

## Full Service Call

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PTG

When Joe first started, in addition to tuning he wanted to get into rebuilding and selling pianos. The first piano he bought was a duo-art with all kinds of challenges. This made him decide rather to focus on full-service tuning. Working on actions is much easier than removing plates and soundboards. He decided to include in his tuning price enough extra to cover a little extra time to do additional work on each piano. Since there is always extra work to do on every piano, instead of talking to the people after the tuning, allow time and charge a bit more to include minor repairs and adjustments as a part of the tuning. Sometimes it helps to quote a price range over the phone so that the customer is prepared mentally for a high dollar amount. Sometimes a piano might need a repair more than a tuning.

Joe schedules appointments about three hours apart, and give the customer an arrival range. For example, he'll say that he'll be there between nine and ten. It is also important to keep in touch by phone to confirm the night before, the morning of, just before, and especially if your schedule has changed.

Chances are that the call for the tuning was really because a key didn't work, a pedal squeaks, or whatever. Make sure to fix the problem first before doing anything else. When you first arrive, play the piano and notice the regulation and voicing. If something is off, point it out to the customers and ask if they like the way it is. Add comments related to what could be changed or improved. To demonstrate how worn hammers will eventually sound, play the soft pedal. Shape a hammer in front of the customer to demonstrate how they will sound once shaped. Many people are so used to how their pianos are and have been for years that it has never entered their minds that the tone or touch can be changed or improved.

While playing the piano, keep this question in the forefront of your mind: "what is most distracting?" Talk to the customer about future work. "Here is what I can do today, but we could schedule a later time to do this other work." Significant things that can be done during the tuning appointment might be leveling the strings, repairing or replacing broken parts, and solving the most blatant issues.

What level of refinement are we after? Press the hammers up against the strings to see how level the strings are. Pluck the strings to listen for and leaking sound.

The logical order for going through a piano would be to clean, repair, regulate, tune, and finally voice. Sometimes a piano might be grossly out of tune; in this case, do a pitch raise at the beginning to give the strings a chance to settle and to find out if the pins are going to hold.

What should be done if the piano is in a cold school just before the heat comes on for the year? In outdoor concerts, the longest wires and the wound wires will go flatter than the other strings. Darrel Fandrich wrote a hand-out on temperature. The pitch changes dramatically with a ten degree change, particularly in the bass; there is a separate curve for the tenor and the bass strings, both of which change more than the upper single wires. One customer kept a humidity graph on a computer in the piano room. If the piano will be tuned twice a year, the best times would be spring and fall, rather than

during the extremes of winter and summer. However, weather is not predictable. The level of the performer and the quality of the instrument is also a factor to consider. For pianos tuned once every ten years, the time of year is not an issue at all.

If the piano needs regulation, what are the first things to look for? Worn hammers are a tell-tale sign. Check the let-off, which will tell a lot in a quick look. After-touch on a grand also is a more detailed examination. During a house call, there is not enough time for a complete regulation, but there could be time to work on the tenor section only, adjusting, for example, the capstans and maybe the drop. Although spoon regulation is tedious, adjusting capstans often will alter the spoons. However, don't start randomly changing things, since many adjustments are inter-related: you might open up a can of worms. Plan your work and work your plan. The goal is to get the piano working in the time there for the tuning time allotted and for the amount quoted. Get it to play. The three levels of play: make it work, make it play, make it a Steinway. The questions are, who's playing, who's paying, and what are the demands of the piano?

Often people will get a "free" piano that needs repair. If the piano can be tuned, tune it. If basic repairs can be made, fix them. If it's a basket case and might take thousands of dollars to get into good shape, then talk it over with the customer and give options. Be an advocate for the piano, whether it says "fix me" or "put me down." For some people, getting a piano is a step up from a little key board, and it can be quite a disappointment to realize that the piano is junk. Be tactful. Keep in mind, in this order, what's good for the piano, what's good for the customer, and what's good for me?

## **Voicing & Tuning Tips**

### Voicing Tools

- 151 molar forceps
- Towel forceps

### Tuning Tools

- Faulk lever , carbon graphite core, aluminum tube: light weight & can feel the pin. Don Galt used to say that you need to feel the pin turn in the wood.
- Key pounder
  - racket ball with a hammer glued onto it
  - padded cycling gloves to protect hand from pounding
- Rubber stationary finger tip covers for tuning intervals on three fingers
- Ear protection