

John: Please feel free to add any other letters, or go back to the first letter in this thread. Fix it up however you like.

PIANO WITHOUT A PLAYER ACTION IS MORE VALUABLE

While this innane thread is occurring in the MMD, I thought it was germane enough to comment on, although anyone who is in the business should know differently.

See:

From: guaruba@cfl.rr.com.geentroep (Don Winter)

To: [<rolls@foxtail.com>](mailto:rolls@foxtail.com)

Date: Sat, 28 Sep 2002 09:14:32 -0400

Subject: Piano Without a Player Action Is More Valuable

Don Teach: I also have a similar dilemma. I personally did a "cost is no object" restoration on my Knabe and it is now 13 years old. Offered at \$3500, playing okay-ish, there are no takers. I also have around 1000 ragtime rolls, and a little investigation demonstrates that the bottom has fallen out of the reproducing piano as well as the player piano market.

Interesting comment, that! A "cost is no object," restoration, and the piano itself, without the player, is worth more? Frankly, the piano alone, fully restored, should be worth well over double what he asked for it. I would say, "Triple," even in this present market. Can you imagine in your mind's eye an ordinary baby grand piano that looks and sounds brand new, sitting on a showroom floor with a price tag of only \$3500, while its brand new size-wise counterparts start at \$18,000-\$25,000? \$3500 is less than some used spinets sell for! And in addition, out comes a drawer and it's an Ampico reproducer. Not even noticeable until called for. But in Don's comment is also the reason why the piano is selling for the same price that an unrestored Knabe grand would sell for.

How can we know more about Don's "Cost is no object" restoration? Let Don himself tell us. "...my Knabe and it is now 13 years old. Offered at \$3500, playing okay-ish, there are no takers." Now of course, we cannot know anything more about his store or his selling practices. Also we cannot know what his store emphasizes selling in player inventory. I'd guess that since his store sells the Yamaha Disklavier players, and since a great deal of inventory dollars is tied up in these, his emphasis would likely be to use the Knabe to compare them to, rather than to push pneumatic players (of which he'd have to restore each one), over his Yamahas. However, there is no way to know that for sure. His statement, from my experience, does not begin to ring true.

I have been restoring reproducing grand pianos for 37 years. I have owned an Ampico reproducer for over 21 years now, restored in 1981. I have yet to hear about any pneumatic player I have ever restored that was only playing “ok” in only 13 years’ time, unless something very simple was wrong. 13 years to a pneumatic player piano is equivalent to a human’s first 20 years of life. Were you about half gone by your 20th birthday and yet in normally good health for those years?

There is no such thing as “ok-ish” in reproducer-dom. Either it plays realistically, with full expression, or it doesn’t. “Cost-is-no-object” restorations are also meaningless. And when it doesn’t play realistically, it needs to be fully restored. Here’s why:

A pneumatic reproducer traditionally depends on cloth, leather, and rubber hose for its quality of performance, plus the way in which these 3 soft materials have been chosen and adjusted. However, their adjustment is fixed and cannot change with playing, so the only thing that can happen to “all new materials” is, they either wear out, or they finish rotting out.

In only 13 years’ time, this Knabe was only playing “ok,” compared to the inferred “perfect reproducing” when it was just completed. What is wrong with this picture? Possibly, Don’s customers knew. Don knew it because Don told the story. Quality new materials do not even start to wear noticeably even under daily heavy use in only 13 years, in my experience. I’m sure however that certain new materials purchased today would not last even that long, and cost-wise, are the most expensive you can buy. Cost itself means nothing, as far as quality restoration materials are concerned. The right suppliers and continual testing of those materials do mean something.

I have nothing further to add and certainly no personal criticism, since Don, who owns a piano store in Shreveport told the story himself, and wanted us to know about it. Thanks, Don.

Craig Brougher

From an economic standpoint I can justify doing the same thing and splitting the things apart to sell, but the mechanical morality tells me to not split up such a nice Ampico piano. I haven't decided yet.

As a collector and rehabber of endangered birds, I have anguished for years the difference between preserving a specific rare bird versus a specific common bird and have come to the conclusion that preservation

(animate or inanimate) as a generality is almost a waste of time because you are fighting human nature, but an individual's relationship to a specific animal or piano is a completely different issue.

99.9% of everything that _ever_ existed is extinct, so saving that piano for a non-existent person should not be an issue to you.

Don Winter