

the Australian Piano Buyers' *guide*



Sixth Edition

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PREFACE

Welcome to the sixth edition of the Australian Piano Buyers' Guide.

If you, or someone in your family are learning piano or thinking about learning, then this book is for you.

Selecting the piano that is 'just right for you' can be a challenging experience. Currently more than 30 different piano brands are available in Australia, each brand offering a range of models and styles. Many of the major brands also manufacture their pianos in a number of different countries around the world. In addition, there are thousands of used pianos being brought into Australia from Japan. So how do you choose the right piano?

I have not attempted to directly compare specific brands and models for the following reasons:

1. I do not think that it is possible to provide adequate comparison given the huge range and variety of pianos that are available on the Australian market.
2. I have been selling Alex. Steinbach pianos for the past 20 years, and other pianos distributed by Pianos First. This means that any comparison on my part would inevitably be biased.

What I have endeavored to provide, is a guide as to the type of piano that would most likely suit your needs. While I have used the pianos supplied by Pianos First as examples, most piano retailers would be able to match other piano brands and models to your needs.

I have also included information that is important and relevant after you have made the decision to invest in a piano. This includes information from 'How to care for your piano' to 'Career opportunities in music.'

Since the last edition we have been overwhelmed by the positive and constructive comments we have received on the Guide. Many of the suggestions have been incorporated into this edition.

Happy reading,

Sam Kwon

Sam Kwon
MANAGING DIRECTOR
Pianos First (Aust) Pty Ltd



CHAPTER ONE

PIANO BASICS

The piano is the most popular instrument in the world for anyone to start learning music. This is because the piano is one of very few instruments widely accepted in all styles of music. You can hear pianos playing concertos with orchestras, improvising in jazz clubs, accompanying folk and country singers, as well as being played by contemporary music artists.

The piano is also the perfect instrument for writing compositions as it can play many notes simultaneously. Most other instruments only play a single note at a time which means it is difficult to hear harmonies for a number of people to play. Many famous composers and song writers have created successful careers on the piano like Mozart, Gershwin, Rogers & Hammerstein, Billy Joel and Harry Connick Jr. just to name a few.

The piano is an excellent instrument on which to start learning and continue to play all types of music throughout the various stages of your life. However it is up to you to decide which instrument suits your personality and will help you achieve your future goals. No one should be forced to play an instrument. Music should be fun, enjoyable and an avenue for expression and creativity.

Keyboard, digital or acoustic?

If you're thinking about purchasing a piano, you need to consider whether a keyboard, a digital or an acoustic piano is the right instrument for you. This section will explain the differences between keyboards, digital and acoustic pianos to help make your decision easier.

KEYBOARDS

A keyboard is generally small (about sixty-one keys or four to five octaves), portable, electronic and plugs into a power source or runs on batteries. It has various sounds and rhythms and many have MIDI/USB connections that enable them to be plugged into computers and the internet. The keys are also smaller and easier to press than an acoustic or digital piano, which is why keyboards make suitable gifts for young children.



A keyboard is a fun instrument for a few years when children are younger but it is not really suitable for learning piano. The keys feel different, there are less notes and the sound is different making it difficult for the learner to really consolidate what their teacher is telling them to do at home. A digital or acoustic piano would be a better option.

DIGITAL PIANOS

Digital pianos are similar to keyboards but they are longer, usually the same length as a traditional acoustic piano (about eighty-eight notes or seven to eight octaves). Digital pianos generate better sound than keyboards because they have large built-in speakers however this makes them heavier and hence most are non-portable. The other major difference is that digital pianos usually have keys that feel heavier to touch, similar to a traditional acoustic piano. The term used by manufacturers is 'weighted keys'. You may also hear the terms 'graded-hammer action' or 'hammered keys'. This refers to an attempt to make digital pianos feel even more like a traditional piano by grading the keyboard from left to right (bass to treble). The bass notes in the left are generally harder to press than the treble notes on the right on a traditional acoustic piano. Graded-hammer action tries to replicate this feature.

The new technology in digital pianos has an incredibly realistic piano sound plus hundreds of band and orchestral voices. There are also a host of rhythms and easy play features that enable the player to create anything from a big brass band to funky rock. These pianos are ideal for people who want to have fun, compose or record music or develop a long term hobby or passion in music. In addition, digital pianos are also available in a magnificent grand piano cabinet which can look spectacular in a home setting.

Many of the digital pianos today may be used in examinations up to a certain level – usually Grade 4. They also have the benefit of being less expensive than acoustic pianos; they can be used with headphones to avoid disturbing other people; they never need tuning; very seldom need maintenance and are more easily moved than an acoustic piano.

There are, however, some disadvantages with digital pianos. As with all electronic products, the technology is being constantly improved. The technology in most digital pianos is usually outdated within two or three years, which decreases the resale value.

In addition, the touch is different to an acoustic piano – even in those digital pianos that claim to reproduce the 'hammered action' feel of an acoustic piano.

Another issue with digital pianos relates to their use by children. If a child is going to seriously develop as a pianist then they will need to transition to an acoustic piano.

This means that it is usually less expensive to start with a suitable acoustic piano than trade-up to an acoustic piano at a later time.



UPRIGHT VERSUS GRAND PIANOS

Acoustic pianos were invented around 1700 therefore have been in existence for over three hundred years. The word 'acoustic' was added to the word 'piano' quite recently because there needed to be a distinction between the different types of pianos. 'Digital' pianos digitally master sounds via computers. Conversely, the sound in acoustic pianos is generated acoustically. That is, by strings sitting inside the piano that are hit by hammers when the keys are pressed. The sound waves created by these vibrating strings travel to the back of the piano and hit a large piece of wood called the 'soundboard', which is the acoustic piano's version of an amplifier. The sound is distributed evenly by the soundboard and emanates through the cabinet, or in the case of grand pianos, through the open lid.

The grand piano is the earliest piano shape. It is regarded as the prestige instrument because of its superior sound and definite advantages over other pianos in construction and design. According to the Oxford Companion to Music (Scholes, Percy A. 1991 Oxford University Press, Bath), the soundboard of a grand piano generates better sound because it is not placed up against a brick-wall, but horizontal to the floor with some distance between the floor and the piano. The dampers also fall by gravity and not by spring and are therefore more efficient. An upright piano is basically a grand piano standing up vertically! An upright piano is the most popular piano in homes because it uses less space.

In summary an acoustic or a digital piano could be the perfect piano for you. It really depends on who will be playing it the most and the main purpose in having the piano.



HOW TO TELL IF A PIANO IS WELL MADE

When purchasing a piano it is very important to consider its internal construction. A piano has around 220 strings that, when stretched, exert a huge force of up to 20 tonnes (approximately 20,000 kgs) of pressure on the piano! So pianos need to be very sturdy to withstand the intense pressure. The following paragraphs will help explain some of the more common terms and phrases you will hear when describing how a piano is made.

FRAME → A heavy frame is needed to resist the strings' tension and prevent warping. It should be made of cast-iron for this purpose. The backposts (explained below) and the frame are like the backbone of the piano. The strength of the back and frame will directly affect the tuning stability of the piano.

BACKPOSTS → At the back of an upright piano there should be between three to six thick backposts which give the instrument extra strength. Check not only the number of the backposts, but more importantly the width and depth of the wood. Some cheaper pianos are made without backposts. Solid spruce is one of the best types of wood for backposts because it has a high strength to weight ratio and resists splitting or cracking after it is seasoned.

SOUNDBOARD → The soundboard is a thin piece of wood that reflects the sound made by the strings. The sound vibrations need to pass through the whole soundboard quickly without being inhibited, so only the highest grade wood with a straight, fine grain is used. Again spruce is the most common wood for piano soundboards. It is also used in violins and guitars because of its effective sound generation properties.

Did you know?

Spruce from countries with colder climates is better because the trees grow very slowly and have finer grains (lines) in the wood. Finer grains reduce impurities and make it easier for sound waves to travel through the wood. For example, soundboard spruce for Alex Steinbach pianos is sourced from the mountainous areas of Germany and Italy, Quebec or Alaska.

Many piano enthusiasts promote the sound qualities of a 'solid spruce' soundboard, referring to just one thickness of spruce. However this type of soundboard is susceptible to cracking and splitting in climates with extreme temperatures or humidity changes. Even the highest quality solid spruce soundboards may crack over time and in certain locations.

The climate problem was solved by some piano manufacturers with the design of a solid spruce + veneer soundboard. This is where the centre of the soundboard is made of solid spruce and then a thin veneer of real spruce (generally 0.5mm) is added across the grain to each side providing strength, durability and retaining the sound projection qualities of the traditional soundboard. This is sometimes incorrectly referred to as a 'laminated soundboard' as some cheaper pianos laminate their soundboards with a polyester material. Polyester reduces the sound resonance so it is best to avoid this type of soundboard. Please check what the salesperson means if they use the terminology 'laminated soundboard' to ensure you are actually purchasing a solid spruce + veneer soundboard, not a laminated one.

If you have any concerns about soundboards, the true test is to listen to the sound. Compare a few pianos next to each other with different types of soundboards and select one that sounds good to you. If you are happy with the sound that the piano makes, then you have no need to be concerned about the construction of the soundboard. If you decide to purchase a one-thickness, solid spruce soundboard and it cracks, it may not affect the piano too much depending on the location and extent of the crack. It should not be the end of the piano unless there is extensive cracking. Conversely, if you are delighted with the sound of a piano with a solid spruce + veneer soundboard then there is no need to worry because not only will it have good sound, you will reap benefits of durability well into the future.

RIBS → The soundboard needs to support the pressure of the strings (called down-bearing) and it also needs to be free to vibrate to a certain extent so that the sound waves travel through the wood and are amplified. For this reason the soundboard is actually arched in the middle and kept under tension by the assistance of ribs which you can see at the back of an upright, or underneath a grand piano. The ribs should be tapered at both edges to match the shape of the soundboard, thus providing greater support in the centre (called the crown) where the soundboard is under greater curvature and pressure.

BRIDGE → Bridges are long pieces of wood running along the soundboard, over which the strings run. When the strings vibrate, the soundwaves travel through the bridge into the soundboard. Hence the bridge plays an important part in sound amplification. It should be made of rock maple and planed to conform to the shape of the soundboard which ensures the right down-bearing (pressure) of the strings on the bridge. Bridges should be notched for each note, right along both sides so that the strings have an exact finishing point. Notching also reduces the mass of the bridge which allows it to vibrate more freely.



The bass bridge should be cantilevered which means that the bass bridge uses longer strings and directs vibrations nearer to the centre of the soundboard, producing increased depth for the lower tones.

TUNING PINS AND PINBLOCK → The pinblock is designed to hold the tuning pins tightly enough so that the strings hold their tension and the piano stays in tune. The quality of the wood and the drying process is the most important thing in ensuring pinblock effectiveness. The pinblock should be made of several plies of hard rock maple, quarter sawn for strength and placed cross-grain to each other. Some people will tell you that the number of plies of wood in a pinblock does not make any difference to sound quality (the number of plies ranges from five to forty-one!). However the number of highly compressed veneers or plies does ensure that the pinblock is dense and less likely to be affected by moisture in any climate. This is very important to consider because if the pinblock expands and contracts in humid climates and cracks then it is very expensive and difficult (if not impossible) to repair or replace.



To prevent rust, tuning pins should be nickel plated and treated with 'blued steel' which is an electronic method that helps prevent moisture problems and means they hold better in the wood.



ACTIONS → The action is the group of parts that work together to hit the strings when a key is pressed. Pianos actions are normally made of wood but new materials are slowly being introduced which overcome issues such as the effect of humidity on these delicate parts.

In the future we are likely to see more pianos with actions made from composite materials.

HAMMERS → The hammer is part of the action. The hammer hits the strings and starts the sound ringing. If you look inside the piano, the hammers should all be evenly spaced and all in line. The quality of the felt used in the hammers is very important. It has to be dense enough to prevent the strings from cutting into it but not too hard so that the tone is compromised. Top grade hammers should have two layers of wool felt.

The outer layer called the 'hammer felt' is usually white and the inside layer called 'underfelt' is either red, green or purple. The felt is generally attached to hard rock maple wood through a process of applying extreme pressure to the felt. The underfelt should provide an amount of compression outwards to keep the hammer in shape and to ensure it rebounds when it hits the strings. The outer layers should be applied with higher tension to give the hammer balanced hardness to ensure durability through repeated use.

STRINGS → The bass strings should have pure copper wound around the strings, not plated, to produce the best tone.

The strings should be spaced evenly and not touching other strings. When you press a key, check the damper alignment and whether or not the hammers hit all the strings of all notes. The most well-known manufacturer of piano strings is Roslau in Germany.



AGRAFFE → Almost all grand pianos and some top level upright pianos have agraffes screwed into the plate through which the bass strings and low treble strings pass. They are designed to keep the strings perfectly spaced and assist in providing a good speaking length (vibrating part) of the string.

PEDALS AND TRAPWORK → Most pianos have three pedals. The one that receives the most use is the right pedal called a sustain or damper pedal which sustains or lengthens the note.

The middle pedal is usually called a muffler pedal in upright pianos. Pressing this pedal causes a piece of felt to drop and muffle the sound of the strings making it softer. This pedal sometimes has a slot to the side that holds the pedal down by itself which means it can be used as a practice pedal. In top upright pianos and grand pianos the middle pedal is called a sostenuto pedal. This means that the pianist can sustain many notes as long as the pedal is held.

The third pedal on the left is the soft pedal or *una corda* which, in an upright piano, moves the action forward and limits the distance that the hammers travel. On a grand piano it moves the action to the right which means the hammers strike fewer strings, allowing the pianist to play softer.

Before purchasing it is important to check that all the pedal functions work correctly and there are no squeaking or buzzing sounds after the pedals and keys are pressed together. Any concerns should be mentioned to the store salespeople because the piano may just require simple adjustment by a qualified tuner/technician to make the pedal fully operational.

WHAT ARE TRANSITION POINTS?

There are two points on a piano where there are distinct changes between the lower and upper strings called 'transition points'. If the transition points are too obvious it can make a piano sound jerky (like gear changes in a car). As you move from the bass strings to the low treble section, the structure of the piano changes. The lower treble strings are stretched across a separate piece of wood (called the bridge), they are not wound on like the bass strings, and there are three strings for each note instead of two. Play each white key of the piano from left to right – if you can hear the sound quality change at a transition point on the scale then this is not a well constructed piano.

The most important design feature of the piano is called its 'scale design'. This refers to many aspects that result in the production of sound. The dimension of the strings, the string tension, speaking length (area of vibration), hammer and damper connection points, bridge placement, soundboard construction etc. The quality of the scale design will provide the biggest influence on the smoothness of the transition points.

What is the German Imperial Scale?

Alex Steinbach pianos come with a German Imperial Scale design which is a unique relationship between all sound-related elements in the piano. Their interrelatedness was designed by a piano master technician from Germany, Mr Klaus Fenner. The German Imperial Scale creates the warm, multi-dimensional sound associated with Alex Steinbach pianos due to the use of the largest possible soundboard with the longest possible bass strings.

CHILD PROOF SAFETY DESIGN

Some pianos provide child proof soft-close lids, also called slow-fall or slow fallboard. This is a feature on some of the higher level piano models that stops the keyboard lid from slamming onto fingers. It operates through a hydraulic mechanism that exerts pressure against the lid when it starts to fall. Hence the name soft-close or slow-fall. There are various types of soft-close mechanisms on the market. Some have very heavy resistance and cannot be pulled down manually at all, whereas others have medium resistance and are more controllable by hand. Ask your piano store for a demonstration and choose one that suits you.



The Grand Piano

In 1709, the “pianoforte” was first revealed as the invention of an Italian harpsichord maker named Bartolomeo Cristofori. Cristofori based his new design on the wooden frame of a harpsichord and implemented a unique keyboarding mechanism that was similar to that of a clavichord. Since its inception, the instrument we know today as the grand piano has had many innovators who have shaped its functionality, appearance and sound. Around 1780, the upright piano was created by Johann Schmidt of Salzburg, Austria and later improved in 1802 by Thomas Loud of London whose upright piano had strings that ran diagonally.

- 1 Cast Iron Frame
- 2 Bass Bridge
- 3 Treble Bridge
- 4 Soundboard
- 5 Piano Case
- 6 Back Frame
- 7 Hammers
- 8 Piano Action
- 9 Keyboard
- 10 Pedals
- 11 Castors



CHAPTER THREE

HOW TO BUY THE RIGHT PIANO

This chapter will give you detailed information on what to consider when you are buying an acoustic piano. We encourage you to take this book into the piano store, or write down some questions from this section so you don't forget important details as you select your piano.

WHERE WAS IT MADE & WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

Acoustic pianos are generally very multicultural. They may have a stamp or label stating 'Made in Japan', 'Made in Korea', 'Made in Indonesia' or 'Made in China' but you will find that many of the parts have been sourced from around the globe and just assembled in those countries. You may hear some incorrect statements that Korean or Indonesian instruments are not as good as Japanese, but this is not the case. Actually, some well-known brands of pianos that you would assume were made in Japan are also made in Indonesia to reduce cost, with no loss to quality. Country of origin should not be a concern if the manufacturer and importer has quality control measures in place.

SHOULD WE BUY A WELL-KNOWN BRAND OR A NEW BRAND?

Many teachers will recommend brands to you that they knew perhaps ten or twenty years ago. These brands are regarded as being safe and many people use them, so the brand is seen everywhere. However there are many up and coming, similarly reliable piano brands on the market that provide customers with a variety of choice and unique attributes.

The best suggestion is to go to a store that stocks various brands and test-drive similar sized pianos next to each other. You will see that there is very little difference between brand names. You just need to choose a piano that sounds the best to you.

Does colour affect performance?

No, not at all. Some people think that all pianos should be black (similar to the misguided thought process that red cars go faster!). Piano cabinets are produced in many colours; ebony (black), ivory, white, mahogany, walnut polish, Ferrari red and more. Do not listen to people who tell you that black is better. Choose the colour to suit your home décor and your own personality.

WHY ARE SOME PIANOS MORE EXPENSIVE THAN OTHERS?

There are two reasons. Firstly, the size of pianos affects the price. The reason for this is that taller uprights and longer grands have longer strings inside the piano. This means there is a greater area for vibration, thus producing richer sound. Hence the taller uprights (or longer grand pianos) are more expensive.

The height of upright pianos starts at around 108cm and often increases gradually up to a professional level of 131cm. The 131cm upright piano will obviously be more expensive and should display better sound than the 108cm upright which is cheaper. Likewise the lower priced grand pianos start around 140cm in length (or 4 ft) and increase in price as the dimensions increase to 275cm (9 ft) and above, which are concert grands and very expensive!

Naturally, the concert grand piano is going to sound much better than the 140cm baby grand. Therefore, when you are looking at a certain range of pianos, the more expensive models are generally better pianos and a better investment in the long-term. However, the second answer to the question is that there are various companies that produce pianos and each brand has a different price. Do not feel you have to buy the most expensive brand of piano to get the best quality. There are many brands of pianos now on the market that offer good quality pianos at an affordable price.

WHAT IS A GOOD MODEL FOR A BEGINNER?

A good starter model is a 110cm upright piano. It is like a small hatchback car that is great for learning how to drive. A 110cm piano, like a hatchback, will function for as long as you need it and will be perfectly suitable to continue playing and practicing on for many years. However in the future you may wish to upgrade to a larger model with better sound. So before you purchase, please think about how many years you will be happy with a 110cm and whether or not it may be better to invest in a larger model initially.

MATCHING PEOPLE TO PIANOS

The best piano is the one that best matches the needs of the person who is going to be playing the piano. The following are some examples:

1. Children who are just beginning. If children are the only people who will be playing the piano, then one of the many entry level pianos in the 108-115cm height range should be suitable. These are in the budget price range.
2. Children as above, but also including adult beginners. In this case, a 121cm or higher piano is really needed. This piano is ideal for both adults and children and is suitable for students who intend to study higher levels of exams, or enter piano competitions.

3. Teenagers or Adults who can play well. A piano 121cm in height would be the minimum standard, and 131cm would be ideal. A good grand piano (150cm/5ft and above) would be another option. The quality of sound in these larger pianos make them an absolute delight to play.
4. Adults who may have played in the past and would like a piano to play just for enjoyment, or people who would like a piano to ornament their house. Any piano is suitable. However we find that the most popular pianos in this segment are baby grand pianos (140cm/4ft). The baby grand is a beautiful furniture piece that also makes a stylish focal point when entertaining. Some baby grand pianos come with optional player systems, such as PianoDisc. The keys move automatically and the piano can be linked to surround sound systems.
5. Schools and Teaching Studios. Schools and public institutions need a piano that is especially rugged. Look for a piano with a very strong cabinet, double rubber castors so it can be moved from room to room, and locks on the fallboard and the top door to prevent unsolicited damage or tapering.
6. Bachelor, Licentiate or Diploma level students, Professional Musicians and Music Teachers. A 185cm (6ft) grand piano or above would meet the needs of most people at this level extremely well. As this may not be practical in smaller environments, a 131cm upright piano would be an excellent alternative. These upright pianos are in fact very close to the tone quality of a small grand piano.
7. Stage Performance. This is where a concert grand piano 225-275cm (7ft - 9ft) is essential.



Unfortunately if you do not like the style or the colour you have chosen you will find it difficult to return or exchange most brands of pianos. Obviously the Trade Practices Act protects the consumer to a certain extent and allows for any faulty goods to be returned, but it does not specify that goods can be returned or exchanged if you don't like the look of it! Please make your selection carefully and check with each individual store regarding their exchange policies if you are unsure.

TO BUY OR NOT TO BUY?

Renting is an option that may suit you and your family. You can rent an acoustic upright piano for under \$100 per month, an acoustic grand piano for under \$200 per month and a digital piano for around \$55 per month. Delivery and tuning (for acoustic pianos) is normally additional.

THE ADVANTAGES OF RENTING ARE:

- ✓ You can see how the piano looks and sounds in your home.
- ✓ Low financial risk (short-term) because if the piano student in your family decides to stop learning then you are not left with a piano to sell.
- ✓ if you are planning to move interstate or overseas in the near future it can be more economical and safer than shipping the piano a long distance.
- ✓ a simple solution for concerts and events where there is no grand piano on-site.

THE DISADVANTAGES OF RENTING ARE:

- ✗ the pianos are not new and may have been used by many people before you, so their condition is not guaranteed.
- ✗ generally you cannot choose the colour, size, brand or model so the piano may not suit your home or musical requirements, this means it may not be an ideal test method.
- ✗ the money paid in rent is dead money. If you decide to purchase you may be offered some of the money off the purchase price. However generally, renting a piano is like renting a car or renting a house. The money you pay in rent will not pay off the piano.

PURCHASE OPTIONS

The purchase of a piano involves a significant capital outlay. Apart from using cash, there are many other ways that this outlay can be financed. The following examples are based around a 121cm upright piano with a price of \$6,995.

PERSONAL LOAN

Many home owners use the equity in their home to source low-interest personal loans. In many instances the interest on these loans is as low as 8%. If a personal loan was taken out for the piano, and repaid over three years, the interest cost in this case would be approximately \$840.

CREDIT CARD

Interest charges on credit cards vary – however at this time the average seems to be around 15%. If the full amount of the purchase was put on a credit card and then repaid in equal amounts over three years the additional interest charges would be approximately \$1,574.

GENERAL FINANCE

Some music stores offer general finance, usually through the world's largest finance company, GE. The promotional line usually states 'no payments' for six, twelve or even twenty four months. Charges and costs however are applied, and if the full amount is not paid on the due date an interest rate exceeding 25% is applied.

THE NEW RENTAL OPTION USING ONLY BRAND NEW PIANOS

**There is a new way to have you playing the piano of your dreams.
It is called Alex. Steinbach Rental.**

It is as simple as filling out the online application form on the Alex. Steinbach website. Firstly go to www.alexsteinbach.com.au, choose the piano of your choice, click on "more information" then "Rent Now" and follow the instructions. After making the first payment, and the delivery fee, a beautiful new piano could be on the way to your home.

If you fall in love with the piano, and we are sure you will, then you can apply to purchase the piano at any time. The amount you will need to pay decreases each month. If you go to the piano of your choice, click on "more information", and then scroll down to, and click on "Apply to Purchase Prices", you will see the purchase price over a three year period.

Below is an example for the Alex. Steinbach Romance piano.

At 1 month pay no more than \$5247
At 6 months pay no more than \$4867
At 18 months pay no more than \$3497
At 24 months pay no more than \$2570
At 36 months and afterwards pay no more than \$233

While we are sure you will fall in love with the piano, we also know that the unexpected can sometimes happen in our lives. The added benefit with this rental contract is that you can apply to terminate the rental any time after the first twelve months.

The rental component is provided by the Polygon Group, Australia's largest rental provider of musical instruments. For more complete details on this rental option, and to see Frequently Asked Questions, go to www.pianos1st.com.au/piano-rental/

NEW OR SECONDHAND?

Many people look for secondhand pianos in the newspaper or receive offers from family and friends. If you are smart about it you may be able to find a good quality piano and secure a bargain. However it is very important to do your research beforehand and be aware of the pitfalls.

BUYING SECONDHAND

Firstly, determine your reasons for buying a piano before you start your search and think about what you hope to achieve over the next five to ten years. It is easy to think ‘Wow, what a bargain!’ when you see a twenty year old, well-known brand in the newspaper, internet or in secondhand piano stores. Please keep in mind that a twenty year old secondhand piano, even with a good brand name, will really only be suitable for casual playing or a furniture piece in the home. If your main reason for purchasing a piano is so your children can learn piano, or if you wish to study for piano exams or performance, a twenty year old piano may not be the best choice.



ALL PIANOS DETERIORATE

Pianos deteriorate and age over time therefore a 20-50 year old piano will need much more work than a new one. The strings in a piano are stretched across the soundboard which is held in a continuously curved state. This tension creates literally 20 tons, approximately 20,000 kilograms of stress on the internal parts of the piano. In time this takes its toll on the soundboard, bridge and pinblock, ageing a piano far more quickly than other strung instruments, like violins or guitars. Another difference, when you play the strings of a violin or guitar, nothing exists between your fingers and the strings. However when you play a piano you express yourself through a very complicated machine, which like any machine wears out with use.

Consequently, after a certain amount of time, usually ten or fifteen years (twenty years at the most subject to the quality of the piano and the level of owner care), all pianos start to lose their ability to project sound. The piano will be less responsive and the tone will not be as clear or consistent across the range. It is important to train children's aural (hearing) and musical interpretation skills well from an early age. Therefore, if you intend to purchase a piano for your children's education and development, a good, new piano from the start will ensure your children learn and develop the correct skills and techniques early and maximize their learning potential.



HIDDEN COSTS

Many people ask to see secondhand pianos believing they will save money but often miss the potential down side. Unlike a secondhand car that has an odometer to let you know how many kilometres it has travelled, there is unfortunately no such indication on pianos about their usage history. You may be lucky and find a piano that has been well looked after but you might also come across one utilized by hundreds of piano students!

If cost is the main reason for purchasing secondhand, remember there are a number of payment or rental options, making brand new pianos possible for most families to afford. Ask your local piano store for information on interest free monthly payment plans or rent-to-buy programs for new pianos. A number of stores across Australia offer Pianos First's Interest Free Purchase Plan. Visit www.pianos1st.com.au for details of store locations and prices.

It is also important to check how many years of warranty a piano carries. Many are only ten years from the date of purchase and only for the original purchaser. In addition, pianos imported from other countries and resold here do not have warranties that are recognised by piano companies in Australia. This is important to consider if you need to obtain parts and service at a later stage.

IMPORTANT STEPS TO FOLLOW WHEN PURCHASING SECONDHAND

If you have determined your buying purpose and decided to purchase secondhand, wherever possible purchase through a reputable piano store with technicians who will ensure you receive a piano in good condition. If you decide to purchase privately, please exercise extreme caution. There are many people selling who are not experts in pianos. Rather than resulting in the savings you think you will make, purchasing privately and especially over the internet sight-unseen, is extremely risky and may result in huge financial losses or additional costs later. However there are a few steps you can take to reduce the risk.

We cannot stress enough the importance of having a qualified piano tuner/technician inspect and assess any privately advertised secondhand piano before purchasing. Very few people would purchase a secondhand car without asking a mechanic to check under the bonnet. In the same way, a piano tuner/technician should be asked to view a secondhand piano internally prior to purchase. Also beware of any piano that is priced too low or pianos over fifteen years of age described as being in 'excellent' or 'perfect' condition. If a car made in the 1980s was advertised at a very low price you would suspect that the car needed a lot of work. In the same way, older pianos and any acoustic piano advertised under \$1000 should be regarded with extreme caution. A low price should set alarm bells ringing and warn you that the parts inside will most likely need rebuilding and the piano will require extensive servicing before it will be able to hold its tune again. You will need to add on another \$1000-\$2000 to the purchase price to bring the piano up to a suitable condition on which to learn piano properly.

TUNING HISTORY

In addition to considering the age of the piano; suspicious pricing and potential repair and restoration costs; please check that the seller has tuned the piano regularly. It is amazing the number of people who sell secondhand pianos and assume their piano is worth a certain amount of money because the outside looks in 'excellent condition'. In actual fact the inside of the instrument determines its real value. Ask to see the owner's maintenance records and if they do not have any (which is quite common), definitely ask for a tuner/technician to come and see the piano. They may charge \$100-\$150 for the call out but it may save you thousands.

For example one gentleman rang us upset because he purchased a cheap, secondhand piano privately thinking it was a real bargain, but his piano tuner could not make it stay in tune. Eventually he called a piano technician who looked beyond just the strings and discovered there was a crack in the pinblock. This is irreparable. So the poor man lost money on the piano, had to pay to have it removed and taken to the tip and also bought a new piano. If he had invested \$150-\$200 in a qualified tuner/technician appraisal initially, it would have saved him much time, heartache and money.

If you do have access to maintenance records, check the frequency of tuning and determine if a regulation service has been performed. Pianos should be tuned regularly, once or twice a year to keep them in good condition. Small regulation adjustments can be done during tuning but a full regulation service is also advised every five years. When you first ring to enquire about a private piano sale, ask the seller when it was last tuned. If they say it hasn't been tuned for many years but it doesn't need it because it's still in tune due to it being such a good quality piano brand, do not believe them! All pianos go out of tune, regardless of the brand. It is especially difficult to bring them back into tune if they have not been tuned each year.

Also, do not trust your own hearing. The average human ear will not notice a piano out of tune because it happens so gradually. This is because often all the notes across the piano's keyboard will uniformly go out of tune. Only a qualified tuner/technician will be able to identify if a piano is out of tune by checking the frequency of the notes (the A note is used as a base and usually set to 440 Hertz). If you decide to purchase a secondhand piano that has not been tuned for many years, remember to factor in to your costs quite a number of tunings before the piano will hold its tune again. This may work out to be quite an expensive exercise.

FIND AN ACCREDITED TUNER NEAR YOU:

Australian Piano Tuners & Technicians Association: www.appta.org.au

Piano Tuners & Technicians Guild of Victoria: www.pianotuners.asn.au

Alex Steinbach Preferred Piano Tuners/Technicians: www.pianos1st.com.au

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR NEW PIANO

A new piano is a significant investment for most families and an instrument you will want to treat with care. Where to position your piano, what maintenance is required and how to maintain your warranty are all important factors in caring for your piano.

WHAT YOU SHOULD EXPECT FROM THE WARRANTY

Piano manufacturers offer different warranties. Ask your piano salesperson whether you will receive five, ten, fifteen years or a lifetime warranty. Warranties may or may not be transferable if you decide to sell the piano, so please check before you purchase. Similar to other product warranties in the retail market, a piano warranty just covers manufacturing defects should they occur. Tuning and general servicing is not covered under warranty.



Warranty example:

*ALEX. STEINBACH PIANOS HAVE A LIMITED LIFETIME WARRANTY.
FOR DETAILS VISIT: PIANOS1ST.COM.AU/ALEXSTEINBACH/WARRANTY/*

PRE-INSTALLATION SERVICE

Remember to check with the piano store about additional costs you may need to pay. Some stores will quote you a price including freight and tuning whereas others will identify each individual item so you are aware of the breakdown. Your piano should also receive a 'Pre-Installation Service' before it is delivered. Many manufacturers and importers stipulate this as a requirement. Please check with the store that this has occurred otherwise your warranty may not be valid.

When purchasing a new piano, the reputation, service and support that is provided by the store and piano brand is just as important as the piano itself.

MAINTAINING YOUR PIANO

Piano maintenance or servicing is called 'tuning'. Regular servicing is important even though the piano appears to be sturdy because of its solid construction, the piano has thousands of moving parts and it is therefore quite a sensitive instrument. Every so often you will also need to book your piano in for a full service which includes 'regulation'. Some people may also want to 'voice' their piano to make sure it sounds perfect which, to continue the car analogy, could be likened to having your car detailed.

PIANO TUNING

- All pianos need tuning. Tuning is the adjustment of each individual string's tension so that they vibrate at frequencies that give the correct pitch. The number of times you need to tune your piano will depend upon changes in climate, age, condition of the piano and how often it is used. Most pianos require a minimum of two tunings a year. New pianos with new strings may need more because the strings will need to stretch out much of their elasticity before they become stable to hold constant tension (much like new guitar strings).
- If you keep your piano regularly tuned it will prevent the pitch dropping flat. If the pitch does drop too low, even having it tuned will not hold the pitch and several extra tunings will be required to achieve stability.
- It is important to find a professional tuner. Some tuners are not properly accredited, so it is important to contact your local music store for advice or visit www.pianos1st.com.au to locate a qualified technician in your area.
- The cost of tuning varies according to each tuner, but is usually around \$100-\$200 plus travel.



FREE TUNING:

Alex. Steinbach pianos are fully tuned and regulated by the dealer at the time of purchase and a coupon for an additional free tuning is emailed to you when you register the warranty online.

REGULATION

- Regulation is different from tuning. All pianos require regulation from time to time. Tuning adjusts strings whereas regulation is the adjustment of the mechanical parts that comprise the action. There are over thirty-five points of adjustment per note in a grand piano and twenty-five in an upright so regulation takes some time to complete.
- If you start to find it difficult to play fast passages or legato/smooth passages it may mean that your piano needs regulating (that's not an excuse for lack of practice though!). The tone may sound strange, the strings may stop vibrating at unusual times, the pedals may not work properly, the keys may be uneven in height or the weight of the keys may vary.
- An unregulated piano will not only sound terrible but may not last as long. The number of times you will need your piano regulated depends on how well it is looked after and how often it is played. All pianos should be regulated in the factory before being exported to Australia. Most importers also require their retail stores to conduct a pre-delivery service on all pianos prior to being sold.
- Most general use pianos only need to be regulated every five years. Professionals, teachers and heavy users should have their pianos regulated annually. Most technicians make small changes to the piano's regulation each time it is tuned but you will still need a full regulation service in addition to these adjustments.

- Regulation costs vary depending on the extent of work required. The cost of parts and the number of hours spent in labour will also push the price up. Although it is difficult to obtain an exact quotation, ask your technician for an estimate of the cost beforehand.

VOICING

- As previously mentioned, tuning involves adjusting string tension to create the correct harmonic pitch. Voicing however is when an experienced technician modifies the piano's tone intensity and quality. A piano's tone may be bright or mellow. There are no right or wrong tonal styles, except to ensure that the tone should be even throughout.
- If voicing is requested, the instrument's role and musician's needs should be considered. For example a warm tone may be more suited to classical music, whereas brighter tones may be more suited to jazz pianists. However the reverse may also be true so the decision is entirely up to you and your technician. The piano's design and manufacture will have the greatest effect on tone, however technicians may be able to adjust this to a certain extent.
- Voicing by a technician generally involves the adjustment of hammers. Depending on the voicing style requested, the hammers may need to be reshaped, realigned, softened with sharp needles in a certain way, or conversely hardened with chemicals. This will affect the force of the hammers hitting the strings and the element of rebound, creating a certain tone.
- You can also adjust the tone of your piano by changing the contents of your music room. Hard and shiny surfaces reflect sound creating brighter tones whereas carpet, fabrics and soft furnishings absorb sound creating warmer, rounded tones.
- Some piano tuners may not be experienced in voicing pianos. So if you would like your piano voiced, please search for a qualified piano technician.
- The cost of voicing varies per piano and person. Ask your voicing technician for an estimate, or if possible a set quotation.



To find an accredited tuner near you visit:

Australasian Piano Tuners & Technicians Association:	www.aptta.org.au
Piano Tuners & Technicians Guild of Victoria:	www.pianotuners.asn.au
Pianos First (Aust) Pty Ltd Preferred Tuners/Technicians:	www.pianos1st.com.au



WHERE TO PLACE YOUR PIANO

- Choose a room that has relatively constant temperature and humidity (i.e. not too close to the kitchen, laundry, hallway, sunroom). The most suitable place is against an inside wall, away from draughty windows, heaters, air-conditioning, doors and exposure to direct sunlight.
- In addition to increasing humidity, direct sunlight will also cause your piano's finish to age and fade.
- If possible, choose a room with few distractions for practising students.
- Acoustically, make sure that shelves and furniture do not block the piano's sound. Depending upon personal preference, carpet and soft furnishings will soften a piano's tone and hard surfaces will brighten the tone.
- Think about ease of access for piano tuners when placing your piano
- Try to keep the top of the piano free of framed photos and other items that might vibrate and rattle when the piano is played. Plants are also dangerous if water leaks or spills. Drinks should be kept away from pianos. Any liquid spill will damage the finish and possibly the inside. Hot cups will also leave marks on most finishes.
- Consider the use of castor cups to protect your floors from castor wheels marks.



HUMIDITY CONTROL

- Changes in temperature and humidity will affect the wooden parts in the piano. Wood is a hygroscopic material (i.e. it absorbs moisture from the air and loses water when the air is dry). This makes the wood expand and contract, especially in the soundboard and bridge, which is not good for the piano.
- If the atmosphere is too dry, splits may form in the soundboard which causes tuning instability and deterioration over time.
- Conversely if the air is too humid the keys and action parts may stick and the strings and pins may start to rust. Constant exposure to extremes of temperature and humidity will cause your piano to lose the quality of its tone.

If you live in an area where you have hot, humid summers and dry, cold winters, we recommend installing a Damp Chaser Piano Humidity Control System. These must be installed by a piano tuner/technician.

You can learn more about Humidity Control at: www.pianolifesaver.com

LOOKING AFTER THE CABINET

- Remember that dust will scratch if wiped with a dry cloth. Try to use a slightly damp soft cotton cloth to soften and remove the dust particles without scratching. Dry off with a clean, soft cloth. Do not use furniture polish that contains silicone because they may affect the finish, or aerosol polishes because the spray could land on other parts of the piano. We recommend using a high quality cream polish such as 'BMW Autopolitur' car polish or 3M Imperial Hand Glaze on high polish cabinet finishes, but only when fine scratches need to be removed.
- Clean the white keys with a slightly damp white cotton cloth (coloured cloths may stain the keys). You can lift the natural/white keys up slightly, approximately 2mm, to reach them properly for cleaning. Try to use a different cloth for the sharp/black keys to prevent the black polish from staining the white keys. The piano may be damaged if water runs down the sides of the keys so ensure you only just dampen the cloth. Finally, dry off any excess moisture and leave the lid open to air.



DEVELOPING YOUR SKILLS

There are many texts and teaching styles to help develop your musical skills and your music teacher should assist you by setting weekly or daily tasks between lessons. However to keep motivated for many years is a challenge. There are some methods listed below that we hope will assist you to reach your potential.

ENTER EISTEDDFODS OR MUSIC COMPETITIONS

Start by talking with your local music store for information on local eisteddfods or competitions. There are a number of traditional or contemporary competitions at a local, national or international level. You may also like to contact each state's Music Teachers Association for information on piano competitions run by these organisations open to all Australian residents. The web is of course another great place to search for information on national and international piano or song-writing competitions.

JOIN A MUSIC GROUP

Talk to your local music store for their suggestions and check posters and advertisements for community orchestras and band members in their windows. You may also like to search the Yellowpages or the Internet for music groups, or visit the Music Council of Australia website at www.mca.org.au. This website lists music teachers, music groups, music camps and summer schools.



ACHIEVE LEVELS IN MUSIC EXAMINATIONS

There are five main Examination Boards for pianos in Australia:

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| 1. | Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) | www.ameb.edu.au |
| 2. | Trinity College | www.trinitycollege.co.uk |
| 3. | St Cecilia | www.st-cecilia.com.au |
| 4. | Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) | www.abrsm.org |
| 5. | Australian Guild of Music and Speech (AGMS) | www.guildmusic.edu.au |

New Technology

Many teachers and musicians are embracing new technology in their endeavour to find ways to improve learning outcomes. One of the best recent developments is the introduction of silent piano technology such as the Alex Steinbach Dream Piano.



The Dream Silent Piano is a system that allows you to play your real acoustic piano silently through headphones. You can practise on your acoustic piano at any time of day and night without disturbing those around you! The Dream Silent Piano is proven to accelerate learning as general distractions no longer restrict practise opportunities. Students can also record and playback their performances making it easier to gauge their progress.

To learn more about the dream piano system and other piano innovations please visit:
www.pianos1st.com.au

CAREER OPTIONS

The ideal career for people who love music is one that involves music. You are indeed lucky if you can make something you are passionate about your career. Work becomes not just a way to make money but a pursuit that is also fun, enjoyable and rewarding.

TEACHING

Completing examinations to diploma or licentiate level or finishing a university degree offers huge opportunities from classroom teaching to managing your own teaching school. The opportunities that can be created are only limited by your imagination.



PERFORMING

There are also many opportunities in the entertainment area – from providing dinner music at a restaurant to being a ‘pop star’. Being part of a band can be a huge amount of fun and create friendships that last a lifetime. In addition to the camaraderie, a good band can also be successful and make a substantial amount of money!



CONCERT PIANIST

The classical pathway is undoubtedly the most difficult and the competition for recognition at an international level is fierce. Being a concert pianist with a symphony orchestra is limited to a very few privileged musicians.

MUSIC INDUSTRY SUPPORT POSITIONS

If passion for music is added to sound business management a whole new spectrum of opportunities emerge! Positions exist in sales, accounting, finance, marketing, management, administration, graphic design, IT and more. These positions are available with music wholesalers, music retail outlets, music teaching schools, sound engineering and CD/DVD production companies, examination boards, music development organisations etc.

“The Australian Guide to Careers in Music” by Michael Hannan is a comprehensive guide to Careers in Music. It has been produced with the support of the Music Council of Australia and details over 190 areas that relate to the production and dissemination of music. Full details of this text can be found at www.mca.org.au

In summary, there are many exciting opportunities in the music industry, with new opportunities being created every day by people who combine vision with passion.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LIFESTYLE PIANOS

since 1896

HISTORY OF PLAYER PIANOS

In 1896, Theodore P Brown introduced and marketed the “Aeriol Piano”, which was the first substantially complete player piano. Through the middle 1890s, Edwin S Votey developed his piano playing device, the Pianola. This was offered to the Aeolian Company to sell alongside their range of reed organs. It was launched in 1897, and very aggressively marketed over the following years. It was the advertising organized by Harry Tremaine and the Wilcox and White Company that established the market for piano playing devices.



Wilcox & White - Angelus piano-player

Advertisement: London, November 1903

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY...

Alex.Steinbach iQ Pianos are a unique range of traditional acoustic pianos that hide a very big secret. iQ pianos are fitted with the exclusive PianoDisc™ Silent Drive technology. This enables the piano to play by itself with the keys actually moving up and down before your eyes!

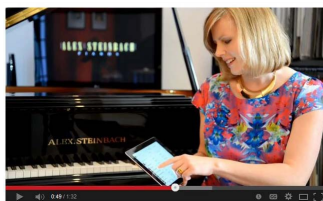
Not only is your piano a beautiful addition to your home, your lifestyle can be transformed by the enjoyment of playing and listening to the piano. iQ pianos come with over 750 songs, plus a selection of music videos, all pre-loaded into the music library. In addition to the piano playing, many songs have extra backing with vocal and orchestral arrangements. The backing is played through 2 concealed speakers that lie under the piano. This total performance experience creates an atmosphere that's sure to impress.



BONUS IPAD THAT PLAYS YOUR PIANO

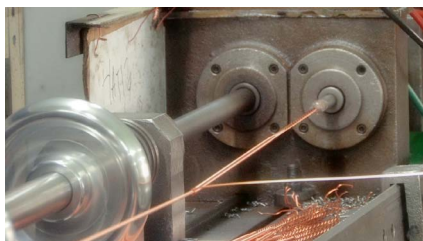
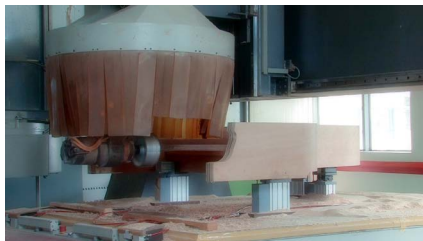
You control your iQ piano with the bonus iPad that comes with every iQ model. Simply turn the iPad on, go to your iTunes folder and select the song or album you wish to play. Then you can adjust the volume, play or pause the music. Thousands of other songs are available for you to download to create your own selection of favourites. You can also stream the pre-loaded music videos from the iPad to your television creating a unique concert performance as you watch the piano play along with artists like Michael Buble.

▶ WATCH THE IQ PIANO COMMERCIAL NOW...



Click on video to play

THE ART OF PIANO MAKING...



WHY THE AUSTRALIAN PIANO BUYERS' GUIDE RECOMMEND ALEX. STEINBACH PIANOS...

Alex Steinbach pianos are an excellent quality range manufactured by Samick Musical Instruments, one of the largest piano manufacturers in the world.

EXEMPLARY SERVICE PACKAGE

The service package you receive is more comprehensive than others in the market. New Alex Steinbach pianos come with a Limited Lifetime Warranty, which is very reassuring when making such an investment. The pianos also receive Pre-Installation set-up which is certified. Plus you receive a free tuning voucher.

LARGE CHOICE

Compared to other brands on the Australian market, Alex Steinbach pianos give you a wider choice of models, styles and colours to better match your performance requirements and complement your home décor.

AFFORDABLE FOR EVERYONE

The range is made more attractive with their reasonable prices plus an option to rent using the Alex. Steinbach rent to buy program.

PROVEN QUALITY

Samick Musical Instruments manufactures some of the most recognized piano brands available today. They have state of the art factories, a long tradition of piano making and a highly skilled and dedicated workforce.

▶ WATCH SAMICK AT WORK...



Click on video to play



the
Australian Piano
Buyers' *guide*
