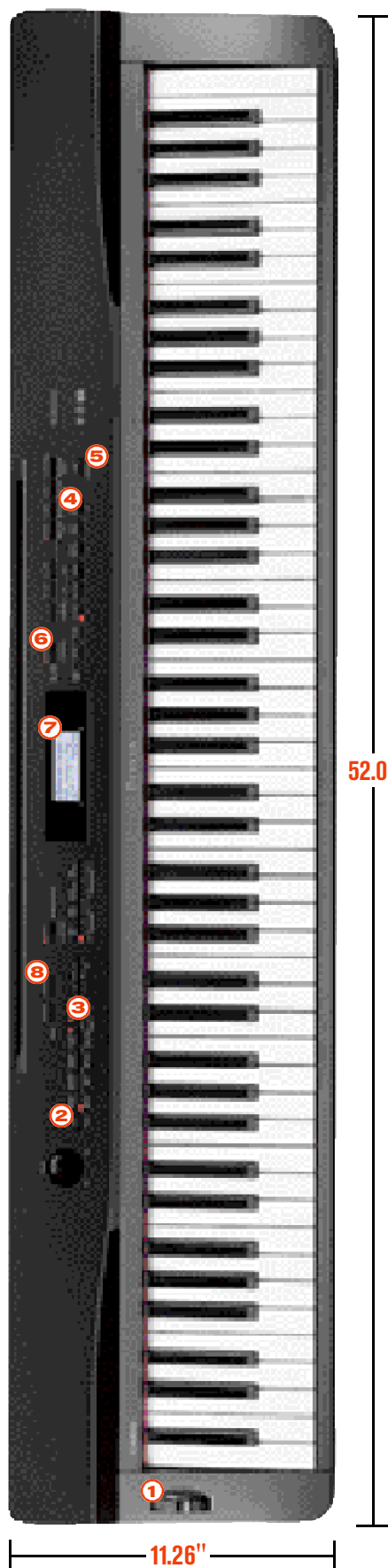




Gig with the PX-330 or another Privia? Tell us about it on the forum at keyboardmag.com.



CASIO PRIVIA PX-330

The Digital Piano for Everyone

by Richard Leiter

PROS

Pro-quality piano sound and feel. Only 25 pounds. Respectable auto-accompaniment. Seamless USB and SD card storage. Irresistible bells and whistles for the price.

CONS

Some of the non-piano, General MIDI patches are weak. Button labeling is difficult to read in low light.

INFO

\$799.99 list/approx. \$700 street,
priviapiano.com

My first thought when I heard that Casio was redesigning their wonderful Privia PX-320 [reviewed June '08] was, "I hope they don't screw it up." In the PX-320, they'd created a \$700 keyboard that felt and sounded pretty much like a piano and a hundred other instruments, weighed only 25 pounds, and was crazy fun to play.

Far from screwing it up, they've released a successor that's great in nearly every way. I predict that in the next two years, musicians will do the following with Casio's new

PX-330: Use it as a main axe on a world tour. Score a low-budget film with it. Take it on a cruise ship gig. Record it on a hit single you'll hear on iTunes. Play it in piano bars in New York, London, Rio, and Mumbai.

It's got performance features no other weighted digital piano at this price can boast: a pitch wheel, 16-track sequencer, auto-harmonization and rhythm accompaniment, and a mic input you can route through the internal speakers. On the PX-320, those speakers pointed up at the ceiling; on the PX-330, they fire at the performer and the audience, as they should.

What's going to make Privia a household name is that it sounds and feels like a grand piano. In fact, you don't really hear how strong the main piano sound is until you run it through something bigger than the built-in speakers. Don't get me wrong — they're terrific, but eight watts is still only eight watts. Within 20 minutes of getting the PX-330 into my studio, I'd played it through my Tannoy and TOA speakers,



HANDS-ON

- ① The pitch wheel is a welcome addition to an affordable digital piano. You can't play a harmonica without one!
- ② This is your drummer. It does intros, fills, and syndro endings that make musical sense.
- ③ Auto-accompaniment and harmonization are musical and clever. For example, the salsa arrangement has horns, bass, piano montuno, and percussion.
- ④ Pick your sounds here: pianos, EPs, organs, vibes, strings, basses, guitars, and lots of General MIDI patches.
- ⑤ This button triggers storage and computer connection.
- ⑥ Hold down the Tone/Registration button and you get Auto Harmonize. Imagine between two and six extra fingers thickening every chord you play.
- ⑦ There's a lot more going on here than meets the eye: altered tunings, temperaments, brilliance, acoustic resonance, and duet mode for starters. It helps to read the manual.
- ⑧ Sequencer is effortless and accurate. You can save ideas, songs, and arrangements, then port them to your music software for further development.

plus the Barbetta and Gallien-Krueger amps I use for gigs, and I can confidently assert that the piano sound rivals many digital stage pianos regardless of weight or price. In fact, it may work against Casio that their product is so light and affordable, because some consumers expect "pro" keyboards to cost and weigh more – but having read this review, you'll know better.

LOOK AND FEEL

Multi-purpose buttons are still clustered around a small display, but instead of three numerals, you now get a 32 x 96-character backlit LCD that really helps you navigate the sounds and options.

The graded, hammer-action keyboard feels sluggish if you play with the sound off, but absolutely sure-fingered and natural when you turn it on. It powers up at the medium touch sensitivity setting, but I backed it off to a lighter touch, and it *danced*. Like a real piano, higher keys are lighter than lower ones. Where the PX-320 had a double sensor on each key, Casio has now added a third that lets you re-trigger each note without the key fully returning to rest position. Ever struggle with

playing rapid-fire, repeating notes on your controller? You won't on the PX-330.

It's definitely a pianist's axe; the keys feel so much like the real thing that they won't benefit someone who lacks basic technique. But if you've got even simple piano skills, you're going to love this action. Smooth acceleration from *piano* to *fortissimo* gets the most out of the 250 built-in instruments (Casio calls them tones). The keyboard invites you to get funky on electric piano and B-3-style organ sounds, yet still lets you be expressive with horns, winds, basses, and the myriad of synths. But the pianos are what really glow.

SOUND

It seems like every digital piano has its Specially Named Process for delivering the goods. Casio's "Linear Morphing System" seems to create very smooth and natural velocity transitions among the gobs of samples that they use in the piano sound. At the end of the day, the PX-330 delivers the acoustic piano from top to bottom.

If you listen as closely and critically as you might to a high-end piano sample library (e.g., Synthogy Ivory or EastWest Quantum Leap Pianos), you can begin to pick up subtle anomalies. There's a slightly gated-sounding cutoff on the very ends of the tails of sustained notes. Also, a few notes in the high mids seem to decay faster than the others. Will either of these bother you in the course of actual playing? Probably not. Will you even notice it in a live setting, or in a recorded mix? Never.

In fact, I played the PX-330 for a two-hour gig in a 300-seat theater and was not aware of the audio quirks I'd unearthed in the studio. The only problem I had was accessing tones, as the labeling was hard to see on a dark stage. I used glow tape to mark important buttons. Also, the gig came up so quickly that I didn't set up registrations to give me fast access to sounds and proper splits – a capability the PX-330 *does* have. It was tricky to scroll through the nine EPs and 13 organs to get to the ones I wanted. An hour spent on organization would have solved that, and let me split bass patches with keyboard sounds up top.

Here's a plus: To store registrations, rhythms, and songs you've created, you

NEED TO KNOW

How are the piano sounds? Better than you'd have any reason to believe at 25 pounds and \$700. They sound even better through an amp or P.A.

Is the main piano sound better than the PX-320? It has four velocity layers instead of three, and uses three times the sample memory. More importantly, your ears will hear the marked improvement.

What about other sounds? There's a professional array of EPs, B-3s with simple but convincing Leslie effects, robust basses, punchy drums, and the whole GM sound set, though a few GM sounds (e.g. Nylon Guitar, Bandonion) are subpar. But the non-Western selection goes way beyond shakuhachi: There's erhu, sarangi, oud, ney, and a dozen more Chinese and Indian instruments.

Does the auto-accompaniment sound like a band? Not quite – it sounds like smart auto-accompaniment, but it's fun. Familiar grooves are augmented by loads of world styles, plus 16 different tunings. An hour with this machine is like a two-credit non-western music course.

plug a USB cable into your Mac or Windows PC, and the PX-330 shows up like a hard drive. It's a little more complex than drag-and-drop – you must rename files that you port from computer to Privia, for instance – but it works. You can shuttle your whole show back and forth in seconds, or upload Standard MIDI files created on your computer to the PX-330's sequencer to accompany yourself on a solo gig.

CONCLUSIONS

You can gig, write, record, lift it with two fingers, and maybe even pay for it in cash. Even if acoustic piano was the only sound the Privia PX-330 made, it would be my no-brainer pick for a digital piano under a thousand bucks. (Casio sells the PX-130, a scaled-down model with the same piano sound, for \$599.99 list/approx. \$500 street.) The PX-330 offers so much for so little that we're awarding it a Key Buy for meter-pegging bang-for-buck. **K**