



Propellerhead

FOR PC & MAC

MusicTech
RECOMMENDED



REASON PIANOS

Can't fit a concert grand in your studio? Help is at hand courtesy of Propellerhead, as Hollin Jones finds out...

KEY FEATURES

- 16- or 24-bit
- Hypersampling, multiple mics and velocities
- Preset, Style and Producer piano presets
- Combinator-format patches

REASON PIANOS

Manufacturer **Propellerhead**

Price **€120**

Contact **Propellerhead (via website)**

Web **www.propellerheads.se**

Minimum system requirements

Mac OS X, G4 1.0GHz, 512MB RAM

PC Windows XP, 1.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM

Hot on the heels of the excellent Reason Drum Kits 2 comes another lovingly sampled collection of instruments from

Propellerhead to complement your sound library. This time, attention is turned to that tricky customer – the acoustic piano. Reason's standard Sound Bank pianos have always been passable, but never really sounded amazing in the face of increasingly stiff competition.

That imbalance has been redressed – and then some – with the release of Reason Pianos. Employing the same Hypersampling techniques used in RDK 2, three pianos – a Steinway D Grand, Yamaha C7 and Steinway K Upright, to be precise – were recorded and mixed using a variety of vintage and modern recording devices.

He ain't heavy

The ReFill is supplied in 16-bit and 24-bit formats on the same disc, with the 16-bit version weighing in at a lean 580MB and the 24-bit at 1.35GB. The idea is to have authentic multi-sampled pianos without the hefty three- or four-gigabyte library files seen in some other sample-based products. The sounds are also optimised for minimum CPU and memory usage, so there's a basic system requirement of a 1.4GHz PC or a 1GHz G4 Mac. You will also need Reason 3.0, as the pianos are all based on the Combinator.

Each piano was recorded at multiple velocity levels from several angles using six different sets of microphones. The Combi's themselves can be pretty complex, although you don't actually need to look inside them if you don't want to. The clever part is that within a Combi, mics are submixed so you can balance them against each other. For example, raise the Ambience Mics knob to get more 'room' in the sound, or lower it and raise the Jazz Mics knob for a more close-up, immediate sound. The programmable buttons and knobs on the Combinator are preset to control useful piano-related things such as hammer noise, soundboard and release resonance. It's a brilliant use of the Combinator's flexibility, and the kind of thing you would do yourself if

you had the patience to set up such intricate patches. Happily, the hard work has already been done.

Tinkle the ivories

The level of control over each piano is stunning – far more detailed than most people will ever need. The sounds are beautifully recorded and are as expressive as high-end digital stage pianos – or, indeed, a real grand piano. The price of this responsiveness to velocity is that most patches comprise a lot of individual samples – sometimes as many as 600 – but loading speeds from the browser are respectable nevertheless (1GB or more of RAM is essential to keep things smooth). It's worth noting that to get the benefit of this 'playability' (which includes creating tiny natural variations in tone to mimic a real piano), you will need a good weighted keyboard and a sustain pedal. These really are a player's pianos, rich and authentic, and it's nice to see an upright piano included alongside the grands.

The patches are grouped into several folders. Preset Pianos offers multiple setups of the three models, all suitably different. Producer Pianos has some customised setups made by professionals for a specific sound. Style Pianos combine pianos with synths and effects for a more pop-oriented approach, and there are even some piano-friendly reverb patches for the RV7000 thrown in. Finally, some templates and separate mic patches give you a helping hand in building your own Pianos from scratch.

Grand finale

Once again, Propellerhead has outdone itself and set the standard for sampled pianos. You can use them in Cubase, Logic, Pro Tools and so on via ReWire, and using the Combinator makes it very easy to tweak a sound to suit your purposes. The only danger with this strategy of developing great sampled instruments is that it might start to make the standard Factory Sound Bank seem a bit dated! **MTM**

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- Wonderful-sounding pianos
- Very playable and authentic
- Easy to customise
- Great addition to any sound library

WALK ON BY

- Some patches are a little light at the bottom end

VERDICT

An excellent collection of authentic, playable pianos for Reason.



MEASURING UP There's no shortage of sampled pianos doing the rounds. Sampletek's Black Grand (£109), White Grand (£155) and Synthogy's Ivory (£189) are all well-regarded and offer similar models of piano. However, they are all in formats other than ReFill, so using them in Reason is not possible. They also lack the tweaking possibilities offered by the Combinator.

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