

Synthogy PC MAC

Ivory II Grand Pianos £235



Pianos are well suited to sampling but the quest for ultimate realism is ongoing, as evidenced by this superb sequel

> Synthogy's Ivory (**cm81**, 10/10) was a standout sample-based piano instrument when it arrived, but Ivory II takes things to a new level of realism.

Ivory II Grand Pianos is a 77GB collection comprising a Bösendorfer 290 Imperial, a Steinway D nine-footer and a Yamaha C7. If those aren't quite to your tastes, Synthogy's separately available Italian Grand and Uprights have both also reached Ivory II status.

As with all large sample-based instruments, installation is a bit of a snore; it took about two hours to feed all 11 DVDs into our machine. Once installed and authorised (via iLok), there were no hiccups. As well as the plug-in versions, there's a standalone version for Mac, and a version of Cantabile (a VST host) is supplied for PC users to use in place of a dedicated standalone executable.

The sound of Ivory II thumping down onto the **cm** test bench coincided nicely with the arrival of a Fatar VMK 188 Plus master keyboard. For our tests, we opened up the elegantly designed Ivory II in Pro Tools, which was hooked up to a Prism Sound ADA-8 interface and cranked through a pair of Focal Twin 6 monitors - a premium audio path that would easily show up any shortcomings. The Bösendorfer sounded vibrant, real, instantly playable and entirely at home in this top-notch environment, and after a lot of enjoyable playing, we turned our attention to the numerous presets and parameters.

The three grands have differing tonal qualities, smoothness and tightness of tuning, overtone variation, etc. The Bösey came across as most natural, neutral and at home in its space. The Steinway seemed softer and mellower, and the Yamaha the most characterful - we'd call it 'cronky' even, especially in the bottom end.

Custom keyboard

Almost every aspect of the instrument can be manipulated from the Program page. There's Soundboard Resonance (choice of 11) and the



new Sympathetic Resonance (see *With deepest sympathy*) settings for starters. Most useful are the Key Noise, Timbre and Timbre Shift controls, which can radically transform the tone and 'knock' of the piano and would be very useful if, for example, you wanted to thin out the sound in order to place it in a busy mix. There's also the Synth Layer feature, which plays synth pad sounds alongside the pianos.

The Session page offers control over the likes of voice/memory allocation, tuning and velocity, while the Effects page offers well-implemented chorus, EQ and reverb/ambience treatments. In light of these comprehensive controls, it seems strange that there are no microphone or surround options.

In the end, it's all about playability and great sound, and Ivory has both in abundance. Its editability makes it truly flexible, and with the right master keyboard, you could lose hours just playing. That's the mark of a true instrument. **cm**

Web www.synthogy.com
Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Info Upgrade from Ivory I, £59; Italian Grand, £119; Uprights, £199

System requirements

PC 1.8GHz Intel CPU, 2GB RAM, Windows XP/Vista/7, 7200RPM hard drive with 77GB free space, iLok, VST/RTAS host

Mac 2GHz PPC/Intel CPU, 2GB RAM, OS X 10.4.11, 7200RPM hard drive with 77GB free space, AU/VST/RTAS, iLok

Alternatively

Modartt Pianoteq v3 Standard cm144 >> 9/10 >> €249

Uses modelling technology instead of sampling. Highly playable and very editable

VSL Vienna Imperial cm144 >> 9/10 >> £495

Monster sampled grand, presenting a single Bösendorfer 290 Imperial pianer

Verdict

For Superb-sounding, playable pianos
Comprehensive modification options
Sympathetic resonance modelling
Half pedaling option

Against Long loading times
CPU- and drive-intensive
No virtual microphones

An excellent update to one of the best grand piano ROMplers money can buy, bringing it bang up to date

9/10

With deepest sympathy

A big part of what makes a piano sound like a piano is the fact that playing one key causes the strings of other (undamped) keys to resonate in sympathy. When you play middle C, the strings for the C below that softly ring out too. Not all harmonics of those strings will be heard, though - only those matching the original played note. This phenomenon is called sympathetic resonance, and Ivory's Sympathetic Resonance control attempts to model this elusive quality.

Although the control does enhance the realism of the sound, overdoing it can result in too much going on at once, creating an unpleasant 'beating' effect. Our advice is to use it subtly!

Other realism-preserving options include half pedaling, lid position, pedal noise, tuning tables and 18 velocity levels. Note that Ivory smoothly interpolates between levels, so you won't hear any 'jumps' at velocity boundaries.