

The Piano Post

Hoessly Piano Service – 614-537-8596 – hoesslypiano.com

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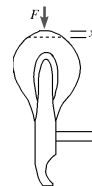
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The Piano Hammer

There are 2 main parts to the overall tone of any piano: the hammer and the soundboard. There are other parts of the piano, and the space that the instrument is in, that contribute, but these are the big 2.



The hammer is made of wool felt glued to a wood molding. According to a 1997 article by Daniel A. Russell of the Science and Mathematics Department at Penn State, “Modern hammers consist of a wooden molding covered with several layers of compressed wool felt, whose hardness is carefully controlled. In order to produce a good tone, the hardness has a gradient so that the outer surface is softer than the inner layers. This gradient may be adjusted using various techniques in a process called voicing.” The hammer has been likened to a spring, the felt needing flexibility. If you’ve ever seen a slo-mo film of a tennis ball hitting the pavement, you’ve seen it hit the ground, flatten out and then spring back to shape pushing the ball back up in the air. If it wasn’t flexible, it would just splat on the ground. A piano hammer is the same. It has to push off the strings, has to have some bounce (which is kept under control by the action mechanism). The hammer felt is under compression and simply put, the more compression and tighter the felt, the harder it is. The harder it is, the brighter the tone. Hard hammers create sharp, pointy sound waves while the softer hammers have a more rounded sound wave.

We can change the tone of the hammer in several ways, with needles, steam, sandpaper, irons; depending on whether we want a brighter tone or a more mellow tone. The choice is dependent on the type of music being played and also the room the the piano is in.

The Pierce Piano Atlas

This is a book that almost every piano technician has. Bob Pierce was a technician who started the atlas in the 1940s with Norman Michel, later taking sole ownership when Michel's health forced his retirement. Bob updated it periodically and after his passing in 1995, his son, Larry Ashley took over. It's main use is to find the age of pianos through their serial numbers. The Pierce Atlas has not just well known makes listed, but many obscure ones. There is often information listed about the company itself, where the pianos were first made, who bought out who, etc. At the end of the lists, there is a section called "Did You Know" plus some great photos. Here are some of those Factoids. I'll share more in the next newsletter:

- Johann Behrent built the first piano in America at Philadelphia in 1775
- Nearly all of Beethoven's compositions were created on pianos built by Nanette Streicher of Vienna.
- Pianos were the 1st meaningful brand names, the 1st status symbols and the 1st major items sold on an installment basis

For the average piano owner, the biggest problem with the tone of their pianos is the wear and compacting of the hammer felt that occurs due to use and the general hardening of the felt as the natural lanolin of the wool dries out over time. The hammer develops grooves, string cuts, where it hits the strings. This also creates a flatter surface and can change the geometry of the system of hammers and levers, eventually affecting the touch as well.



side view of worn & new



top view of new & used

For most of my customers, what seems to make the biggest difference is to use a sandpaper file to remove the top layers of felt in order to restore the original shape of the hammer. This can be done 2-3 times over the hammer's life as the hammer does become slightly smaller each time. A filing/shaping job with some needling can greatly improve and clean up the tone of a piano. It is amazing the difference 1-2 hours can make in the sound of a piano that has nothing to do with tuning!



some different voicing tools

This and That and Important News

1. I am having knee replacement surgery on Feb 22. This means I will be in recovery and not tuning or doing other service for, I've been told, about 8-10 weeks. I'm hoping to be back working by the beginning of May. I will not start scheduling new appointments until I'm a bit more than halfway through that process as I will have a better idea when I can start working again; I don't want to schedule something I'd have to cancel and I certainly don't want to have any setbacks. So, please wait until after Easter to start asking for appointments. If you cannot wait, I certainly understand. I can recommend my colleagues in the Columbus Chapter Piano Technicians Guild. You may find them online at ptgcolumbus.org. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me.

2. Rather than listing individual concerts, I have changed to giving you the links to the venues which will be more up to date.

otterbein.edu/drama music.osu.edu

<https://www.capital.edu/academics/conservatory/>

<https://www.otterbein.edu/music/events/>

<https://columbussymphony.com/events>

<https://promusicacolumbus.org/current-season/>

<http://agocolumbus.org> (Cols. Am. Guild of Organists).

3. I haven't updated my list of teachers in a while. If you are no offering lessons, please let me know

Piano Teachers: In addition to this list, also check out the OMTA at www.ceomta.org.

43004 Blacklick

Katherine Wolfe 614-861-4569

43017-16 Dublin

Amy Laurence 614-764-2775

Rita Lewandowski 630-220-9127

Annette Suhovecky 614-352-3540

43026 Hilliard

Debra Mattera 614-529-1133

Julia Bolton 614-465-7512

43064 Plain City

Laura Phipps 614-733-3770

43147 Pickerington

Laurie Loper 614-856-0826

43065 Powell

Sara Marie Brenner 740-938-9090

Trista Hill 740-363-5544

43081-82 Westerville

Debra Aichele 614-891-5303

Susan Treer 614-316-1019

Marianne Brown 614-898-0900

Amy Girvin 614-899-2711

Encore Music Studio 614-882-6681

43085 Worthington

Janice Cook 614-848-3360

Karen Hittepole 614-888-6736

43123 Grove City

Beth Kloes 513-767-0699

43209 Bexley

Debra Bradshaw 614-846-9386

Music Palette Studio 614-869-0151

Chambers Music Studio 614-525-0254

43212 Grandview

Rick Markle 614-599-9963

43214, 43202 Clintonville

Margaret Atkinson 614-267-1726

Cynthia Mahaney 614-263-9965

43229 Columbus

Debbie VerMeer 614-890-0416

43220, 43221 U.A., Columbus

Cynthia Adams 614-327-1395

Kristin Basore 614-570-0533

Gerry Willke 614-451-8137

Liz Atkinson 614-485-9448

43235 Columbus

Janet Sinzinger 614-846-0869

Theresa Murphy 614-832-0045

Catherine Pellegrini 614-761-8547

Encore Music Studio 614-882-6681

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