



“Once you start playing on a Steinway Model D, then you play differently. They are a different animal. And that is a privilege to have.”

-Mitsuko Uchida

Steinway, one of the most recognized names in piano history, started out with humble means. Henry Steinway (more about him in issue 4 *The Original Steinway*), started the American company Steinway & Sons in 1853. He continued to experiment as he built more and more pianos, being granted his first patent in 1857. Steinway & Sons now hold over 125 patents. Every piano built was an improvement on the last. Henry and his sons built many square grands and upright pianos as well as differing grand piano models with names like: Wing Grand and Monitor Grand. Within thirty years, in 1878, they had created the 6’2” Model A grand piano, known as the “Parler” Grand, essentially defining the modern piano. The Model B came out the same year and soon became referred to as “the perfect piano”. The

model D was in development between 1884-1892 as the go-to concert grand for artists worldwide. Steinway introduced the Model L in 1900 as the first of the larger “baby grands”; it was later replaced with the almost identical Model O in 1923. The Model M was released in 1911 as a smaller grand for those who could not fit an A, L or a B. During the depression of the 1930s, Steinway released the tiny Model S in hopes that it would save the company, but it turned out the console-size 40” upright would actually save them. Like many small uprights of the time, the console size was perfect for most households.

During the early to mid 1900s, Steinway decided to try soaking their wood action parts in a liquid solution containing fats and oils to make them more durable and hardy to humidity changes. Though it may have worked at the time, the result is that the oils started to leach into the joints and cause an oxidation called verdigris. Unfortunately, the only true lasting cure is to replace the wood parts, as they continue to “rust” the pins in the joints.



In another attempt to combat humidity, Steinway tried to improve their actions by using Teflon, a synthetic material, to bush the action joints. It appeared to work for a time, but as the wood aged, it changed, but the Teflon did not and the two ended up producing a clicking sound when moved during normal play of the instrument. Steinway decided to stop producing repair kits for these types of actions a few years ago. There are a few ways to stop the clicking, but being that the parts are usually around sixty years old anyway, it is best to replace them with new parts.

“I insist on a Steinway for my recordings, my concerts and my home. It is the only piano I want to hear my music played on.”
-Michel LeGrand

Steinway & Sons released a new line of pianos in 1992, the *Boston*. Advertised as “designed by Steinway”, Boston pianos are produced in a Kawai factory in Japan or Indonesia. The Boston Performance Edition came out in 2009 and the Performance Edition II was released in 2016. I find that these pianos have a lot of good qualities, but are not especially durable. The Pinblocks seem to be loose long before they should be and the joints on the lyre do not last long. They have an enormous sound and usually good tone even though the soundboards have little to no crown. I tend to find their playability on the heavy side.

Another new line of designed-by-Steinway pianos appeared in 2000, *Essex*. These pianos are made by Pearl River in China. They are everything you can expect from a Chinese made piano regardless of the Steinway association. They tend to have lower quality parts and manufacturing ultimately leading to a cheaper price tag. They are designed entirely by Technicians working for Steinway in their permanent offices in Shanghai, China.

Many of the pianos built by Steinway in the early 1900s are considered from the “golden era” of Steinway and are sought after by piano rebuilders worldwide. A few years ago, after declining to sell the company to China, Steinway put out a letter to all rebuilders threatening legal action if the piano was rebuilt and still called a Steinway even if attainable Steinway parts from the company were used. The company stopped selling decals for the instruments. There was a significant discussion between Steinway, piano rebuilders, and the Piano Technicians Guild to resolve the issue. Eventually Steinway backed down and actually made more parts such as soundboards and Pinblocks available to rebuilders. A few months ago, Steinway raised their prices on new parts for rebuilders almost tripling the cost of rebuilding a Steinway piano of old. What will happen next?...

*all photos except the fallboard photo are from Steinway.com