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# Keyboard

FOR  
**DUMMIES**<sup>®</sup>  
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## Learn to:

- Choose the right keyboard for your needs
- Play, program, and perform with a wide variety of keyboard effects
- Connect your keyboard to your computer, tablet, and various forms of amplification



Listen to audio tracks online

**Jerry Kovarsky**

*Acclaimed keyboard developer and musician*





**by Jerry Kovarsky**

**Foreword by Stephen Fortner**  
Editor in Chief, *Keyboard* magazine

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## **Keyboard For Dummies®**

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)

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Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2013948009

ISBN 978-1-118-70549-0 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-118-70731-9 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-118-70566-7 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-118-70563-6 (ebk)

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Keyboard For Dummies®

Visit [www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/keyboard](http://www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/keyboard) to view this book's cheat sheet.

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# Foreword

When the folks at Wiley first approached me about adding a title on playing keyboards to their hugely popular *For Dummies* family of reference books, I was delighted. The concept, they said, was to be different than the excellent *Piano For Dummies* (first published in 1998). It was to go beyond how to play the piano and cover all the ways in which modern electronic keyboards make learning music fun, enrich the lives of players of all levels of ability and aspiration, and give professionals powerful creative tools not offered by the traditional piano or organ.

I was particularly inspired because this was very much the same challenge faced by *Keyboard* magazine (originally called *Contemporary Keyboard*) at its inception in 1975. Then, electronic keyboards and synthesizers were a nascent and esoteric thing — sci-fi starships piloted by a crew of rock-and-rollers, academics, avant-garde composers, and committed enthusiasts. Now, they're enough of a known quantity that — although technology never ceases to evolve — they really do offer something for everyone. Which sort of instrument is best for you? How do you take full advantage of its features? How do the two somewhat-different experiences of pushing buttons and playing notes integrate to produce musical fulfillment? How can all this technology actually help you *play better* as opposed to being a crutch? That — and much more — is what this book is all about.

Just after that first phone call with Wiley, a little guy with wings and a harp — make that a keytar — appeared on one shoulder, and a red guy with horns and an unusually pointy tuning fork appeared on the other. "Write this

book,” said the red guy. “Think of the prestige, the fame, the red carpet!” “Puh-leeze,” retorted the winged guy, “the only carpet is the one you’ll get called on for blowing the deadline because you’re already so busy running a magazine. You and I both know that Jerry Kovarsky is *the* one to write this. Call him. *Now.*” Fortunately for all of us, the winged guy then shot a bolt of lightning from his keytar, and the only other thing I heard from the red guy was his tuning fork ringing (a tritone, of course) as he vanished in a puff of smoke.

Indeed, I can think of no better guide for your first journey into keyboards than Jerry Kovarsky. He’s as talented a traditional keyboardist as he is a technologist, so he understands that technology is there to serve the music. He was there at the dawn of MIDI, the digital language at the core of every electronic musical instrument since the early ’80s. Though he has held high-level product management gigs for Casio and Korg — two companies that have long been at the forefront of creating fun and affordable musical instruments — even their competitors always considered him an asset thanks to his tireless passion for educating people about music technology in general. Last but not least, his technical know-how, integrity, and get-it-done attitude have earned him the trust and friendship of many of the keyboard world’s brightest stars, including prog-rock godfather Keith Emerson and the late, great George Duke.

I hope that *Keyboard For Dummies* launches you into a lifetime exploration of creating cool sounds, playing your favorite tunes, and even composing some of your own. If you're hungry for more after working through this book, head to [www.keyboardmag.com](http://www.keyboardmag.com) to check out our online content and subscribe to the print edition of *Keyboard* magazine. There, you'll find music lessons from today's top players, how-to articles from experts including Jerry,

and interviews with stars who put keyboards at the center of their music making. Now, dig into this book and start putting these instruments at the center of yours!

**Stephen Fortner**

*Editor in Chief, Keyboard magazine*

# Introduction

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It used to be simple; you could say, “I play the piano” or “I play organ.” That was pretty much it. Through the last few decades, thanks to technological advances, the world of keyboards has exploded. Now so many options are available that when you press down on those familiar black and white keys, any sound may come out. A small portable keyboard can have the sound of a nine-foot concert grand piano, and that baby-grand-piano-looking instrument can produce the sounds of a full orchestra and a rock band to boot! Anything is possible in the world of electronic keyboards today, and you don’t have to rob a bank to get a single keyboard that can do what took cape-wearing rock stars a circle of gear to do in the late ’70s.

And therein lies the reason behind *Keyboard For Dummies*. No one has adequately tackled this subject, explaining what all the keyboard options are and how to choose and use them. When I was approached to write the book, the task was more than a little daunting. I know the subject matter well; my whole career has been in keyboards — playing them, teaching with them, developing and marketing them, and enjoying them. But this field is such a wide area to cover, from simple little toys up through a wide variety of home and stage keyboards. So my goal is to make technology easy to understand, clearly explain the many types of keyboard available, and help you dive in and use and enjoy the features of these various instruments. I have only two requirements for covering an instrument in this book:

- ✓ It has the aforementioned black and whites keys
- ✓ It has a power cord or runs on batteries

Show me those two things and I'm in.

## ***About This Book***

*Keyboard For Dummies* makes sense of this wide world of electronic black-and-white-key instruments. I explain all the types of keyboards available today, grouping them into logical categories. You gain a basic understanding of how they work, what each is good for, and how to choose the right one for your needs.

I cover the basics of music so I can share some playing tips, and I introduce the fundamentals of synthesis so you can tweak your sounds and effects when you need to. You get into the basics of computer integration and even discover how to play songs by ear. My goals are to make things clear, interesting, informative, unintimidating, and most of all, fun! I don't care what type of music or which keyboard family is your favorite. I try not to let my personal taste color any of my writing. Though perhaps my age slips through now and again; I can't try to be any younger (or older) than I am.

Covering such a wide array of keyboards and topics means that not every chapter relates to your specific needs. *Keyboard For Dummies* is written so you can dive in to any chapter that interests you; you don't have to read it from front cover to back. In particular, you can skip over shaded sidebars and anything marked with a Technical Stuff icon. These bits are interesting but provide more information than what you absolutely need to know to understand the point at hand. But I think that if you're interested in keyboards, you'll find every chapter of some interest to at least expand your horizons about the possibilities that are out there.

Reading is all well and good, but I'm talking about sound and music here. I love this quotation, often attributed to comedian Martin Mull: "Writing about music is like dancing about architecture." I couldn't agree more, so I provide plenty of online audio examples that take the words and concepts in this book and translate them into sonic reality for you to absorb and enjoy.

Within this book, you may note that some web addresses break across two lines of text. If you're reading this book in print and want to visit one of these web pages, simply key in the web address exactly as it's noted in the text, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist. If you're reading this as an e-book, you've got it easy — just click on the web address to be taken directly to the web page.

## ***Foolish Assumptions***

I've made some assumptions about who you, the reader, are. If any of these is true about you, this book is for you:

- ✓ You're a beginner to music, keyboards, and technology and want guidance from the ground floor up, including tips to help you purchase the right keyboard for you and use its features to the fullest.
- ✓ You're a good pianist who wants to explore keyboard technology.
- ✓ You just love music and keyboards.
- ✓ You're a parent or other adult shopping for a keyboard for a child and need suggestions on what types and features are best for youngsters to practice with.
- ✓ You're curious and want to learn.



# *Icons Used in This Book*

Throughout the book I use icons to help break up the text and to draw attention to points I'm making. Here's what each icon means:



This icon highlights helpful info that will enhance your keyboard skills. It may be a shortcut or another way of doing things. Think of it as a friend, adding to the information at hand.



This icon identifies important tidbits you should squirrel away for later use.



Potentially damaging or dangerous issues carry the Warning icon. Take them seriously.



At times, I go into greater background detail than what you need to grasp a basic topic, and I use this icon to identify that extra information. It isn't essential reading, but gives you a deeper understanding of a subject.



I've sprinkled a lot of audio examples throughout the text to bring all the subject matter in this book to life. When you see this icon, it indicates that you can find an online audio track related to what you're reading about.

# ***Beyond the Book***

In addition to the book content, you can find a free online Cheat Sheet that includes a glossary of common keyboard terminology, a helpful list of must-have and good-to-add accessories, and a who's who of keyboard companies. Go to [www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/keyboard](http://www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/keyboard) to access this handy reference material, and then print it out and keep it by your side when purchasing, studying, and playing your keyboard.

You can also access additional free articles that cover information I simply couldn't fit into the book. You'll find information on sixth and seventh chords, the General MIDI (GM) soundset, and entertaining educational features included on some keyboards. I also offer lists of songs that showcase each type of keyboard. You can find them at [www.dummies.com/extras/keyboard](http://www.dummies.com/extras/keyboard).

Finally, [www.dummies.com/go/keyboard](http://www.dummies.com/go/keyboard) is home to the more than 100 audio tracks that accompany this book. Head there to listen to me demonstrate the sounds of instruments, play all the exercises provided, use various keyboard features, and much more. Sometimes I even talk!

## ***Where to Go from Here***

You don't have to read *Keyboard For Dummies* in any particular order; I've written it to be modular, so jumping around is perfectly fine. You can turn to the table of contents, find the section you're most interested in, and get started. That said, starting with [Chapter 1](#) will give you a great overview of what this book covers.

If you don't have a keyboard and want to learn about what's out there, be sure to read [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#). Want

to know more about music and playing basics? Skip right over to Part II. If you have an arranger keyboard or anything with automatic accompaniment, be sure to check out Chapters [10](#) and [11](#). Interested in synthesis? [Chapter 14](#) is for you. Eventually, you'll want to read them all; I wrote this book to be a resource that you can keep coming back to for (hopefully) years to come. Enjoy!

Part I  
**Getting Started with  
Keyboards**



*For Dummies* can help you get started with lots of subjects. Visit [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) to learn more and do more

with *For Dummies*.

## *In this part . . .*

- ✓ Meet the many kinds of keyboards that have been played throughout the years and the various types that are available today. They fall into logical families that help you to make sense of all the options.
- ✓ Determine what your music-making needs are and decide what type of keyboard is the best choice for you.
- ✓ Settle your keyboard into its optimal home. After it's there, a few common-sense safety precautions and bits of upkeep will help keep it in tiptop shape.