

# Which keyboard?

The word keyboard and piano can be very confusing. Even a piano uses a keyboard and is referred to as that. The key types of instruments are ...

1. **Acoustic piano**. No electronics, electrical wire connected to it, no power needed. It may be an upright or a grand. Usually 88-keys (8 octaves) with the ideal and best possible sound. An old one can sound better than the BEST digital or electronic instruments.
2. **Digital piano**. Essentially trying to come as close to an acoustic piano. In terms of quality of sound, fully weighted 88-key feel of playing. Almost any instrument will allow you a minimum of 5 to 6 sounds that includes the option of grand piano, piano, church organ, Hammond organ, harpsichord etc.
3. Everything else is a **keyboard**. With an enormous range of options, features, benefits and what exactly do you want. In this category you will get samplers, synthesizers, workstations, polyphony, touch response, 61-keys or less to confuse even the most discerning musician – leave alone a buyer.



- ❑ The above is a single-visual attempt using a CASIO range of keyboards to help select a keyboard.
- ❑ At the TOP-LEFT corner are the toys, not-serious and HUGE range of keyboards that have flooded the world market making CASIO a household name. They are not full-sized keys. It may serve a purpose BUT I would like to exclude these.
- ❑ At the BOTTOM\_RIGHT is the BEST suggested option. An acoustic Grand Piano. If too expensive or space a constraint then an acoustic Upright piano is good. If neither is possible, feasible, available nor realistic ... we are now then in the realm of keyboards and confusion – please read on.
- ❑ All the middle models have a range of features and complexity that is quite bewildering and beyond the ability of most consumers to choose. It is as difficult for a Teacher to suggest one as well – but let me try.

## All those keyboards in the middle

Moving away and upward from the BOTTOM-RIGHT hand corner brings up some features.

I will call them Category B, Category C and Category D – but this is only for simplifying and clarify. Category A are the acoustics and Category E are the toys. There is no such thing as Categories of Keyboards – just to help you understand the options.

### Category B

1. We are now talking about a Digital Piano or Electronic Piano.
2. It should have 88-keys.
3. It should have weighted-keys with a feel and sound coming as close to a real-acoustic grand piano as possible.
4. For and with just the above feature – there are keyboards that offer minimal electronics but trying to get closest to the acoustic playing experience.
5. The focus is on classical music, reading notes and actually playing the piano. You can practice, practice, practice and attempt good high quality grade exams ABRSM, LCM or Trinity Hall where mostly you will be asked to perform and certified on a Grand Piano.
6. You may also get an organ, harpsichord and few other modes but that's just a simple bonus and not too important.

### Category C

<http://themusicinternational.com>

1. A hybrid of the piano + electronics features. Usually called Electronic Keyboard.
2. 88-key or 76-keys. Reasonably weighted feel.
3. Good sound quality.
4. Synthesizers. Samplers & Sequencers have different end-uses. Checkout online. We can and do teach all these aspects, features and applications from a Western Orchestra Music perspective.
5. Lots of features and options for sequencing. Storage. Tone controls.
6. MIDI connectivity to a PC-Laptop. Accessible to and from Software + Professional arranging, sequencing, composting applications.

#### Category D

1. Typically 61-keys. Must be full-sized keys in the first place.
2. It may have several of the options of Category C but not many of Category B.
3. If you are serious about reading music notation, playing scales & arpeggios, playing classical music, developing good, playing technique this is not for you.
4. 61-keys is limiting in several ways. Playing 2 octave scales on all keys for example. Playing slightly advanced classical pieces. Playing solo pieces – its nice to have the range of low bass and high notes. Usually these keyboards do not have weighted keys nor the feel.
5. Cost attractiveness and portability being the main factor to select one of these. Many millions of these are made thereby bring down the cost and seemingly real value-for-money.
6. Of course once you have learnt you will be able to work around and use a 61-key keyboard quite effectively. Only a bad workman blames his tools. As a mid-range instrument in a band that includes bass, lead etc. this can do fine.
7. Sound quality is an issues. Most models do not sound like a real piano, real organ or real any instrument.
8. NOT for the serious keyboardist but if this is ALL you have or have access to we can live with it and help you become a keyboardist. You must aspire for a Category C or Category B or even better if affordable and you have the place in your home a Category A.

Over time you may even own more than ONE KEYBOARD or piano. While playing and performing most pianists expect a piano at the venue they go to and are always playing on an instrument other than their own.

Unless you are en Elton John. For the Bangalore concert (and many others) he had HIS grand piano flown in for just that one-evening concert.

## Criteria for selection

1. Do you have the money? A lower end 61-key keyboard can be bought at Rs. 10,000/-. A digital 88-key stage piano can cost between 25 and 40 K. A parlour upright could be 70 K to 1.2 lakhs. 2.5 Lakhs and upward for multi-featured living room-finish instruments. A new acoustic piano whether upright or grand can be range from Rs. 6 lakhs to 15 lakhs and more.
2. Do you like the sound of a piano? An acoustic piano? Maybe you have to compromise and get a digital piano which sounds closest to this?
3. Do you want a sampled sound instrument? Synthesizer? Workstation? Are you professional or desirous of earning money from this?
4. Do you want to be able to take it with you? To shows? Friends homes for practice? Show-off to the relatives? In short do you want mobility.
5. Are you going to connect this to pre-mixers, amps, stage or studio audio equipment?
6. Do you like the sound of an organ? Want to play church hymns, sacred music? Or rock, blues, pop organ?
7. Will you stick with it? Years of practice, hourly, daily, weekly, monthly. If the opportunity arises and you want to, would you take up examinations?
8. Do you want to sing? Improve your singing? Play and sing at the same time?
9. What genre of music do you want sing and play? Jazz? Pop? Western classical?
10. You have to learn to accompany others with your piano (or keyboard) playing. Read music. Play chords. Accompany a singer or group of singers, accompany a flute, clarinet, saxophone, violin, cello or other instrument.

## *What can I do with a piano?*

### **Solo**

The piano is a stand-alone primarily a solo instrument with possibly the widest range of available music written for solo playing.

### **Play & Sing**

There is enormous volume of music that allows you to read music notation and play BOTH in the classical repertoire and non-classical of almost every genre of music.

### **Accompany**

There is an enormous range of music available. In fact most works of music will have a piano-copy of it somewhere in the world. The piano can accompany any orchestra instrument and the voice in any numbers or combinations.

### **Orchestra**

It is a regular part of any orchestra. There is a huge body of work written for piano and orchestra and piano and various combinations of instruments.

## *What can I do with a keyboard?*

| <b>Mode</b>   | <b>Solo</b>  | <b>Play &amp; Sing</b>  | <b>Accompany</b>   | <b>Organ</b>  |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| The keyboard of a higher end electronic-digital keyboard system has a range of MODE settings. You could set it for PIANO. ORGAN. HARPSICHORD as 3-key-main options. In piano-mode you would do all that is possible on an acoustic piano. | Play complete instrumental pieces using the keyboard in any mode; including split, tracks, arrangements, with and without accompaniment, intelligence ... its' a one-man band. | Play and sing setting the keyboard in piano, organ or any other mode. | Play chords to accompany yourself singing or another singer, instrument or any set or sets of instruments. It could be a part of a band. In organ mode you would use it in a church Sunday mass, Sunday service or more. | The organ is a regular part of major orchestra. This has multiple manuals including foot and can simulate a range of sounds. Many of these can be replicated on an electronic digital instrument. |

## **I recommend**

IF Category A and Category E is effectively ruled out - By default, if you are a novice, as a first keyboard, I am suggesting an 88-key fully weighted keyboard. Else you can look at a Category C keyboard, or even a 76-key workstation with a reasonably set of features which allows you to try all the different options, experiment with genres and over 3 years get to one level of expertise – budget for this as of May 2014 is about Rs. 35,000/- - with accessories this will be Rs. 40,000/- (approx).

NOTE : Over time you may own more than 1 instrument. On stage or at a performance you may have an option and select a different piano or keyboard for different songs and sounds. Being adaptable to a genre, and instrument and the audience is a critical learning requirement.



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