

Mac PC What is it? Modelled acoustic piano **PRICE: €249**

CONTACT: contact@pianoteq.com www.pianoteq.com

VOICING
Hammer hardness, hammer noise, character and soft pedal settings can be made here, and there's also the spectrum profile to consider

GENERAL COMMANDS
Randomise the Tuning, Voicing and Design parameters or make use of the undo/redo commands. Pianoteq's PDF manual can be accessed [here too](#)

PRESETS
Pianoteq comes with two grand piano models as standard (C1 and M1) and presets are supplied for both. They can be selected here

TUNING
Live out your dream of being a real-life piano tuner by tweaking these parameters

DESIGN
Make changes to your piano's design and hear how they affect its sound

EQUALIZER
EQ adjustments can be made here, and you can also change the velocity curve to suit the MIDI controller keyboard you're using

REVERB
Three reverb parameters can be adjusted, and each of the presets is offered from player, orchestra and listener perspectives

PEDALS
From left to right, you'll find soft, harmonic, sostenuto and sustain pedals

MODARTT Pianoteq



On the DVD

AUDIO DEMOS
You'll find examples of the Grand C1/medium, Grand M1/jazz and Grand M1/rock presets in – you guessed it – the Audio demos folder

- **SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**
- PC:** Intel Pentium 4 3GHz or equivalent, 256MB RAM, Windows 2000/XP, VST-compatible host application, ASIO-compatible audio interface, MIDI controller keyboard
- Mac:** A recent CPU (less than two years old), 256MB RAM, Mac OS X 10.4, VST- or AU-compatible host, MIDI controller keyboard

- **TEST MACHINE**
- PC:** G5 dual 2GHz, 1GB RAM, OS X 10.4, Logic Pro 7.1

Sick and tired of acoustic piano emulations that make your hard drive weep? Modartt are too, so they're proposing an alternative solution...

Conventional wisdom has it that the way to create an authentic acoustic piano in software is to sample the instrument as extensively as possible. And boy, do developers like to capture lots of samples: Steinberg's The Grand ships with a 3.5GB library; NI's Akoustik Piano requires 15GB of hard disk space; and the soundbank for Synthogy's Ivory is a jaw-dropping 40GB. Undeniably, the consensus is that bigger is better. Modartt, however, think differently. Far from being a multi-gigabyte behemoth, at just 8MB, their new

piano plug-in is a mere slip of a thing. This being the case, it probably won't surprise you to learn that the software isn't sample-based; instead, Pianoteq generates its sound in real time. What's more, its unique design means that as well as being capable of emulating the classics of the past, Pianoteq can also create new piano models of its own. All of which is great in theory, but will count for pretty much nothing if Pianoteq's sound can't compete with that of its heavyweight rivals. But we'll consider that issue shortly...

The technology
Pianoteq is a download-only purchase, and its small size means that you can buy, install and authorise the software in a matter of minutes. Opening the plug-in – there's no standalone version, sadly – reveals an interface that's functional but certainly couldn't be described as over-designed. The first area of interest is the preset menu. The two original grands that are included (C1 and M1) are based on mathematical analysis of several real pianos – you won't find any straight emulations of specific

pianos here – and the presets do a fair job of showing off what they can do. You also get four miscellaneous instruments (including a marimba) that provide evidence of Pianoteq’s ability to generate sounds that are outside of its core remit.

Below the presets menu is the Tuning section – here you can make the kind of adjustments a piano tuner would. If you want to go honky tonk, for example, this is the place to come to. To the right of this is the Voicing section; you can set the hardness of your hammers at piano, mezzo and forte velocities (soft, medium and hard) and also (among other things) add or remove hammer noise. The intriguing spectrum profile window can be found here too – this lets you adjust the intensities of the eight overtones that form a large part of the piano’s sound.

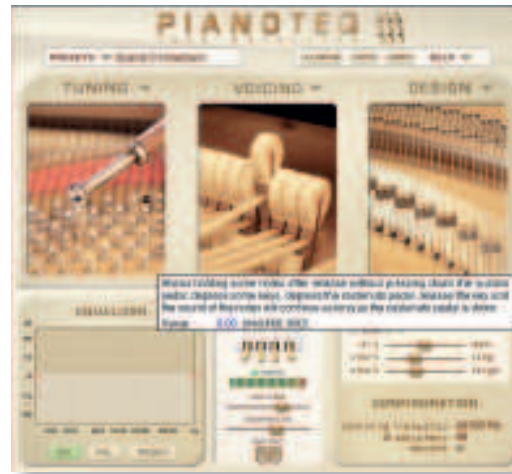
To the right of the Voicing section is the Design area. This can be used to change the size of your piano and adjust its soundboard characteristics. If you want to roll the sonic dice, you can have all the Tuning, Voicing and Design parameters set to random values at the click of a button... but

presets. You can also configure Pianoteq’s output (stereo, mono or headphones) and optimise it for your computer.

The crunch

All of which is great, but what you’re really dying to know is how Pianoteq sounds. If we’re being completely honest, we’ll admit that some minor alarm bells rang out when we heard that Modartt’s software is modelled rather than sample-based, but pleasingly, Pianoteq comes pretty close to living up to its billing as an expressive, dynamic instrument. It reacts well to both sensitive and abusive playing, and doesn’t feel obviously synthetic.

Pianoteq’s cause is surely helped by the fact that all 127 MIDI velocities are available for each note played. Other pianos are painstakingly sampled at multiple velocities, but because every note played through Pianoteq is generated in real-time, you could argue that it’s more ‘real’ and alive than any of its rivals. That said, we wouldn’t go so far as to claim that it actually sounds better than Ivory, The



▲ Every feature of Pianoteq is documented with pop-up ‘help balloons’

select a new patch and have it instantly ready for playing, and how refreshing not to have to wait for a multitude of samples to load every time you boot up a project. Pianoteq’s CPU demands are a little greater than those of its sample-based rivals, but they’re certainly not outrageous.

The non-science bit

Born in a research lab, Pianoteq has transcended its mathematical origins and emerged as a playable and involving instrument that’s sure to get better in the future. A major concern, though, is the €249 price tag – this puts it in the same ballpark as its three major rivals, but Pianoteq’s tone isn’t yet quite in the same league. If you’re a soloist who wants a top-quality performance grand, you should still look towards one of the multisampled piano solutions.

Ultimately, though, this is a fine first attempt. Pianoteq sounds more than acceptable in a mix and could soon make for a serious alternative to its disk-dominating relatives. One day, it might just be a compelling one. **cm**

“PIANOTEQ COMES PRETTY CLOSE TO LIVING UP TO ITS BILLING AS AN EXPRESSIVE, DYNAMIC INSTRUMENT”

given how unpredictable the results you get from this can be, you may choose to press the Undo button shortly afterwards.

The lower section of Pianoteq contains what Modartt refer to as its standard controls. These include an EQ/velocity curve window, four pedals and a reverb unit with a selection of

Grand 2 and Akoustik Piano, but on the basis of our head-to-head testing, it doesn’t fall too far short of them.

And then you factor in the other advantages. We’ve already mentioned the quick, easy and (most importantly) space-saving installation, but there are also the fast preset-loading times to consider. How great it is to be able to

More to come

Easy expandability is certainly a key selling point of Pianoteq, as new instruments can be created simply by adjusting the software’s parameters (rather than by adding sample banks).

Two add-on patches are currently available, and both are free to registered users. There’s an 1812 Schöffstoss pianoforte patch based on the instrument residing in Kremsegg Castle in Austria, and a 1790 Johann Evangelist Schimdt pianoforte that takes its inspiration from the one sitting in the

George Frederic Handel Music Museum in Halle, Germany.

Having never played either of the instruments in question, we can’t vouch for the patches’ authenticity, but they certainly sound different enough to Pianoteq’s standard grands to prove that we’re dealing with a more flexible plug-in than first suspected. Modartt say they’re currently working on other historical add-ons, and that Pianoteq is capable of emulating several different keyboard and string instruments.



▲ Additional piano patches are easily installed

▶ ALTERNATIVELY

NI Akoustik Piano
cm93 >> 9/10 >> £220
Expensive, but the four pianos in this collection sound wonderful and are beautifully presented

Synthogy Ivory
cm81 >> 10/10 >> £189
Lovingly crafted piano suite, though you’ll need 40GB of spare disk space to install all of it

VERDICT

- FOR**
- + Decent sound without samples
 - + Hardly uses any hard drive space
 - + Fast preset-loading times
 - + Highly tweakable
 - + Easily expandable

- AGAINST**
- Expensive
 - No standalone version
 - Tone not quite perfect (yet)

Pianoteq doesn’t quite have the tone of its sample-based rivals, but it’s certainly more flexible and convenient. Definitely one to watch

RATING

