

Kawai MP10 – A Serious Stage Piano for Serious Players

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I am an experienced professional performer and have reviewed many keyboards and stage pianos for publications such as 'Music Teacher' and 'Keyboard Player' magazine over the years. In my performing I have played numerous acoustic and electronic keyboards ranging from superb quality to a category best described as abysmal. Since acoustic pianists, unlike most other musicians, are often not performing on their own instruments it is very important to be able to quickly adapt your style and touch to match the action and response of the instrument you are playing. This is a vital skill since no two instrument playing actions are identical and experienced players become very adept at this skill. However when you eventually sit down and play a piano with a really fine playing action then instead of adapting your playing to suit the instrument you can simply relax and enjoy performing concentrating all your efforts on a really expressive sound. When Mark Crossland asked to review the MP10 I was really interested as I had read Kawai's claim that it possessed 'the best keyboard action available in a stage piano' and keen to test out this claim. Kawai, like Yamaha, also manufacture a complete range of fine acoustic pianos, from uprights to full-size concert grands, so they know all about what constitutes a fine playing action. This in-house knowledge must be invaluable when developing the playing action of a portable stage piano like the MP10 but the proof of the pudding is in the playing!

MP10 Playing Action and Physical Appearance



The instrument is very solidly made, weighing in at a hefty 70lbs, and it was pleasing to see real dark mahogany wood side panels which gives a really classy appearance to this keyboard. Part of the reason for the substantial weight of the MP10 is that the keys are made of real wood operating a specially-designed *RM3 Grand Piano* key action with key let-off just like a top-quality acoustic grand action. The wooden keys are covered with a synthetic ivory-effect material in an attractive cream colour and they feel extremely comfortable and non-slippery under the fingers. As soon as I started playing the MP10 the action felt completely comfortable to me and I suspect the same would apply for anyone brought up on acoustic pianos. This feel of the key action is right for all styles of music whether playing classical, jazz or popular music and simply cries out to be played. The MP10 has by far the best key action of any portable keyboard I have so far played and it reveals Kawai's pedigree in fine piano making. The instrument also comes with the F-20 double pedal unit featuring a sustain and una corda pedal although you can also switch this to sostenuto if you prefer. There is a substantial metal music rack which fits into the rear of the instrument.

Sound Quality and Operation

The fine playing action needs a sound quality to match and this aspect also does not disappoint. In the MP10 Kawai has aimed for quality rather than quantity in the sounds available with only 27 sounds being offered. However these sounds are all of the highest quality with a range of acoustic pianos, electric pianos and string/pad/choir/harpsichord sounds. The acoustic pianos capture the sound of Kawai's concert grand piano with each of the 88 notes being carefully recorded and reproduced using proprietary *Ultra Progressive Harmonic Imaging* technology. Although there are plenty of controls on the MP10 I really like the fact that you do not have to delve into tedious menus to achieve

what you need. Each control or slider does what it says and this makes it a really simple and intuitive instrument to play and set up. Listening firstly to the Concert Grand Piano 1 the richness of tone and the natural reproduction of string resonance is really impressive. When you press down on the sustain pedal you hear the dampers being lifted just as you would on a genuine acoustic instrument. The bass end is full and rich and the extreme treble rings out beautifully and the dynamic response to touch between the key action and actual sound is just what you would expect from a grand piano. The notes all sustain naturally and it is difficult to discern any looping of the sounds making it a very convincing instrument to play. There are three basic acoustic piano settings – concert, pop and jazz each with three variations so it is very easy to achieve the bright, mellow or rich sound you desire. There is also a 'Virtual Technician' where you can adjust aspects such as string resonance, voicing, stereo width, key fall-back noise and so on and then save the edited sound into memory. The electric pianos are of a similar high standard and offer a range of Rhodes, Wurlitzer and Clavinet instruments. Apart from the usual reverb controls the MP10 is also equipped with a wide range of effects and amp simulations to really spice up the sounds. All these are quickly called up through clearly marked controls and the finally edited sound saved into one of the 156 internal memory set-ups. I was as impressed with the quality of the electric pianos as I was with the acoustic. The strings/pad/other sounds are operated via a sub button and as in all the sounds there is a proper mixer slider for volume. Consequently it is simple to play acoustic piano and then switch on some background strings and adjust the relative balance easily via the fader. As I have said before having all the controls and faders so obviously placed makes operating this instrument very straightforward and pleasurable.

Recording and MIDI

The MP10 has a fully featured MIDI system making it ideal as a studio controller as well as performance keyboard. The instrument has standard MIDI in, out and thru ports as well as USB MIDI connection. The instrument is equipped with both modulation and pitch wheels and there are useful connectors for foot controllers such as expression pedals. Recording and playback of audio is very simple with the MP10 as it has a convenient USB memory slot at the front. You can easily record audio wave files or mp3 files direct to the USB memory and even overdub recordings onto an existing wave or mp3 file. There is also a convenient Line in R and L connector at the back so that you can connect CD player or mp3 player and play along to backing tracks. There is a proper 'Line IN' volume slider conveniently placed on the keyboard to adjust balance. All these features help to make the MP10 a really flexible and versatile instrument.

Some Conclusions

As you can see from this review I have been enormously impressed with the Kawai MP10 which is an extremely well designed product. The key action is superb and the quality of the pianos and electric pianos are also excellent. I particularly like the fact that all the controls on the instrument are clearly labelled and dedicated to doing one thing so there is no need for delving through endless menus. All this makes the MP10 very simple to use despite its sophistication and flexibility. To get the best out of the sound you would need to hook it up to quality speaker system and on the road it is not the lightest of keyboards. However any serious pianist will relish playing a keyboard of this quality. I think Kawai have excelled themselves with this product and produced a potential classic in the MP10. I recommend that you try it out for yourself and feel sure you will be equally impressed.