

KEY PERSONNEL

BILLY JOEL KEYBOARDIST

DAVID ROSENTHAL

David Rosenthal has played keyboards with artists as diverse as Robert Palmer, Enrique Iglesias, Rainbow and Cyndi Lauper. But he's perhaps best known for his current gig: keys for Billy Joel.

Rosenthal has been Joel's keyboardist for 13 years. "In live shows, I do all the synth parts, play organ, and do orchestrations," he says. "On a few songs Billy brings me up to play piano while he sings lead. I have my hands full—I do quite a bit of stuff!"



The Piano Man hasn't recorded much in the past decade, but David has also added his talents to a few Joel sessions. "I played on 'Hey Girl,' on Greatest Hits Vol. 3," he recalls. "Much to my surprise, Billy had me play piano at the session. He said, 'I'm just going to sing—you play piano.' I thought he'd probably replace it when I left, but he didn't! It was kind of cool that I got to play piano on one of his records."

David also worked as assistant musical supervisor on the Twyla Tharp/Billy Joel Broadway production *Movin' Out*, earning a Grammy nomination for his involvement. "The show has been a tremendous success," he reports. "It ran three years on

Broadway. The US touring version has been going for two and a half years, and we just opened a London production. I did all the synth programming, wrote the synth book, and produced all the classical playback tracks for the show. One of my current jobs is to coach and train any new piano players we get, to make sure they're playing all the parts right. A lot of people come in and think they play Billy's music right, but they kind of have their own piano bar versions of him—it's pretty close, but maybe a little off."

Rosenthal recently hit the road again with Joel. "We just finished up the US leg of a tour," he says. "We're taking a little break, and then we're going to Europe for six weeks this summer."

A key part of Rosenthal's live setup is Yamaha's 01V96 digital mixing console. "I have a pretty large keyboard rig," David explains. "The 01V96 enables me to bring in all the different synth outputs and have total automated control. It's a lot of power in a concise package. I can do a scene change for each song, each with its own setup, routing, and whatever else I need. It's a powerful addition to my keyboard rig."

And Rosenthal exploits that power. "I'd been using analog mixers for years," he says. "I used to blend and balance synth patches solely through MIDI volume. But the 01V96 also has automated EQ, sends, routing, everything—all inside the mixer. I'm using it with the Yamaha Studio Manager software, which is a tremendous help in terms of getting around the interface."

Given the range of music David covers in each show, such control is essential. "Billy's music spans nearly 30 years," he observes. "There are sounds from the '70s, '80s, and '90s, all with different flavors. I use a Yamaha Motif ES7 as a controller—it's got some great, current sounds and great action, so I like playing it for all the synth stuff. I mostly program my own sounds, but some of the factory patches offer a good starting point. On some of the '80s material, I also use vintage Yamaha sounds from the TX816, TX802, and DX7."

Rosenthal also has a DM2000 digital mixing console, the "big brother" of the 01V96, in his own studio. "With 96 channels, the DM2000 gives me all the inputs I need. It can handle all the recording I do, not to mention the large keyboard rig in my studio."

David recently used the DM2000 to record an album with legendary instrumental progressive-rock group Happy the Man, for whom he also plays keyboards. "Happy the Man was one of my favorite bands back in the late '70s," he says. "When they re-formed in the late 90's the original keyboardist wasn't interested, so I jumped up and volunteered to be involved. We recorded at my studio—the whole thing was tracked and mixed at 24-bit/96 kHz. It was great to do everything, start to finish, at that high resolution."

"Happy the man" is also a fair description of Rosenthal himself. "I've been very fortunate to play with so many different types of artists," he reflects. "I've been able to record and perform in front of so many people and jump across so many idioms. Every time I go onstage, I try to pause for a moment and really take it in. I try never to take it for granted, I want to enjoy each and every show."



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