

*2007–2008 Annual  
Supplement to*

# THE PIANO BOOK

*BUYING & OWNING A NEW OR USED PIANO*

LARRY  
FINE



Prices shown below are the approximate lowest and highest typical selling prices of new pianos in the least expensive style and finish.

### **Group 1: Highest quality performance pianos**

These pianos are for those who want the best and can afford it. They utilize the very best materials, and the manufacturing process emphasizes much hand labor and refinement of details. Advanced designs are painstakingly executed, putting quality considerations far ahead of cost and production output. They are suitable for the most advanced and demanding professional and artistic uses. Most of the pianos in this group are made in the U.S. and Western Europe. *Comparison with automobiles: think Rolls-Royce, Bentley, Mercedes-Benz.*

Verticals:	\$14,000 to \$34,000
Grands 5' to 7':	\$40,000 to \$90,000

**Group 1A:** Blüthner  
Bösendorfer  
Fazioli  
Steingraeber & Söhne  
Steinway & Sons (Hamburg)

**Group 1B:** Bechstein, C. (Concert series)  
Förster, August  
Grotrian  
Sauter

**Group 1C:** Kawai, Shigeru  
Steinway & Sons (New York)

Commentary on Group 1: It was easier to arrive at a consensus on Group 1A than on any other subgroup in this rating system. So celebrated are the pianos in this subgroup that dealers eagerly nominated their competitors for the list. These pianos have everything, and the attention to detail can only be called fanatical. Some of the names in this group are well known and expected, but one that is not is Steingraeber & Söhne. I was aware of this brand, but was surprised at how many others with even passing acquaintance with it named it without hesitation. Note that Steinway & Sons (Hamburg) is not routinely available in North America; I include it for informational purposes only.

The pianos in Group 1B are also fabulous, and very “fussy,” but there was little doubt that they were second to the pianos in Group 1A, either because their

Pianos made by: Steingraeber & Söhne, Bayreuth, Germany

Bayreuth is famous the world over for its annual summer Wagner festival. But tucked away in the old part of town is a second center of Bayreuth musical excellence and one of the piano world's best-kept secrets: Steingraeber & Söhne. Founded in Bayreuth in 1852, and in its present factory since 1872, Steingraeber is one of the smaller piano manufacturers in the world, producing fewer than 250 pianos per year for the top end of the market. It is owned and operated by sixth-generation family member Udo Steingraeber, who still makes pianos using the traditional methods of his forebearers.

Steingraeber makes three sizes of vertical piano—48", 51", and 54"—and three sizes of grand—5' 7", 6' 9", and 8' 11". The 5' 7" grand model has an unusually wide tail, allowing for a larger soundboard area and longer bass strings than is customary for an instrument of its size. One interesting option on the vertical pianos is "twist and change" panels. These are two-sided top and bottom panels, one side finished in polished ebony and the other in a two-toned combination of a wood veneer and ebony. The panels can be reversed as desired by the piano owner to match room décor or just for a change of scenery. Steingraeber also specializes in so-called ecological or biological finishes, available as an option on most models. This involves the use of only organic materials in the piano, such as natural paints and glues in the case, and white keytops made from cattle bone.

Steingraeber is known for its many innovative technical improvements to the piano. One new one is a cylindrical knuckle (grand piano action part) that revolves. It acts like a normal knuckle until the hammer reaches the let-off position. After that point, in soft playing, the knuckle revolves, reducing friction and making pianissimo playing easier, smoother, and more accurate. Another innovation is a new action for upright pianos. The "SFM" action, as it is called, contains no jack spring, instead using magnets to return the jack more quickly under the hammer butt for faster repetition. It is available in all three models of vertical piano.

The 6' 9" model 205, known as the "Chamber Concert Grand," was designed to embody the same tone quality of the Steingraeber Liszt grand piano of circa 1873. The 8' 11" model E-272 concert grand was introduced in 2002 for Steingraeber's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Unique features include: a drilled capo bar for more sustain in the treble, unusually-shaped rim bracing, smaller soundboard resonating area in treble to better match string length. In 2007, Steingraeber will introduce a new 7' 7" concert grand to provide an additional, smaller, concert-size instrument. Its design will feature many of the innovations of the E-272.

Steingraeber pianos have a unique sound, with an extensive tonal palette derived from a mixture of clarity and warmth.

In addition to its regular line of pianos, Steingraeber makes a piano that can be used by physically handicapped players who don't have the use of their legs for pedaling. A switch in a backrest cushion operates the sustain pedal and a switch under the keybed operates the soft pedal. This mechanism can be installed in pianos of other makers if certain technical requirements are met.

The Steingraeber engineering department has designed and manufactured prototypes of new piano models for a number of other European piano manufacturers. These designs are not the same as Steingraeber's own current models.

Warranty: Ten years, parts and labor, to original purchaser

## **STEINWAY & SONS**

Steinway & Sons, Inc.  
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Long Island City, New York 11105

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800-366-1853

[www.steinway.com](http://www.steinway.com)

Heinrich Englehard Steinweg, a cabinetmaker and piano maker from Seesen, Germany, emigrated with his family to the United States in 1850 and established Steinway & Sons in 1853. Within a relatively short time, the Steinways were granted patents that revolutionized the piano, and which were eventually adopted or imitated by other makers. Many of these patents concerned the quest for a stronger frame, a richer, more powerful sound, and a more sensitive action. By the 1880s, the Steinway piano was in most ways the modern piano we have today, and in the next generation the standards set by the founder were strictly adhered to. (The early history of Steinway & Sons is fascinating, and is intimately connected to the history of New York City and the piano industry in general. You can read a summary of it in *The Piano Book*, and there are several excellent books devoted to the subject as well.)

Jumping ahead to the 1960s, the fourth generation of Steinways found themselves without any heirs willing or able to take over the business, and with a lack of capital with which to finance much needed equipment modernization, so in 1972 the Steinways sold their company to CBS. CBS exited the musical instrument business in 1985, selling Steinway to an investment group. In 1995, the company was sold again, this time to a major manufacturer of brass and woodwind instruments. The combined company, now known as Steinway Musical Instruments, Inc., is listed on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol LVB. Day-to-day management of the company has remained unchanged since at least 1985. Steinway also owns a