

Medeli SP4200 Pros and Cons

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1. INTRODUCTION

This also goes for Thomann SP5600 (that I own), Kurzweil KA-120, Beale Stageperformer 1000 etc, that are identical (manufactured and private-branded by Medeli).

2. PROS

- The combination of a decent 88 keys hammer action (non-graded) keybed and keyboard/arranger/training/recording features and lots of instrument sounds that are reasonably useful, and an optional wooden stand with 3 pedal unit, is a great combination, and as such this is a good choice for anyone on a tight budget that wants to learn the piano as well as compose own music, possibly using the piano as a MIDI controller.
- The combination of the SP4200 with the wooden stand with 3-pedal unit is great at home or studio, while live performances could be done using an X stand. The instrument + wooden stand also looks great yet are of course not as stylish as a fully integrated piano.
- It starts almost immediately and is a pure ready-to-play piano to start with, making it directly useful for playing and testing out song ideas. Having a dedicated Piano button also helps to get back to a pure piano mode after getting lost in the features.
- There are lots of instrument sounds, many of them useful, yet of varying quality. The acoustic piano is clearly looped yet has a very nice attack. The acoustic pianos, woodwinds, brass, strings, pads and drums sound great. Organs, guitars and leads not so much, and there are e.g. few realistic emulations of organs (e.g. no Hammond) or electric pianos. Leads are partly fixed by applying an external MIDI controller for filter, modulation etc.
- Reverb and chorus help make the sound more pleasing. They can be adjusted and saved to registration memory, optimized for the instruments (rotary speaker for organs, flanger for guitars etc).
- It's very easy to layer (via **Dual**) and split (via **Lower**) voices, and they can be combined. Each selected voice/part can then be selected and changed by pressing **Voice** multiple times.
- There are lots of features that work in mysterious but creative and complementing ways.
- Having 48 registration memories (8 banks of 6 memories) is plenty and likely more than enough for home use and also stage use.
- The hammer action is rather light and non-graded, which works fine for me, and fits well for other instruments like organ, guitar etc, but might be shunned by real pianists that are used to acoustic graded piano action.
- It supports both old-style MIDI and MIDI via USB, which covers all grounds in that regard. The only drawback is that when MIDI over USB is active the MIDI ports are deactivated, but understandable considering the possible conflict.
- The **Record** feature (sequencer) is capable provided you only need free-hand recording and max 5 tracks. You can even record accompaniment with your playing, and you can edit, mute, and delete tracks and whole songs. The limit of 5 songs is overcome by storing songs to a USB stick and then loading them when needed.

- Performance Assistance (**Perform**) is a creative feature, at least in theory, that might help when playing accompaniment for someone singing. Yet, you won't find a similar feature in an acoustic piano, so it's better to learn to play the piano properly. Well, nor will you find accompaniment on an acoustic piano, but at least you can play chords as on a piano and get accompaniment as a bonus.
- As it's GM2 compatible there are several more controls accessible via MIDI than are available via the user interface, hence can be controlled from a dedicated MIDI controller or a PC. See MIDIPads for a practical use of such features.
- It's fully multi-timbral so each of the 16 MIDI channels can have separate settings including Voice/program. All channels of course share the max 128 voice polyphony, but it's still plenty.

3. CONS

- Some features seem to be based on what makes sense from a demo point of view rather than playing. Examples:
 - **Song** auto-plays and auto-repeats. That's bad design. **Song** should always be used with Start/Stop and play only once. This is remedied by pressing **Song** twice right after selection. But even then, songs will repeat after completion.
 - Quick selections of **Style** and **Voice** are not based on instrument groups but on arbitrary choices. This is also bad design, as you always want to select an instrument group and then scroll to choose variants. Of course, the first choice should be a core one, but jumping into a group makes navigating even harder, and you might miss instrument gems this way. Also, after the last Voice button there are **lots** of instruments remaining that you need to use the wheel to get to. Many spins... Sometimes I go from Piano and down instead. Optimal for getting to the drum kits.
 - If multiple MIDI files are in the same folder on a USB stick they will be played in sequence automatically.
- There should have been a numeric keypad. There's room for it and would have helped selecting **Voice** and **Style** from the manual. Practically speaking, you should create registration memories for your preferred voices and other settings.
- Abbreviating Auto Bass Chords (**A.B.C.**) and One Touch Setting (**O.T.S.**) is a mistake (but seemingly industry-wide) and could instead have been Bass Chords and One Touch or even Style Voice or Style Preset.
- Intros and outros of songs are too long and too "flowery". They should just round out the song in one beat at the most, rather than being songs in themselves that are likely more elaborate than what's being played (at least in my case). **Song** seems to use the same intros and outros. I tend to end by pressing **Fill A** and then **Start/Stop** after one beat instead.
- **Shift** is needed a bit too often. Frankly for most of the features, as they are often "under" presets for **Voice** and **Style**. This is not the least the case for **Record**, where all specific functions require pressing **Shift**.
- Accompaniment is generally too loud but can be lowered overall via **Accomp** and in detail via **Mixer**. The volume level is reset at power on but can be saved to a registration memory. I made one that resets to reasonable base settings (like **Piano**, but with extra tweaks), that I always use after power on.
- Choices for Reverb and Chorus should have been better described. What's e.g. "GM Chorus 1". General MIDI? Why mention it?

- Some Voices are not impressive, e.g. electric pianos and voices. The Ah and Oh voices sound synthesized and are not clear. Also, lead sounds are lifeless without external modulation.
- A lot of different and not all positive things could be said about the feedback you get from the instrument, mainly through the display, but as buttons don't have LEDs (that would be better) it serves as status for many of the instrument modes. That way it must be crammed with information. In any case it's quite informative, and shows all relevant states, yet in a smallish way.