

GX-1 Review

By
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I bought one of these very recently and I've had sufficient time to get a feel for what it is, what it does and some of the limitations. I bought mine from a local dealer for what I considered a fair price with delivery and a short warranty (\$1000). And the very few I saw on Craigslist and such were in that ballpark price.

My history with organs goes back to 1958 or so when my dad bought a Baldwin Orgasonic of some model or other. It was my first introduction to learning and playing the organ. Since then I've had a Yamaha basic model, a Hammond Aurora Classic, a Kimball and a couple of others that I don't remember. But it has been more than 5 years since I last played.

Currently, in addition to the GX-1, I have a Hammond H-133 and a Wurlitzer 625T. The Hammond is a full console, tube-type organ; the Wurlitzer is a spinet and is all solid-state with a mix of analog and digital sounds.

The GX-1 is an excellent instrument in most ways; the single word that describes it best is versatile. It is all digital, nary an analog to be found. With that comes a certain brightness that seems to be associated with most digital music, especially of this era (about 1985-86).

That brightness is both a good and bad thing. If you want the more classic organ sounds, this just really doesn't compare to a more classic, analog organ at all. Everything is bright, from flutes to strings and brass. While I think it sounds very good, it is more of a 'band in a box' type design than any of the other organs I've owned or played.

If you want to take the time, you can set up virtually unlimited sounds and effects on this instrument. But it isn't easy or intuitive in many cases. Most changes and such require more than one keystroke for each small

change, with your hand all over the panel doing it. It uses a numeric keypad, plus another key or two to make most changes. You can almost make it whistle Dixie on power up if you want to take the time and effort to figure out how! <G> Well, that is an exaggeration, but the limits of sounds and combinations, and how those sounds and rhythms interact is almost limitless.

The saving grace in all this is the presets. You can have so many presets available, all changeable, that if you plan, you can have presets for quite a few songs in place, ready for a 1 or 2 stroke change. Of course, you need to have some way to remember or notate those preset settings so you can use them. But you have to make all those changes manually; there is no way to save different presets to disk or tape on this model. I think that changed in later models.

Sounds:

Flutes are fine, but they certainly won't remind you of that 'Hammond' sound. On the upper keyboard, there are 6 flute tabs, ranging from 16' to 2', with two of them being dissonant tones. While the volume level of each is the same, there is a function to allow for 'tone bar' type settings to set them to different volumes. Unfortunately, that is a major PITA to do.

Strings are of the orchestral string section type for the most part. I don't hear any that are great as solos.

Brass is much better, in my opinion. Quite clear and brassy as you would expect both as solos and as coloring for other settings.

Pedals - The bass is just weak in my opinion. Even adding the 16' pedal doesn't produce that classic diapason or bourdon foot tones that most organs I've played had. I'm not sure if it is the speakers, amps or just the way the tone is generated that causes it. But you can add a Genie tone to the pedal fairly easy and even though it still isn't the classic organ pedal tone, it can be very interesting.

Rhythms & Stylings:

Here I think the GX-1 really shines. There are 36 built-in styles, easily changed to and very good to my ear. Additionally, you can do an opening bar or two and a closing quite simply, and the FX bar makes breaks simple. I really like these and it helps remind my hands and feet what to do as I try to relearn the feel of playing the organ.

You can use the styles as is, or you can change the overall registration of the lower keyboard/pedals with the Genius buttons. These allow for 10 different tonal changes to the rhythm and style you have selected.

Additionally, you can use just the rhythms by killing the style very simply. I do this often as it helps me with timing. Both volume and tempo of the 'drums' are adjustable, as is the volume of the 'style'

Chording:

Here's another area that is excellent. Lowrey's implementation allows for single or two finger chording quite simply and provides a chart that is easily used to guide you. But the thing that makes it even better is that you can finger the chords also and it uses the chord in the way you have the keys. Some earlier models always put the chord name as the root of the chord regardless of your fingering. You can also mix full chording with one and two finger chording and the organ has no problem figuring it out.

Overall I think this is an excellent instrument as long as you are not buying it to play and sound like many of the classic organs. I believe that it is very weak in that role. But as a very fun instrument to play, with lots of bells and whistles to make it easier to play while not putting too many limitations in the way of your growth as you learn and practice, it is excellent.

It can be used for a church organ, but that is really not its forte and most of the things that are its strengths wouldn't be used in that role.