

Steve Peffer Well-Traveled Keys

Veteran Nashville keyboardist Steve Peffer has played around the world and on dozens of national television shows with such artists as LeAnn Rimes, Sara Evans and Martina McBride. He's also a session player with his own studio, where he's recently begun producing other artists.

Which does he prefer: stage or studio? "Both!" says Steve. "I love touring, and I love playing in the studio. I really think they complement each other. Playing live keeps you fresh for the studio, and playing in the studio keeps you fresh for playing live. And the more you do it, the more people you work with, the more you learn. I'm the type who never wants to settle and say 'okay, I've reached the point where I don't want to practice anymore.' I always want to keep learning and expanding my abilities."

Case in point: Peffer's work on the Alana Grace song "Black Roses Red" from the recent movie *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, a project that allowed Steve to collaborate with other musicians hundreds of miles away. "We did it over the Internet—it's amazing that we have the technology to do that now," he notes. "I did the piano parts here in my studio and FTPed them to the producer. Then a couple months later, I was hearing it in a movie theatre!"

Peffer also recalls his recent tenure with LeAnn Rimes with particular satisfaction. "I was really proud of that band," he says. "When I first started with her, LeAnn told the musicians, 'I'm tired of doing songs from ten years ago exactly like the records, so come up with your own arrangements!' Most artists want you to do it like the record every night, so that was a lot of fun."

Steve says he's a longtime fan of Yamaha keyboards. "The first keyboard I ever owned was a Yamaha Clavinova P100. In fact, I still have it! Through the years I've tried them all—and nothing sounds or feels like a Yamaha. They just sound good! I'm not the guy that likes to get in and tweak the sounds. I like to plug it in, turn it on, and go. And that's the other thing I like: You find a good sound, and it just works. If it's in the studio, the sounds sit well in the mix. And on live shows, the acoustic piano samples cut nicely through the mix, especially when you are trying to be heard through a bunch of guitars!"

These days, Steve relies on Yamaha's S90 digital piano and synthesizer, P250 professional stage piano, and Motif Rack. "I tend to be percussive and play pretty hard," he explains. "With some other keyboards, it feels like I'm going to break them! I've played them all, and I've never played anything that feels as close to a real piano as these Yamahas do."

Peffer tends to use his P250 onstage. "Live, that thing rocks!" he enthuses. "The P250 and my Motif Rack are used for most of the sounds for my touring rig. I always keep the P250 speakers on, so I can really feel the notes coming out. My favorite piano sound on the P250, the one I use on everything, is Grand Piano 2. I think that's what it's called—it's the second button, anyway! On the Motif there's a sound called 'WurliAmped' that I always use live, and quite a bit on sessions as well."

In contrast, Steve's S90 digital keyboard sees a bit less of the world. "The S90 is my primary controller in the studio," he says. "But I'll take it to sessions if they don't have an acoustic piano. Or if I'm doing something in a larger studio that has a piano and a B3, I'll take the S90 and use the electric pianos, string sounds, and whatever else the producer may want."

Peffer's own studio also features Cubase digital audio recording software. "I feel more comfortable on Cubase than anything else," he states. "I've been using it for years. Back when I started, the MIDI features in Cubase were way better than other platforms. I still think they're better, to be honest! I just work better in Cubase—I'm quicker on it (than on other platforms), and everything flows well for me."

At home or across the world, there's nothing Peffer would rather do than play music. "It doesn't matter if it's ten people in a club or 30,000 in a stadium," he says. "I just love to play. If I didn't love it, I would have chosen something else. There are times when it's a hard living. When you're touring, you miss your family and your home. But it's worth it. When I'm on the road, I always say, 'I play music for free. I get paid for all the hours I ride on a bus and don't get to sleep in my own bed!'"

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