

INCLUDES AUDIO

WHAT IS IT?

A sample-based Grand Piano software instrument with chord analysis and MIDI files

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Healthy sounding piano
- 2 Chord analysis works well
- 3 Included MIDI files can be inspirational for composers



Toontrack EZKeys Grand Piano | £115

It's a new approach to adding expert keys into your productions and *Steve Hillier* tests it out...

SPECS

Available Formats: 32 and 64-bit VST, AU and RTAS instrument plus standalone application
System Requirements:
PC: Windows XP SP3 or newer, Pentium 4 or Athlon processor, 1GB RAM
Mac: OS X 10.5 or newer, G5 or Intel processor, 1GB RAM
700MB free hard disc space

EZKeys Grand Piano is a compositional tool for those who need top quality piano in their productions but don't have the skills to play like a pro. The plug-in is presented as a 700MB Steinway D concert grand but Toontrack have also included an intelligent MIDI file player that transforms it into a songwriting companion. There's a handy standalone version included too.

It comes with a wealth of MIDI files you can drag and drop from its song browser into a timeline within the instrument. The software automatically analyses the MIDI file's chord structure and displays this above the region. Here's where things get interesting: you transpose or otherwise modify the parts not by manipulating the notes directly, but by chord name. It's a simple idea and it works well. Experimentation with chords is just a mouse-click away and you can perform much of the same work

in Grand Piano as you would in a regular DAW. You can't directly access or change the individual notes, but you can drag the MIDI files out of the instrument for finer editing if required.

It works with any MIDI file, no matter where it originates from. This is handy in a number of ways. If you want to manipulate your playing within the instrument, that's easy. More useful is the ability to import your doodlings and let the software work out which chords you were playing. It also comes with a handy 26-page music theory primer.

Banging away
Having pro-quality piano playing at a mouse-click is surprisingly inspiring, and I can imagine many vocalists and top-line writers using Grand Piano as their go-to compositional aid. We tried all manner of esoteric sequences using choices from the elegant 'circle of fifths' chord selector. The smooth playing of

the included MIDI files helped save the chords from sounding random or disconnected and we started writing melodies that simply wouldn't have occurred had we been playing these chords by hand.

This will be most useful for composers who like the feel and sound of a real piano but prefer to create their compositions in the computer. Pianists will enjoy playing it too, although the single set of samples might be limiting. At this price, we'd like more variations in piano tone, and we also couldn't see a way to automatically edit the inversions of the chords. You can sometimes get around this by carefully auditioning the included MIDI files to find what you need but this is a major oversight, and something Toontrack will hopefully address. This feels like a first attempt at a new kind of compositional instrument; hopefully it will grow and mature over time. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT

STABILITY [Progressive bar chart]

VALUE [Progressive bar chart]

EASE OF USE [Progressive bar chart]

VERSATILITY [Progressive bar chart]

RESULTS [Progressive bar chart]

This will be very handy for songwriters but it's let down by some surprising shortcomings.