

How to Invest Wisely in an Acoustic Grand Piano from Gorby's Music, Inc.

All too often, the choice of a grand piano is made on the spur of the moment for all sorts of wrong reasons. This paper will provide you with simple guidelines to help assure that the amount you invest will be wisely spent.

Rule #1

Buy the finest piano you can. The qualities of a good piano are remembered long after the purchase price is forgotten. Keep in mind that the finest piano may not be the most expensive piano in the size you need. We'll explain that, and, a better piano will always have a higher resale value, should that need arise.

Rule #2

Given the size of the area you have to place the grand, with all other factors being equal, buy the longest grand you can, as this piano will sound better, have more resonance and will sound deeper. The reason is that there is a practical limit to the length of a grand piano. If all the strings were the same thickness and tension the piano would have to be more than 25' long. Since this is impossible, thicker strings are used to substitute for length. The smaller the piano the more difficult it is to obtain a good tone in the tenor and lower bass strings regardless of the use of copper windings. The result can be a piano that is not in harmony with itself.

Rule #3

Check the warranty and know what it covers and for how long. Read the fine print. The length of time a manufacturer uses is directly related to the integrity of their product. Keep in mind that stencil brand pianos, instruments made by a manufacturer for another maker, are usually not covered by the original maker. Warranty times can vary 10 years or more.

Also check to see if the warranty is transferable to future owners. This will enhance and needed resale value

Rule #4

Find out about the soundboard, also called the SOUL of the instrument. Cheap soundboards are laminated, ie plywood, and have the worst sound and best warranty.

Better soundboards are made of solid Sitka spruce with a tight grain. Grading is measured in grains (annular rings or growth lines) per inch. Loose grain will be 6-8 grains per inch while tight grain may be over 20 grains per inch.

Sound waves travel along the grain, so a tighter grained sound board, which costs twice as much

or more, will produce a superior sound.

A dramatic improvement in sound is found on pianos that have a tapered soundboard, particularly if it is asymmetrically tapered from 8-9 mm thick in the center out to about 5 mm at the edges. This design produces significantly better harmonics that result in a richer, fuller tone.

Rule #5

Know what type of sound you prefer. It's not unusual for the novice to confuse a loud and bright tone with one of quality. It's why many lesser brands have survived. In general, most serious players in the U.S. prefer the rich mellow tone with strong mid-range harmonics found in Steinway, Young Chang Pramberger, Pramberger, and Mason and Hamlin pianos. In contrast, European pianos, like Schimmel or Petrof, have a tone that lacks strong harmonics. Oriental players like pianos that are thinner and more brilliant with sharp sounds produced by strong high-frequency harmonics.

Choosing one of these three types is a matter of taste. They are different, and you should at least have a preference before you invest. Remember that as any piano ages the felt on the hammers will compress and the sound will become brighter.

Rule #6

Know the difference between so called 'hand made' pianos and others. Most smaller makers have never had the funds to fully automate and are actually decades behind. The result is that their pianos cost more because their factory is not automated. In fact, not only are many automated factories turning out lower priced pianos, in addition they produce a lot more consistent product.

Rule #7

Learn about the country and company that made the piano you are considering. Piano making in the past century has shifted from Europe and the U.S to Asia. The piano is a labor intensive item to make with 6,000-7,000 parts.

Japanese wage rates are now higher than the U.S. Korean rates are much lower and the Chinese wage scale is currently incredibly low. Because of this fact there are over 50 start-up factories in China, some of which will, in time, produce fine instruments.

The three top Oriental makers now produce 80% of the world's pianos.

Rule #8

Never test or buy a grand that hasn't been serviced, that is, unless you're just buying a piece of furniture. The same goes for pianos on the internet. You want to hear what might be your best friend for a long time.

If you've read this far, you're way ahead of most buyers, but there are still more items to consider.

Rule #9

Many piano dealers have forever played the mark-up / mark-down game. In other words, they provide an inflated retail price to either allow for what appears to be a big discount or an over-valued trade-in, neither of which is reflective of true value.

The only way to bypass this is to use all the information presented here and compare features, reputations, etc. of both the maker and dealer. Your final price, not a ficti lost price or discount price, is the only basis for comparison.

Rule 10#

Beware of 'Promotional' models. Many large makers offer 3 or 4 different quality levels of grands in the same size, but normally only in the more popular smaller models. The lower priced versions have much lighter plates, thinner rims, thinner ficticeous and fictitious materials rather than solid wood parts. They weigh less, have significantly shorter life expectancy, and may require frequent tunings.

Rule #11

Beware of 'University' sales. These have a certain unethical quality because colleges are seen by the public as making decisions based on quality we as, being strapped for money, they have allowed a dealer and manufacturer to 'loan' them pianos for a year with the promise of holding a sale at the end of the loaner period on the premises of the university, access to the alumni mailing list, and the guarantee of bringing in quantities of pianos not used by the university. Quite often a team of high-pressure sales people are hired for the event to explain about the 'big discounts'.

Remember that Federal Law allows you three days to rescind any purchase not made at a dealer's regular place of business.

Rule #12

If you have a limited budget, decided whether you want a grand for a particular cabinet style and finish or for its sound and playability. Fancy cabinets can cost thousands more, and the choice of the exquisite veneer can add over \$10,000. more to the suggested list price, although we've found the same wood costing \$7,000. more on one brand than another on basically the same sized grand, and both were quality brands.