



In the keyboard alone, taking into account that not all keys have a damper, there are about 570 to 723 moving joints!

Have you played your piano recently? It does not even matter so much that you practiced and got better, but did you go “tickle the ivories” and make sure your piano keys move? Do they all make a sound? Do they easily repeat? Pianos may be beautiful furniture. They may be wonderful instruments. Some may even consider them a doorway to the soul. But, above all else, they are, at their core, a machine. A machine with joints and many moving parts. Pianos in total have around 12,000 parts. Not all of these parts move or are supposed to move, but there are many that do. Moving one key, playing one note, has seven moving joints on an upright piano and nine on a grand piano. In the keyboard alone, taking into account that not all keys have a damper, there are about 570 to 723 moving joints! If one of those joints seizes up or fails in some way, that note will no longer work.

Some may think, “well, what’s one note out of 88 that doesn’t work. What’s the big deal?” In a sterile way, 1% of the keyboard not working does seem insignificant, but when that 1% happens to be middle C, it may be a very big deal. Maybe four notes, 4.5% of the keyboard, no longer sound or repeat. So what? Those notes happen to be the middle C major triad with the octave. Good luck trying to play in C major, F major, a minor, and other keys if that is the case. Maybe the 1% that no longer functions properly is the last C all the way at the top of the treble, the last note on the right side of the keyboard. That note may not be as important. It is all relative when a specific need is involved.



How does this happen? Why would a joint stop working? Usually from a lack of use. If you wear a cast on your wrist for 6 weeks, when you take it off, your wrist will be stiff and take some time to get it moving again. When you do not drive your car for ten years, do you expect it to start up easily and drive smoothly? If you sit and read a book for six hours and then get up to walk around, are you as supple as if you had just done Pilates? Probably not. Pianos are no different. They need love and they need to be played.

Why would a joint stop working?
Usually from a lack of use.

The joints in a keyboard involve some sort of metal. Sometimes the metal has a finish or plating on it that degrades over time and gums up the joint. Some piano manufacturers from the early 1900s would soak their wood parts in an oily, waxy substance that over time would creep into the joint and gum it up. Brass is used in the joints of some pianos and develop a corrosion from poor environmental conditions over time. It is also possible that someone used a poor quality lubricant or non-lubricant on the joint at some point and made the sluggishness worse. Regardless of the cause, many of these ailments can be prevented by frequent and consistent movement of the joints.

Another possibility for a failing note is that a joint is too loose and the parts just flop around. Sometimes a glue joint that isn't supposed to move came apart causing the pieces to shift and bind against other notes. Maybe a foreign body became lodged in the part and is blocking its movement. These scenarios cannot be solved by playing the piano and require professional attention, but the only way you will find out if your piano does not work quite right is to play it.

So...

Go play your piano!