

# Piano Perspectives



Floyd Gadd Piano Service

Brandon 727-4266

Toll Free 1-877-497-4266

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## Can the Tone of a Piano be Improved?

Many dimensions of the tone of a piano are determined by its basic design, whether it be a spinet, a console upright, a full sized upright, or a grand. There are various aspects of a piano's sound, however that can be adjusted by a skilled piano technician.

It is not unusual for the sound of a piano to grow harsher as years go by, especially if it sees a lot of playing. The tone becomes more brash, playing softly becomes more difficult, and sustain time becomes shorter. If the felt hammers inside the piano are examined, grooves can be seen on the surface that strikes the string.

As these grooves become deeper, the piano strings are increasingly being struck by a flat felt surface (the bottom of the string groove)



rather than a curved felt surface (which was the original set-up.) This change in the shape of the striking surface of the hammer, together with the fact that the felt beneath the surface of the hammer is harder than the felt near the surface, is the cause of the harsher tone.

A piano technician can reshape the hammers by carefully removing some of the felt, and can selectively soften some of the remaining felt on the hammer by various means, so that the harshness is reduced or eliminated. There does come a time in the life of a piano when removing more felt will not solve the problem. This is when replacement of the hammers becomes a priority.

Even on some newer pianos, the felt hammers are either too hard or soft or too hard to produce the most pleasant tone possible. A skilled technician can often adjust these properties of the hammers, bringing a significant improvement in tone.

## Dealing with Sluggish Notes

"Mom, this key won't come back up fast enough. Every time I try to use it it messes me up!"

Notes that are sluggish are annoying and can become a real obstacle to having a rewarding practice session at the piano. Fortunately, solutions to this problem are fairly straightforward.

If the piano is nearly new, or the keyboard has just been professionally reconditioned, the problem is likely that the new cloth bushings that guide the motion of the front of the key have expanded slightly as they have adjusted to the environment of your home. Adjusting the clearance of these bushings is a routine task that your piano technician can complete in just a few minutes time.

This problem is not unique to new pianos, however. If the piano has been out of use for a long time, a film of oxidation or other contamination may have built up on the polished key pins along which the key bushings slide. In this case, repolishing and the application of a specialized lubricant might be the solution. This might take a little longer than simple easing of the bushings, but is not a complicated procedure.

Sometimes a piano that has been exposed to moisture or high levels of humidity experiences a swelling of the wood in some of the keys that makes these notes virtually unplayable. Sometimes the solution is as easy as the routine adjustment of a new keyboard. Sometimes more work will be involved. In any case, Floyd Gadd, piano technician, will be happy to work with you to find a solution that will make your experience of playing as pleasurable as possible.

For more information visit [tuning.floydgadd.com](http://tuning.floydgadd.com)