

ANYONE CAN PLAY THE ORGAN!

A Beginner's Guide to Roland's Atelier-Series Organs



By John Hertzberg

Most people enjoy listening to music. When we hear an inspiring piece of music, we are often overtaken with images of ourselves performing before an audience that hangs on our every note. While this may be an exaggeration, it alludes to the fact that humans are inherently creative. With this in mind, Roland created the Atelier series of organs.

Atelier literally means, “workshop or studio, especially for an artist”—a name that truly captures the spirit of these instruments. While each model in Roland's Atelier® line of organs has the look and feel of a traditional organ, these instruments contain a new world of sounds and rhythms that give you unsurpassed musical expressiveness. Following is an in-depth overview of Atelier organs. The information presented holds true for most models across the entire Atelier line and highlights the fact that anyone, on any budget, can play the organ.

Gain access to an infinite palette of sounds

A palette of paints, a handful of brushes, and a canvas are often the only tools an inspired artist needs to express a creative vision. While paints and brushes are not solely responsible for an artist's creativity, these tools bring his or her artistic vision to life. Like paints and brushes, Roland's Atelier organs offer as many as 340 individual instrument tones to bring *your* musical vision to life—and you do not have to be a professional musician to experience the magic.

Each Atelier tone represents an individual instrument or voice, and these tones can be combined in many interesting ways. For example, with “Jazz Organ” on the upper manual, “Strings” on the lower manual, and “Contra Bass” on the pedals, you can evoke images of an era past. This may be a simplistic example, but it highlights three basic areas to which tones can be assigned on Atelier organs: (1) the upper manual (the keyboard nearest the top of the instrument that is usually played with the performer's right hand); (2) the lower manual (the keyboard nearest the bottom of the instrument that is usually played with the performer's left hand); and (3) the pedals (a row of 13–25 pedals that are usually played with the performer's left foot.) These three destinations are the



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framework on which an infinite array of tonal combinations is built. Drawing from instrument families like “organ,” “symphonic,” and “orchestral,” tones can be played individually or combined to create “layered” tones (tones that play simultaneously on a single manual). To get a feel for this, let’s experiment with individual tones on the lower manual and layered tones on the upper manual.

On the left side of an Atelier you’ll find a section labeled “Lower.” The illuminated buttons in this section represent the current, lower-manual tone. A mellow organ sound labeled “Lower 1” or “Organ” is usually the default lower manual tone (a button with one of these labels should be illuminated in the “Lower” section.) If you press the illuminated button(s), the button(s) will dim and the lower manual will no longer make a sound when played. Press any of the tone buttons in the “Lower” section while playing keys on the lower manual and you’ll hear the corresponding instrument tone. When you hear a lower tone that you like, it’s time to experiment with layered tones on the upper manual.

On the right side of an Atelier you’ll find a section labeled “Upper.” The buttons illuminated in this section represent the current upper-manual tone. A bright, organ tone labeled “Full 1” or “Full” is usually the default upper-manual tone (a button with either of these labels should be illuminated in the “Upper” section). In the subsection labeled “Orchestral” (beneath the “Upper” section label), press the tone button labeled “Strings” (both the “Full” button and the “Strings” button should be illuminated). When you play the upper manual, you should hear a combination of bright organ and strings—this is called a “layered” tone. Continue to experiment with layered tones until you find a combination that you like. On most Atelier models, you can combine up to four simultaneous tones on the upper manual if you include tones from

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all four “Upper” section tone families. These families include: “Organ,” “Orchestral,” “Symphonic,” and “Solo.” Once you feel comfortable navigating an Atelier’s tonal palette, you’re ready to take the next step.

Add shadings of rhythm and style

People are often mesmerized by an artist’s ability to capture depth and mood in his or her paintings. While artists achieve depth through careful use of color, they also achieve depth through perspective and shading. To achieve this musically, Roland’s Atelier organs offer as many as 200 “music styles” (*i.e.* short musical scenes) for transforming your musical ideas into something memorable—and you don’t have to be a professional arranger to partake.

In simplest terms, a “music style” is a short rhythmic pattern (such as a “drum beat”) that repeats until you tell it to stop. To get a feel for this, find the section labeled “Rhythm” on the left side of an Atelier organ. Press one of the buttons labeled “Big Band/Swing,”



“Country/Gospel,” etc. (the button will illuminate when selected). Press the “Start/Stop” button to sample your choice. While the repetitive rhythm pattern is playing, press the “Fill In: To Variation” button. You’ll hear a short,

connective phrase leading into a variation of the original pattern. Press the “Fill In: To Original” button to return to the original pattern. When you’re ready to call it quits, press the “Intro/Ending” button to hear a short musical ending, or press the “Start/Stop” button to stop the drum beat immediately.

You’ve just experienced the smallest structural unit of a music style, the “rhythm pattern.” This is the structural framework on which other portions of the music style are built. When rhythm patterns are combined with additional musical elements (like instrumentation, melody, and phrasing), the elements interact with one another to create musical character. It’s this musical character that gives music (*e.g.* jazz, classical, funk, etc.) its unmistakable sound—or “style.” Atelier organs are wonderful for adding shadings of rhythm and style to your own musical creations. To get a feel for the possibilities, let’s go one step further by examining “One Touch Program.”



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“One Touch Program” is a quick and easy way to experience music within a chosen style. For example, press the white, “One Touch Program” button (located on the left side of an Atelier Organ). Press one of the buttons labeled, “Big Band/Swing,” “Country/Gospel,” etc. (the button will illuminate when selected). Press any key on the lower manual. You’ll hear a short, musical introduction in the chosen style before the virtual band settles into a more repetitive pattern. While the band is playing, play a few notes on the upper manual. You’ll notice that the upper-manual tone is stylistically appropriate. For example, if you chose a “Country” music style, the upper manual might feature an Acoustic Guitar tone—an instrument that is almost synonymous with country music. If you press one of the “registration buttons” 1–4 (the square buttons between the upper and lower manuals) you’ll notice a stylistic change in the music. Not only does the virtual band alter its arrangement, but the upper-manual tone becomes a different tone that’s still characteristic of the chosen style. This is the essence of “One Touch Program.” Imagine playing any tune, in any style, with the touch of one button—it really is that easy. Once you’re comfortable playing within a given style, you’re ready to take things to the next level with musical snapshots.

Take musical snapshots

Not all artists work in the paint medium—some choose photography. And just as photography captures reality, Roland’s Atelier Organs offer as many as 12 User Registrations (99 sets of 12 registrations per floppy disk) for capturing every detail of your panel settings.

“User Registrations” are like panel-setting snapshots. These snapshots allow you to recall a group of panel settings with the touch of a button. For example, you can easily switch from an upbeat polka featuring vibraphone on the upper manual and brass on the lower manual to a slow, country ballad featuring slide guitar on the upper manual and strings on the lower manual. To accomplish this, make sure that “One Touch Program” is off, make the appropriate panel settings, press and hold the red “write” button (located between the upper and lower manuals on most models), press the white registration button labeled “1” (located between the upper and lower manuals), and release the buttons. Now anytime you press the white registration button labeled “1,” all of your panel settings will return. While saving a “User Registration” is a simple procedure, you may find yourself a little intimidated by the thought of creating custom registrations—

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especially if you have not dedicated your life to the study of orchestration and instrumentation. For this reason, some deluxe Atelier models include “Quick Registrations”—an alternative to “User Registrations.”

“Quick Registrations” are preset registrations created by world renowned organists such as Hector Olivera. “Quick Registrations” allow you to alter panel settings based on simple, on-screen explanations. For example, you can switch from a simple Baroque organ registration to a more sophisticated pipe organ registration by following simple, on-screen guides. To get a feel for this, touch the “Registration” button on the main screen, touch the large “Quick Registration” button, and select “Cathedral Organ.” The screen should resemble an address book with tabs labeled: Total, Upper, Lower, and Pedal. Touch the “Total” tab to see two “Total” registration buttons displayed on the screen (use the down arrow to display two additional “Total” registrations). These “Total” registrations represent four unique panel settings within the style of “Cathedral Organ.” When you select one of these “Total” registrations, the Upper Manual, Lower Manual, and Pedals are configured automatically. If you’re wondering what settings are being altered on the Upper Manual, press the “Upper” tab and read the on-screen explanation for the chosen registration. You can do the same for the Lower Manual and the Pedals by using the “Lower” and “Pedal” tabs respectively. Once you’re familiar with “User Registrations” and “Quick Registrations” you’re ready to capture musical moments on disk with the “Composer.”

Capture musical moments on disk

Moving images have become the *de facto* standard for expressing an idea or thought. Knowing this, many artists use moving images to express their artistic vision. This is often accomplished by capturing small scenes with a camera and stringing them together in a way that speaks to us emotionally. Just as an artist strings scenes together to create emotional impact, Atelier organs allow you to capture and refine musical moments using a standard floppy disk—and you do not have to be a member of the screenwriters guild to get involved.



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You can
change
the key,
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and/or
the dynamics
of your
performance

All Atelier organs feature a built-in composer that functions just like a tape or CD recorder, but with one small difference: The composer does not record audio. What? That's right, the composer on Atelier Organs does not record audio, instead the composer captures instructions for playing a piece of music. For example, when you play middle C on the upper manual, the composer captures the following:

- Play middle C softly
- Wait four beats at a tempo of 60 beats-per-minute
- Release middle C
- Stop

While this example is over simplified, it gives you an idea of what's going on inside the AT composer. Every aspect of your musical performances (e.g. notes, tempos, dynamics, etc.) is captured and stored as a long list of "events."

What's the advantage of storing "events" rather than recording audio digitally? There are two major advantages: (1) after recording, "events" can be altered more easily than digital audio; and (2) events require considerably less storage space than digital audio files. For example, once a performance has been captured as a list of events, you can easily change the key, the tempo, and/or the dynamics of your performance. You can also mute and un-mute instruments as well as change "tones" while the music is playing. While some of these changes can be made to digital audio files, the process is much more difficult—if not impossible. For example, can you imagine replacing an oboe with a pipe organ in a 2-track digital recording of a 40-piece orchestral performance? Probably not. Using an event list it's easy: Simply isolate the oboe's events and assign the events to a pipe organ tone.

Once recorded, your performance can be stored on a floppy disk as a file, and recalled at any time. This is a great way of capturing

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and preserving your magical performance for posterity. You can also save your performance as a Standard MIDI File (SMF). An SMF is a musical performance event list (instructions for playing a piece of music) that's universally recognized by most MIDI players and recorders ("sequencers") and/or computers with a media player and sound card (most of today's computers come standard with these). This means your magical performance can be saved as an SMF and shared with friends, family, and even the world via floppy disk, email, or the world wide web—even if they do not have an Atelier organ!

To understand how this works, let's record a short musical performance and save it to a floppy disk as an SMF. Press the "One Touch Program: Arranger" button, press the "Country/Gospel" button in the "Rhythm" section, touch "DCountry 1" on the screen, press the red "Rec" button (located in the "Composer" section), and press any key on the lower manual. After the short musical introduction, play a few notes on the upper manual. Now press the registration button labeled "2" (a small square button located between the upper and lower manuals). Play a couple of notes on the upper manual. Press the "Intro/Ending" button, and the band will bring it to a close. To hear your performance, press the "Reset" button and then press the "Play/Stop" button.

If you're happy with your performance, insert a blank, PC-Formatted floppy disk into the disk drive. Touch "Rec/Play" on the screen, touch "Utility," touch "Save," use the up and down arrows to select a disk destination, touch "Save" again, and touch "SMF"—that's it! Your musical performance is now on the floppy disk. This floppy disk can be inserted into a computer and easily transferred to your hard drive or attached to an email like any other computer file. Imagine the possibilities!

Elegance with unsurpassed musical expressiveness

If you're looking for an instrument that has the look and feel of a traditional organ, but contains a new world of sounds and rhythms, Roland's Atelier organ line offers the most elegant solutions available. Gain access to an infinite palette of sounds, add shadings of rhythm and style with "Music Styles" and "One Touch Programs," take musical snapshots with "Registrations," and capture all of this, and more, on a floppy disk with the "Composer." While functions and features vary slightly between Atelier models, the line is surprisingly consistent. Every model in Roland's Atelier organ line is powerful, yet easy and fun to play. In fact, anyone can play the organ—as long as it's a Roland Atelier organ.