

## Claude Montal: Piano Technician, Piano Builder, and Author

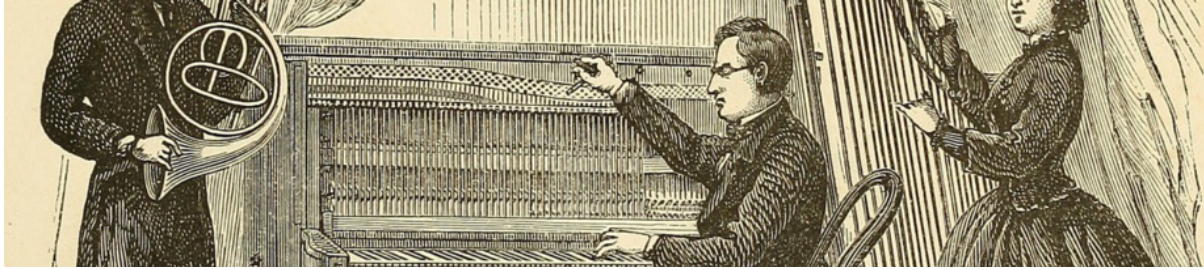


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Way back in the day, in turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century France, there was born a soul who would change the way pianos were maintained forevermore: Claude Montal. As a child blinded at the age of five by typhoid fever, he attended a school for the blind until becoming a teacher at the same school by the age of twenty. He desired a more independent life away from the school and, branching from his love of music and the piano, decided to go out and learn how to tune and repair pianos. He had someone read to him anything he could find about piano tuning and at the same time, disassembled pianos to learn about the mechanism, what technicians refer to as the *action*. By the age of thirty, he had mastered his craft and was teaching tuning at a piano store as well as repairing and selling pianos.

In 1836, he wrote the most comprehensive text at the time about piano tuning and repair entitled *The Art of Tuning Your Own Piano Yourself*. He soon became well known among the musical community of the day and was placed

next to piano manufacturers such as Pleyel and Érard. He began building his own design of pianos with complex actions that were far advanced for his time. He set out to build high quality upright pianos that could rival any grand piano of the time and eventually replace the square grand.



After some time and the rapid advancement of the piano during the early 1800's, Montal decided to revise and update his book. He did away with entire sections that he found no longer relevant and added sections to clarify or bring new material about advancement of the piano since the first edition. One of his additions covers the decision by the French government to establish a standard pitch to tune instruments to. After much debate and reviewing of information, the French agreed that the standard pitch would be A435 instead of the modern A440. It is even written on some instruments that Montal so completely breaks down for us in the book. His final edition of *The Art of Tuning Your Own Piano Yourself* was released in 1865 shortly before his death in March of that year. Fred Sturm, RPT, recently translated the entire text into English as a project with the Piano Technicians Guild Foundation.

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Claude Montal was a marvel and a major influence on piano building and professionally maintaining pianos. He was the first one successful enough in his venture to establish the profession of piano technician and to make it a possible profession for those who have lost their vision.