

Frequently Asked Questions

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The Janko was promoted in the 1890s. Why didn't it catch on?

Several theories have been presented about why the Janko failed. Certainly the inertia of countless pre-existing conventional keyboards was (and continues to be) a factor. However, I believe that a Janko-style keyboard has a better chance in the new millennium than in the 1890s for several reasons:

There are more musicians today, so the same percentage playing a Janko would produce more sales, hence a better chance of commercial viability.

Keyboards at that time were less portable than now. Hence, a Janko pianist's performance venues were limited. Today, a musician can carry her midi controller wherever she wants to perform.

Also, the original Janko (in my opinion) had several drawbacks:

1. One too many key rows,
 2. No tactile orientation system,
 3. Octave span too short for most male adults (4.78 inches), and
 4. The vertical distance from the key tops to the underside of the key bed was too large.
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How many rows is ideal?

I played four-row Jankos professionally for fifteen years. Finally I concluded that five rows is better, at least for piano orientation (as opposed to accordion orientation). The reason: With a four-row Janko, all chords must be fingered using no more than three adjacent rows, in order for them to be transposable to all keys. For chords which span (and include) an octave, this requirement usually forces the two octave notes to be played in the same row. I play these types of chords frequently, as many musicians do. Playing octaves in the same row forces a twisting of the wrist--particularly when both hands are playing octaves near the center of the keyboard. If the musician is heavy-set, then the problem is exacerbated further.

With a five-row Janko keyboard, octave chords can be played using four adjacent rows with the thumb two rows lower than the fourth or fifth finger (an octave away). This is much more comfortable and ergonomic.

The original Janko keyboards had six rows. Mr. Von Janko advised the musician to restrict himself to five contiguous rows while learning a composition. To transpose the composition by one half-step, he could then simply move the entire piece up or down by one row. Hence, no re-learning was necessary for transposition. In theory, anyway. If Kurt Gödel were a musician, he might have asked: "But what if the pianist wants to transpose the piece, Barry-Manilow-style, within a single performance? Couldn't the two-part piece then be regarded as a single piece requiring six rows? Of course it could. Then if the musician wanted to transpose that piece by one half-step, he would need a seventh row." Gödel would have then "proved" that an infinite number of rows are necessary. I'll leave it to someone else to construct a "Janko Revolving Cylinder" keyboard :-)

As I see it, five rows are quite sufficient. On my 1892 Decker Bros. piano, I have a strip of heavy paper placed over the top key row, so I don't even see it when I play. More rows add cost/weight and make orientation more of a challenge.

Why are you offering a six-row version?

Because some musicians may want one.

What are the dimensions of the Daskin keyboard?

Octave (center-to-center): 5.1" / 12.96cm

Whole step (center-to-center): 0.85" / 2.16cm

Front-rear depth of each row (measured from the front of a key to the front of a key in an adjacent row): 1.123" / 2.85cm

Height of each row (relative to an adjacent row): 0.4" / 1.02cm

Vertical key stroke: ~0.3" / .76cm plus pad compression

Overall Dimensions (Case Dimensions):

Width: 38.6" / 98cm

Depth: 5-Row: 10.4" / 26.4cm;

6-Row: 11.6" / 29.4cm

Height: 5-Row: 4" / 10.2cm;

6-Row: 4.3" / 10.9cm

(An astute observer will notice that the differences between the 5-row & 6-row cases do not match the height and depth dimensions of the single additional key row. This is because the key tops are angled slightly toward the rear. I like the keyboard this way, and it makes the case a little shorter in height. You can always use a physical object, e.g., a strip of wood, to set the keyboard angle to whatever you want.)

How can I learn to play a Janko?

Unfortunately, I know of no good Janko instruction books at this time. I have scanned several pamphlets from the 1890s, which I am happy to email to anyone. However, I have not found them to be very helpful. I have not looked for any instructional materials from the Chromatone folks. If there are any, I would guess they are in Japanese.

I have not yet taken the time to develop instructional materials. I will produce a video when I have units for sale. In the meantime, here is a brief lesson in 5-row Janko fingering. These suggestions are consistent with the Janko instruction booklets which were published in the 1890s.

1. The bottom two rows are for the thumbs only.
2. Never play the top two rows with a thumb.
3. When you play an octave with one hand using the thumb and little finger, the thumb should be two rows lower than the little finger.

There are rare exceptions to all of the above rules. For example, if you want to slide an octave quickly five rows down the keyboard, then you must, of course, play the two notes of the octave in the same row.

4. As much as possible, try to keep the thumb on rows which are lower than the rows which the other fingers of the same hand are using.

The 1890s Janko right hand fingering for a C major scale (which I agree with) is:

Begin on the middle row (3rd row) C with the index finger (finger 2).

Middle finger (finger 3) on D in the same middle row.

Ring finger (finger 4) on E in the same middle row.

Thumb on F in the next lower row (row 2).

Index finger on G two rows higher (row 4).

Middle finger on A, same row (row 4).

Thumb on B in row 2.

Index finger on C in row 3. Now you're back where you started, one octave higher, so you can continue up with the

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same fingering, if you wish.

Notice that in the above major scale fingering the thumb is always below the other fingers. The hand is comfortable this way.

Different people will have different ideas about how to play a Janko. Different people will also prefer different fingerings. These differences can be attributed to different hand sizes, or personal preferences. I cringe when I watch Chromatone players on YouTube playing octaves with one hand in the same key row, and fingering patterns very differently than I would recommend. Nevertheless, I welcome anyone to publish whatever instructional materials they endorse, and let the public hash it out.

A standard piano has 88 notes. Why does the Daskin have 81?

The 5-row Daskin keyboard has 203 keys. Each key can be user-programmed for any note. So you can easily have all 127 midi notes on the keyboard simultaneously, if that's what you want. As a professional musician, I have found that 81 notes, C to G# is sufficient for most pieces of music. 88 key sets would make the keyboard wider, heavier, and more expensive.

If you have occasion to play notes lower than C 32.7Hz, then you can assign the twelve row 1 and 2 keys at the bass end of the keyboard to the next lower octave. Since these keys are intended for the left thumb, and the left thumb is at the right side of the left hand, they are rarely used in conventional tuning anyway. And, of course, you can do the same thing at the treble end of the keyboard. In this way, you can have 105 notes (including the standard 88) simultaneously available with little or no inconvenience.

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