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# How to buy a piano

## Tips to remember

- ① Unlike most items, a piano can have a lifespan of 70 to 80 years, so think long term regarding current and future musical needs, furniture you like and the amount of money you're comfortable investing.
- ② Most "old uprights" are over 80 years old and require thousands of dollars work to be useful again. They have discouraged many novice piano players.
- ③ Inexpensive little keyboards can also discourage beginners. These are not to be confused with good digital pianos.
- ④ A piano wisely purchased holds its value well over time, and the best retailers have a buy-back/trade-in guarantee.
- ⑤ There are two broad classes of new pianos available: hand-made and mass-produced. Hand-made pianos have many more hours of skilled human contribution.
- ⑥ Virtually all "entry-level" or most affordable new pianos are made in China or Indonesia, no matter what name is on the front. Many have proven themselves over the years to be very good musical instruments.
- ⑦ Buy your piano at the retailer's premises, not an off-site sale. The selection is best and you can gauge their service capabilities.
- ⑧ Be wary of piano promotions which require an appointment; these are extremely high-pressure events.
- ⑨ A tour of the retailer's premises is a great way to experience the difference between hand-made and mass-produced pianos, how acoustic and digital pianos work and some fascinating piano history.

## The "gift of a lifetime" is more affordable than you might think

Looking for an "entry-level" piano? How about a solid investment in one of the world's great handcrafted grand pianos? Either way, you'll be glad to hear that a piano has a lifespan similar to a human's – it will be young at 10, 20 and 30, middle-aged at 40, 50 and 60 and old at 80 or 90!

"Chances are you'll have a piano for a lifetime, and it's often handed down to subsequent generations," says Robert Lowrey, President of Robert Lowrey's Piano Experts, whose business has seen this happen many times since they sold their first piano in 1974.

"The three most important considerations when buying a piano? Ask yourself: will it satisfy my current and future musical needs, is it furniture I can accept into my home and finally, am I comfortable with the price?"

A piano can also be a very emotional item, he says, but this can be a double-edged sword. Many families, when they discover that new pianos begin in the \$3,000 price range, might acquire an 'inexpensive' old upright – and they usually pay too much. Most are 80 to 100 years old, can't be tuned, require thousands of dollars worth of work, and in their current condition will discourage someone trying to learn music.

However, once properly restored, an old piano can be a wonderful instrument again.

"Pianos represent technology that has not really changed in the last 100 years," says Lowrey. "In fact, the most expensive new pianos are made in the proven, old-fashioned way.

There are two broad classes of pianos today – hand-made and mass-produced. All affordable entry-level pianos are mass-produced. The good news is that there has never been a better time than now to buy an affordable new piano."

Currently, new uprights begin in the \$3,000 to \$4,500 price range while grand pianos range from \$8,000 to \$11,000. Handcrafted new pianos can vary greatly in price. Bösendorfer and Fazioli, for example, produce instruments which are so intensely hand made that they create only 500 and 100 pianos a year respectively. These high-end manufacturers (mostly North America, Japanese and

European) add value by using the best materials and increasing skilled human involvement. However, they simply cannot compete in price with the entry-level pianos from China and Indonesia, so they can cost a little more to a lot more, depending on the extent of skilled human contribution.

"Virtually every inexpensive new piano is from China or Indonesia no matter what name is on it," says Lowrey. "Famous piano names do endure, but they can be made in different countries from one year to the next, so it's the responsibility of your salesperson to tell you where the piano was made."

Pianos are unlike most new purchases – every manufacturer recommends pre-servicing by its dealer before delivery. Make certain this is done.

Your manufacturer's warranty may also be honoured by the retailer, so it's always best to buy your piano at the retailer's premises, where you can

inspect their facilities and gauge their ability to service your instrument.

This might seem obvious, but many pianos are purchased at "off-site" sales at convention centers, recreation halls, etc. – not a good indicator for pre-service or after-servicing.

"A piano is usually the most expensive thing a family buys after a house and a car, and you should be able to select from a wide variety of instruments from every price range in a relaxed and educational

environment," Lowrey says. In fact, he attributes the success of his 31-year business to maintaining this type of environment in his store – in addition to the expertise of his salespeople and the fact that he handles virtually every aspect of service including tuning, refinishing and even moving. Lowrey also has a 70% buy-back/trade-in guarantee for 3 years on all acoustic pianos under \$6,000 (some conditions apply).

"Learning what constitutes an entry-level and a more expensive piano will help you feel comfortable, whatever you purchase," he adds.

Finally, there are digital pianos. These have many advantages – their compact size and the privacy of headphones make them perfect for condominiums. In addition they don't mind the heat, humidity or cold so they're great for cottages. Add to these features no tuning computer compatibility and enhanced educational capabilities, and a good digital piano may be right for you.

"We also conduct Workshop Tours for schools," he says. "Classic pianos in every stage of restoration includes demos of digital piano capabilities and the latest technology in self-playing pianos."

