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Don't Move A Piano Until You Read This

By D Ruplinger

How do you move a piano? Very carefully.

Okay, I'm being a little sarcastic, but moving a piano is a serious endeavor.

I'm a big advocate of hiring a professional mover to move a piano. Pianos are heavy and it's easy to damage a piano while moving it. I'm speaking from experience. I own a Kimball piano my parents bought brand new for me when I was a child. That piano was a big deal to me after having played on an old "clunker" of a piano for several years. I played that new piano every day.

When I got married it was time to move the piano to my own home. My husband and his brothers moved it themselves. It wasn't an easy job even with the moving dolly they used (pianos weigh several hundred pounds - grand pianos can weigh 1,500 pounds). The amateur move of my piano resulted in both of the piano legs being damaged (a common occurrence when people move a piano themselves) and some unplanned internal work (some pins needed repair and a string broke). I should have hired a piano mover. Then I wouldn't have had those problems, but my husband and I thought we would save money by doing it ourselves. It was a lesson I should have remembered, but I was foolish a second time.

A few years ago my husband and I built a new house. When it came time to move the piano again, my husband was reluctant to hire someone to move it professionally because our pocketbook was already feeling empty from the expense of building the house (he called our new house a "money-sucking black hole.") In his mind, moving it wasn't a big deal. Our new house was less than two miles from our old one; and he had a dolly, a trailer, and a brother who was willing to help him.

Everything went okay until my husband turned into the driveway of our new home. The sharpness of the turn strained the ropes holding the piano on the trailer and they broke. The piano tipped over and sustained a lot of damage (the entire "guts" of the piano are ruined and the case is chipped and scratched). I haven't had it fixed yet, but I have gotten an estimate. It's going to take a lot of time and money to fix the piano. It needs to be totally rebuilt. Because of the labor involved, it would be cheaper to buy a new piano than have it fixed, but the piano has a lot of sentimental value to me so I will have it fixed. This is why I say, "Hire a professional!"

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What does a professional piano mover do to ensure a safe and successful move? With upright pianos, they almost always strap the piano on a skid called a piano board. They also cover the piano with blankets to help protect it. The entire bundle is then typically put on a dolly and taken to its destination. If steps are involved, the piano is taken off the dolly and slid up or down the steps on the piano board.

Moving a grand piano is a little more involved. The lid, lid hinges, pedal lyre, and leg on the straight side of the piano are usually all removed. The piano is then put on the piano board, on its side, with the straight side down. The other legs of the piano are then removed. The piano is then covered with blankets, strapped to the board, and put on a dolly.

Some movers don't like to move a piano up or down stairs. If it's feasible, they prefer to hoist it to the appropriate floor via a window that's big enough to accommodate the piano.

So what do you do if you just want to move your piano from one part of a room to another? First, decide if it's really important to move it because there's always the risk of damaging a piano even with a short move. Piano legs are the most likely thing to get damaged or broken.

Be very careful to avoid putting too much weight on the legs. Get a few strong people to help if the piano is an upright; and get at least 5 people if it's a grand piano. With an upright or spinet, tilt the piano back a little to take the pressure off the front legs, but be careful not to tip it back too far and tip it over. With a grand piano, lift the piano up enough to get the pressure off the legs before you try to move it. It's not necessary (and not recommended) to lift the piano off the floor entirely.

If you're going to move a piano often, consider having it fitted with special casters that will allow you to move the piano fairly easily. Or, have the piano placed on a piano truck.

How do you find a good piano mover if you've decided to not try and move it yourself? My suggestion is that you call your local piano store and ask them for recommendations. They should be able to give you the name or names of reputable movers in your area.

Okay, so you've decided you are definitely going to move your piano and you've decided on a method. Now you have to figure out where you're going to put the piano. Where should it go?

Try to put your piano in an area of a room where there are little or no drafts, where it's out of direct sunlight, and where the temperature and humidity are stable. This is because pianos are sensitive to humidity and temperature. Lots of temperature and humidity swings cause a piano to go out of tune faster than normal, can damage the wood case, and if they are severe they can even eventually cause structural failure.

Don't place your piano over or next to a heat vent and avoid putting it close to a fireplace. Don't put in front of a window because that's typically a drafty place as well as one with direct sunlight. Try to find a room in your home or apartment that has consistently stable temperature and humidity. That is the best room for your piano.

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If you can't find a place in your apartment or home that is out of direct sunlight, free of drafts, and doesn't have big temperature swings, you may want to consider having a climate control system installed in your piano.

Moving and placing your piano correctly will help ensure you have a lovely instrument to play for a long time rather than having what I now own - an oversized paperweight that needs to be dusted.

D Ruplinger is a featured writer for

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Be Kind To Your Piano When You Put It In Storage

By D Ruplinger

You own a piano you love. But, you find that you need to put it in storage for a while. How should you go about doing it?

Many experts will tell you to avoid storing a piano if at all possible. It's suggested to do everything you can to find a relative or friend who can keep the piano in their home or apartment until you're ready for it again.

But what if that's not possible?

A climate controlled storage facility is the best storage choice. Then the piano won't be subjected to big temperature swings and big humidity changes, both of which can cause a lot of damage to a piano.

Pianos are very sensitive to temperature and humidity changes. Frequent, severe swings in temperature and humidity can wreck the wood piano case; doing things to it such as drying it out to the point of cracking if it's too dry for a long time or warping it and wrecking the wood if it's too humid.

Frequent or severe temperature and humidity changes will also cause the piano to go out of tune sooner than it normally would. It can also cause the wool cloth in the piano actions on better quality pianos to deteriorate.

If you have a piano at an unheated summer home or cottage, it's probably better to keep the piano there during the cold winter months than to move it back and forth every year. If a person has to

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choose between storing a piano in a place that's very hot versus very cold, the piano will usually fare much better in the cooler place. Some experts suggest placing moth balls in the piano during the winter storage period, taking care to make sure the moth balls don't touch the finish of the piano. Just be sure to remember to remove them before you start using the piano again.

One additional warning comes from "The Piano Book" by Larry Fine (an excellent and comprehensive resource book on pianos). He says a piano that has been kept for years in an area that was damp or unheated should never be moved to a dry location or a well-heated location. Larry says pianos that have had this done to them have been known to "self destruct" in a short period of time.

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