Fazioli

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Bob was sponsored by NW Pianos to go to Italy to study at the Fazioli factory to find out what sets Fazioli apart from other piano makers. During Bob's talk we were sitting between a 9'2", a 6' and various other Fazioli models in the room. Fazioli makes 5 models of pianos, and produces 120-140 pianos a year. They make grands only. Their cabinets are custom-made because many of their workers are talented wood workers and cabinet makers.

The concert grand has four pedals. The fourth pedal takes up lost motion, shifts the keyboard over and reduces the distance of the hammers to the strings. Many piano players don't like this because it's a new feature that they are not used to and introduces a new skill that they would have to learn. Besides, most piano players can play so softly that they don't really need this pedal. It is a unique feature.

Bob left Renton in the snow and took a non-stop 10-hour flight to Paris, France, and then a small flight to Venice, Italy. Then he went by car to Sacile, which is like a mini Venice for wealthy people. The old district from the 16th century has a large plaza. Bob stayed at a Bed and Breakfast. Bob's only problem was that he didn't speak Italian.

The Fazioli Pianoforti is a large building. Claudio Valent, Fazioli's Head Technician, just retired this year, shortly after Bob left. Bob was the only student for the class. The schedule was structured. Work started promptly in the early morning, around 7:30 am. There was a generous midday lunch break for about an hour, and all work ended promptly at 4:30 pm. In the building are five or six special voicing rooms. The entire manufacturing process is very closely supervised by Sig. Valent and Sig. Paolo Fazioli. It is very quiet at Fazioli, in contrast with Steinway, where it is noisy all the time.

They have a special room for soundboards. The finishes are mixed in mid-air with a spraying nozzle. The flat sets and bigger parts are on conveyors and big machinery. The plate castings might come from Germany unfinished. A local shop applies the finish to the plate. They machine the plates in the factory. When Bob was practicing tuning Claudio would not let Bob set his tuning hammer on the plate because it could chip the finish, which would be very difficult to repair. The attention to detail is top-notch on every aspect of construction. Paolo Fazioli plays every single piano before it leaves the factory. In other factories the founders and owners are never even in their factories.

Bob had dinner with Paolo Fazioli, his son Luca Fazioli and his wife, who is Japanese American and plays very well. Paolo is a Renaissance man. He pays the piano, he is taking jazz theory, and is a superb technician.

European Hammer Voicing

To voice, the Fazioli technicians use an adjustable three-needle tool. Each technician has a little room big enough for a piano and a heater. This is where the final voicers and regulators go to work. There are 5-6 people who are very good mechanical finishing technicians, which leaves not much of anything to do for field technicians.

Hammer Filing

- Support hammers on a support block
- Sanding strips for angled hammers (app 15mm wide)
- 7-8 cm wide for straight hammers to do several at a time
- First pass 120 grit
- Second pass 240 grit
- Final pass 800 grit to make them perfectly smooth
- Iron hammers for final smoothing

Needling

- Do 10 stitches at each angle
- Start horizontally, with shallow stitches
- Needle diagonally
- Needle vertically, but not too close to strike point. Deepest. Go deepest downward
- Use an adjustable tool that lengthens or shortens the needles
- This process is physically tiring

Final Treatment

- Iron the hammers
- Put the action on a pounding machine
- In the field, use a single needle chopstick tool
- Look for the part of the hammer that is hard and needs to be voiced.
- Often there are only a few isolated notes that need to be voiced.
- Mute off the strings and check the strings for brightness to determine where to needle.
- Do progressively less needling up the scale.

Duplex Scale

- Pre-voice the duplex scale by moving the triangles
- Tune the piano, then tune the duplex triangles
- Adjust the duplex triangles on the plate using a Teflon tool with a slit on the end
- The string goes in the slot. Tap the tool like a punch.
- The scales are calculated 4:1 (double octave), 3:1 (twelfth), 2:1 (octave), 3:2 (fifth), and 1:1 (unison), by section
- The pitch of the duplex is affected by termination point friction
- Use only proper tool to adjust
- Do not chip plate finish, which is very difficult to repair.
- Tuning the duplex scale is time-consuming, because during the process the pitch changes.
- Once the tuning is finally set, it tends to stay.

Bob has been to Steinway, Yamaha Little Red Schoolhouse, Kawai, and now Fazioli. He would still like to go to Petrof in the Czech Republic. Each company has its own way, its own style and techniques, and its own culture. We need to learn the reasoning behind why each of these companies makes their pianos the way they do; it is important to understand the approach of each manufacturer.