



Purchasing Acoustic Pianos ('real') versus Digital Pianos

So, I'm often asked about advice for getting a piano here are my own informal thoughts and advice. If it doesn't answer your specific questions please let me know:

Misunderstandings:

- Acoustic piano is another way of saying 'real' piano. This means there is no electricity required. The instrument will have strings and hammers inside, which will mean it is taller and heavier than any of its digital relatives, and not easy to move around your home once it is in place. It will need up keep of being tuned (approx. once a year / once every 2 years), with a fee of £50+. It is likely to hold its value if you look after it, and is a bit like a pair of shoes in that it takes on some of the personality of the pianists that play it!! Treat it well and it will sound beautiful. It will be best in a room of constant temperature ie. Not a conservatory. A decent secondhand instrument can be purchased more cheaply than you might think (see below)
- Digital Pianos – people often call them keyboards but be careful! You will get what you pay for, and instruments at the very cheap end of the market are more likely to be electronic keyboards which are not as realistic to the touch of a pianist, as digital pianos. Having said that 'electronic keyboards' for sequencing can be very expensive as well, so it can be a confusing term! No matter what the name, function is the most important factor, and alongside 'full size piano keys' (especially important to check if you are buying from the internet, and just looking at a picture!), the next most important 'function' will be *touch sensitive keys*. This means that the instrument will respond to a lighter touch by playing quietly, and a stronger touch by playing loudly. Digital pianos are then embellished with a whole host of hidden extras that are nice but not always essential if your budget is restricted – it would be nice to have a stand for it to rest on, as a table is too high (higher range models will have permanent 'legs' but can still be fairly easily moved around the house), pedals – some instruments will include these as part of your purchase, lower price range models should at the very least have a 'pedal' socket in the back of the instrument so separate pedals can be added. Number of keys: an acoustic piano has 88 keys, lower priced digital pianos may well have less, which is fine for the early stages (up to approx. Grade 2). It really is a case of paying as much as you can afford, and it is more likely to last you longer (see 'renting' below). Digital pianos don't need tuning, but can decrease in value as 'better' models are brought out (like computers). Other extras include more 'voices' (ie. It can sound like a trumpet!), MIDI input – for the technically able it can connect to your computer if you want it to!! All instruments are likely to have a headphone socket 😊
- FOR BOTH DIGITAL AND ACOUSTIC pianos you will need a stool to sit on. A chair is fine – but don't use it like a chair! Ie. Don't lean back! Make sure it is the right height for the instrument – it should be possible to sit at a piano with your arms in front of you and your forearms and hands should be flat (not sloping downwards: you are too high / piano is too low AND not sloping upwards: you are too low / piano is too high!)



PURCHASING YOUR INSTRUMENT:

Having made the decision whether to look for a digital piano or an acoustic piano, the next step is finding your instrument! If buying is an issue, or a commitment to playing it is a worry, rental is a possibility for both types of instruments:

- Rental schemes are available in many places. For example, in Cambridge a good place to try is http://www.millersmusic.co.uk/index.php?main_page=page&id=6 as they offer a money back scheme where you get all your rental money back if you buy the instrument (or one of a higher price) within 6 months. After this time you can still get 70% or 40% of your money back, depending on when you stop renting
- Renting an acoustic piano can be arranged this way, as well as renting a digital piano
- Buying acoustic pianos – both 1066 Pianos in Fulbourn, and The Music Gallery in Cambridge also have very good ranges of new and secondhand pianos. Ask someone in the shop to play it for you if you are not a pianist yourself, and you will know if you like the tone (sound). In all honesty, the ‘look’ of the instrument is important, even more so than the colour of your car!! It has to fit into your home, so be realistic and measure the outside case of the piano as there is no specific standard size – they do vary! Like buying a second hand car, you may not find the right instrument when you first start searching for a secondhand piano – be patient and keep looking, don’t feel rushed into buying one as more become available all the time.
- Online lists for secondhand digital and acoustic instruments can be out of date, it’s better to visit shops or ring them to ask about their stock.
- Buying a new digital piano is easy from the internet, but you really need to know what you are buying, and you may not get the aftercare with the purchase that you can get from a shop! (ie. Setting it up or servicing if there are any technical problems. Digital pianos can ‘break’). Visit shops first and look at makes and models. Ask shop assistants to play them for you and ask what offers they have, before searching the internet – but do look around for a good deal using the make and model number.
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Makes / Models / Prices:

A basic new upright acoustic piano can be bought for just under £2,000 (Waldstein, Steinmayer), other makes you will find include Kemble, Yamaha, Bohemia, Winchester listen to the sound you like, but your budget will ultimately decide what you can afford!

Secondhand acoustic instruments: take a look at www.piano-tuners.org as another place to try. You will see random prices from as low as £100. This is a national website, so transportation is a consideration and cost to add but you would also want to see it before you buy it, so local is probably best!! (Look at 1066 or The Music Gallery if close to Cambridge) www.pianologistics.com is a piano removal specialist company, but normal house movers often offer this service as well. Using ‘a man with a van’ is a cheaper option – but pianos can be very hard to manage and damage can happen to their internal mechanisms (that’s the piano, not the man or the van!). Do be careful!!

Digital Pianos – a good, but more basic model starts from around £600, however there are cheaper ones on the market that will get you started if you can’t afford to go straight in at this level. Popular makes are Yamaha, Roland, Casio. Remember to ensure the instrument you buy has FULL SIZE KEYS and has TOUCH SENSITIVE KEYS (realistic/weighted piano action)

~ Good Luck! And Have Fun! ~

