

Mac PC What is it? Second incarnation of Steinberg's virtual grand piano **PRICE: £170**

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► **SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**

PC: Pentium/Athlon 1GHz (1.4GHz or faster recommended), 512MB RAM (1GB recommended), Windows XP, 3.5GB hard disk space, Steinberg Key

Mac: G4 1GHz (Dual G4 1.25GHz recommended), 512MB RAM (1GB recommended), OS X 10.3.7 or later, 3.5GB hard disk space, Steinberg Key

► **TEST MACHINE**

PC: P4 1.8GHz, 512MB RAM, Windows XP SP1

On the DVD

AUDIO DEMOS
Find out whether Steinberg's latest is as grand as the name implies in the **Audio Demos** folder

STEINBERG The Grand 2

Does size matter? Steinberg's second-generation grand piano may be smaller than some of its rivals, but it's the sound that really counts...

► **ALTERNATIVELY**

Best Service Galaxy Steinway 5.1 cm80 >> **8/10** >> £166
Piano ROMpler with 5.1 surround outputs for the ultimate in ambient realism

Synthogy Ivory cm81 >> **10/10** >> £189
It needs 30GB of disk space, but its sounds are extremely realistic

VERDICT

FOR

- + Sounds great
- + Only 3.5GB
- + Surround sound ambience
- + RAMSave and Eco modes

AGAINST

- Not as detailed as Synthogy Ivory...
- ...which costs the same
- Signal attenuation

Not the ultimate grand piano solution, but a fine-sounding option nonetheless

RATING

8

The Grand was the original piano ROMpler, but it's certainly not the only one around these days. Other products have surpassed Steinberg's effort in terms of size and quality (notably Synthogy's Ivory), but now we have The Grand 2. This revamped version of the original boasts new features and comes in VST, DXi, AU and standalone formats.

Based on an interface very similar to that of its predecessor, The Grand 2 packs two pianos into its 3.5GB soundbank – a revised version of the original and a brand new one. There are multiple velocity-layered samples for each key and, as with the original, full pedal support (sustain, sostenuto and soft).

The inclusion of key click and damper pedal sound samples is a major step forward in terms of realism. You're able to dial in the amount you hear, and also take control of the string release, hammer release and sustain resonance amounts. There are four tone modes – Natural, Bright, Soft and Hard – and the sound is malleable.

The new piano sounds great at both ends of the scale and has a rich tone that extends right down to the



▲ The Grand 2 incorporates two soundbanks – one old and one new

lowest notes. The improved version of the original model is also good; it lacks the tonal depth of the new one, but would sound fine in the midst of a mix. Both pianos are playable and responsive – the useful Keyboard Settings dialog provides user-editable velocity curves and a sensitivity control.

Take a load off

Large sample-based instruments such as this can weigh heavily on your processor, especially when you're using them within a sequencer.

Thankfully, Steinberg have included RAMSave and ECO modes, which can be used if your machine is struggling to cope. RAMSave operates in a similar way to a sequencer freeze function – it unloads any samples that aren't being triggered by MIDI data recorded on a track. The ECO mode settings can be configured in the Global Options dialog – you can adjust the quality, number of voices and natural instrument sound amounts – and you can switch between this and the 'full fat' setting at the click of a button.

The Grand 2 sounds great and plays very nicely. In our view, Synthogy's Ivory is still the most authentic sounding grand piano emulation on the market, but it requires up to ten times the hard disk space if you install all its models, and you have to ask yourself whether you really need such a huge instrument. If you're a solo pianist who wants the ultimate in realism then Ivory is probably the one to go for, but if you're after an editable, great-sounding piano that won't fill up your hard drive, The Grand 2 will more than suffice. **cm**

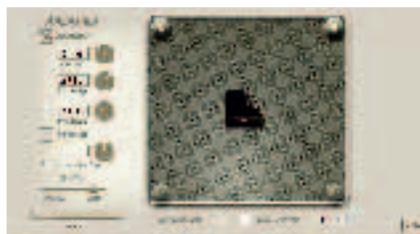
Customised ambience

The Room Options dialog (accessed by clicking a button at the bottom of the main screen) provides several ambience-related controls.

Both of the pianos were recorded in an anechoic chamber (with no reverberation whatsoever) and by default the ambience is switched off. Turn it on, however, and you're in for a treat: both pianos sound fantastic with a sprinkling of room sound. There are controls for amount, room size and pre-delay, so

you can create the perfect ambience for your performance – whether you want an intimate room or a vast cathedral.

But that's not all. If you have four speakers, surround ambience is supported. With this feature active, the piano can be positioned within the room by dragging the onscreen piano icon around the virtual space. Finally, a quality slider enables you to lessen the demand on the processor if you're having problems.



▲ Move the piano around the virtual room to get the right ambience. It's much easier than doing it for real!