

ByteNoise

Propellerhead Reason Pianos

Reason Pianos is a Refill by [Propellerhead Software](#), the Swedish company who made [Reason](#) itself, and it lives up to the precedent of high quality set by their flagship sequencer.

In typical Propellerhead style, they make up for the fact that they're merely selling you intangible replicas of instruments by faithfully recreating the best instruments available. In the case of these pianos, they've recorded the sounds of a Steinway D grand piano, a Steinway K upright piano, and a Yamaha C7 grand piano.

There are many different ways you can mic up a piano. You can position the microphones above the hammers at the front, at the side and back, underneath it, or pretty far away to soak up some of the room's ambience. As this makes such a big difference to the [sound](#), you may be wondering which microphone positions were used. The answer is simple: all of them. As well as choosing which of the three pianos you want to use, you get to choose exactly which microphone positions you want too. That's a *lot* of choice.

The most obvious question is *how do the pianos sound?* To my ears, they sound very good. I can only assume they sound about as good as the real things, albeit without the same level of expression. Looking at one of the patches in NN-XT, four notes were recorded per octave, and each of those notes was

recorded at four different velocities. Although that doesn't sound like much on paper, it's more than on, say, the totally decent sounding Peter Siedlaczek's Total Piano, which is the only comparable sample CD I have. At any rate, the result is seamless and sounds great.

The only problem I have with this Refill is psychological: choice. Barry Schwartz wrote a book and gave [a TED talk](#) about how having too much choice can give people vertigo. You may end up not making a decision out of fear of making the *wrong* decision, because it's quite likely that whatever you end up picking, you could have picked something even better.

This Refill is very much a case in point. You have to choose one of three absurdly prestigious pianos to play. Then you have to choose which microphones, or combination of microphones, you want to use. Perhaps the close mics and the ribbon mics. Perhaps the jazz mics and the ambient mics. Or you could load up one of their producer patches for any given piano, complete with intricately programmed compressors and equalisers. Maybe you'd rather choose a particular song you like the sound of, such as [Aphex Twin's Avril 14th](#), and load up the slew of samplers, EQs and compressors that emulates that.

So basically, my only complaint boils down to the fact that this product offers me too much choice for me to make a quick decision about which samples to load in the first place. If you can get past the bewildering array of options, I'd definitely recommend Reason Pianos.

There was a time when I'd weight the pros and cons of buying "real" tangible music technology versus the software equivalents. Taking the advantages of software to their logical conclusion, Propellerhead have supplied faithful recreations of

such expensive, if not downright historic, instruments that I'd never have a hope of being able to afford the real things.

Needless to say, this €120 Refill compares favourably against saving up for a \$105,000 Steinway D, let alone the other two other pianos, then trying to fit them all in your lounge.