



Acoustica

# PIANISSIMO

**MusicTech**  
**VALUE**
**FOR**  
**PC**

Not everyone needs huge, expensive virtual pianos – which is where Acoustica's Pianissimo comes in. Hollin Jones is in key.

## KEY FEATURES

- 250MB quadruple-strike samples of Steinway Model D
- 10 piano patches
- Built-in reverb and tone controls
- Hammer sounds and lid height can be altered
- 256-voice polyphony
- Standalone or VSTi format
- Two-track sequencer with audio mixdown

## MEASURING UP

Pianoteq is rather more expensive at £249 and uses only physical modelling, resulting in a tiny 15MB installation. Its tuning and dynamics can be edited and there are multiple controls for sound-shaping, but none of the recording options of Pianissimo. Various free/shareware VSTi pianos can be found for Windows, although none that we've come across comes anywhere near the sound quality or playability of Acoustica's Pianissimo.

## PIANISSIMO

Manufacturer **Acoustica**

Price **£69**

Contact **Et Cetera 01706 285650**

Web **www.acoustica.com**

Minimum System Requirements  
**PC 1.5GHz processor, Windows 98, 1GB RAM**

The grand piano is one of the instruments most often recreated in software form – but also one of the hardest to get right. The technology is well-established, but frequently the resulting samples are too bright and clinical, lacking life or warmth.

Thankfully, this isn't the case with Pianissimo, the latest offering from Acoustica. Available as a download or in a traditional box, it comes in VST and standalone formats for Windows and will take up a mere 250MB of space on your hard drive – not much in this day and age. Its system requirements are similarly easy-going, supporting Windows as far back as 98.

## Tone blending

The software uses a combination of sample playback and physical modelling to generate its sounds (the original samples were taken from a Steinway Model D concert grand). The instrument itself is very simple to use: simply connect a MIDI keyboard and you're away. Ambience is available courtesy of an integrated studio reverb offering several types and a dry/wet

slider for controlling the amount. There's also a master volume slider and a Hammer Sounds control that governs the amount of hammer noise included in the output. This seems to work best set somewhere around the middle, giving a natural effect.

Hit the Tone Controls section and you can edit the piano's velocity curve response and sympathetic resonance. There's also EQ provision and a chorus effect, although it effectively kills the stately character of the piano if you turn it on, making it rather honky tonk. Finally, there's a control for adjusting the height of the piano's lid, which correspondingly alters the sound.

## Simple studio

Pianissimo has ten preset piano models ranging from classical grand through rock and uprights to ballad. For the most part they all sound very good, considerably better than we would normally expect from affordable software grands. Certainly, the pianos you're most likely to use – the grands and the uprights – sound realistic and are very playable indeed: clear, responsive and warm, without sounding over-produced or sterile.

The standalone version of Pianissimo is more flexible than the plug-in in the sense that it acts like a mini studio. Supporting any Wave, ASIO or WaveRT device, it enables two-track MIDI recording. You can't see or edit these recordings, but either track can be muted or erased and re-recorded.

There's also a programmable metronome, BPM and time signature settings, as well as a bar counter. You arm one 'hand' for recording, record a part, then overdub another hand or part. This kind of operation is clearly aimed at those learning or practising, and it's a very simple but effective method to assist with learning the piano.

Recordings can be exported as WAV, mp3, WMA or OGG files, which is an added bonus. As a musical sketchpad it's extremely easy to use and there's the option to export recordings as MIDI files (and also to open MIDI files). Again, this is very useful for those getting started with their keyboard skills as well as players at an intermediate level.

## Softly does it

In a world of ever-expanding, multi-gigabyte sampled instruments, it's quite refreshing to see a simple, straightforward and usable one like this, with low system requirements and virtually no learning curve. Crucially, its sounds are very good, so even if you're already a decent player or don't want to use the built-in recording facilities, it would be a fine addition to your Cubase, FL Studio or Sonar setup running as a VSTi and bringing a touch of class to your productions.

We can't deny that Pianissimo looks fairly basic, but this is due to its focus on simplicity. In terms of usability and sound it's commendable, and there are plenty of VSTi's out there that will satisfy your lust for flashy graphics and bleepy sounds. Format-wise, it's slightly restricted (and we'd like to eventually see a Mac version, too), but in the meantime, visit the website and check out its sounds for yourself. **MTM**

## SUMMARY

### WHY BUY

- Authentic piano sound
- Low CPU requirements
- Plug-in and standalone operation
- Acts as mini studio with simple MIDI recording facilities
- Export recordings as audio
- Good for learning piano

### WALK ON BY

- A Mac version would surely be popular
- Can't view or edit MIDI notes once they're recorded

## VERDICT

A simple and lightweight yet great-sounding virtual piano for Windows. A Mac version would be the perfect companion for it.

