



Moments de la Vie d'un Piano

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As the large, burly men placed the new 1882 Érard vertical piano against the wall in the music room, a young girl, Blanche, no more than ten, peered around the corner. She knew this was the piano she would soon be taking lessons on. Her brother, who wanted to be a doctor, stood close to her also captivated by the scene. The butler showed the men back to the main entrance of the stone house that rested on the French countryside and he wished them well. Back in the house, Blanche turned to her brother and they both smiled.

“Today we will learn about cadences and how to transition back to the tonic chord,” authoritatively stated Blanche, who had grown up and was teaching music

theory at a music school outside of Paris. She went home each day and played on the same Érard piano she had as a girl. She had even begun to write her own music. The Érard was becoming part of her soul.

One afternoon in spring, Blanche heard a knock at her door. She turned away from her piano to discover who had come knocking. She only played the Érard for enjoyment now as it had been many decades since her days teaching harmony. On her porch stood a young woman, Josette, a local governess, in her early twenties. Timidly, Josette spoke about how it had been insisted to her to come visit this house as she had a love for singing and should meet the great musician that lived here. Though vastly different in age, the two women became fast friends and spent the next year making music together with the Érard on Saturday mornings.



They kept in touch regularly even though Josette had moved to the city after their year of music making. Blanche passed away a few years later, willing the piano to Josette. It was now 1956 and Josette knew it was time to have some work done on the piano. She had the felts and leather replaced but made sure to keep all the wood original. She had decided to move to the USA in 1957 after working at a US military air base. Through no fault of her's, the piano was poorly packaged, wrapped only in a single sheet of paper, and left out on the pier in an open wooden crate. It was rained on at least once.

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“It’s ruined!” Cried Josette as the piano was un-crated. Pieces of the case began falling off of the instrument as two men picked it up and moved it into the military housing. She received a letter shortly after informing her of the US Air Force’s deepest apologies and a check to reimburse her for the instrument. She was not happy as that piano, even the years of dust inside of it, had meant more to her than a few dollars. Luckily, it was still playable and her future husband had taken to learning to play it.

Josette married and moved to Philadelphia, but did not realize the effect it might have on the Érard. One dry winter, while she sat at home, she heard a loud bang come from the piano. It made her jump and her stomach started to tie itself in knots. She pleaded, “Is there nothing more that can be done?” But the technician shook his head. The wood of the Érard’s structure had finally had enough and split. It was no longer tunable, no longer playable. It followed them to their house in Mount Holly where it remained in the hallway. Occasionally, the grandkids would come and bang on it before being chased away. This is how one of the hammers was broken off inside the piano.

“Would anyone like to play it?” I asked the salon guests as we sat around the Érard upright I had spent the last month refurbishing. Carole, Josette’s daughter, had just given me the piano in hopes that someone would love it again. Using my skills, I was able to love it back to life. In October of 2021, Carole heard for the first time the Érard that had been in the hallway of the house she grew up in. She fought back a tear as the first notes of a Chopin prelude were played by one of the salon participants.