



How A Piano Works Workshop



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In the beginning of November, I taught a class at one of Settlement Music School's branches about how a piano works. The class was entitled "How a Piano Works" and in the class we explored just that. The class ran for about fifty minutes and covered all sorts of topics about the piano including history, the action design, and how it makes sound. We had great attendance by many students and their parents. One of the key factors in making this class possible can be attributed to Russ Klein, a piano teacher at Settlement, and his family. I would like to thank him and his family and their help in organizing and recording the class.

It is not often that I get to teach a class like this and to have an engaged audience was even more thrilling! In past years, Art Jones, Settlement's piano technician before me, had taught the class and I am happy to be continuing the legacy.

I believe that the more informed a piano owner is, the better choices he/she can make about how to care for and use his/her instrument. Having knowledge about what an instrument can do and how to control the various aspects of it open up an infinite world of possibilities for music making. If someone can move their fingers well but have no idea what the middle pedal does, then I suggest he/she is not able to fully explore and enjoy the instrument.



I think that the best part of the class was the tangible models and parts available to the attendees. We had a concert grand piano, a grand action model, grand action parts, an upright piano, an upright action model, and upright action parts. I passed around the parts to the piano actions to give everyone an idea of what the mechanism inside the piano looks and feels like. The action models were helpful to show what happens when a key is pressed and how all the parts move to strike a string. It was nice to have a concert grand piano available to show how everything connects and produces a sound after the string begins to vibrate. A large piano like that makes it easy to see everything under the lid.

One of my favorite parts of the class was the question and answer section. We had an array of different questions about all aspects of the piano. It kept me on my toes to be able to quickly answer any of the questions presented. One of my favorite questions was “does a piano work?” That one required a creative response. I believe it depends on what you expect the piano to do before it can be answered: if you expect it to haul a trailer or cook a pizza, you will be upset, but if you expect it to play a Chopin Nocturne with a little help from your fingers and feet, you will be pleased.

As far as I know, this class will not be taught again until next autumn, though I believe once the word gets out about the class, there will be a calling for it to happen again sooner.

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