

## WHAT IS A PTA REGISTERED TUNER/TECHNICIAN?

*Tuner-Members have to pass a test to show their capability in undertaking tuning and repairs.*

*Technician-Members similarly are qualified for rebuilding, major overhaul, string making, action design, or other aspects of the piano industry.*

*The Pianoforte Tuners' Association was founded in 1913 as a trade union, but was de-registered in 1972 to become a professional body.*

*Since then its membership has gradually grown, around the world as well as in the United Kingdom, proclaiming its commitment to improving standards.*

*For many years the Association was firmly based in London, however, since 1981, in different towns throughout Great Britain, an Annual Convention and General Meeting has been held to which all classes of membership - and aspiring non-members - are invited, so they may learn new techniques, and hone their skills.*

The Piano Gallery  
Saint Mullins  
County Carlow  
[www.thepianogallery.ie](http://www.thepianogallery.ie)  
051 424442

## LEAFLETS IN THE SOUND ADVICE SERIES:

- Nº 1 Your Piano - Your Questions Answered
- Nº 2 Buying a Piano

50p each, including postage

© The Pianoforte Tuners' Association 1995



**Our membership qualification sets the standard for the profession.**

*To obtain a list of the Members of the Pianoforte Tuners' Association in your area contact the Secretary:*

Mrs Valerie Addis  
10 Reculver Road  
HERNE BAY  
Kent  
CT6 6LD

Telephone (01227) 368808  
Facsimile (01227) 368808

SOUND ADVICE. Nº 2

## BUYING A PIANO

*Whether you intend buying new or secondhand, our aim is to assist you in choosing the piano that is right for you. However, there are many pitfalls, as this leaflet will demonstrate.*

*It is the recommendation of the Pianoforte Tuners' Association that before acquiring a piano you seek the advice of a fully qualified tuner or technician.*

## BUYING NEW

In general, if you find a reputable piano retailer, buying a new piano should be no problem. The choice of piano is yours, and the amount you pay will in general determine the quality of the instrument. When you find a piano that satisfies your needs, purchase the one you have tried, as another of the same make and model could be quite different in touch and tone.

## BUYING SECONDHAND

Once again, buying from a reputable retailer, tuner or technician should not be a problem, as the piano will have been professionally restored where necessary, and it should be covered by a warranty. However, beware of poorly restored pianos, or instruments with only 'cosmetic tidying up' sold as 'fully restored'.

## AVOID SPENDING AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE ON A 'BEGINNER'S PIANO'

You would not give a learner driver an old car with faulty brakes and bald tyres!

A poor piano is as hazardous to the musical life of a learner as a poor car is to the physical life of a new driver.

A large piano is usually best, whether upright or grand.

## UPRIGHT PIANOS

The most common of the many different types of piano are:

### *Straightstrung or Overstrung*

In a straightstrung piano, the strings run parallel to one another throughout. An overstrung piano has the bass strings running diagonally across the piano, crossing over the treble strings - hence overstrung.

Overstrung is preferable, as the strings are longer than is possible otherwise, and this produces a much better tone.

### *Overdamper or Underdamper*

In an overdamper action, the hammers (the action parts which strike the strings) are obscured from view (when looking into the top) by a wooden rail holding the dampers (the action parts which press on to the strings to stop them from sounding). An underdamper action has the dampers located beneath the hammers and they are usually much more effective than overdampers.

If a straight strung overdamper piano is in good condition, it can be satisfactory, and occasionally one finds examples produced by some of the best piano manufacturers. However, without expert knowledge it is usually best to avoid them, as by far the majority are old, worn out, and unsatisfactory - particularly for a beginner!

## GRAND PIANOS

A horizontal piano, standing on three or six legs, is called a grand, which also could be straightstrung or overstrung. Again, the overstrung construction is preferred.

The action of a grand is located behind the keys, and can partially be seen through the strings, beneath the music desk. Without removing the action it is difficult to identify which of the several different types of action is present.

**Unqualified persons should never attempt to remove a grand action; there is considerable danger of causing damage.**

## THE FOLLOWING CHECKLIST WILL HELP YOU IDENTIFY PROBLEMS WHEN PURCHASING A PIANO IF A QUALIFIED TUNER OR TECHNICIAN IS NOT AVAILABLE.

## IF THE ANSWER TO ANY OF THESE QUESTIONS IS "YES" IT IS ESSENTIAL TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL ADVICE.

## YES / NO ?

### *First Impressions*

1. When playing a few notes, does it sound badly out of tune? Is it at the incorrect pitch?  
(Use a tuning fork, or an instrument like a recorder or a flute to ensure that its 'C' matches 'C' on the piano.)
2. Are there any buzzing noises.
3. Are the keys uneven, with excess side movement?
4. Is the case dirty and untidy, with bad scratches?
5. Remove top and bottom panels. With a good torch check all around. Is there any woodworm in the keys, action or casework (including the back of the piano)?
6. Do the pedals fail to work properly and quietly?

## Action and Keys

1. Does the action look untidy and dirty?
2. Can you see any broken, missing or badly worn parts?
3. Can you see any irregularity in what should be a neat row of hammers?
4. Can you see any obvious sign of moth damage?
5. Try repeating a few notes at treble and bass. Are there any sluggish hammers? Do they fail to return to the rest position?
6. Are the damper felts dirty, hard, or not stopping the notes from sounding when the key is released?  
(Dirty or hard felts could cause buzzing noises, and notes continuing to sound indicate broken damper springs.)

## Iron Frame and Strings

The iron frame can be seen most easily in the bottom of an upright piano, although it usually covers most of the area inside the piano. The strings are attached to the frame at the bottom and to the tuning pins at the top.

1. Is there rust on the frame or strings? (top and bottom)
2. Is the iron frame cracked?
3. Are there cracks in the wrest plank (the wood in which the tuning pins are inserted) between the tuning pins? Are some tuning pins leaning down more than others?
4. Are any strings missing, or have some been replaced? (New strings will be a different colour from the rest.)

## Soundboard and Bridges

The soundboard is the varnished wooden panel which can be seen underneath the strings. The bridges are lengths of wood, glued to the soundboard, into which metal pins are driven. The strings run over the bridges and between the pins. The vibration of the strings is transmitted to the soundboard by the bridges, and this produces the sound you hear. It is vital that these parts are in good condition.

1. Are there cracks in the soundboard?
2. Are there splits in the bridges between the bridge pins? (An older piano may have a wooden bridge close to the tuning pins, in addition to those on the soundboard.)
3. Are the bridges poorly attached to the soundboard? (If so, the sound will be of poor quality and there may be a rattling noise as the notes are played.)