



Grand ambition

Can Casio's new hybrid piano impress a self-confessed acoustic lover? We sent intrepid piano teacher Karen Marshall to sample the GP-500, with surprising results...

I am a piano teacher who owns a Roland stage piano and two electric Yamaha pianos, as well as two acoustics – a Bentley upright and a Steinway grand. (And I must confess to preferring my acoustics.) I say this, as impressing me was going to be a tough one for Casio. I spent a morning at Banks Musicroom in York (thanks to the team there for their support) where I trialled the Casio Celviano Grand Hybrid model GP-500. My findings are summarised below.

The action

The real-hammer mechanism inside the instrument did make a considerable difference, as did the keys themselves, which felt just like an acoustic (they are wood). Designed in conjunction with renowned piano maker Bechstein, the repetition of the notes was brilliant – so important when playing ornaments. The

instrument provided some resistance, which is helpful for developing finger strength and playing from the knuckles.

The sound

The three different sounds – ‘Berlin’, ‘Vienna’ and ‘Hamburg’ – were beautifully realistic, with a variety in bass and treble. They sounded just as good as most uprights, and far better than many! One important test for me is damper resonance. Basically, if you silently hold down the keys, those strings still sound while others were played. This has been a significant weakness in the past for many electric pianos. Some repertoire was simply not possible on them – especially Impressionistic music. Some of my pupils have been unable to practise works like ‘Ghostly Conversations’ by Paul Harris, which feature silently depressed notes, purely because their

electric pianos do not support this technique. The Casio Hybrid passes this test brilliantly: silently depressed notes sing on as others are played.

The additional 35 sounds – from cathedral organ to strings, electric guitar to harpsichord – were impressive. I think the position of the switch for this on a pad on the left was good, although it did take some time finding what I needed on the selector. (I’d prefer a selection of buttons over the keyboard for if I need to quickly change voice.) Volume is conveniently at the right-hand side. I must also mention the orchestral backing tracks from the music library. I can’t say I have the ability to do it, but if you do you can play a full piano concerto if you want to. Having seen some of the Leeds Piano Competition this year, I did think of the young pianistic geniuses while listening to these backing tracks programmed into the instrument. »