



## Questions and answers pertaining to buying a piano

Q: What should you know before buying a piano?

A: The purchase of a piano is usually a once-in-a-lifetime investment and therefore, an extremely important one. The typical piano buyer, however, is unfamiliar with materials and manufacturing methods that differentiate poor pianos from premiere pianos. In the following material, you will find answers to some of the questions most commonly asked by prospective piano purchasers.

Making music should be enjoyable. The better a piano sounds and the more responsive the action, the more the player, either student or professional, will want to play it. This is especially important to a child who can become discouraged by the constant struggle with a poorly functioning older piano or a lesser quality new piano.

Buying a piano requires an informed decision on your part. Every Baldwin piano reflects thousands of intelligent decisions made by engineers, designers and craftsmen to give you a piano with superb tone, touch and the finest cabinetry to enhance your home for many generations to come.

Q: How do you know if you are getting a good piano?

A: First, consider the reputation of the manufacturer and the pianists who recommend that manufacturer's piano. No performer can afford to trust his or her career to an instrument that is less than the finest available.

Therefore, a musician's opinion is a personal and professional recommendation rather than a paid commercial endorsement. Professional pianists choose a piano on the basis of tone, touch response, volume and sustaining power. Many of today's top musicians and musical organizations own and use Baldwin pianos for personal and professional purposes, including Dave Brubeck, Marian McPartland, Earl Wild, and John Williams.

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Non-professional musicians buy Baldwin because the same quality of materials are used in Baldwin pianos for the home as well as for the concert hall. In fact, the Baldwin Hamilton (the largest selling model in piano history) has long been purchased by schools, colleges and churches because of its reputation for superior tone coupled with unmatched durability.

The tone of your piano should be pleasing to you, and with no mechanical noise. The action should produce a quiet, even touch without clicks or buzzes. Many poorly made instruments have noisy actions because of inferior workmanship and materials.

Baldwin introduced the SD10 concert grand, heralded as the major advance in piano design of the 20th century, in 1965. Baldwin has systematically redesigned all of its pianos, using many patented grand features in its vertical pianos. That's why we say there is something grand in every Baldwin!

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Q: Why should you buy a new piano?

A: Many advances have been made in piano design in the past 25 years. Better quality glues and construction methods are now used to ensure that a new piano is built better for long-lasting service. With a new instrument, you know what you are getting and have the manufacturer's warranty to back it up. A higher quality piano is a better investment because, as a player advances, he or she may quickly outgrow a piano with poor tone or an unreliable action.

Many new piano prospects desire the look and performance of a grand piano but realize they are limited by price and space to the purchase of a vertical piano. A used grand that has been well manufactured and well cared for can be an excellent buy. Such a piano, however, is difficult to find.

Used pianos sometimes have hidden problems. Private parties selling a used instrument may comment that the piano is in perfect condition, but it may need \$1500 to \$2500 worth of repairs if the pinblock and strings have to be replaced before it can be used. In addition, the service record of a used piano may be difficult to document.

Having a piano technician check out a used piano is well worth the price of the service call. Ask the technician for an evaluation and detailed report on the piano's condition.

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Q: Should you consider a digital piano?

A: Today's digital pianos with their digitally sampled sounds offer certain advantages. Price can be appealing, and maintenance costs are lower because such a piano does not require tuning. Being able to play through headphones and to interface with advanced equipment through MIDI are often important to a prospect. Digital pianos also offer a variety of additional sounds in addition to the piano sound.

Modern technology has been able to produce piano sounds that are exceptionally realistic and closely duplicate "real" piano

touch. Many pianists, particularly more experienced ones, still feel the touch and sound of an acoustic piano are essential and cannot be duplicated satisfactorily in an electronic instrument.

Acoustic pianos traditionally hold their value well over the years. It is likely that a 20-year-old piano, if well kept, can be sold at a price that is equal to or above its original price. This is particularly true for grands and high-quality verticals. While digital pianos may be an alternative, they do not enjoy the appreciation in value that fine quality acoustic pianos have historically enjoyed.

Musical instruments also become an emotional investment. Individuals have traditionally purchased pianos, intending them to be heirlooms passed from generation to generation.

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Q: What's the difference between a grand and a vertical?

A: The principal difference is the direction of the strings in the case and the action position in relation to the strings. Vertical piano strings, back and plate are perpendicular to the floor. The action has to have assistance from several springs, in order to have reliable repetition.

The grand piano strings, frame and plate run parallel with the floor so the action can slide underneath the strings. Because the grand action is greatly assisted by gravity, it is more responsive. It is the overwhelming choice for professional pianists and serious piano students.

Baldwin grands have many unique patented features. One of these is the patented Acu-Just™ hitch pin, which allows the adjustment of the string in relationship to the bridge. Through this adjustment, the bearing (pressure of the strings on the bridge) can be increased or decreased - a final step to ensure that every Baldwin operates at its highest level of performance. The Acu-Just hitch pin is found on Baldwin grands and Concert Verticals.

The bridge on a Baldwin grand piano is made of vertically laminated hard rock maple, the most desirable kind, to evenly and quickly transmit the sound to every part of the soundboard. A vertically laminated bridge is superior to a solid or horizontally laminated bridge because sound transfers four times faster along the grain than across the grain.

In Baldwin 7-foot and 9-foot grands an additional piece of hardened steel is added at the treble end of the piano for more precise termination of the strings. These patented steel treble termination pieces provide better, clearer sound projection in the high ranges.

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Q: Which size vertical piano is best for you?

A: Many people are confused when they shop for a vertical piano because there are so many styles, sizes and price ranges. The terms — spinet, console, studio and professional upright — are used in reference to piano height with spinet

being the shortest. Many claims are made for the performance qualities of vertical pianos, based primarily on size.

Bigger doesn't necessarily mean better. With proper design, the tone from a smaller high-quality piano will be better than that from a larger but poorly designed piano. The design of Baldwin's smaller vertical pianos, for example, allows the plate and strings to extend all the way to the floor for longer string length and a larger sound.

Design, craftsmanship and quality are more important in a piano than the volume or size of a single ingredient. Using a cooking analogy, you can compare making a cake to making a piano. If your recipe calls for two cups of flour, you know that four cups will not make your cake twice as good.

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Q: Why is the action so important?

A: The action must respond to the slightest variation in touch so that the player has control over the music's dynamic range (how loud or soft it can be played). This ability to play loud and soft has separated the piano from other keyboard instruments since its inception.

Most companies use a small, compressed piano action in their console size pianos because the height of these pianos fails to allow a full-size action inside the case. Although Baldwin uses a compressed action in some of its more economically priced models, most Baldwin pianos have a full-size action (called a Full-Blow™ Action) because of its superior performance.

The Full-Blow Action repeats 23 percent faster than a small compressed action with miniature parts. Such smaller parts have to work much harder to do the same job and, therefore, have to be serviced and repaired more often. Baldwin puts the same Full-Blow Action in its Classic, Acrosonic, Hamilton, Professional and Concert Vertical pianos.

Baldwin-manufactured hammers are of prime importance to tone quality. As the hammer hits the string, the string will start to vibrate. Overly hard hammers produce a tinny or harsh sound and eventually cause string breakage. Hammers become firm with use because they compress as they repeatedly hit the strings. A new piano should sound clear and pleasant to your ear. Premium 100 percent virgin wool hammer felt is used in hammer construction.

Baldwin uses seasoned hard rock maple for action parts, action rails and hammer rest rails. This contributes significantly to the even feel and quiet response of Baldwin keys. The piano action has to be extremely durable because the notes are played thousands of times through years of use. Baldwin life tests all materials and assembled parts.

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Q: What does the soundboard do?

A: The soundboard is the heart of the piano. When the hammer strikes the strings, the vibrations are transmitted by the bridge to the soundboard. The sound of the string is then amplified by the vibration of the soundboard.

Many pianos have a laminated soundboard. This board will produce a slightly different quality of sound than a solid board, and sound will decay more quickly. Manufacturers of some of these pianos provide a lengthy warranty, claiming they have soundboards that will not crack. This warranty is typically on the soundboard alone and not the labor. A laminated soundboard is a practical alternative for a less expensive piano.

Solid spruce has always been the material of choice for the best quality of sound. If you examine the most expensive American and European grand pianos they always have quartersawn solid spruce soundboards. How the wood is cut distinguishes a quality soundboard. The best way to cut spruce for soundboards is to quartersaw it. Quartersawing allows the grain of the wood to run in the right direction to be more stable through the changing seasons. All solid spruce soundboards in Baldwin pianos are quartersawn and tapered for better flexibility and, thus, better sound.

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Q: How often do you have to tune a piano?

A: The number of times that your piano has to be tuned varies with use. The Piano Technicians Guild recommends that instruments be tuned several times during the first year and twice a year after that to insure that your piano will settle properly. Strings take several tunings in their new surroundings to stretch and stabilize. Tuning, for example, on concert grand pianos is done prior to every performance.

Tuning is most often affected by changes in temperature and humidity. The soundboard absorbs moisture in wet seasons and loses it in dry seasons. This will swell and shrink the wood, and the tension on the strings will change.

Several factors contribute to a piano's ability to stay in tune. The strength of the cast-iron plate and the piano case and back posts is important. Also critical is the stability of the pinblock, bridges, ribs and soundboard under changing climatic conditions. Today's modern pianos, whether a 9-foot concert grand or a 36-inch spinet, have a total string tension of 36,000 to 40,000 pounds. Properly designed pianos will exhibit excellent tuning stability, even if the piano is moved from the location where tuned. A lesser piano will not possess this stability of tuning.

The pinblock of the piano should be made out of the finest and most dense wood available because it must hold the tuning pin tightly for many years. The Baldwin 41-ply, 19-ply and 5-ply pinblocks are made of seasoned hard rock maple compressed in a special process, removing virtually all of the moisture in the wood. The multiple thin laminations produce a pinblock that is dimensionally stable and holds the tuning pins firmly through the changing seasons. No other company uses a 41-ply pinblock. The 19-ply pinblock utilizes this superior construction technique of multiple thin laminations to offer grand-type construction in a vertical piano.

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Q: Why does one piano sound better than another?

A: The sound of a piano is the result of some 12,000 parts, all working together. The size, length, weight and quality of those parts as well as the way they are interrelated is referred to as the scale of the piano.

In the Baldwin grand, the soundboard is attached to a hard rock maple inner rim so that the case will not absorb sound from the soundboard but will reflect it back onto the board for greater volume and duration of sound.

The size (length and diameter) of the strings is another important factor in producing good clear tone. Developed by Baldwin researchers using computer-aided design programs, patented SynchroTone™ bass strings produce consistently rich and detailed fundamental tones and harmonic overtones.

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Q: How can you tell if the cabinet is well constructed?

A: Piano-making is an art requiring skilled craftsmanship. A piano must be a beautiful piece of furniture as well as a fine musical instrument. In fact, in the furniture trade the highest quality finish is referred to as a “piano finish.”

No piano made today has a case made out of one solid piece of wood. Solid wood case parts can warp and crack under stress. Beware of salespeople who claim to have a solid wood piano.

One method of case construction involves wood core stock over which a final layer of cabinet wood is glued. The outside layer is called veneer. Baldwin cases are veneered with the finest cabinet woods such as cherry, mahogany, oak and walnut, carefully cut to reveal the most beautiful grain patterns. Then the cases are sanded, stained, finished and hand-rubbed to bring out the beauty and richness of the wood. Baldwin satin ebony finishes are the result of multiple layers of lacquer, hand-rubbed for a satin sheen.

All wood used in Baldwin pianos is inspected, cut and kiln dried at the Baldwin factory. This guarantees that total control over critical moisture conditioning is maintained. Properly seasoned wood maintains its shape after cutting, a very important factor in good furniture construction.

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Q: What are the pedals for? Are they the same on all pianos?

A: On all pianos, the pedal to the far right sustains the sound by lifting the dampers away from the strings so that they will continue to vibrate.

The pedal to the far left is the soft pedal or “una corda” on a grand piano.

This pedal makes the piano softer in volume. The middle pedal is often different from piano to piano. In most grand pianos, it is called the sostenuto pedal and holds the dampers from selected strings so that these notes alone will sustain. European pianos frequently have no middle pedal, and little piano repertoire requires it.

On most vertical pianos, the middle pedal sustains the bass notes alone or lowers a muting felt between strings and the

hammers, to reduce the volume. This is known as a practice pedal. All pedals should do something. Beware of middle pedals that are not attached to anything.

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Q: What should the warranty cover?

A: The manufacturer of your piano should be responsible for providing an instrument that you can depend on. The warranty should cover defects in workmanship and parts, labor for repairs, and transportation of the piano to and from the factory if necessary.

Many companies offer warranties on parts only, not labor. However, labor is often times the most expensive aspect of a repair job. All Baldwin pianos have a 10 year labor warranty plus a 10-, 15-, or 25-year parts warranty.~

