

the Yamaha S90 ES Which in your professional opinion would be the best choice, taking into account specifics such as keyboard action?

**Leon Lester
Sydney, Australia**

John bates replies: First of all Lester, your choice of MacBook Pro. This is one of the new breed of Intel processor powered Mac computers. Unfortunately, there are more than a few problems running music software on it or, indeed, any Intel Mac PC.. All parties concerned claim it is the fault of the other. We could state what these issues are but to avoid legal action, we suggest you do some research. A few minutes scouring the Internet will reveal just what those problems are.

Music software has to work with many different communication standards at the same time, e.g. VST plug-ins, direct X plug-ins, RTAS plug-ins, WDM drivers plus the 'hooks' that link to digital audio timing streams, MIDI timing, etc. With any new operating system it's best to wait until the gremlins have been sorted, let alone having one on stage. If you need to get going right now, buy a laptop that runs under a proven system like XP or O/S 10.

You then mention the Novation Zero, which is one smart cookie. It can control many instruments and applications from its keyboard. I am not certain how you are planning to plumb this into your system and you don't hint at the software you are linking your VSTs through, (VSTs here are taken to be software synthesizers).

In terms of raw MIDI sensibility, the Kawai MP4 is the best bet by far. Kawai has a long history of making ultra-clever MIDI controller keyboards that outperform the others. The Yamaha S90es has a similar weighted key action and has more on-board sounds but is not primarily a controller keyboard. Since you make no mention of using on-board sounds, you could save a lot of money by opting for a smart controller keyboard with a weighted action. Try Fatar or CME: these companies make excellent controller keyboards so check, via the Internet, for your local distributor and current offers.

Finally, I cannot know the keyboard action you feel at home with; it is a very personal choice. I

may like the feel of the 'XYZ' keyboard; you could find the exact same model lifeless. While there are some 'across the board' judgements to be made, which we clearly state in our reviews, it is the individual's taste that determines what is finally purchased.

ALL FINGERS AND THUMBS

REALLY have to take issue with John Bates' comments on page 19 in the November 2006 issue (*Classnotes*). You write: *'Notice how the thumb has to go under the third finger.'* Someone could interpret that as actually moving the thumb under the hand and that is what we try to avoid as it will slow you down at very fast tempos (though not at very slow tempos).

The preferred method of playing is to keep the thumb glued to the index finger, keep the hand compact and avoid sideways wrist movement. When playing a C major scale (and keeping the thumb 'glued' to the index finger), we play (RH) C with the side of the thumb, index finger on D and middle finger on E.

The next part is tricky: keeping the fingers basically parallel to the keys and keeping the thumb basically glued to the index finger, we slightly raise the hand and slide it (fingers parallel to the keys) and drop the thumb down to play the F. When you write about the thumb going under, some (probably most) will move the wrist sideways to get to the F ahead of time instead of what I have said above.

There will be a very slight break in the sound from the E to the F. What you suggest (if I understand you correctly) won't cause any problems at a slow tempo but it will become an ingrained bad habit and interfere with very fast playing. I know this from personal experience: I'm 56 and studied with a concert pianist when I was 28 or so. None of my private teachers in high school or college talked about keyboard technique in any specific detail. At the age of 28 I had to relearn how to correctly approach the piano. It took me about three

months to unlearn 15 years of bad habits.

If there is any pain or tension in the player's top forearm muscle, the student is using the wrong set of muscles and should seek out someone who can correct this.

**Dave Horne
The Netherlands**

John Bates replies: I totally agree with you that the hand should remain parallel to the keyboard while the thumb and fingers do all the work. I have mentioned this before and have included some finger exercises to enforce this very point in earlier *Classnotes* articles. Twisting the wrist sideways will, as you say, work at slower speeds but be disastrous for any piece requiring finger agility.

Whilst at Conservatoire, I had a piano teacher of some repute who, for several lessons, just wanted to see and hear me place my third (RH) finger on Eb and then play C - F - C with my thumb but without moving my wrist. This, as he put it, was *extending* the thumb. The rest of the lesson was quite simply a scale (in both hands) of C, played very slowly. I thought he was crazy, but he proved himself to be more than sane and did me a whole lot of good, correcting technique and making me aware of my body posture whilst playing.

I tend to avoid using the phrase 'glued to the index finger' as I feel that it may put over the wrong hand movement. The image of using the keyboard as an ironing board (in other words the hand extends in order to play) might be another way to get this point over. Any pain or feeling of tension is almost certainly incorrect technique; the body is either imbalanced or the muscles are not switching on and off correctly.

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