PIANO BUYERS GUIDE

Developed by leading experts & technicians to help you learn what makes a piano tick, what to look for (and look out for) in any new or used piano or digital keyboard.





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Chosen by more than a quarter million concert artists, families and beginners of all ages since 1912 as their most trusted source of the best products, pricing and incomparable expertise.

Whether you're looking for a traditional or digital piano, a player piano that will perform from your iPad, or the concert grand of your dreams, we've got your instrument. We also have a team of professionals that can help you take care of it, and if you like, teachers that can help you learn to play it.

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We proudly represent the world's finest pianos, chosen for their value at each level of size, construction and performance caliber. We're so confident that you won't find a better buy on any product we offer that we promise it in writing with our exclusive Lowest Price Guarantee, ensuring the best value available.

At Jordan Kitt's Music, our mission is to help you get the most satisfaction possible on your musical investment, and to help you along a lifetime journey into the wonderful world of piano music.

Sincerely,

Chris Syllaba President & CEO Jordan Kitt's Music

Piano Buyer's Guide

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SO DE LA CARROLLA PIANO!

You've decided to buy a piano: The timeless standard of instruments and center of the home, source of family culture and tradition, learning and fun. But regardless of whether the instrument is for tiny hands just beginning the journey into music, or for the serious concert performer, this major purchase is deserving of significant consideration to ensure the best value for the investment.

However, that doesn't mean buying a piano should be anything other than a happy and rewarding experience. You'll want to use this guide to help you make sure that you're not only happy with the purchase experience, but also with the instrument for years to come, including its appearance, touch, tone, and market value over the years. All of these are important considerations, and if you follow these guidelines, you'll be well informed to make what is for many a once-in-a-lifetime purchase and will enjoy what you've chosen for many years.

The Universal Instrument...

To play a musical instrument is to discover a tremendous outlet for self-expression. For most people, the piano has been the most popular instrument over time (often called 'the basic instrument') and is perfect for learning, playing solo, or accompaniment of any kind. To learn to play piano is to learn harmony, rhythm, counterpoint and bass and treble clef. For any instrument you may play in the future, your training on the piano will be invaluable.



IS BIGGER REALLY BETTER?

The answer is: Not necessarily. However, all things being equal, it is true that larger pianos have a larger sound and greater volume. This is due to a much larger soundboard, and the longer bass strings, which give the larger pianos a more fundamental sound in the bass register.

However, concert grands, which are nine (or more) feet in length, are primarily designed for concert halls, and few homes can accomodate them.

There are really very good instruments in all sizes, and it is wise to select the one that best suits your space, your needs (and your budget!).



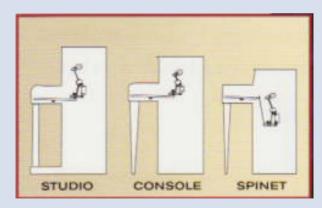
Piano Types: The Basics

There are two basic types of acoustic pianos: Grand pianos and vertical (or upright) pianos.

The smallest acoustic pianos are called spinets, which are typically about 36 inches high. Next are the pianos commonly called consoles, which are about 40 to 43 inches high. Professional studio pianos are the largest, and range anywhere from 44 to over 50- inches in height. Regardless of height, however, all vertical pianos use up a similar amount of floor space (roughly five feet by two feet).

While spinet sized pianos enjoyed great popularity for many years, they were a design answer to materials shortages during World War II, and aren't a modernly manufactured style. While unique in terms of look and style (and history) console or studio pianos are most often preferred due to their superior tone, touch and musical qualities.







Grands & Baby Grands

Grand pianos come in a variety of sizes, and are measured by length from the very front edge to the very back. The term "baby grand" usually indicates a grand which is less than 6' in length. Large concert grands are typically up to nine feet in length. Depending on the maker, there are many different size variations between the two extremes, and can be suitable for home, performance or a combination of the two depending on the design.

Should I buy a grand or vertical piano?

A fine quality grand is the ultimate expression of pure piano sound and tone if space and budget permit. Because of the design, a grand has a certain inherent advantage over a vertical configuration: The gravity action of a quality grand allows for faster repetition of notes and for better, more subtle control of expression and tone than that of a vertical action piano. The horizontal construction and the shape of the soundboard allow the tone to develop in an open manner. Musically, a fine grand is the superior instrument. Aesthetically, it is an iconic shape, and can be an elegant and dramatic addition to your home décor.

However, space and budget are often major considerations, and not all grands are created equal. A first class vertical piano is an excellent musical instrument, and will outperform and outlast a poorly made, inexpensive small grand. Vertical pianos come in a variety of furniture styles and finishes that can enhance your home décor, and will take up a fraction of the space of even a small grand.





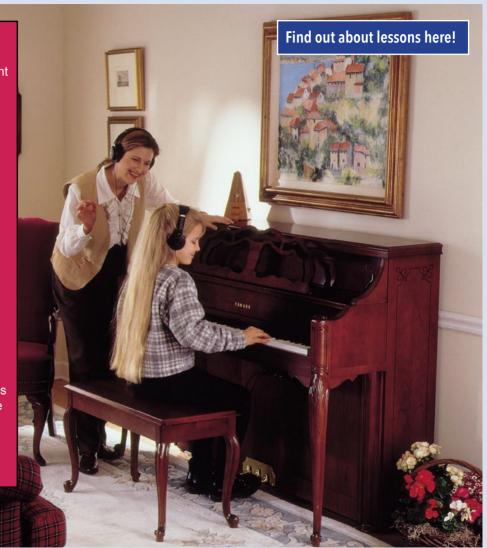
Child development and the piano...

There is an undeniably strong correlation between music education and the development of skills that children need to become successful in life.

Self discipline, patience, sensitivity, coordination, and the ability to memorize are all enhanced by the study of music. These skills will follow your child on whatever path he or she chooses in life.

The piano is an excellent first instrument through which to provide your child this source of lifelong joy, satisfaction and accomplishment. No other single instrument matches the piano for its broad application of musical concepts.

Even if later your child chooses to play another instrument, the melody, rhythm, and sense of harmony acquired with piano education will pay off handsomely.



What makes one piano more expensive than another?\$ \$?

The answer is simple: High quality pianos are more expensive to manufacture than lesser quality instruments.

Selection of materials. The finest materials - top grade spruce, wool felt, expensive hard rock maple, veneer, and all the other components that go into the making of the piano - will affect the end result. The makers of more expensive instruments take great care in selecting and handling their materials consistent with the quality of that instrument.

Preparation of Materials. Proper seasoning of woods is time-consuming and costly. First, the wood must be air-dried for a period of time, and then placed in kilns to stabilize it to specific moisture contents. Through this process, better instrument manufacturers go to great lengths to ensure the quality and long life of their pianos.

Workmanship. There is no substitute for the quality of workmanship. The more skilled the builders, and the better the processes used, the better the piano. However, high quality can be found across a broad range of pricing. Mass produced pianos from names such as Yamaha have excellent reputations for quality because of the engineering and sophistication of the processes employed. Some piano makers, such as Bösendorfer, who only produce a few hundred pianos a year by hand for the entire world, also share stellar reputations.

Scale Design. A beautifully balanced scale is the result of the work of a master scale designer. Scales tend to evolve and be refined over a period of time. Manufacturers of the finest pianos constantly strive to find ways to make their scale designs even better.

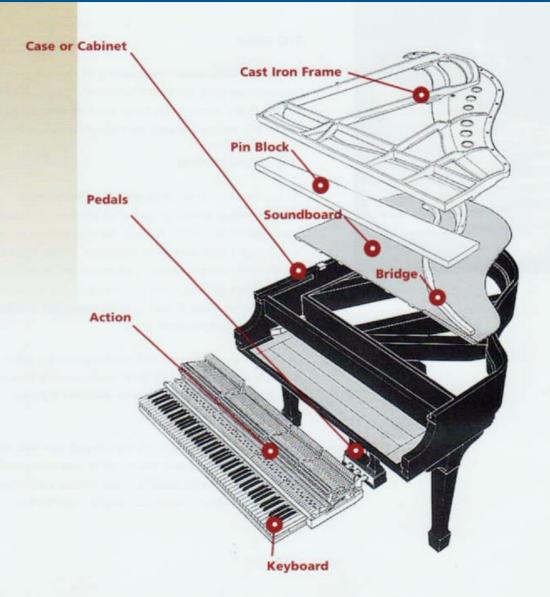


The Anatomy of a Piano...





The major elements of a grand piano...





The Back & Soundboard



The Back

The back of a vertical piano, or the bottom in case of a grand, is the piano's foundation, and must be exceptionally strong to withstand the tons of "pull" exerted by the strings. This is the reason for the vertical back posts, or in a grand, the braces underneath the piano.

The Soundboard

The soundboard is the heart of the piano, and is one of the most important and least understood parts of the instrument. It's purpose is to convert the vibrations of the strings into what we know as piano tone. Without it there would be no amplification, and you would hear little, if anything at all. If the soundboard is not made of the proper kind of wood, or if the size, thickness, crown (curvature), grain direction, texture and other factors are not in balance, the end result will be unacceptable tone, texture and quality.

Spruce is the species which nearly all manufacturers of top quality pianos use for their soundboards. There are several grades of spruce. The highest, fine grain quality is expensive and is used in the top quality pianos.

A long, even grain of a solid spruce soundboard will produce the highest quality results. Though it should be noted that some manufacturers have developed veneered soundboards that can produce a satisfactory result for a dramatically reduced investment.



Bridges & Pin Blocks

Bridges

A critical step in the making of a quality piano is the shaping and fitting of the bridges. The bass and treble bridges must be planed to exact thickness from end to end and fitted securely to the sound-board. Absolute accuracy is paramount so as to provide the proper down-bearing of the strings upon the bridges. It is this correct down-bearing which is so vital for the transfer of the string vibrations to the soundboard (resulting in fine tonal quality from the lowest bass to the highest treble).



The Pin Block (or wrest plank)

The pin block is a laminated hardwood plank running the width of the piano and attached to the back frame. Embedded in holes in the pin block are the steel tuning pins around which is coiled one end of a piano string. The pin block has to hold the tuning pins tight enough, by friction alone, so that all the strings are maintained at the right tension without unwinding - thus keeping the piano in tune.

The durability of its pin block is important to the long-term life of a piano. Defective pin blocks can be replaced on grand pianos at great expense; however, it is nearly impossible to replace a vertical piano pin block.

Pin blocks come in several varieties, which differ in the number of laminations they contain (from four to over 40). There is not particular advantage to many multiple laminations. The important thing is that the pin block is properly designed and the holes accurately drilled. Bösendorfer, one of the world's most revered handcrafted pianos, has a pin block with many thick laminations of hard rock maple.

Properly designed pin blocks made with well-seasoned woods will often last the life of the piano if kept in the proper climactic conditions. Loose pins are usually a result of a poor pin block or excessive dryness over a period of time.



The Plate & Pedals

The Piano Plate

The piano plate is made of either cast iron, or created out of a vacuum process (also out of iron) to the individual manufacturer's specifications and scale design. The plate along with the back frame to which it is attached is the foundational strength to resist the tons of string tension placed upon it.



Pedals and their Functions

Most pianos have three pedals, but occasionally you see some with just two pedals. Two-pedal pianos are usually

pianos manufactured outside the United States.



GRANDS - The right pedal, called the damper or sustaining pedal, operates on the grand piano just the same as in the vertical piano. It lifts the dampers from the strings and allows all the strings to sound until the pedal is released. This is the pedal that is used the most.

The left grand pedal is called the "una corda" pedal. When depressed, the entire action and keyboard is shifted slightly to one side so that the hammers only strike two strings rather then the three strings per note. This slightly changes the character of the sound, as well as makes the piano sound a little softer.

The middle pedal on a grand piano functions in one of two ways. On some pianos it functions as a bass sustain. And on others, the middle pedal is the "sostenuto" pedal. When depressed, it will sustain a single chord or an individual note without affecting the rest of the keyboard. While this pedal is almost exclusively found on grands, it's interesting to note that some

VERTICALS - The right pedals is called the damper, or sustaining pedal. It lifts all the dampers off the strings so that any notes played simultaneously while the pedal is depressed will continue to sound. When the pedal is released the dampers fall back against the strings, and the sound is stopped. This is the pedal that is used the most.

The left pedal is the soft pedal. When depressed, it moves all the hammers close to the strings so that the stroke is shortened and the result is a softer sound.

The middle pedal on a vertical piano is often a bass sustaining pedal.

When depressed, it lifts off the dampers in the bass section. On some vertical pianos, the middle pedal is a "practice" pedal or "muting" pedal. When it is depressed, a thin strip of felt is lowered between the hammer and the strings, which muffles the sound to a very low level.

SCALE DESIGN



Piano construction begins with scale design. Reduced to simple terms, the scale is the physical layout of the strings and other components, which produce or affect the sound and tone quality of the piano. The scale designer must consider: The speaking length of the string, the gauge, or wire size of each string, the tension in pounds, to which each string is drawn when it is tuned to exact pitch, and the gauge of the pure copper winding of the bass strings. All of these factors are interdepen-

dent. One cannot be changed without affecting all of the others. Differences in scale design give pianos their own special tonal qualities or personalities. In drawing his master plan, the piano scale designer strives to keep all these elements in place.

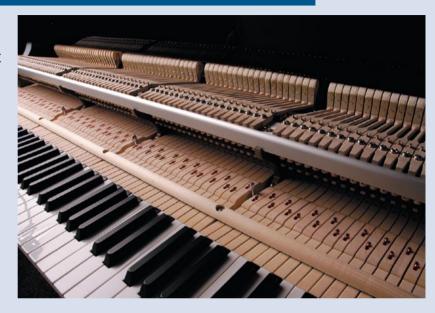
If all these factors are in proper relationship to one another, we have harmony, and the result is an excellent foundation upon which a quality piano may be built. So scale designers are the tonal architects of the piano, and the scale is their master plan.



The Keys & Piano Action

Each key is mounted on a key frame, which are located in exact positions by the center pins, the balance point of each key. Quality pianos have weighted and balanced keys for consistency of touch and weight throughout the entire range of the keyboard.

Ivory has not been used for keys for over a half-century. Today, modern composite materials are used which give the appearance, feel and durability required for optimum performance. They will



never yellow, crack, split or chip, unlike their predecessors.

The piano 'action' is comprised of literally thousands of parts which synchronize to cause a hammer strike on the appropriate string when a key is played. Modern action parts are made of a variety of materials, including wood, composite and metal. In addition, several kinds felt, cloth, leather, nickel, glue and much custom attention goes into every piano action.

The complex action that takes place each time a key is played is far more than meets the eye: The hammer must strike the string almost instantaneously, and also impact an exact point on each string. It must strike with the exact amount of force required to produce the desired volume and return the hammer instantly into position, ready to repeat the process in rapid succession.





Regulation & Voicing

This is the final stage of a piano's manufacturing process. Hammers, in spite of being made in a controlled environment from the best felt wool available, still will vary slightly in density and hardness. These variances are corrected by the use of fine steel needles inserted into the hammers at the proper depth and place.

By 'needling' a hammer, a technician can make the tone of an individual note sound hard, mellow, full or thin. This fine adjustment is called 'voicing'. The end result when done properly is tonal balance and an instrument with rich tone.

Action regulation is done by skilled technicians at the factory, and consists of many small adjustments throughout critical points in the action to ensure correct performance.

A reputable dealer should have a voicing service as well.







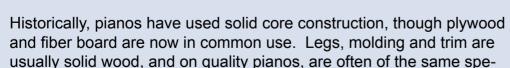
Piano Cabinetry & Finish

Approximately 85% of every acoustic piano is made of wood, and a good portion of that is the cabinetry. Exquisite furniture and finishes have long been associated with the fine art of piano building. For most buyers, the style of cabinetry and wood finish is an important consideration. From period styles to contemporary, there is sure to be a finish and style that will work with your decorating tastes.

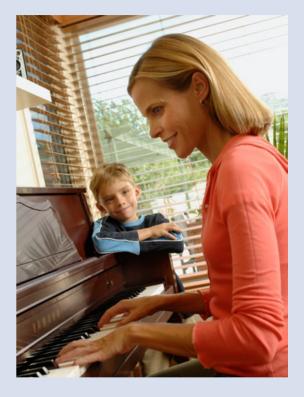
There are basically three types of cabinet construction:

cies as the rest of the cabinet.

- Sold Core solid lumber core with two outer layers of veneer on each side
- 2. **Plywood** Approximately half to three quarter inch plywood panels face veneers on each side.
- 3. **Fiber board** panels made of compressed wood fiber, and with face veneers applied to each side.



While elaborate cabinets are typically more expensive than simple ones, there is no necessary difference in the quality of the instrument.



Used Pianos

Wise Investment? Or Big Risk?

Depending on the piano in question, it could be either. There are a number of quality used pianos on the market that have been well cared for and maintained, and would make an excellent addition to any home.

However, there are even more that are potential nightmares, costing more than they are worth to recondition, that will never achieve the richness of sound and beauty of tone that will make them the centerpiece of your home.

Purchasing a piano from the private market (especially unseen or inspected by a professional you trust from a private or online source such as e-bay) can be a more expensive proposition than a brand new piano of the same build quality in the long run. Major repairs and rebuilding are extremely expensive propositions.

If you have one you're inheriting, or have a situation where you can acquire one from a private entity you trust, it's still important to have it professionally inspected to make sure you know what you're getting into.

Quality dealers often have used instruments for sale that have been taken in on trade, and that have been inspected for any major problems. Some even offer a warranty. This will not likely add much to the up front cost of the piano from a reputable dealer, but will be worth much more in terms of peace of mind and getting the best value for your investment.



A proper checklist includes over 200 different areas that need inspection prior to purchase, many of which can't be correctly assessed by a layperson.



visit
jordankitts.com
for a complete
selection of
used pianos.



BEWARE.

The Right Piano = Years of Enjoyment The Wrong Piano = Years of Regret

5 common mistakes to be wary of...

- 1. Purchasing from a private party. That piano that your neighbor no longer wants may look (and possibly even sound) fine, but without a professional inspection and assessment of the brand and manufacture quality, you could be investing in one big headache for years to come.
- 2. **Ebay/Craigslist**. While there may be a bargain to be had, the rules above apply doubly so. Even if pictures look great, there's no telling what kind of shape the important parts of the piano may be in.
- 3. 'Gray market' pianos. Some retailers that would like to represent quality piano lines (such as Yamaha) but can't, do the next best thing: They import (often heavily) used (and often abused) models from overseas. These pianos may look or even sound like their new counterparts, but there are underlying problems, such as the lack of a real manufacturer's warranty, parts that have been seasoned for climates in other parts of the world, and an unknown past of international travel and institutional overuse.
- 4. **Settling for a piano beneath your needs**. Since for many this will be a once-in-a-lifetime purchase, you should consider the very best piano you can afford, rather than settle on an entry level model for family use. The more the caliber of the instrument matches that of the performer (present and hopeful future), the more fulfillment and enjoyment you'll get.
- 5. Choose a piano retailer carefully. Many piano retailers have come and gone over the past 25 years, due to varying levels of customer satisfaction, quality of products and brands offered, and general business practices (or lack thereof). Make sure whatever retailer you become involved with has an established record of commitment to customer service, offers recognizable brands, and has physically been in their location for a reasonable amount of time. If they haven't, it's usually because they couldn't.

contents

What's a hybrid piano?



Introduced only recently in the United States, a 'Hybrid' piano uses the best of both the acoustic and digital worlds. It uses an actual concert grand piano action for an exact replication of the touch, response and feel of an acoustic grand. Twelve speakers and sixteen specially engineered amplifiers simulate the astounding projection and beauty of a real grand piano.

If you have the space for a small grand piano, but would enjoy the versatility of a digital instrument (quiet practice with headphones, unique styling, less weight, more sounds) but the look and resonance of a grand, you should look into a hybrid piano.



The Modern Player Piano

Much of the success of piano in the early 20th century was due to the popularity of the player piano. These wonderful creations were entirely mechanical with thousands of individual parts designed just for that model, including bellows, pneumatic tubes, tracker bars, and even more obscure components. They largely faded with the addition of radio, the phonograph, and eventually TV.

The modern player piano of create performances indistinguate from the original performances, and are more reliable, better suited to most decor, and have capabilities

unimagined in their formative years.



Most now use servo technology that maintains the integrity of the original acoustic instrument, but allows control from a modern music platform such as an iPad or a smart phone.

They can play songs with full digital accompaniment, have volume control for softer playing, record a performance as it's played with the exact nuance of the player, and generally provide a complete home entertainment piano platform for players and non-players alike.

Player pianos have experienced a tremendous resurgence over the past decade, now comprising a significant share of all grand sales purchased nationwide.



The Modern Digital Piano

These instruments are now over a half-century old, but didn't achieve mass popularity until the last twenty years due to their sound. They only 'approximated' a real piano using analog waveforms, and were easily distinguished (not usually favorably) from their acoustic counterparts.

Now, the innovations in sound channeling and modern digital acoustics, authentic piano sound can be virtually replicated in a more compact and lighter case that never needs tuning or service.

Digital pianos, as opposed to keyboards, are defined as having 88 full-sized piano keys, and have their own built in amplification and speaker system.



Modern innovations in sound delivery and digital modeling have made some digital pianos almost indistinguishable from their acoustic cousins, and can include extras from a few basic piano sounds to complete symphonic accompaniment, karaoke, and recording. Connection to a PC or Mac is now

a standard.





Learn more here!



When you're ready to choose!



Buying a piano should be a happy, comfortable, rewarding experience. When you visit Jordan Kitt's Music, you'll have access to the best products available, factory trained representatives to show you what makes one piano better than another from the inside out, and 100 years of experience satisfying the needs over 250,000 customers, performance venues, and educational institutions.

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