

The History of the Electric Piano

The Electric piano is an Electric musical instrument. The piano generates sounds mechanically and the sounds are changed into electrical signals by pickups.

In the 12th century clavichord and harpsichord were developed. As technology got developed more sophisticated and standard keyboard got developed with 12-tone keyboard. In the 18th century, the piano was adopted which allowed a new way of controlling volume by varying the force of the press.

The next step was to develop electronic sound technology. The first musical instrument was Denis d'or which was built by Vaclav Prokop Dovis in 1753. It was incorporated with 700 strings temporarily electrified to enhance their sonic qualities. In 1760 Jean Baptiste Thillaie de Laborde developed clavecin electrique. This was keyboard instrument incorporated with plectra and activated by electricity.



But both instruments were not using electricity to produce sound. Elisha Gray invented one of first electric musical instrument called musical telegraph. It was making sound from electromagnetic circuit's vibration. He incorporated basic single note oscillator. Next he added loudspeaker consisting of diaphragm to make data audible.

The first electric piano was invented by Msr Hipps in Switzerland in 1867. He was the director of the Neuchatel Telegraph Factory in Switzerland. "The Electromechanical Piano" seems to have used electromagnets and dynamos to generate musical tones. In 1929 the Neo-Bechstein electric grand piano was also among the first. Probably the earliest stringless model was Lloyd Loar's Vivi-Tone Clavier.



In 1935, the Hammond organ was introduced. It was capable of producing polyphonic sounds. Next development was Chamberlin Music Maker in late 1940s and Mellotron in early 1950s.

The first step towards the electronic piano was by Rhodes with the pre-piano. It was a three and a half octave instrument. The next generation was capable of doing self-amplification.

Harold Rhodes' first piano was the Army Air Corps Piano. It was built during the World War 2, with tonebars made from aluminum pipes found in B-17 bombers. This instrument was designed for therapeutic use, in addition to being a teaching tool: injured soldiers were able to play the Xylette in bed and were instructed using Harold's "Sit Down and Play" piano method.



Harold Rhodes next invention was the first electric Rhodes piano called the Rhodes. The Pre-Piano has a 38-note keyboard covering the midrange notes, with a classy wooden body and a stand/bench that makes it look like it belongs in an elementary school. The sound is somewhat like a toy piano, with a "plinky" bell-like tone.



Over a decade later, the Fender Rhodes Piano Bass was the first Rhodes electric piano manufactured by the newly formed Fender & Rhodes Company. It was a 32-note keyboard covering roughly the same range as a bass guitar, with the bottom note being low E. The Piano Bass is best known as the bassist for the Doors (played by Ray Manzarek's left hand).

The piano bass was essentially an electric piano containing the same pitch range as the electric bass (or the double bass), which could be used to perform bass lines. It could be placed on top of a piano or organ, or mounted on a stand. The Keyboard player in The Doors' Ray Manzarek placed his Fender Rhodes piano bass on top of his Vox organ to play bass lines.

Ray Charles used the Fender Rhodes Electric Piano in the film 'The blues brothers' in 1980. Ray made a breakthrough with the electric piano on his hit, "What'd I Say" back in 1959, using the Wurlitzer electric piano. He also used a



Farfisa stage organ for songs such as 'One Mint Julep'.

The Clavinet C, used on Stevie Wonder's Superstition.

A Clavinet is an electrically amplified keyboard instrument manufactured by the Hohner company. It is essentially an electrically amplified clavichord, analogous to an electric guitar. Its distinctive bright staccato sound has appeared particularly in funk, disco, rock, and reggae songs.



Originally the instrument was designed for home use and aimed at playing early European classical and folk music. The Clavinet L, introduced in 1968 was a domestic model and featured a wood-veneered triangular body with wooden legs, reverse-colour keys and an acrylic glass music stand

The invention of the musical synthesizers in the 1960s was a step ahead towards the modern keyboard. As technology became more developed, huge synthesizers evolved into portable instruments that could be used in live shows.

This began in 1964 when Bob Moog produced his moog synthesizer. It did not have the same keyboard but its next generation was equipped with a built-in keyboard. The keyboard was able to produce only one tone. Some instruments such as the EML 101, ARP Odyssey, and the Moog Sonic six could produce two different tones at once when two keys were pressed. The next number of electronic keyboards produced which were combination of organ circuits and synthesizer processing.



Digital Piano's, Digital pianos use microchips, amplifiers and speakers to create sounds similar to those of an acoustic piano. Digital pianos are essentially small pianos that store sounds in a digital bank rather than creating sound with hammers and string. Because acoustic pianos create sound when a hammer strikes a string, causing it to vibrate, there is no way to play an acoustic piano without others being able to hear the sound. Digital pianos create sound using electric components and can therefore play the sound through speakers or through headphones so that only the person playing the piano can hear the music. When playing an acoustic piano, slightly different volumes and effects can be created when striking the keys with different amounts of force and at different speeds. Digital piano keyboards emulate the feel and sound of acoustic pianos by using weighted keyboards and velocity sensors.

