



# Korg PS60

by Ken Hughes

The look of Korg's new PS60 is all business, not unlike their earlier M- and T-series keyboards or a Roland D-50. While Korg's designs for the Radias, M3, and SV-1 are certainly more audacious, the PS60's no-nonsense appearance bespeaks its single-minded mission: To be taken onstage and played live. You have to wonder if the lack of flamboyance is calculated to enhance appeal in hard times: "Look, honey, it's not a flashy toy. Can I get one, please, can I, please?" The lightweight plastic enclosure is reasonably rigid, and the panel is as organized and as easy to read on a dark stage as it is in bright sunlight. (The LCD doesn't fare as well in the sun, but what LCD does?) It's also appealingly compact.

## Layout

Performance controls are at left and include a dedicated button for simu-leslie speed on organ sounds, octave and semitone transpose controls, and four banks of five preset Performances per bank. A Performance is a macro-level setup encompassing sounds, splits and layers, effects sends, modulation effects, delay, reverb, and EQ. The Easy Setup panel at center is where you choose sounds and build splits and layers on the fly.

Here's where things get interesting. The PS60 is always in what many

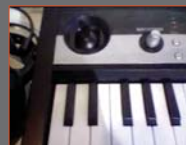
other axes call multi, combi, or performance mode. All six sound categories are available at the touch of a button. Want an acoustic/electric piano layer? Light the On button under "A. Piano" and choose a piano sound, hold that On button and press its counterpart under "E. Piano," then choose an electric piano. Balance to taste using the white volume knobs. Done. Dare to create a massive, six-layer monstrosity? Light up all six On buttons and go nuts. With 120-voice polyphony, you're pretty much ready for anything.

## Keyboard Feel

When I placed the PS60 front and center in my studio, and before turn-

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Video: First look at Korg's other new keyboard, the MicroStation.



Audio demo by the author.



ing it on, I thought its synth-action keys were way too light and that they bottomed out too softly. Why do I mention this? Because you might make the same judgment if you encounter the PS60 at a retailer where they don't keep every unit plugged in. After I spent some time *playing* (what a concept!), a whole new impression confronted me. The PS60 impressed me as much with its keys-to-sound connection as the vastly more expensive Yamaha CP1 stage piano. Granted, it's a completely different feel from anybody's piano-weighted keys, but the PS60's keys are a pleasure to play because—and this is important—their response is so tightly integrated with the internal synth engine. Many of the source samples, if they don't actually feature a dozen or so velocity layers, *feel* as if they do. It's so bloody easy to be musical. Okay, I'm gushing. Go play one and find out why.

## Sounds

Certainly we're in bread-and-butter land—but it's artisan bread and fresh butter from a local creamery. The grand pianos in particular are gorgeous, with plenty of girth, sparkle, and air. They're everything you want in a stage piano, and there are several tasty flavors. It's here that the finger-to-music connection is at its absolute best. If you buy and connect a Korg DS1H damper pedal (about \$60), you get half-pedaling, too. Stretched-tuned pianos are offered; try them for solo piano songs or passages.

Electric pianos, both Rhodes and Wurly, are every bit as good, aided by a clever implementation of the Lock button above the joystick: Push the stick forward for tremolo to taste, then press Lock to keep it there. (Incidentally, the Lock button can affect either, but not both, of the joystick's axes.) Creamy, swirly, snarly, Disney end credits—all the essentials are on hand, as well as cool extras like digital, Prophet VS-style electric piano sounds, which are rendered really well. Clavs and harpsichords live in this bank, too, including one with the key-off noise of a real Clavinet with sticky old hammers.

Korg has great organ simulations, but CX3-style drawbar modeling isn't part of the PS60's innards. The simu-Leslie isn't as convincing as I'd like to hear, but Korg has included a slew of drawbar tonalities, plus delightfully cheezoid transistor organs for when you need to pump it up, light someone's fire, or cry 96 tears. If you spend most of your time playing B-3 sounds, you're probably going to get them from a dedicated clonewheel anyway. All this said, the audio demo at [keyboardmag.com](http://keyboardmag.com) attests that even a relative hack like me can wring a decent Hammond sound out of the PS60.

## In Use

Spending a few weeks with the PS60 was really enjoyable. I used it in the studio as both MIDI controller and sound source. The keys that I had initially dismissed became my new favorite for playing soft synths, devices in Propellerhead Reason, and the like.

I cooked up a demo tune that answered the question: "What would it sound like if Tower of Power had Donald Fagen and Bernie Worrell sit in?" Since the PS60 contains no drum sounds, not even in a General MIDI bank buried somewhere, Reason provided drums and percussion. Since the PS60 isn't a workstation with a built-in sequencer, I recorded everything else live as audio into Pro Tools LE 7.4. I found a perfect bass guitar among many worthy candidates in the Synth bank, which seems to be more or less the "everything else" category in the PS60.

Layering a Dyno Rhodes with a bright grand piano was a snap, and with a little tweak to the phaser effect on the Rhodes, I had exactly the

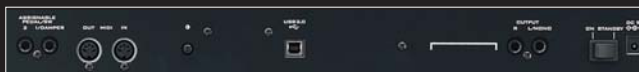
## Specifications



**PROS** Exceptional finger-to-music connection. Half-pedaling on piano sounds with extra-cost pedal. Compact and light. Great sounds. Multiple tuning temperaments.



**CONS** No aftertouch. No arpeggiator. Can't layer programs from the same category.



**CONCEPT** An always-in-multi-mode gig synth loaded with high-quality sounds you can split and layer with alarming speed.

**POLYPHONY** 120 voices in single mode; 60 voices in double mode.

**MULTITIMBRAL PARTS** 6: Acoustic Piano, Electric Piano, Organ, Strings, Brass, and Synth.

**SIMULTANEOUS EFFECTS** 5 inserts, 2 master, plus global EQ.

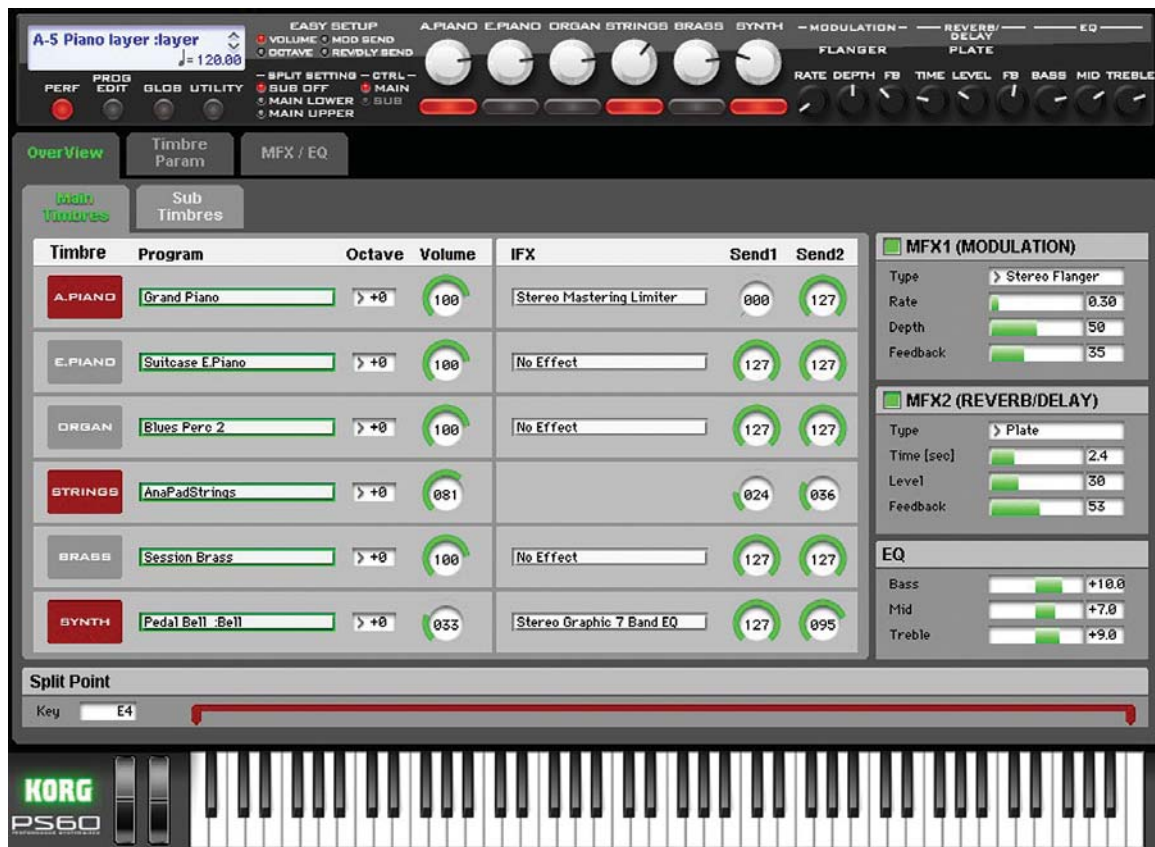
**W x D x H** 36.41" x 11.45" x 3.54".

**WEIGHT** 10.14 lbs.



**PRICE** List: \$899  
Approx. street: \$700

[korg.com/ps60](http://korg.com/ps60)



With the PS60 connected via USB and this plug-in or standalone editor running on your Mac or PC, knob and button moves on the PS60 update instantly onscreen, and vice versa. You can also automate the PS60 like a soft synth.

right texture. I tracked the layered piano-and-Rhodes in one pass. Building a credible funk horn section required two passes with different sounds; the PS60's otherwise excellent "TOP Section" patch gave me a pre-made split (this is a single program, not a multi) with a fat baritone sax in the left hand and a sax-and-trumpet trio in the right. It sounded a little soft, though, so I overdubbed a pass of "Killer Brass," which skews more into Jerry Hey territory. Mixed just under "TOP Section," it added extra sharpness. I also used the pitch bender to add very subtle "falls" to the end of each brass stab on this pass. Korg's joystick has always made this gesture easier for me than a pitch wheel or Roland-style paddle. If the PS60 let me layer Programs from the same category, I could have recorded both brass sounds in one pass, but no dice.

After that, I tracked the organ, with some judicious volume pedal work using the pedal from my Korg CX3. I used the "Distortion" patch, which did a nice job of evoking Chester Thompson's "Squib Cakes" and "What Is Hip?" tones. For the lead synth sounds, I had so much fun blowing through them that I can't tell you exactly which ones I used, but I can tell you there's nary a ho-hum sound in the lot. Hiding in the Synth section are a number of pretty good guitars as well, including a distorted lead and a jangly, tremolo-dipped Telecaster.

Not only is there a great software editor included with the PS60, but it also runs as a plug-in in all major DAWs, as well as standalone. It makes working with the PS60 like working with a soft synth, right down to automating all front-panel parameters from your DAW. (In Pro Tools, you need to add those you wish to automate in a pop-up after clicking the Auto button in the plug-in itself.)

The PS60's editor wants to be connected to the PS60 by USB only; I tried it with old-fashioned MIDI and USB at the same time because my rig includes hardware synths connected via a vintage Midiman interface, and I got a MIDI note loop that ate up the PS60's polyphony and gave me phasey sound no matter what the local on/off settings were on each end. The fix was to go into Pro Tools' "Input MIDI Device" settings and de-select the Midiman port to which the PS60 was connected, so that Pro Tools saw the PS60 over USB only. Not the PS60's fault—just something to look out for if your studio is "blended" like mine.

## Conclusions

As I put a rig together for a tour with my band Maybe Tuesday, the PS60 is very attractive with its light weight, small size, low cost, fantastically responsive keys-to-synth connection, and quick navigation. Using the editor software beforehand and storing custom presets will save time. I've seen some online forum chatter bemoaning the lack of a sequencer. That misses the point—if you want a workstation, go get one. An arpeggiator would've been useful, though. Though the absence of aftertouch detracts from the appeal as a player's axe, you can't have everything at this modest price.

The needs of weekend warriors in bar bands and in churches are remarkably similar, and the PS60 is a home run for both camps, especially those on a tight budget, and isn't that most of us right now? I predict that a lot of mid-level touring pros, not just beginners, will get a PS60, a case, and a spare wall wart, and hit the road. I'll likely do just that. **K**