



A Piano Buyer's Guide

How To Find The Best Piano ©



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So, you are considering the purchase of a piano! Like most piano buyers you probably wonder how to begin your shopping, what to look for, how much to pay, new or used, etc. Most questions and concerns about buying a piano fall somewhere within a combination of the questions listed below. My intent is to answer these questions as if you were asking them of me in our store. I hope that my answers will provide you with a guide of sorts that you can use as you shop for the best piano.

1. **What makes one piano brand better than another?**
2. **Why are there so many conflicting opinions from “piano experts”?**
3. **Who can be trusted to help you buy your piano?**
4. **Which piano should you buy?**
5. **Where should you buy your piano?**
6. **How much should you pay for a piano?**
7. **When is the best time to buy your piano?**

Shopping and buying a piano should be a fun experience. Here are some insights to help you find the piano that is best for you.

What makes one piano brand better than another?

The design, materials and the method of construction determine the musical attributes of a piano. And it is the *credentials* of a piano that verify the integrity and quality of these three musical attributes. The highest credentials coveted by a piano builder are bestowed by people who make their living playing the piano on concert stages, music academies, recording studios, etc. Three world renowned piano builders have earned the credentials that qualify them to be recognized as professional performance grade instruments. Yamaha is one of them. As a piano shopper you can select a piano for yourself just like accomplished musicians choose a piano for their next performance. Every piano, no matter its brand, shape, size or price can be judged on these three credentials: 1) Tone - how musically perfect the piano sounds; 2) Touch - how accurately the piano responds to the fingertips of the musician; 3) Reputation - the con-

sistency and dependability of a piano's tone and touch, as proven by the test of time under all types of performance conditions.

Think about the last time you saw a piano performance. Perhaps it was on TV, maybe a live venue, etc. Can you recall the name that was on the side of the piano or on the front of the piano right above the player's hands? Chances are you didn't notice, but the name on the piano was very likely to be Yamaha. Thousands of musicians, who stake their professional careers on the pianos they play, have judged Yamaha Pianos to have the best tone, touch and reputation as compared to any other piano that they could choose. This is the most treasured proclamation a piano builder can earn. Erroneous allegations are sometimes made that these proclamations are paid forms of advertising. However, the highest profile performers who play a Yamaha Piano could never be influenced to compromise a performance in lieu of a paid endorsement. Whatever the amount offered, it would pale compared to the money they earn every time they sit down to play on a stage, recording studio, etc. The fact is that Yamaha is demanded by these most critical piano players for one reason: the piano under their fingertips enables them to execute their skills and talents with no limits. Such are the professional opinions rendered on Yamaha's tone, touch and reputation. And it is these three attributes that are cultivated into the design, material specifications and construction of every Yamaha Piano purchased by people just like you. Whatever Yamaha Piano you choose, it will share the musical credentials earned by its big siblings on performance stages all over the world!

Why are there so many conflicting opinions from “piano experts”?

What appear to be conflicting opinions about pianos are the result of competing sales and marketing agendas. Every piano manufacturer has a story to tell. But keep in mind that each piano brand is designed and manufactured according to either a set of musical standards or a price point target. The price of a piano built according to musical standards, such as Yamaha, is the result of the materials and assembly systems required to meet a pre-determined set of musical performance standards. The opposite approach is used by a manufacturer that determines what materials and manufacturing systems must be used to build pianos that meet pre-determined price points.

As a piano shopper you can expect to be subjected to a variety of sales presentations. You are reading one right now! Because so little is commonly known about pianos a shopper can get confused by the opinions that are presented as facts about a piano. Facts can be proven, opinions can, at best, only be believed. Search for facts as you search for your piano. Here are some facts: more people who make their living playing a musical instrument play a Yamaha over any other brand. Yamaha started to build pianos in 1900, 54 years before the company manufactured its first motorcycle. (For what it's worth, the Yamaha corporate logo found on every Yamaha product, including motor cycles, is three piano tuning forks crossed with each other!) Yamaha Pianos first received a World's Fair award in St. Louis in 1904. Yamaha built the world's first acoustic research room to improve the musical qualities of its pianos in 1923. Visit this website for a chronology of Yamaha's corporate history: www.yamaha.com/about_yamaha/corporate/history/index.html

Who can be trusted to help you buy your piano?

People who know each other and have shared interests tend to trust each other. Perhaps you know someone who plays; a piano teacher, the music minister at church, etc. Find out what they might suggest to help you get started in your research. Use the internet to survey the piano world by visiting the official web sites of piano manufacturers. You will learn a lot about piano brands, features, etc. Internet forums and blogs about pianos are easy to find but range from confusing to misleading. Stay with the official manufacturer sites.

Your shopping activities must include visits to piano stores so that you can see and hear pianos. Get to know the people at the stores. Ask questions until you are convinced that you are working with someone who knows what they are talking about and has your best interests in mind. Buy your piano from the person who you can trust and who offers you the best piano value.

Which piano should you buy?

This question is easier to answer than one might think if we accept the proclamations of the performance stage to be a standard by which to compare one piano to another. It is a fact that Yamaha Pianos are commonly selected as the piano of choice by professional musicians, music faculties, recording studios, etc. Therefore, the best Yamaha Piano for you would be one that physically fits into your home and financially fits in your wallet. Whichever Yamaha you choose it will be a piano that takes the pianist in your home as close as possible to the performance attributes of the Yamaha Concert Grand in terms of tone, touch and reputation. Yamaha Pianos have proven to be the best choice compared to any other brand piano of the same shape (grand, upright, digital), size and price.

A quick word about used pianos...avoid buying one unless you know the person who is selling the piano and can verify that it

has been tuned at least once per year since it was new. Without that assurance there is an elevated risk of problems with tuning stability and other maintenance routines in the future. A new Yamaha Clavinova™ Digital Piano can be purchased, in many cases, for less than a "good used piano". Then you are assured of perfect tone and touch with a new owner warranty and Yamaha's reputation for quality and satisfaction.

Where should you buy your piano?

Buy your piano locally from someone you trust. And if you are buying a new piano verify that the store is an authorized dealer for the brand you select. Reputable piano manufacturers are tenacious about how their product lines are represented to piano shoppers like you. Yamaha dealership appointments are based on a merchant's abilities to represent Yamaha products in an honest manner, help customers get the information they need to make the right purchase decision, and then follow up with service and warranty fulfillment after the piano is delivered.

How much should you pay for a piano?

The purchase price of a new piano is largely determined by three factors in the journey from its factory to your home: 1) the piano brand and model; 2) the time and place of final delivery; 3) retail store operations. We will use an imagined piano to understand how a piano price evolves. Assume you have shopped and have decided to buy the Acme GP123 Grand Piano. Your local Acme Piano Dealer will pay the same price to buy the piano from the Acme factory, give or take a few percentage points, as any other Acme Piano dealer. Your Acme dealer might save a bit if you, the buyer would make a purchase at a time when the Acme Company is offering its dealers some type of incentive program. Additionally, timing might also help lower your purchase price by taking delivery within a certain time frame that combines with other local piano shipments and deliveries. Pianos are heavy; the logistics to transport them are expensive.

However, these first two pricing factors rarely add up to much more than a few percentage points of price differential. The most costly variable in the purchase price of a piano is embedded in the operations of the dealer selling the piano. Operating expenses determine the difference between the factory price and the retail price a piano store requires to stay in business. This difference is called the mark up, or margin. No retail business can exist without the mark up, it's just that some require more than others. Piano manufacturers don't typically own retail stores and, therefore, don't have influence to determine the purchase price a piano dealer might offer you. Therefore, it is the store owner that has to compete for your piano purchase by controlling costs while providing you with the piano you want and the service you deserve. In the final analysis you, the shopper, will determine which piano store offers you the most value for your dollar in terms of piano brand and model, time of delivery and customer service.

Be cautious about buying a piano from an internet source. Most of the reputable piano manufacturers, including Yamaha, do not allow retail dealers to solicit and sell their brand of new pianos over the internet. It's all about customer satisfaction and service. A piano has to be safely delivered to your home, tuned and maintained. Pianos, like other items purchased through internet sources, are generally shipped "free on board". This means that the title of ownership transfers from seller to buyer when the piano is loaded on to a transport truck. Consequently, the piano's delivered condition along with tuning service and warranty fulfillment belong to the buyer, not the seller. Any potential misunderstandings and misrepresentations are difficult if not impossible to resolve, especially in cases where the piano is purchased from an out of state retail store.

When is the best time to buy your piano?

This is a personal decision. Perhaps you want your children or grandchildren to learn, or maybe it's you who wants to start or re-start playing the piano. For what it's worth, the author started selling pianos in 1969 and became a Yamaha Dealer in 1974. There has never been an occasion, save a few abnormal circumstances, when a customer who purchased a piano returned to the store to lament their decision. And, the writer has never met an adult who celebrates their decision to quit playing when they had the opportunity to take piano lessons in their earlier years. So, assuming you have the physical space and the financial resources, the best time to buy your piano is NOW. Procrastination kills enthusiasm, anxiety prevents decisions. Playing the piano does nothing but good for people. NOW is the best time to buy. Tomorrow never comes. Find your piano today!



About the Author

After graduating from the University of Illinois School of Business in 1969 Al was employed as a piano sales person in the suburbs of Chicago. Since that time he has owned and operated other piano stores, held executive management positions for piano manufacturers and major musical instrument retailers, helped start a piano retail finance company, and founded a management consulting company. Al established Las Vegas Pianos, the authorized Yamaha Piano Dealer for Southern Nevada and Northern Arizona. He resides with his wife in Henderson, NV.

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