breeze, and Yamaha included both pitch and mod wheels in the upper right corner—a welcome addition that many other stage pianos lack. There are also well-placed controls to access effects, playback, metronome and recording (more on that in a moment), as well as a nicely detailed five-band EQ. A compressor with seven presets can be quickly activated and tweaked to make sure your sound is getting through the mix.

The back panel offers both balanced XLR and unbalanced 1/4-inch outputs—a major convenience for pro players. It also includes a 1/8-inch input for sending audio through the CP4's outs, which is great for playing backing tracks or even break music. You will also find two foot-pedal jacks and a pair of expression-pedal jacks, along with MIDI in and out, making it a very competent controller for outside sound sources as well. Also on the back panel is a USB-B jack for connecting to your computer as a MIDI controller, and a USB-A jack for recording audio directly to an external drive. Among my pet peeves are so-called professional instruments that use an AC-to-DC "wall wart" power supply, and Yamaha is on the same page-an internal power supply on the CP4 eliminates that problem.

But the thing that really matters most is the sound. Any piano player will be immediately immersed in the piano sounds of the CP4. Yamaha included a few different piano options, each with 15 variations. The main piano (the one that comes up when you boot up) is the sound of the company's flagship CFX grand, and it is so gorgeous that it was difficult for me to stop playing and move on to the other piano sounds. The second piano is much darker, modeled on Yamaha's CFIIIS, and the third is the S6, a piano that falls somewhere in between the other two. All are a joy to play and inspirational in their tone.

The CP4's Electric Piano section is also extremely playable, with Rhodes, Wurli, CP80 and DX pianos all represented. The Rhodes sounds are modeled on Yamaha's RDII and RDIII electrics, so there is a slight difference in the tone, but they are nice and warm, and they have a satisfying growl when you dig in. There are also a wide variety of clavinets, melodic percussion and synth tones—great for layering and easy to accomplish with just a couple of button presses. With individual sliders for part volume control, your splits and layers will always be balanced the way you like them. The synths in particular are well represented for a stage piano, and if you want to get in-depth to tweak them, the capability is there, though not so much in a performance context. The organ tones are useable in a pinch, but not really on a par with the dedicated "clone wheels" on the market now. This is not surprising for a stage piano, and playing organ on the CP4's piano action would be challenging, anyway. There are enough variations to be useful for quick organ parts, but not much else. This is a small complaint when

considering the incredible detail of the pianos, electric pianos and clavs. Indeed, the CP4 is not meant to be the next Motif.

The CP4 is a professional ax all the way, and would be at home in almost any context. Piano players in particular will fall in love with the feel and sound response, but any keyboard player would do well to use this as their main 88-key board. The nearest competitors that sound this good are quite a bit more expensive. There is no after-

touch, but again, this is a stage piano, and that feature will probably not be missed by most. Yamaha has a hit with this one, and it is priced right for all the functionality and playability it offers. —Chris Neville

Ordering info: usa.yamaha.com

Garritan Abbey Road Studios CFX Concert Grand

High-End Virtual Piano Experience

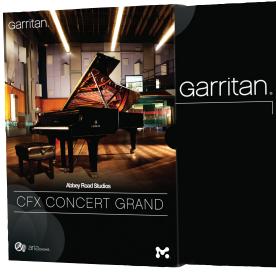
collaboration between Garritan/MakeMusic and Abbey Road Studios has resulted in a great-sounding virtual instrument that combines one of the world's most painstakingly constructed pianos with the renowned London studio's acoustic environment, microphone collection and engineering team.

Those familiar with the popular Ivory piano sample library will find a similar modeling paradigm in the Garritan Abbey Road Studios CFX Concert Grand. It uses a similar interface and most of the same parameters: sympathetic resonance, sustain resonance, lid height, pedal noise, velocity curves, EQ, convolution reverbs and many more. The breakthrough feature of this collection is the variety of microphone positions on both close and ambient mics. This gives a huge amount of naturally modeled control over timbral aspects of the instrument.

The piano itself is the centerpiece of this sample collection. The 9-foot CFX is Yamaha's flagship concert grand, comparable in quality to the Steinway D, Fazoli F308 or Bösendorfer Imperial. Retailing at just under \$300, my first concern was if this virtual version of the CFX would be versatile enough to be used in a variety of styles, or if it was merely a well-crafted one-trick pony. Fortunately, there are a number of presets that will put you in the ballpark for almost any style you're looking for by changing up EQ and velocity curves as well as reverb, mic positions and the numerous other parameters at your disposal. From a bright Elton John-ish sound to an even and articulate tone more suitable to jazz, to a rich and nuanced instrument well suited to Chopin, the variety and versatility of sounds that Garritan was able to derive from sampling this instrument in Abbey Road's legendary Studio One is simply amazing. But this instrument really excels where most others fail: hearing it solo, unaccompanied by other instruments. With the dynamic subtleties and shades of overtones, as well as the recreation of extraneous

noises and ambient environment, one can hardly expect to hear a more realistic recreation of a fine acoustic piano.

How an instrument feels and responds to the player in performance is just as important as how it sounds. Latency—or the delay between when a key is pressed and when the note sounds—is often a problem with soft-synths, but the Garritan Abbey Road Studios CFX Concert Grand is surprisingly responsive. Even at some of the higher buffer settings, there was no perceptible delay. The velocity curve and dynamics are also highly adjustable, so the player has almost limitless ability to match their expected response from the instrument with their controller of choice.



Potential users should be aware that the Garritan Abbey Road Studios CFX Concert Grand can be very demanding on your computer's system. It will work with either Windows or Mac and can be used either as a plug-in or a standalone player. But the full install requires a minimum of 125GB of space to store the samples (almost three times as much as the largest Ivory instrument). Once installed on my stock MacBook Pro, it took more than 5 minutes to load each of the "full" presets. This could be a consideration for some if they are planning on using it in live performance. Fortunately, for less robust systems it offers the ability to run the instrument in "compact" mode, which uses only one-fifth of the sample resources while retaining all the features of "full" mode. "Compact" mode still sounds wonderful, though not as detailed, and is able to run on a relatively weak system at a low buffer size without any noticeable dropouts or system

The Garritan Abbey Road Studios CFX Concert Grand is a highly playable virtual instrument that would make a great addition to anyone's sample library.

–Vijay Tellis-Nayak

Ordering info: garritan.com