

Beginning Piano Lessons: Is a keyboard enough?

“We’d like to start our son in piano lessons, and our neighbor has a keyboard we can borrow. Will that be ok?” Like so many electronic items, keyboards vary greatly in terms of price, capabilities, and quality. It is important to begin a young musician on an instrument that will best meet his needs and allow him to have maximum success in his studies. Keyboards or digital pianos should have four basic features. They should be touch sensitive so the student can produce loud and soft tones without adjusting the volume control. They should have 88 full-sized keys as opposed to mini- or ¾-length keys—a good way to tell is by making sure that the white keys are the length of a dollar bill. The keys should also be weighted, so that they push down with the same resistance no matter where they’re pressed. If you can put your fingers under the keys (as on an organ or most inexpensive keyboards), they are not weighted. Weighted keys are imperative for gaining finger strength and technique. If a student is playing on a keyboard without these features and then goes to his piano lesson where the instrument is a different quality, he will be unable to achieve the same results—frustration will set in at an early stage and his progress will be hindered. A sustain pedal is the fourth required feature. The average student will begin to incorporate the pedal after about 6 months of lessons, and adding the coordination of the feet takes practice and patience. Optional features include a built-in metronome, additional instrument sounds and rhythm features (beware that too many “bells & whistles” can be a distraction), and headphones (a nice treat for parents at times).

When considering purchasing a used acoustic piano, remember that a new keyboard with the features suggested above can provide more fun and fewer problems than an old upright found in the classifieds.

With any luck at all, you’ll be upgrading to a high quality acoustic piano after 5 to 7 years of lessons. A budding musician is only as good as his instrument!

-Mickey Lytle, Music By Mickey