

Piano Perspectives



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Can the Touch of My Piano Be Improved?

If you play the piano very much at all, you know how much touch responsiveness can vary from one piano to another. Sometimes the difference is one of character—two fine instruments that are both a delight to play, but that differ from each other. Often, however, the difference is one of quality. One instrument invites you to explore its responsiveness, and another seems to resist every effort you make to play expressively. Can the touch responsiveness of a piano be improved?

Two major factors determine how your piano will feel to the touch as you play it. One is *design* and the other is *set-up*.

Design can refer to the class or size of piano being considered, whether grand, full-sized upright, apartment sized, or some variation on these themes. *Design* can also refer to how well a piano has been engineered, whatever its size.

Set-up has to do with the fact that every piano has hundreds of fine adjustments that will determine whether or not the instrument will play up to its potential. The word more commonly used to describe the setting of these adjustments is *regulation*.

Some piano manufacturers are careful to regulate their pianos to a very high standard before allowing them to leave the factory. Other manufacturers, even some with high quality designs, make sure their pianos are playable, but fall short of bringing their instruments up to their full potential before they go out the door to the customer.

Add to this the fact that the regulation of any piano will deteriorate over time, and that heavy use and seasonal swings in humidity will accelerate the decline. It is not unreasonable to give a well used piano a full regulation every five years or so. Doing so can make a marked difference in its responsiveness.

A fairly ordinary piano that is carefully regulated on a regular basis can be more expressive and more satisfying to



play than a more expensive or prestigious instrument that is not regulated as conscientiously.

Most piano owners, even those who have their instruments tuned regularly, are unaware of the importance of regulation. ***Almost all pianos that are more than a few years old, and many newer ones as well, can be significantly improved by careful regulating.***

If the piano is a few decades old, additional wear and tear will be a factor. Some reconditioning may be needed in order to reap the benefits of regulation. Dealing with this wear and tear, then regulating the reconditioned action, can transform a piano, sometimes making it play better than new.

Regulating and reconditioning is not an all-or-nothing proposition. While some piano owners make the plunge and have the work all done at once, others have half an hour or an hour of this work done each time their piano is tuned. Over time the benefits accumulate. Only a few of the reconditioning tasks, like hammer replacement, cannot be handled in this way.

Consider making an investment in improving the touch responsiveness of your piano. Floyd Gadd, piano technician, is eager to help you choose an approach that matches your goals, your piano and your budget.