



The Piano Shop on the Left Bank: A Short Book Review

In recounting his rediscovery of a passion of his youth, Thad Carhart has made both the technology and the culture of the piano come alive. His skillful interleaving of the engineering considerations that go into making a great piano with the human satisfaction that comes of playing one has produced a totally engrossing book.

-Henry Petroski
The Book on the Bookshelf

About a week ago I finished a wonderful novel written by Thad Carhart. The book entitled *The Piano Shop on the Left Bank: Discovering a Forgotten Passion in a Paris Atelier* allowed me to see a different perspective to my profession as a piano technician. The story is about a man who moves to Paris with his family and decides to be a fiction author. While taking his children to school one day, he notices a small shop with piano parts in the window. To rekindle his love for music and return to the piano playing of his youth, he purchases a piano and begins to play again. The novel explores the relationship he has with his piano technician and his piano teachers. He dives deep into what the piano is really all about and what it means to different people. Throughout his journey he sees many different pianos of different shapes, sizes and ages, all with different sounds and feels. It is a novel about how someone finds the piano again after reaching adulthood and discovering what it means to him and his family.

What I enjoyed most while reading is the familiarity I have with the subject and the ability to focus on the people instead of the instrument and all of its overwhelming intricacies.



As a piano technician, I have to say that I found the accuracy of the description of how the piano works and behaves was spot on. It tickled me to know that there are well researched novels out there about pianos considering most people know only a small amount about the big, hulking, wooden box in their living room. The way the information is delivered is clear and straightforward and does not interfere with the whimsical quality of light fiction writing. The story is easy to follow even if some of the description is skipped over.

Since I am not a piano teacher and am mostly self taught when it comes to playing the instrument, I especially enjoyed the parts of the novel when the main character interacts with his piano teachers.

He describes what they tell him and we, the audience, get to see how it is perceived through his filter. Sometimes he joins us as a listener and lets us decide what was meant by what was said. Closer to the end of the novel he attends a master class and describes his experience watching others with a higher level of playing receive comments about their playing. He watches with us and tries to pull meaning out of what the master pianist has to say in his own way and leaves the rest for our interpretation. I believe my playing will improve a bit just by reading what was said by the teachers he encounters.

I would highly recommend this book to anyone with a piano in their life. It opens up a world that I believe many people don't even know exists.

History blends seamlessly with memoir in this paean to the piano... Could be dangerous for anyone who doesn't already own one.

-Kirkus Reviews

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