Voicing with Pliers

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The Value of Voicing

Voice with every tuning. Besides tuning, voicing is the most mysterious thing that we do. Our whole purpose is to make the piano sound better. The average customer not only knows whether the piano is in or out of tune, but can also really hear the difference after it has been tuned and start liking their own piano better. Voicing involves regulating, tuning, hammer travel and more.

Stories

- Jim's first voicing was done on a little piano in the back of a music store. It had really hard hammers, and he couldn't even get his #6 needles in, and broke more and more needles. This process took over four hours. Light hammers can be voiced faster than those with more mass.
- Eric Shandall was driving back from Bamff, and between mountain ranges he found a great radio signal. He decided to see how well he could adjust his radio sound as perfect as possible. He turned the knob until it sounded absolutely clear; then he looked down and saw his hand was on the cigarette lighter.

Average Customers

Some rooms sound louder than others. For the lesser piano and for the customer who really does not know the difference, voicing can make an impressive difference. Most of these customers play fairly easy music with a light touch. They are not pounding the piano.

Tools

- Voicing needles in various kinds of handles.
- Make a paddle using adhesive step tread
- Capstan pliers. Filed down so they are sharp: puts two holes right at the strike point on the dies
- Long-nosed vice grips with a wider spot that is almost parallel.
- Slip-joint pliers filed down with two nubs.

Techniques

- *Comparisons:* Compare an old upright hammer with an Imadigawa hammer. Cut a slit from the strike point to the wood on each hammer and notice how far apart the felt separates.
- *Using pliers:* To soften the tone of a hammer, either needle it or squeeze it. For lighter pianos and for the average customer, squeeze the sides at the points where a needle would normally go in the front. What we are doing is to crush the fibers to make it softer. With pliers, a whole set on a lesser piano can be done without shaping the hammers, in about five minutes. With an upright piano, roll the hammer forward, support it between your fingers, and squeeze with the pliers.

Sometimes squeezing only the top half can be enough. Start by squeezing at 10:00 and 2:00, moving around. If you squeeze too close to the edge, the hammer will cup; if this happens, take a hammer and file the hammer flat. Squeeze it too close to the wood and it is either too hard to squeeze or you will actually crush the wood. Sometimes this might leave little dimples on the side of the hammer, but usually nothing is visual, in contrast with noticing needle holes on the hammer surface. To do a whole piano well can take about an hour either squeezing or needling.

- *Other activities* that aid in removing sizzle and blatant sounds:
    - tap down the bridge pins
    - seat the strings
    - move the strings out of the metal grooves
    - make sure the unisons are cleanly tuned.

Comments

We want tension in the hammer, especially in the outer part. We can't change the tone of a hammer with no tension unless we change the attack. This is why we reserve our needling on the tip for the very last. Strive to voice the best from 11:00 down; only sugar coat the tip as the very last gesture. If the main part of a hard hammer with no tension is softened with pliers, at least the impact will be improved or be less offensive. The length of fiber in the original felt can also make a difference. Longer-fiber hammers are lovely material and can be worked with in more directions.