

Roland RP701 vs Kawai CN201 Digital Piano: Specs, Reviews & Price

Meta Description: Compare the Roland RP701 vs. the Kawai CN201. Get expert analysis of keyboard action, sound engines, speakers, features, and which piano suits your needs.



Alt text: The Roland RP701 in a softly lit room, with a stool in front of it and a beautiful potted plant in a white vase sitting outside the window beside it.

Key Takeaways

- The Roland RP701 features SuperNATURAL Piano technology with 324 sounds and 256-note polyphony, the PHA-4 Standard keyboard with escapement and ivory feel.
- The Kawai CN201 offers the acclaimed Responsive Hammer III action with counterweights and let-off, Shigeru Kawai SK-EX concert grand sampling with 192-note polyphony, and a more powerful 40W speaker system.
- Roland wins on versatility with 324 sounds versus Kawai's 19, higher polyphony, more built-in songs, and a bench included. Kawai wins on piano authenticity with superior keyboard action, premium concert grand sampling, and a more powerful speaker system.
- [Sam Ash](#) offers both digital pianos with a 45-day return policy, free shipping, and flexible financing. You can reach out to our Gear Expert Team to discuss whether versatility or piano authenticity better serves you.

Two Giants, Two Philosophies: Roland vs Kawai

Roland and Kawai approach digital piano design from different directions, and understanding this helps explain why each company makes the choices they do.

As pioneers of digital music technology, Roland emphasizes innovation, versatility, and modern connectivity. Their instruments typically offer extensive sound libraries, sophisticated modeling technology, and deep integration with apps and learning platforms. The RP701 embodies this approach; it's designed to keep families engaged with variety and technology.

As a company rooted in acoustic piano manufacturing since 1927, Kawai prioritizes authentic piano feel and tone above all else. Their digital instruments leverage decades of acoustic piano expertise to recreate the touch and sound of their acclaimed concert grands. The CN201 reflects this heritage; it's built for pianists who want the closest possible approximation of an acoustic instrument.

Neither philosophy is wrong. The right choice depends on your priorities.

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Specification Comparison: Keyboard Action

Roland RP701: PHA-4 Standard Keyboard Action



Caption: The PHA-4 Standard is a capable action that serves learners and casual players well, but lacks the advanced features found in Kawai's RHIII.

Alt text: Roland RP701 88-Key Digital Piano (Contemporary Black) with a playing stool.

The PHA-4 Standard is Roland's mid-range keyboard action, found on many of their piano models. It's a solid choice for beginners and casual players, though it doesn't quite match the premium feel of Kawai's RHIII action.

The keys are weighted to feel like a real piano, heavier when you press the lower bass notes on the left, and lighter as you move up to the higher treble notes on the right. This isn't just for comfort; it's intentional. Playing on properly weighted keys trains your fingers to develop the right strength and control, just as they would on an acoustic piano.

As you press a key down, you'll also notice a faint resistance or click about halfway through the keystroke. This mimics what happens inside an acoustic piano, a moment called escapement, where the hammer physically releases from the key just before it strikes the string. On the RP701, this sensation is simulated mechanically to give you a more authentic, realistic playing feel.

Kawai CN201: Responsive Hammer III Keyboard Action

Kawai's Responsive Hammer III action represents one of the most sophisticated keyboard actions available in mid-range digital pianos. It incorporates technologies typically reserved for more expensive instruments.

Triple Sensor Detection uses three sensors per key rather than the typical two, enabling greater precision in tracking hammer movement. This enables faster key repetition and more accurate dynamic response, which are essential for advanced repertoire that requires rapid repeated notes.

All 88 keys contain embedded counterweights that balance touch during quiet passages while providing substance and solidity during powerful playing. This feature dramatically improves control at both dynamic extremes.

The RHIII action is objectively more sophisticated than the PHA-4 Standard, incorporating features that support advanced technique development and provide a more authentic acoustic piano experience. This is the CN201's primary advantage.

Sound Engines: SuperNATURAL vs Progressive Harmonic Imaging

Roland SuperNATURAL Piano (RP701)

Roland's SuperNATURAL technology combines multi-sample recordings with physical modeling to create expressive, dynamic piano tone. Rather than relying solely on recorded samples, SuperNATURAL models the behavior of piano strings, hammers, and resonance in real time.

Behavior modeling fills gaps between samples with calculated audio that maintains natural transitions across dynamics and the keyboard range. String resonance simulates sympathetic string vibration when the sustain pedal is depressed, adding the ambient complexity of a real acoustic instrument. Key-off resonance models the subtle sounds that occur when keys are released, contributing to overall realism.

Beyond acoustic pianos, [the RP701](#) includes 324 sounds covering electric pianos, organs, strings, brass, synths, and more. This variety keeps families engaged and supports diverse musical exploration.

Kawai Progressive Harmonic Imaging (CN201)



Caption: Kawai's Progressive Harmonic Imaging technology focuses intensely on recreating the sound of specific acoustic pianos through advanced multi-sampling techniques.

Alt text: Kawai CN201 88 Key Digital Piano Satin Black.

[The CN201](#)'s flagship sound is sampled from the Shigeru Kawai SK-EX, a handcrafted concert grand piano that costs over \$200,000 and is produced in fewer than 20 per year. This is among the finest acoustic piano sources available in any digital piano at this price point.

Each of the 88 keys is individually sampled in stereo across multiple velocity layers, ensuring consistent tonal quality across the entire keyboard without sample switching artifacts. PHI models complex resonance interactions, including sympathetic string vibration and damper release effects.

While far fewer than Roland's 324 sounds, Kawai's 19 selections focus on quality over quantity: the SK-EX and EX concert grands in multiple voicings, upright piano, electric pianos, organs, strings, and pads.

Speaker Systems: Power & Projection

The Roland RP701's speaker system delivers 24W total through two 4.75-inch drivers with bottom-firing placement that reflects sound into the room. The system fills small to medium

rooms adequately and produces a clear, balanced tone. Roland's 3D Ambience technology enhances headphone listening by creating a sense of spatial depth.

The Kawai CN201's speaker system delivers 40W total, about 67% more than the RP701, via two 12cm drivers. Kawai emphasizes that the CN201 features a redesigned motherboard and premium audio components specifically engineered for low-noise, high-fidelity reproduction with minimal distortion.

The additional power provides greater headroom for dynamic passages, producing cleaner sound at higher volumes and better bass response overall. Kawai's exclusive Low Volume Balance feature intelligently adjusts keyboard touch and tonal characteristics when playing at reduced volumes, maintaining natural expression while considering family members. Spatial Headphone Sound enhances headphone listening with spatial positioning presets.

What Customers Say

★★★★★ 5 **Awesome Digital Piano!!**

Love everything about it! No complaints at all!

Caption: A Sam Ash customer shared their experience with the Roland RP701, praising every aspect of the instrument.

Alt text: Customer review.

Sam Ash customers have found the Roland RP701 delivers on its promise of versatility and value. One verified purchaser summed up their experience simply: "Love everything about it! No complaints at all!"

This straightforward endorsement reflects the RP701's ability to meet expectations across the board, from sound quality and keyboard feel to the included accessories and overall value proposition.

The CN201 carries Kawai's reputation for exceptional keyboard action and piano authenticity. Players transitioning from acoustic instruments consistently note the RHIII action's realistic response, particularly appreciating the counterweights and let-off mechanism that support proper technique development.

Pricing

The Roland RP701 is available at Sam Ash for \$1,759.99 and includes a bench. The Kawai CN201 is priced at \$2,349, which reflects \$650 in savings off its \$2,999 MSRP, though it does not include a bench.

Both pianos ship free and are backed by a 45-day return policy. Sam Ash also offers flexible financing, including 24-month interest-free options, so you can invest in the right instrument without stretching your budget all at once.

Quick Specifications Comparison

Feature	Roland RP701	Kawai CN201
Keys	88	88
Keyboard Action	PHA-4 Standard with Escapement	Responsive Hammer III (RHIII)
Key Surface	Ivory Feel	Ivory Touch
Triple Sensor	No	Yes
Counterweights	No	Yes (all 88 keys)
Let-Off Mechanism	Escapement (simulated)	Yes (mechanical)
Sound Technology	SuperNATURAL Piano	Progressive Harmonic Imaging (PHI)
Main Piano Sound	Roland Grand Piano	Shigeru Kawai SK-EX Concert Grand
Total Sounds	324	19
Polyphony	256 notes	192 notes
Speaker System	2 × 12W (24W total)	2 × 20W (40W total)
Speaker Size	2 × 4.75"	2 × 12cm (4.7")
Built-in Songs	377 (includes 287 lessons)	59
Recorder	Yes (SMF + WAV)	Yes (3-song, ~10,000 notes)
Bluetooth Audio	Yes	Yes
Bluetooth MIDI	Yes	Yes
Headphone Jacks	2 (1/4" + 1/8")	2
USB Ports	2 (Type A + Type B)	USB to Host
MIDI	USB, Bluetooth	USB, Bluetooth
Pedals	3 (Progressive Damper Action)	3 (Grand Feel Pedal System)

Half-Damper	Yes	Yes
Display	OLED	OLED (128×128)
App Support	Piano Every Day, Piano Designer	PianoRemote, PiaBookPlayer
Dimensions (W×D×H)	53.7" × 18.2" × 40.4"	53.5" × 16" × 34"
Weight	101.4 lbs (46 kg)	95 lbs (43 kg)
Bench Included	Yes	No

Sam Ash: Helping Families Find the Right Piano Since 1924

[A digital piano](#) is one of the most personal purchases a household can make. It sits in your home for years, and the difference between the right instrument and the almost-right one shows up every time someone sits down to practice.

The RP701 and CN201 are both genuinely good pianos, but they are built around different priorities, and the one that fits your family will depend on how you plan to use it. That is a conversation our team has every day. You can reach our Gear Expert Team by phone, chat, or email to get a straightforward recommendation based on your needs.

Both pianos [ship free](#) and are backed by our 45-day [return policy](#), which gives you real time to live with the instrument before making a final decision.

We also offer flexible financing, including 24-month interest-free options through the Synchrony Music and Sound card, so you can invest in the piano your family deserves without putting pressure on your budget.

A digital piano bought with the right guidance can last a decade or more. We are here to make sure you start with the one that keeps everyone playing.

[Shop our digital piano collection today!](#)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Which piano has a better sound, the Roland RP701 or the Kawai CN201?

The Kawai CN201 samples the prestigious Shigeru Kawai SK-EX concert grand (a \$200,000+ instrument), which many consider more refined than Roland's house grand piano samples. For pure acoustic piano tone, Kawai has the edge. However, Roland's SuperNATURAL technology produces excellent piano sound that satisfies most players.

Why does the Roland have more sounds but lower polyphony?

Roland emphasizes versatility; 324 sounds let players explore pianos, organs, strings, and more. Kawai emphasizes piano authenticity; 19 carefully selected sounds with focus on the core piano experience. The polyphony difference (256 vs 192) is negligible in practical use; both numbers far exceed what most players will ever need.

Between the Roland RP701 and the Kawai CN201, which is better for classical piano study?

The Kawai CN201. Its superior RHIII action, SK-EX concert grand sampling, and focus on piano authenticity make it the better choice for classical repertoire and serious study.

Can I get both the Roland RP701 and the Kawai CN201 at Sam Ash?

Yes, [Sam Ash](#) carries both digital pianos. The Roland RP701 is available for \$1,759.99, and the Kawai CN201 is available for \$2,349, with \$650 in savings from the \$2,999 MSRP. Our Gear Expert Team can help you determine whether Roland's versatility and value or Kawai's piano authenticity and superior action better serve your household.

***Note:** *Pricing and/or product availability mentioned in this post are subject to change. Please check our [website](#) for current pricing and stock information before making a purchase.*