

Grand designs

Casio's latest digital pianos combine state-of-the-art technology with sounds developed in collaboration with Bechstein. **Colin Clark** reveals which instrument deserves the laurels

Casio's flagship Celviano Grand Hybrid range has recently upped the ante with two new models promising significant improvements over their predecessors. Both instruments are advertised as boasting a new speaker system enabling 'enhanced sound projection and reinforced bass reproduction' while 'an improved touch response offers greater control of sound and more dynamic contrast'.

I paid a pre-lockdown trip to Musicroom in central London to put these claims to the test. The GP-510 normally retails at £3,895 and the GP-310 is priced at £2,735, though both were slightly discounted at the time of my visit. 'More Grand than Ever' is Casio's tagline.

They each come with a five-year product warranty from Casio. Werner Albrecht, a master piano maker as well as service director at Bechstein, worked with Casio

to develop realistic sounds which reproduce the decay of actual strings. The Celviano Grand Hybrid uses Casio's AiR Grand Sound Source to convince listeners that the instrument is an acoustic grand piano. AiR – short for 'Acoustic and intelligent Resonator' – uses linear morphing to create natural transitions between dynamics.

The GP-510 features a new six-speaker system (Grand Speaker System II) that offers a wide dynamic range, and with Natural Grand Hammer Action combined with a new touch response and pedal design, the idea is to make the instrument as 'believable' as possible. Austrian spruce is used for the full-length wooden keys. The fulcrum point is the same as that of a grand piano, while a graded hammer action aims to be as responsive as possible to the touch. A solid wooden base is also used, while a pedal simulator aims for maximal realism – a vital part of the equation if the idea of 'practice' is to ring true.

The by-now standard feature of Concert Play (classics to play along with) is present along with a Hall Simulator.

A moving hammer mechanism, which works in sync with the digital technology, is best

observed when playing the instrument as a piano. The available piano options are Berlin, Hamburg and Vienna, while the simulator offers a variety of acoustics (including the rather surprising venues of Sydney Opera House, Notre Dame Cathedral and Wembley Stadium). You can even get it to imitate a harpsichord or a honky-tonk jazz piano, but these feel like gimmicks that are likely to wear thin pretty quickly.

The Berlin Grand on its default setting is the brightest and most comfortable to play, with Hamburg and Vienna in various degrees of muffling or softening, depending on the player's preference. The Hamburg Grand on its default setting has a lovely soft touch.

The keypad-operated menu on the piano cheek is easy to navigate. In case of mistakes, simply pressing 'exit' takes the user back to the home screen. Bass response was more than adequate (try the climax of Debussy's 'Cathédrale engloutie') and the keys feel beautiful, even for scale work.



Casio's GP-510 Celviano Grand Hybrid