piano, I thought that I might ask you a few further questions about how this keyboard compares to the others currently offered.

I am looking to create a portable keyboard rig with a new MacBook Pro laptop and run VSTs from the board through the use of a Novation Zero controller. I am currently attempting to determine which keyboard will be suitable for this purpose and have narrowed it down to two boards, being the MP4 and the