



Using digital technology, Roland founder Ikutaro Kakehashi has created a long series of groundbreaking musical instruments. We asked him about the thinking behind the C-30 Digital Harpsichord.

Ikutaro Kakehashi
 Roland special consultant
 Roland Foundation Chairman



- 1930: born Osaka. • 1954: opened Kakehashi Musen [Wireless].
- 1960: founded Ace Electronic Industries. • 1968: founded a joint venture with U.S. Hammond International. • 1972: left both companies to launch Roland Corporation; known as a music innovator, the company has created a long series of groundbreaking products, including world-first digital musical instruments. • 1991: received Honorary Doctorate in Music from Berklee College of Music. • 2000: inducted into the Hollywood RockWalk Hall of Fame in recognition of, his technical breakthroughs in electronic instruments and his many contributions to the world of music.
- 2002: as a result of voting by the world's leading music journals, honored with the mipa (Musikmesse International Press Award) Lifetime Achievement Award. • His autobiography, I Believe in Music (Hal Leonard Corporation), has been published in the U.S.A., Germany, Taiwan, and even China. Mr. Kakehashi's motto is 'Simple & Straight.'

How did Roland come to develop the digital harpsichord?

Roland has actually been making digital harpsichords for 20 years. But with earlier models we didn't clearly know in what kind of place the instruments would be played and who would be playing them. Development reflected this lack of focus. So while absorbing customer feedback, we investigated how rental harpsichords were used. We found out that most often they were hired for small ensemble concerts with instruments such as violins, flutes, and recorders. So, for the latest harpsichord, we aimed to make things as convenient as possible for players in that type of situation, we set out with clear development goals.



What then, are its actual features?

For a start, in the 17th century, harpsichords were not really loud enough for concert situations. That is why they moved from a mechanism that plucked the strings to one that hit them with hammers. And so, by chance, the piano was born. The first pianos were made by Cristofori, an Italian harpsichord builder. If Cristofori were alive today, we wondered how he would go about developing the harpsichord as an instrument. We thought about the development issues from the point of view of a harpsichord maker. Naturally, a digital harpsichord has to retain the virtues of the original instrument. But what about increasing the volume and making it simple to match the tuning for ensemble playing? We gave priority to features such as being

able to easily switch between the major tuning methods used in Baroque music. Using digital technology, these things that have been so difficult to accomplish with acoustic harpsichords, can now be done simply. Moreover, the harpsichord is an extremely delicate instrument. Whenever a harpsichord is moved, the player has to go through a great deal of trouble to get it back to playing perfection. Reducing this high maintenance is of great value. But we can go even further and make the instrument smaller and easy to move. By maximizing the benefits of digital technology, we knew we could make a harpsichord that could reliably provide sound in any setting.

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Roland is known for advanced instruments. Why is the company getting involved with such an old instrument?

It is wrong to think that digital technology should just be used to keep adding new capabilities to musical instruments. It's also important to consider the musical sensibilities and playing skills that have been accumulated up to the present. As a musical instrument maker, our mission is to also use digital technology to fix problems with current instruments. Roland doesn't just lead with advanced technology and new capabilities, we also look to our musical roots. I think that's the reason that we got involved. It's not just the harpsichord. We have established a whole section to deal with developing products for the Roland Classic Series.

What was the actual development process like?

We didn't set out feeling that we had to score a big hit with the product. It wasn't a case of having to use some special technology. Rather, we approached development by thinking deeply about the history of the harpsichord and what was right for the instrument.

People of my age generally had very little leisure until we reached our 50s. Today, however, people have more spare time. During this time, many turn to music. We went about development hoping to allow them to take pleasure in the sound of the harpsichord. After all, the sound of the harpsichord is quite soothing and a perfect match for a settled lifestyle.

If there's a harpsichord in the room, it's easy to try your hand and see, in a relaxed mood, what you can do. It's a great alternative, an ideal second instrument.

By doing away with the things that don't match current lifestyles and retaining what is so wonderful about the harpsichord, I think that the good points of the instrument will exert a compelling appeal in the lifestyles of today. I expect it to be accepted both in Japan and overseas.

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What does a finished C-30 look like? What do people think of it?

Well, in my experience, the initial reaction of most people has been positive. They really like it. About eight out of ten people must have said the word "Cute!" (laugh). It's the first time I have ever heard that said of any Roland musical instrument. Just from seeing what it looked like. If people find it appealing enough to get it because of how it looks... well, I think that alone would make me proud. But the harpsichord has a keyboard. That means it's an instrument that piano and organ players already have the skills to play. It also has a familiar sound. I think that the design has been worked up to match how people would like an accessible digital harpsichord to look.

The design features a lovely picture and stained glass, doesn't it?

Yes, a lot of effort was put into making the harpsichord as attractive as possible. These decorative touches were added to enhance the presence of the C-30. But, you know, the picture board and stained glass panel can be removed altogether, or swapped for designs that better suit the space.

The picture boards are printed with a special technique that makes the subjects feel more real. This was achieved by using the technology of one of our group companies, Roland DG Corporation.



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Doesn't digital technology have a number of advantages, such as a broader range of volume, no need for constant fine tuning, and easy transportability?

The greatest thing digital technology did was to give variable volume to the harpsichord. I just don't think that there would be any point in Roland simply replicating of the sound of period instruments. But it wasn't a case of providing

the unadulterated sound of the harpsichord and nothing else. After all, Cristofori was concerned to enhance musical expressiveness by enabling both soft and loud sounds. Piano (soft) sounds were not enough; he wanted to enable loud (forte) sounds, too. That's how the pianoforte got its name. Back in the early 18th century, this concern with volume led to the evolution of the piano, a completely different instrument. Today we can use digital technology to make the harpsichord itself capable of piano and forte sounds. You could call such an instrument a harpsichord forte. That's what we set out to make.

For a pianist, the ability to play softly and loudly is taken for granted. They spend hours practicing to fully develop the skill of varying the strength of sound. I think that's why good playing sounds so natural.

Besides, with the harpsichord, we are able to provide other instruments with sounds that are also likely to appeal to anyone attracted to the harpsichord. Just by pressing a button, you can switch to a pipe organ or fortepiano or other instruments that create sounds evocative of past ages. And this is a digital instrument, so you can use MIDI to take a recording or even produce a score there and then, right on the spot.

Much care has obviously gone into the C-30. What kind of people are going to want to play it?

Obviously, anyone who loves the sound of the harpsichord is going to welcome the C-30 into their home. I can see its appeal as an element in small ensemble playing, too. How easy it would be to get together with a violin or flute player. A young musician can invite friends over. When they are ready to play for their family and friends, holding a home concert in the living room would be no trouble at all. The harpsichord is also a great instrument for accompaniment and ensemble playing.

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I'm surprised to hear that. You don't think that the C-30 should take center stage?

For the pull of number two to have any effect, the contribution of number one and number three are surely important. But I wouldn't say that the harpsichord is number three, more like number one (laugh).

Finally, what kind of other instruments are being developed for the Roland Classic Series?

Because we want to make certain instruments more widely available at attractive prices, we are using the digital technology of today to improve instruments that are difficult to maintain and which were expensive even when they first came out. I'm confident that these products will gain widespread acceptance and that this will sustain the general appreciation and admiration of the sound of these classic instruments. Such historical instruments produce enchanting sounds and are part of our musical heritage. Even so, practically speaking, because they don't match the times or changing trends, they're in danger of being gradually overlooked.

We could make any type of instrument. There's no limit. I mean, for example, thirty years ago, when the first synthesizers came out, they were prohibitively expensive. They were not something that ordinary people could afford. It's already possible to call the synthesizer a classic, don't you think.

And, although it doesn't come under the Roland Classic Series, look at the accordion. It produces a full and attractive sound, but is handicapped by weight, price, and handling difficulties. With the V Accordion we have been able to use electronics to make the instrument more enchanting. It's another good example of how technology can make more users happier.

Thank you for telling us about the C-30.

The pleasure was all mine. I really do want people everywhere to get to know and love the digital harpsichord.

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