

About Pianos & Electrical Keyboard Instruments

Pianos are the preferred instrument of choice for piano students, of course. Parents and students should be aware that a keyboard is Not a replacement for a piano for a serious student. Students on keyboards do not develop touch control and finger strength. Furthermore, a piano *lives* in a way an electronic collection of recorded sounds cannot. *However*, their new cousins – the digital pianos and keyboards – both have vastly improved in quality and cost effectiveness in recent years. I never used to take students unless they had a piano: many teachers still don't.

Following is my usual set of recommendations for families looking to purchase a piano, digital piano or keyboard, followed by a list of all piano dealers within a 2 hour drive that I could find. If you hear of any new ones, or if you have any particularly bad or good experience with a dealer, let me know of this as well, please.

The first rule of thumb is to provide the student with the best instrument possible. While this may sound like the wrong approach (Will the student stick with it? Will I lose the money I invested?), the reality is that a poor instrument is nasty to play. Who would ever continue to work at something if the results are poor? By purchasing a quality instrument you are preventing discouragement and the developing of dislike for the sound and performance of the very thing you are paying for: learning the piano. Furthermore, in the worst case scenario, a good piano has a pretty fair resale value.

The second rule of thumb is to keep your instrument in good repair. A piano should be tuned twice a year (remember, the student's ear is being developed – what is heard is what is learned, right or wrong) and, if something breaks, get it fixed. In doing this you are maintaining the all qualities and benefits of the instrument you invested in, whether acoustic or electronic...

Keyboards

Essentially a keyboard is a collection of pre-recorded sounds. A Digital Piano is simply a keyboard made to work and act like a piano. Keyboards can be a lot of fun to have and can have advantages over an acoustic piano. They can be small which can be helpful if you live upstairs, have a small space or move frequently. They can talk to your computer if both are MIDI (Music Instrument Digital Interface: the language standard used between electronic instruments &/or your computer), compatible. You can wear headphones and practice quietly. You can choose different instruments and configurations for different pieces or record and play back what you just did. Some keyboards have the capability to take the sounds and modify them or record new ones. Keyboards with this capability have what is called a synthesizer for it can make new sounds

I require a minimum of 76 full sized, touch sensitive keys (if you touch a key softly you get a quiet sound, if you touch harder you get a louder sound). A standard piano has 88 keys, and 2 or 3 pedals (depending on how nice it is). The closer to 88 keys you get, the longer the keyboard will be useful. If you can get weighted or even semi-weighted that is much better. Be sure the keyboard has a jack for a pedal and preferably is MIDI compatible with an extra out jack. It can be a lot of fun, and useful too, to have this and it rarely costs anything more now a days. Cost can range from \$200 for a "rinky dink", up to \$10,000 for a professional model with all the whistles and bells. At this time you should be able to get a really nice one for between \$700 and \$2000. A keyboard can be nice to have even if you have a full piano. Just make sure the keys are full sized.

Where Used Keyboards are occasionally available through private parties and sometimes re-conditioned ones can be had from a manufacturers outlet. Generally speaking though, things have changed so fast - - quality up and price down – that used is rarely worth it. Locally I recommend Sam Ash Music or Guitar Center. Both have rinky dink to pro models and good prices. Look for sales and financing which happen often. Guitar Center may negotiate a bit on price and are the ones to go to if you need advice or have questions.

Care and Placing: Keyboards are not as sensitive to temperature and humidity fluctuations and don't need tuning as a piano would. Otherwise, the care for a keyboard is pretty much like an acoustic piano. If something goes wrong though, they are rarely worth fixing.

Pianos

A Piano is a hybrid instrument: a cross between the Strings and the Percussion families. It is also relatively new, invented in 1709 in Italy by Bartolomeo Cristofori. It is the most popular instrument in the world. It is estimated that there may be as many as 65 million pianos around the world. Pianos can be rented with an option to buy from many dealers. You might want to consider buying or renting a used piano. I would! It can save you many hundreds to thousands of dollars and, if it was not mistreated or completely played out, it is every bit as good as a new piano. Try to avoid pianos from the 1960's through early 1980's if possible. Many tend to be of shoddy quality. Average life span of a good piano, used and maintained regularly, is 50 years. Even so, most home pianos do not see this level of use (pianos are rated at a few hours every day, possibly by more than one person) so your piano may easily last several generations if stored and cared for properly.

There are 2 basic types of pianos: "Upright Pianos" and "Grand Pianos". An entry level, upright piano, new, starts at about \$4200. A good upright piano starts at about \$6500. A performance quality upright starts at \$12,000 to \$25,000. Prices on used pianos can start as low as \$200, but they are probably no good. For a grand piano start by adding \$2,000 to the price and go up from there. As a rule of thumb the larger the piano, the better the sound. It is a difference in sound quality and the piano's response time. Also, in the super small pianos (called spinets usually) the long term maintenance costs increase radically due to more parts and cheaper materials. Middle size is fine. A Concert Grand Piano can be up to 12 feet in length. Don't get anything shorter than 5 feet long or the tone becomes too compromised. Performance wise a Grand Piano is always considered to be superior to an Upright Piano.

Where? Start with the list attached and your phone book. Universities have sales often, the newspaper can be good and many piano tuners have pianos for sale or knowledge of ones that are. If you buy from a private party and spend any kind of money I strongly recommend you have a tuner check it out: I would personally. If you want to educate yourself first, the best book on the market is called *The Piano Book*, by Larry Fine. This book covers what a piano is, how it works, what you need to know when buying a new or used piano, a list of all the piano manufactures world wide (including names, addresses, contact numbers, ratings, etc.), and how to take care of it once you have it: all without getting overly technical. The Barnes & Noble Bookstore in Rancho Cucamonga keeps it in stock for me, but it can be ordered through any bookstore. The National Piano Tuners Guild has an excellent web site on the subject as does the National Piano Manufacturer's Association.

Buying a Piano: Obviously, you cannot pay a tuner to visit all the pianos you look at. I recommend first visiting several stores with no intention to buy and listen a bit. Play a few keys in a given range on each brand and figure out which sounds you like: piano tone can range from bright to rich depending on the maker and line. You will hear it a lot so a little time is worthwhile. Keep in mind that at least in an Upright Piano the footprint on your floor is the same size whether the piano is large or small.

Basic Things to Check For If Buying a Used Piano: You will need to examine the insides. If you are not allowed to, don't buy. If you see Any water damage of Any kind – Run don't walk. Keep in mind; you are buying (hopefully) a sound, not a look (though that is nice too). Get down to eye level with the keys: are they relatively level? If not, expensive regulating may be needed. Push keys down and quickly release. Do they bounce back? If the response is soggy, especially in the well used middle keys, the piano may be played out. Rebuilding can cost more than a cheap new piano. Inside the piano also look for signs of rust or insect damage. If you see any, don't get it. Remember that the piano may be out of tune. That is pretty normal – any moving of a piano, even just a few feet across the room can knock it out of tune. You might want to ask when it was last serviced and how often. These are only a few basics. There can be things wrong that you have no eye for, or that cannot be seen without dismantling the piano – something only your tuner should do. Personally, I would never spend any large amount of money on a used piano, unless I was very sure, without asking my tuner to check it out first. Finally, pianos made before the 1900's are usually only good as museum pieces. The parts are not standardized and must be hand made and most tuners either can't or won't work on them.

Piano Care: OK, so now you have a piano. Have it tuned twice a year! For reasons mentioned above - Very Important! One of the worst things that can be done to the piano is to not play it. So use it for what it was made for. Treat the outside like a fine piece of furniture. Avoid polish with silicone in it. It deteriorates the raw wood inside the piano. Never, Never, Never put any type of liquid in or on a piano: not drinks, water, cleaning fluids, bug spray or flower vases. One tip and the piano will Never be the same. Your piano may get dusty inside, if it really bothers you have the tuner do it, there are just too many small parts to mess up. Overall, dust will not affect the sound. Besides, if the piano is played regularly the sound vibrations knock most of the dust off. Your keys will get grubby: use a damp cloth, wrung out until it won't run and wipe in the direction of the keys so you don't accidentally get water between the keys. If they still won't clean you can use dishwater instead of plain water or a moist wipe, again being careful to wipe with the keys. Never use mothballs or bug spray, it will damage the wood inside the piano. It is also a good idea to discourage touching the strings inside the piano as they are not treated and may rust and change the sound. Finally, if you have a pre World War II piano it may have keys made of ivory. Be sure to leave the key board lid open most of the time as ivory will turn permanently yellow without natural light.

Place your piano where the temperature and humidity are the most constant. It will stay in tune the best and will avoid long term damage. Never store a piano in the garage or a storage shed. The radical changes in temperature and humidity will crack the sound board and do much other damage; repairs are either very expensive or impossible. Avoid putting it next to any heating or cooling source, open windows or doors and Never in direct sunlight. If you must put it on an outside wall, leave an air cushion of 4 – 6 inches between piano and wall. You can always store things back there. If you have a very expensive piano it may be worthwhile to invest in a temperature/humidity control system and a blanket.

One Last Note: There are new systems out there that combine an acoustic piano with a Recorder/Player/Synthesizer. These are very nice, very useful, and very expensive. You can play duets with a pre-recording, purchase music for the piano to play like a player piano and have live music at your party, or record yourself for posterity or analysis for a performance.

Thank you for making the effort to provide your student with the best experience possible.



UPRIGHT PIANO



GRAND PIANO

TO THE WEST & SOUTHWEST

BURT'S MUSIC IN PRINT - (626) 966-2466, since 1974

186 East Rowland Street, Covina, 10 fwy, exit Citrus north, right on Rowland at Jack in the Box,
Rentals \$25 and up,

FIELDS PIANOS – (800) 437-4266, www.fieldspianos.com since 1938

810 East Dryer Road, Santa Ana, 55 fwy south to Dyer West
New & used, rentals \$30 and up, good to top quality concert pianos
Steinways, Boston & Yamaha, Schimmel, Kohler & Campbell, Baldwin, and most other acoustic
brands, & , Disclavier, Clavinovas, Roland Digital Pianos

GARD'S MUSIC – (626) 963-0263

848 South Grand Ave, Glendora
New & used, Many rentals

HOLLYWOOD PIANO CO - (213) 462-2329, since 1928

1647 North Highland Avenue, Hollywood, may need to ring bell
New & used, rentals \$30 and up, huge selection, Specializes in restored and rebuilds

HUNTINGTON MUSIC – (714) 848-9280

6829 Warner Avenue at Goldenwest, Huntington Beach
Specializes in any kind of music you can imagine, music software, orders, metronomes, gifts

JOHN WALTRIPS - (800) 656-6874, since 1969

1271 South Baldwin Avenue, Arcadia, West side of street across from Bank of America. Park in back.
Large selection new & used, rentals \$35 and up, digital pianos & keyboards, music for sale, metronomes
Yamahas, Disclavier, Clavinovas, Baldwins, Wurlitzer, Samick, Technics, Chickering

KASIMOFF-BLUTHNER PIANO CO - (323) 466-7707

337 North Larchmont Blvd, Los Angeles
New & used, some rentals, good to top quality concert pianos

KEYBOARD CONNECTION – (818) 577-8812,

1252 East Colorado Blvd., Pasadena
Keyboards, band instruments & music, metronomes

PEDRINI, THE MUSIC MERCHANT –, since 1938

(714) 547-6929 – no pianos, music & band instruments, metronomes
(714) 538-9315 - 330 West Katella Avenue, Orange
New & used, no rentals, music & band instruments, metronomes

PIANO FACTORY OUTLET –, since 1980

1033 North Hollywood way, Burbank – (800) 697-4266
15722 Tustin Way, Tustin, - (800) 597-4266
New & used, rentals \$20 and up, 31 brands, digital & Disclavier pianos, keyboards, software
Discounted prices, good to top quality concert pianos

PIANO CITY SUPERSTORE –, (626) 851-8900, www.pianocity.com since 1986

210 North Sunset Avenue, West Covina - take 10- fwy west to Sunset Avenue,
10200 Beach Blvd, Stanton (1 mile South of Knott's Berry Farm)
New & used, rentals \$55 and up, Digital, Player Pianos fair to good quality
Specializing in Baldwin, but has many brands, Warehouse type store, music software
Good selection, Specializes in Baldwin Pianos

PIANOS WHOLESALÉ – (626) 442-1150, www.pianos-wholesale.com since 1967
4923 Santa Anita, Temple City – take 10 fwy to Santa Anita North, just North of Sam's Club, West side
New & used, , heavily discounted, rentals \$35 and up, Specializes in restored and rebuilds

SHEET MUSIC CITY – (909)981-8777
555 North Benson Avenue, Upland,
Sheet Music & Gifts (high markups)

SOUTH COAST AUCTION – (800) 649-4922, www.southcoastauction.net
New & used, auction held weekly Wednesdays at 4:00 PM

TO THE EAST:

CANNON PIANOS – (800) 888-1233, www.cannonpianos.com since 1977
1375 South Camino Real, San Bernardino, North of 10 fwy, West of 215 fwy at Auto Plaza Drive
New & used, rentals \$25 and up, tuning, rebuilding & restorations, good to top quality, piano moving

COLTON PIANO & ORGAN CONSIGNMENT CENTER - (909) 825-5537
1205 Valley, Colton, exit at Pepper, turn right on Valley
New & used, rentals \$25 & up, poor to mid quality

FISKE MUSEUM OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AT BRIDGES AUDITORIUM – (909) 621-8307
450 North College Way, at 4th & college under the auditorium,
Largest collection this side of the Mississippi River of historical instruments, especially the Keyboard
varieties. Curator Dr. Albert Rice, Free, by appointment only

GUITAR CENTER INC. – (909) 899-9843
12479 Foothill Blvd, #G-H, Rancho Cucamonga, just east of 15 fwy, behind Walmart
Digital Pianos and keyboards, general electronics & software music supplier, band & world instruments

HI-LINE MUSIC – (909) 941-9451
7900 Haven Avenue, STE 26, Rancho Cucamonga, just north of Foothill, NW corner, by Bowling Alley
Band Instrument, some music, metronomes

PEDRINI PIANOS – (909) 824-5347, since 1938
24716 Redlands Blvd, Loma Linda, 10 fwy east , exit at Tippecanoe south, right at Redlands Blvd, in a
2 story grey concrete block building
New & used, keyboards & digital pianos, no rentals, music & band instruments, metronomes

PIANO CITY SUPERSTORE – , (909) 825-2400, www.pianocity.com since 1986
1405 West Valley, Colton
New & used, rentals \$30 and up, Digital, Player & Concert Pianos fair to top quality
Specializing in Baldwin, but has many brands, Warehouse type store, music software

PIANO MUSIC CENTER – (909) 687-9800
3386 Tyler, Riverside, 15 fwy south to 91 fwy east to Tyler south, take first right, next to PetCo
New & used, rentals \$30 and up, , digital pianos, music, will beat prices
Specializing in Yamaha, Clavinova's & Disclavier's.

PROSSER Piano †Organ, a Steinway Gallery – (760) 341-4550
74-040 Highway 111, Palm Desert, CA 92260

SAM ASH MUSIC – (909) 484-3550, since 1924
4449 Mills Circle, Ontario Mills Mall, NW corner, outside entrance
Digital Pianos, keyboards, music electronics, software, and gifts band instruments, metronomes, music