

# One-Man Band

As I did this website, I realized that I would need to explain fully how one person (myself and the few local keyboardists who have embraced the technology of the last 40 years) can be a “one-man band.” Most folks have never seen such a performance. They still think of a “pianist” as someone who only plays the piano!

In the late 60's and early 70's when I began my public performance career, there were a limited number of keyboard instruments available. Most were highly un-portable, such as pianos and organs. Each weighed-in at several hundred pounds, and although famous folks had “roadies” to move these monsters, the rest of us had to make-do with things called “combo organs” and “electric pianos.” Both of these were just electronic versions of their larger cousins, heirs to both their pros and their cons. Nonetheless, we keyboardists made some very good music!

Time marched on, and the late 70's and 80's saw the advent of synthesizers. These keyboards could manufacture the sounds of other instruments much more realistically than early organs. Additionally, the “rhythm box,” later called a “sideman” and finally a “drum machine,” brought percussion under the control of the keyboardist. Soon appeared a real harbinger of the future, the portable keyboard. Early versions were quite dreadful but they were the shape of things to come.

Finally, in the late 80's, the Yamaha Corporation created the digital piano. Shaped like a piano but sporting the controls and abilities of an organ, a portable keyboard, and a drum machine, these instruments finally brought it all together and made it possible to really and truly be a “one-man band.”

Here's how these things work - or at least, how I personally make them work to entertain folks. (Of course, if a client wants only piano music, that's simple. The piano tone of my digital rivals that of a high quality acoustic piano.)

First, I choose a style of musical accompaniment appropriate for a particular tune - let's say it's “Moon River.” I choose from a list on my digital piano of hundreds of musical styles one called “Piano Ballad.” That seems appropriate. I also tell my digital piano how fast I want that accompaniment to play. The digital piano is pre-programed to use whatever instruments (such as strings, guitars, horns, flutes, and drums) which are typical of that music style, and to use them in a manner characteristic of that style. Basically, it will play an accompaniment which would readily be recognizable as a “piano ballad.”

Next, I tell the keyboard what notes I want it to play in that accompaniment. I do this in “real time” with my left hand by playing “chords.” These are 3 and 4 note groupings which form the accompaniment of all modern popular songs. Chords are what a guitarist strums as he sings.. In addition to this “live feed” of chord instructions, I will also tell the instrument to play variations of the accompaniment style which are appropriate for verses, choruses, introductions, and endings. These patterns are under my complete control as I play the song, thus making the accompaniment totally realistic.

Over top this accompaniment, I choose instruments with which to play the song's melody, its tune. There are literally hundreds of very realistic instruments available to me. Any instrument used in any band, orchestra, or combo, from a score of nations, and in almost any musical style is available to me at the press of a button.

When you add to this feast of electronic music-making about 35 years of performing live music such as jazz, rock, blues, country, standards, show tunes, ballad, big band, ragtime, boogie-woogie, etc etc etc - well, the result is VERY realistic.

And VERY exciting.

And VERY carefully crafted to YOUR needs and wants for YOUR special occasion!

So, you see, I can be a solo pianist or a full dance band - and I can go from one to the other with the push of a few buttons. This brings many benefits to those who hire me:

- Only one person to deal with and only one musician to pay,
- No need to tune or repair your own piano,
- A very wide variety of musical styles to choose from, and
- Complete volume control, as complete as that available on your CD player.

Of course, there are folks who would prefer that I perform on their home pianos and that is just fine so long as nothing but piano music is desired.

In addition to what I've described so far, there are other possibilities. You should assume that I CAN provide what you are looking for. I will tell you straight away of anything I cannot. Here are just a few requests I can NOT fulfill:

- A full rock band and any styles demanding such, like heavy metal or rap
- Serious classical music
- Serious jazz
- Four hours of continuous music - too demanding physically, you'll need someone with less experience but more stamina, such as a kid

Happily for both of us, these are requests I've seldom had. I haven't had to refuse more than a handful of jobs in the last 30 years.

Now that you have some idea of how I deliver music to your special event, your next step is to examine the sample Play Lists for ideas. Please read the next essay.