

Vintage Vibe Electric Pianos

Abundance of Feel, Soul & Depth

In the world of vintage keyboard instruments, there are two camps. On one side you have folks buying and restoring them to keep their legacy alive. On the other you have people dismantling them for parts. Vintage Vibe is a company with an alternative: a line of electric mechanical pianos.

I paid a visit to the Vintage Vibe workshop in Rockaway, N.J., to experience what the company's electric pianos are all about. Being an acoustic pianist who owns a Fender Rhodes and a Wurlitzer 200A, I have a thing for *real* instruments. No digital samples here.

Owner Chris Carroll and his team are known for their expertise in restoring vintage electric pianos. But recently, they set out to build a new instrument that's more manageable for a gigging musician.

The classic early '70s Fender Rhodes inspires the action and tone. Vintage Vibe decided to utilize tines, which is the hallmark of the Rhodes sound. Starting with the harp of a Rhodes—without the heavy metal frame and recontoured to utilize about half the wood—the company created a new, lighter design and found additional ways to shed weight without sacrificing sound or feel. For instance, the keys are made of linden wood, which is light but strong. The action rail has been completely redesigned, too, with 2.5-inch holes drilled across it to reduce mass without compromising strength.

The result is a gorgeous instrument at *half* the weight, with a body shape that looks very much like a Wurlitzer. The Vintage Vibe Deluxe 73 comes in at 60 pounds—compare that to the original Fender Rhodes 73-note stage piano, which weighed about 125 pounds. The company's flagship 64-key model weighs 53 pounds, making it ultra-portable. Vintage Vibe even makes a 44-key version at 35 pounds. With their bright sparkle color, these instruments would take center stage in any performance situation.

But how do they feel and sound? I was overwhelmed by the touch—amazingly responsive. I've become slightly weary of having to draw the sound out from my own Rhodes—especially during soft passages—but the Vintage Vibe allowed me to use a wide variety of dynamics. The tone is clean, direct and extremely defined, but due to the overtones it has a real bark when you lay into it. I was impressed by the natural range of timbre and colors it can produce. I felt very expressive playing it and enjoyed the aftertouch and clarity when running faster series of notes. Having all the great onboard features right at my fingertips was useful as well as inspiring.

The Vintage Vibe electric piano is available with passive controls, with



tone and volume knobs alongside a mono 1/4-inch jack. It comes with cutouts for upgrading to active controls, which I highly recommend. Active controls deliver stereo-panning tremolo featuring depth, speed and a half-time setting; bass boost and treble control are offered as well. The connections, found on the bottom of the 64- and 73-key versions, sport an effects loop for plugging in your favorite stomp box. There is a headphone jack, as well as left-right outputs that make it possible to run effects in true stereo. On the 44-key version, the connections are on the back, so you can easily place it on top of another keyboard instrument.

The base prices for the Vintage Vibe electric pianos are \$3,505 (44-key), \$4,770 (64-key) and \$5,670 (73-key), respectively. The 64- and 73-key versions are also available in a "classic" model that uses slightly different materials such as imported pickups and an ABS plastic lid, which offsets the cost by about \$1,000 but makes no detectable difference in the feel and sound.

Optional features such as a choice of 73 different colored fiberglass lids, 40 different sparkle finishes, pedal/rod and active electronics cost an additional \$100–\$500. You can even order a "suitcase" speaker that the piano sits on. Vintage Vibe's Stereo Console amp, at \$2,800, has two 10-inch speakers that angle up toward the player and two 12-inch speakers that face the audience.

These electric pianos are not cheap. But compare their prices to the expense of a restored Rhodes and consider that you're getting a high-quality, road-ready instrument that is sonically equal at half the weight.

With a growing roster of endorsers such as Robert Glasper, Vintage Vibe is gaining notoriety as a customer service-oriented specialty company that sets up and voices each instrument to sound and feel great. Anyone wanting the experience of playing a real instrument with an abundance of feel, soul and depth should give one of their electric pianos a try. —Oscar Perez

Ordering info: vintagevibe.com

Yamaha CP4 Stage Piano

Professional Action, Inspirational Tones

Yamaha has long been one of the main players in the increasingly crowded stage piano market, and the latest offering in the line does not disappoint. The 88-key CP4 Stage Piano represents a major step in the evolution of Yamaha's long history with these instruments, and the company clearly has been paying attention to what your average stage piano customer needs and wants.

The CP4 is a solidly built instrument, and even though it weighs less than 40 pounds, it has a great playing heft to it. The keyboard of the CP4 is Yamaha's new Natural Wood Graded Hammer action, and it feels fantastic. The white keys are real wood, and have a synthetic ivory finish, albeit a slick



top, not textured. The action is heavy, but not overbearingly so, and the depth of the keys was spot-on under my fingers. Overall, it creates an uncannily piano-like playing experience.

The front panel is uncluttered and simple to navigate, with quick access to all the performance controls. Setting up splits and layers on the fly is a