

Verona.....Scala.....is there a difference?

Most of you, in fact probably all of you, will now be shouting at your computer screens, 'of course there's a difference.....who is this idiot??' or words to that effect. I've been called worse, but, up until a couple of weeks ago, I was under the impression that the only real difference between the two organs was that the Scala had a few more sliders and allowed you to use 4 voices on the upper manual compared to 3 on the Verona. Yes, I've lived a sheltered life; it was only last year I discovered Santa wasn't real. So, maybe the question should be....Verona...Scala....What is the difference?

For just over three years, I was the proud owner of a Verona; purchased from my local music store, Allen's Music Centre, in Great Yarmouth, who offered me a good deal on my Technics GA3 which had 'died' on me. Like many others, my first experience of Wersi was through listening to Klaus Wunderlich records and being fortunate to see him perform live. From then on the Wersi sound embedded itself in my mind and the thought of maybe owning one some day was high on my wish list. As soon as I heard the Verona I was amazed at the difference between it and the GA3. There was no comparison; the Verona was superior in all departments.

I nurtured the Verona from Version 4 through to 7 enduring a couple of system failures along the way, caused by Microsoft, which resulted in a complete reinstall and start again as all presets etc were lost; I'm sure I'm not the only one to have experienced this!! I was sure the Verona would last me for many years to come.....until.....

Out shopping recently, I wandered into Allen's to look at the sheet music and peruse the organs they had in stock. Amongst the shiny new Lowery's, Roland's and second-hand Technics and Yamahas were a Verona and not one but two Scala's; one was version 5 and the other had just been upgraded to version 7. Looking for an excuse to get me out of trudging around the shops looking at women's clothes, not for myself I hasten to add, I decided to take a closer look at what the Scala had to offer and soon discovered there was more to it than just a few more sliders and a 4th voice layer on the upper. I pulled a couple of drawbars and played a chord on the upper manual and thought...'oohh, that sounds nice,' ... a slight adjustment of drawbars and another chord and I was hooked.

To cut a long story short, I was made, in true Godfather style, an offer I couldn't refuse and in the time it takes a Bossa Nova intro to play, I found myself to be a Scala owner. Delivery day arrived and my fingers were itching.....I think I had touched something yucky in the workshop at work which was irritating my skin.....so I scrubbed them clean and set about 'discovering' the Scala.

The first difference I noticed between it and the Verona was the physical size. It's wider, longer and taller. The bench is a three-seater but one person would have enough room to have a pile of music one side of them and a picnic the other. The screen is tilted more towards you whereas the Verona's screen lays back. I often found myself leaning forward slightly to view the Verona's screen but not with the screen on the Scala.

Some of the buttons and sliders/drawbars have been re-positioned. The effects buttons, of which there are 10 (8 on the Verona), now sit above the rhythm variation buttons and the Upper drawbars have been moved to the left hand side of the screen; which takes a bit of getting used to after three years of them being on the other side.

To the right of the screen can be found the lower manual drawbars. Next to these are two new sets of Tonewheel sliders. The first set is labelled Tonewheel Percussion and consists of nine drawbars ranging from 16' to 1' which, as their name suggests, adds a percussive tone to the drawbars. On the Verona this is achieved by pressing the Percussion button and is limited to whatever setting is built into OAS. The Scala expands this effect by allowing you to set individual drawbars according to the percussive sound you wish to create. For example, if you want a deep, heavy percussive sound you can create it by using just the 16' and 5 1/3', or use the 1' and 2' to create a higher pitched sound. The variations really are limitless. The percussive effect can be expanded further as the Scala has an additional button for long percussion.

Next to the Tonewheel Percussion drawbars are 3 sliders, 16', 5 1/3' and 8', labelled Tonewheel Pedal. Personally, I have missed this on the Verona as there have been many occasions where I have wanted a flute sound on the pedals but haven't been able to get the right sound. Also, not every song is suited to either an acoustic or electric bass sound.

And there's more.....

To the right of the screen the bank of buttons labelled 'Organ' on the Verona have been expanded from 3 rows of two Buttons to 3 rows comprising 4 buttons per row. The additional buttons are as follows: B3 Wersi – which I have been reliably informed **'the B3 button switches the OX7 drawbar system between the B3 emulation and older Wersi instruments. (With the lower models you had to go into OX7 edit)'**

(Thanks to Bill for that). I've tried it a few times with different drawbar settings and factory sounds and you can hear the difference it makes. Sometimes the effect is to give your sound more depth and fullness, whilst at other times it'll add a subtle change to the setting by enhancing the high end sounds.

Normal/Celeste – I haven't played with this button yet and would not like to guess what it does. I'm sure there's somebody out there who has used it who could give a brief description and suggestions as to how, and where, to use it in our music.

Percussion Long – Does as it says, lengthens the Percussion effect.

Church Organ – Like any other sound button, Piano, strings etc, the Church organ button allows you to fill up (map in other words) 5 banks of 9 buttons with church organ sounds. I like this as I was being restricted to mapping the Tonewheel and Tonewheel Presets buttons with church and theatre organ sounds thus reducing the space I required for mapping organ sounds.

Sacral – As for Church Organ.

Theatre Organ – As for church organ but using Theatre organs sounds instead.....obviously.

Additionally, and as far as helping us to produce a greater sounding performance goes, maybe the most important difference between the Verona and Scala is the extra sound layers available for Pedals, Lower and Upper manuals. On the Scala there are two layers for the Pedals, 3 for the Lower and 4 for the Upper. This gives greater scope when creating such sounds or presets as string orchestras, brass bands, Theatre Organ, vocal ensembles etc., etc., etc. I'm still experimenting with the extra layers but have found that having just one extra layer opens up countless opportunities and variations. On the other hand though, having too many options can confuse things.

If I have one criticism of the Scala it would be the colour of the accompaniment and manual volume sliders. They seemed to be more spaced out on the Verona, the various sections more defined. I'm finding it difficult to locate a particular slider, for instance, Upper 1 volume, if I need to adjust it in a hurry whereas on the Verona I could locate it with ease. This appears to be because there are more of them bunched together. If the sliders, or just the ends, had different colours for each section I think it would make locating individual sliders much easier. There again, in time I'd probably get used to where they are.....or I could paint them.

Now to the sound. I mentioned earlier playing a chord with a random drawbar setting produced a nice sound. Play a 4-finger chord, say G7, on the upper manual with a similar setting on the Verona and you get a sound that has you thinking, 'wow!!' Do the same on the Scala and you think 'Oh....my.....God!!' as the sound hits you and seems to wrap itself around you. Go for a full, fat drawbar setting and there's not a modern organ anywhere that can beat it. Adding the percussion drawbars gives you countless combinations to produce almost any organ sound possible.

The specifications suggest that the Verona and Scala have the same amplification and speaker system. If that was the case then shouldn't they sound the same? The Scala definitely has a 'different' sound compared to the Verona which might be attributable, in part, to there being larger speakers in the cabinet either side of the music rest, which, now I've mentioned it, sits up straighter and is more 'solid'. The speaker housing at floor level is taller than the Verona's which suggests that the speakers enclosed could be bigger thus aiding 'bigger, better' sound quality. This is only my assumption and would need to be verified.

I have, so far, only scratched the surface of the wonders of the Scala and expect to find more differences as I explore it further; I was still finding new things on the Verona after 3 years! But, from what I've found so far, my earlier belief that 'the only real difference between the two organs was that the Scala had a few more sliders and allowed you to use 4 voices on the upper manual compared to 3 on the Verona,' was as near to being right as me being a better organist than Klaus Wunderlich!!!

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