

# Expanding Your Musical Palette

Break Forth Canada

**Class Description:** The sophistication of today's electronic keyboards and computer-based "virtual" instruments offers a keyboard player a huge palette of sonic possibilities. Here are some style tips that can help you freely play pads, B3-type organ, Rhodes, and string sounds.

## Introduction:

Work towards having these sounds available in your keyboard "palette" of sounds:

- Convincing grand piano
- Lush, warm pad sounds
- Authentic Hammond B3 organ sound
- Convincing string sounds

**Great Grand piano sound:** "Ivory", developed by synthogy at [www.synthogy.com](http://www.synthogy.com)

## Playing Pad Sounds

Think "drone"

- Find a note that works through the entire progression and make that note the highest one you play
- Create "2" chords as needed (for example, if the chart says "C", play a C2 instead, using the notes C, D and G rather than the notes of the C chord, C, E and G.
- Use open voicings (mostly 4ths and 5ths, rather than stacking voices using lots of 3rds)
- Use wide intervals like 6ths and 10ths
- Avoid using left hand; low notes net a "muddy" sound

## Playing Organ Sounds

Again, think "drone"

- Find a note that works through the entire progression and make that note the highest one you play
- Use open voicings (mostly 4ths and 5ths, rather than stacking voices using lots of 3rds)
- Avoid using left hand; low notes net a "muddy" sound
- Grace notes below the top droning note work great
- Let your leslie simulator (often the mod wheel) give your part motion
- For an extremely authentic (and fun to play) software-based Hammond type organ sound, check out B4II from [www.nativeinstruments.com](http://www.nativeinstruments.com)

## Playing String Sounds

Again, think "drone". Try it. Really.

- Find a note that works through the entire progression and make that note the highest one you play
- Below that note, create melodies, moving lines
- Occasionally, let the note in that melody "rub" against the top, droning note
  - For example, if you're in the key of G, sound a G on top of your voicing as the droning note
  - Create a melody that moves below that G
  - From time to time, let your moving melody below that G come all the way up to the F# just a half step away from the G
  - A really nice dissonance results
  - The ear wants to hear that F# move to the E or D below it, so great forward momentum is created

Use lots of 6ths (a pair of notes that are 6 notes apart in the scale)

For example, in the G scale, here are the 6ths that exist

### **Top note/Bottom note**

G/B    A/E    B/D    G/E    D/F#    E/G    F#/A

Use "parallel 6ths"; play a succession of 6ths melodically; beautiful patterns can result

Besides using droning notes, create melodies

Let these melodies have long note values and big melodic leaps

Within these melodies, go for occasional dissonances (notes that don't belong in the current chord)

The result can be very lush and contribute great emotion to the musical moment



## Fender Rhodes Sounds

Think mostly right hand

Create musical “hooks” (Example: Chris Tomlin’s recording of “Unfailing Love” on his Arriving project)

Hook defined: a melodic or rhythmic pattern typically heard in a song’s intro and then reused for the reintro and outro

Grace notes “speak” well with a Rhodes sound

Generally, the part will be space

Rhodes rarely “leads” the song

Unsure what to play? Limit your playing to only the chords as they change, with no melodic activity.

Exploit the characteristic “bite” of the Rhodes sound

## In Conclusion

Each of these “beyond grand piano” sounds have these things in common

They play a supporting role

Unlikely to “lead” the song, whereas grand piano could do so

They contribute significantly to the delineation of sections within the arrangement (Verse, Chorus, Bridge, etc)

For example, you might play on the intro, lay out for the verse, reenter on the chorus

They can contribute to a growing fullness of the arrangement as the song is played

## A Final Thought

If you’re ever unsure of whether or not the part you’re creating is contributing to the arrangement:

Stop playing for a moment

Hint: In a rehearsal, not in a service!!!

Is there “void” left when your part is not heard, or do you hear another instrument your part had been covering up?

