


ROCK THE PIANO GLISSANDO

by Scott Healy

It's part comedy and part drama. Early rockers, Broadway rehearsal pianists, and Jersey rockers alike have used and abused the piano glissando. It's dramatic, cool, and aggressive, but it's also a tad clichéd – which could be bad, unless that's what you're going for!

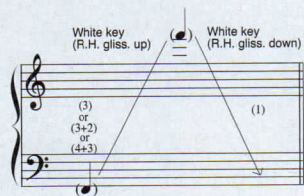
On the bandstand, when does one employ a full piano glissando? Well, unless you're in a Jerry Lee Lewis tribute band or playing "Rosalita" with Bruce Springsteen, the answer is almost never. That's not to say it can't be just the right musical effect in the moment, and

certainly every serious modern pianist should know how to do it without causing serious injury (to yourself or to your listeners). 

Want to see exactly how to play piano glissandi? Watch video of this lesson at keyboardmag.com.



When's the right time to use a gliss in rock piano? Share your thoughts on our forums at keyboardmag.com.



Ex. 1. The right-hand gliss up can be fingered with either the third finger alone, or any combination of the second, third, and fourth fingers. Going down, use the thumb; it's strong enough on its own. Try to let only your fingernail make contact with the keys. Otherwise you could hurt the skin over your nail. Start in the vicinity of a low note, then rake your hand over the white keys till you get up to the top of the piano, then turn your hand around and go back down, as shown here. Reverse the fingering for the left hand – the nail of the thumb going up and the second, third, and fourth fingers on the way down.

Ex. 2. Gliss up and down the piano as in 2a, making different notes your stopping and starting points. Add some sustain pedal. You'll see immediately how much the sound builds up with the pedal down, more so on some pianos than others. On digital pianos with limited polyphony, sustaining throughout the slur can cut off some notes. Work this example with each hand; be sure to experiment with the pressure you apply and the speed with which you gliss. In 2b, try a full *fortissimo* sweep down with the right hand using the thumbnail. Hold the pedal down and listen to how your instrument responds. The downward sweep is the most common piano gliss in rock music. Jerry Lee Lewis and other early rockers loved its drama, and the cascading effect shown in 2c is the most dramatic. Here, a quick right-hand sweep down is overlapped with a quick left-hand sweep down, then the right hand, then the left, over and over.

Ex. 3. Do a quick sweep up with the right hand in 3a, catch it in the pedal, then momentarily release the pedal while you land on a note or chord at the end of your sweep. This is an interesting flourish to add to your repertoire, as you never know when a '60s cocktail party might break out; you can also try this technique by glissing with the left hand and hitting the final chord with the right. The technique in 3b may be a little awkward, but you might use it sometime: Gliss up with the right hand, right into a rock riff. Make the gliss in time – here, it's two beats long – and you'll have more control. You'll use the variation in 3c more if you're doing the Jersey rock thing. The slide down fills a few beats after a phrase, or going into a new phrase.

Ex. 4. For a dramatic ending flourish following a tremolo chord, sweep down with the right hand and button it up with a final note in the left hand, clearing the pedal just before you punch out the button.