The Owner's Guide to Piano Repair



Focus On: Routine Maintenance for Your Spinet Piano

Information provided courtesy of:

Lee Gordon / The Piano Shop
Member: Piano Technicians Guild
P.O. Box 22958
Honolulu, HI 96823-2958
Phone: (808)722-0618
Email: leegordon53@gmail.com
Web: www.hawaiipianoshop.com

As the owner of a spinet piano you have the advantage of playing on an authentic acoustic piano which is conveniently sized–approximately the same dimensions as a digital piano. A spinet is often a good option for the home owner or apartment dweller who doesn't have an abundance of space, but who wants a real piano to play. With proper maintenance, a good quality spinet piano can be a reliable instrument that provides years of musical enjoyment.



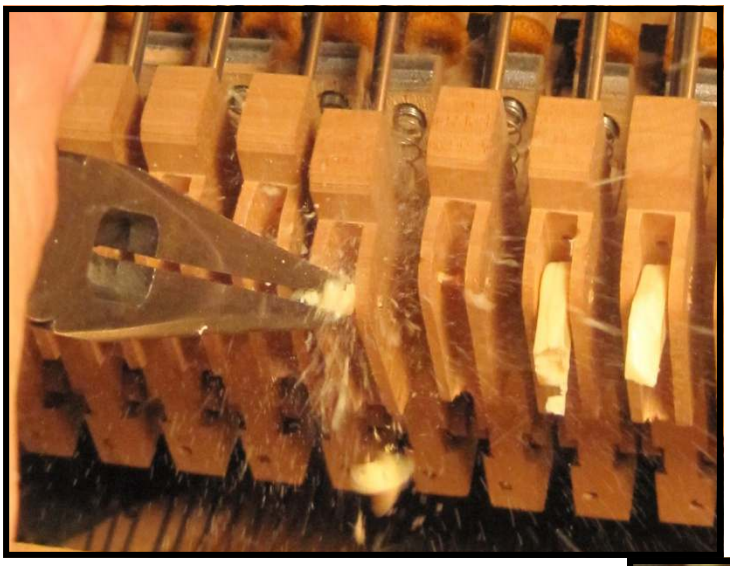
Sitting down to play on a freshly tuned spinet can be a pleasant experience for beginners and more advanced pianists alike!

The following information is intended to enable you to better understand the proper maintenance required to keep your spinet piano in top form.

Tuning: As with any acoustic piano, following a regular tuning schedule is essential for a spinet piano to perform up to its potential. All pianos go out of tune over time because of a variety of factors such as seasonal swings in humidity levels. An important key to your spinet piano sounding its best is to keep it in proper tune by having it professionally serviced on a regular basis. An adequate tuning schedule for a piano being used frequently is a once-a-year tuning, usually scheduled for approximately the same time of year each year. For the piano that is being played heavily, a semi-annual or quarterly tuning would be better yet.

For a piano currently not being played but which is being maintained for future use, a tuning every other year will usually suffice. Letting any piano go for longer than two years without tuning, however, is not recommended.

Repairs: Your spinet piano action has thousands of individual parts, and after years of use parts may wear out or simply break. Oftentimes spinets have plastic parts which may be more susceptible to breakage than wooden parts. The good news is that most of the parts found in a spinet piano action which are prone to breakage are typically replaceable by the professional piano technician.



An example of a part which often fails in older spinets is that of plastic elbows–essential parts which connect the keys with the working mechanism (action). The plastic used in the original elbows hardens until it becomes extremely brittle. In the photo to the left, old elbows are being pulverized with a pair of needle nose pliers. Very brittle, indeed!

The best procedure for replacing parts which have begun to break is to replace the entire set in order to avoid future problems. In the photo to the right, a new elbow is being installed on the lifter wire that connects the key to the action. The plastic used for replacement elbows is much more durable, and does not have the tendency to become brittle with age.



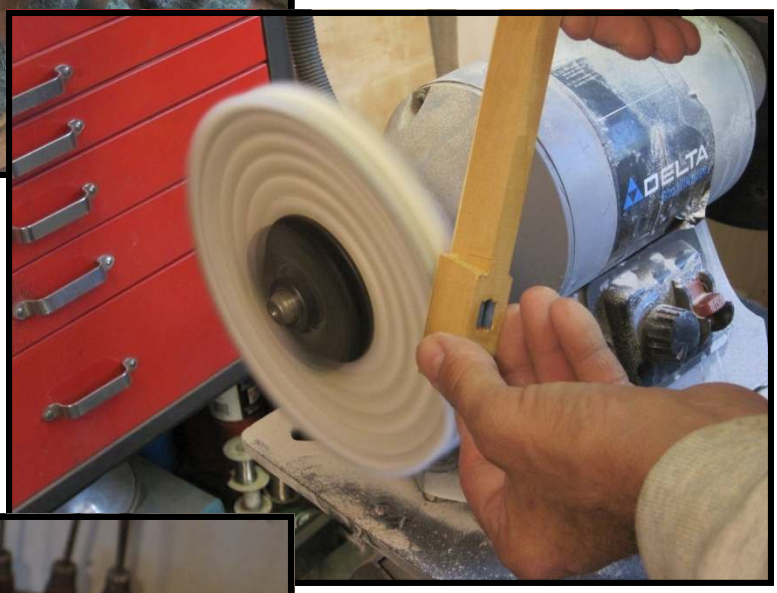


When an entire set of parts is replaced, further repairs should not be needed in the foreseeable future. In the photo to the left, a set of replacement elbows has been installed in a spinet which had been having recurring breakage problems. The problem is now solved, once and for all. This approach is recommended whenever possible.

Other commonly needed repair / maintenance work on an spinet piano would include such jobs as vacuuming up dust and debris from under the keys (especially important for those owners with dust allergies), professional polishing of grimy imitation ivory keytops, and repair or replacement of loose or worn hammerheads. The photos below illustrate these often needed repairs:



With careful removal of the keys (NOT a job for the DIY'er—way too many parts to break), the keybed may be thoroughly vacuumed and brushed out—making it as clean inside as the day the piano left the factory.



Imitation ivory keytops may be cleaned and buffed with special compounds designed for just for keytops (typically the keys are taken to the workshop for this job) and restored to their original luster.

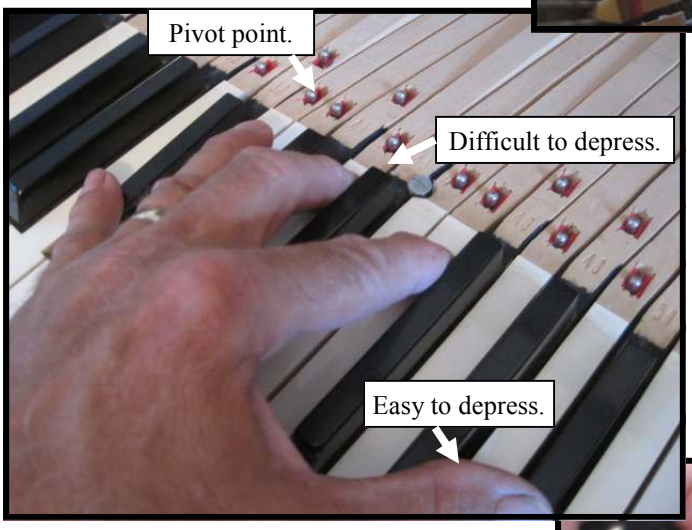


Hammerheads which are loose (as in the photo to the left) or badly worn may need to be repaired or replaced entirely. Again, for this type of work the action would need to be transported to the workshop. With the action in the shop, other needed repair work could be done as well.

Regulation: For your spinet piano to perform at its peak, the first step is to get it into tune and repair all broken or worn parts. When this has been done, the piano is ready to be "regulated." Regulation refers to the procedure of adjusting all the moving parts of the piano action so that the mechanism is performing in peak form, with no wasted motion. Because of the compact design of the spinet piano, it is particularly important that the piano is adjusted to perform at its best.

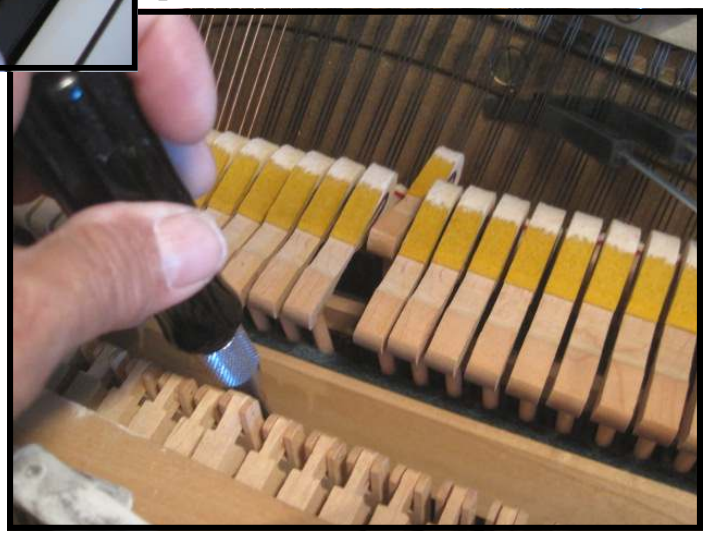
Explanation: The keys of a spinet are shorter than those in an upright or grand to allow room for the action to drop down below the level of the keys. (The keys of an upright or grand piano go all the way under the action parts.) This "inverted" style of action is necessary for the compact size of the spinet, but presents serious challenges for the technician.



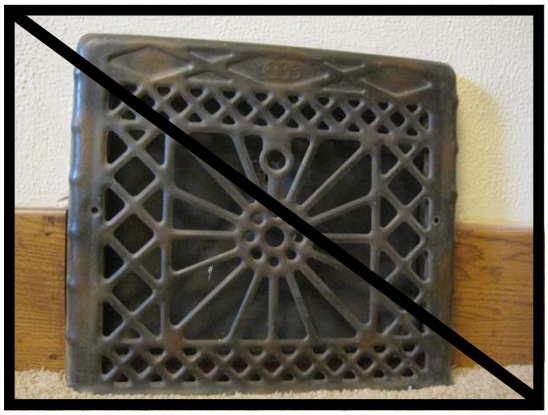


Because of the shorter length of the keys, the pivot point that each key rocks on will be very close to the back of the keytop. When the fingers go deep on the keys in playing certain chords, a noticeable difference will be felt in the amount of effort needed to depress the various notes.

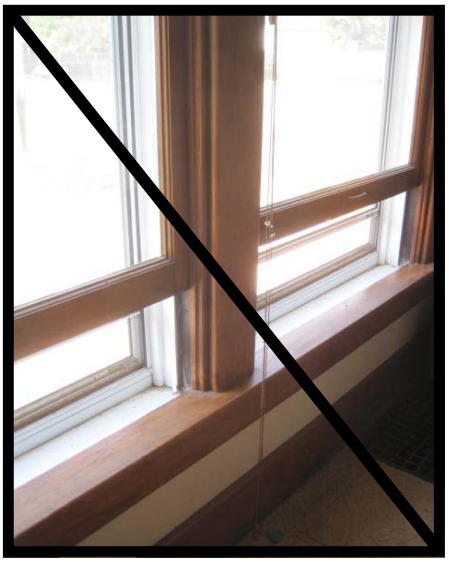
In order to minimize the effects of the compact design of the spinet action and keyset, keeping the piano regulated (one step of which is shown in the photo to the right) is extremely important. Just as a small car is more enjoyable to drive when it is running correctly, a small piano will be more satisfying to play when correctly regulated.



Environment: While tuning, repairs and regulation are the job of the technician, seeing to it that your spinet piano is placed in an appropriate spot within your home is up to you. What is needed, as much as possible, is a location where temperature and humidity are kept at moderate levels year-round. Drafty locations, or areas where wide swings in either temperature or humidity occur (unheated porches, moldy basements, etc.) are unsuitable for a piano. In particular avoid placing your piano in front of either of the following if at all possible:



1. Hot air registers—dry, heated air blowing directly on the back of a piano is particularly bad for the soundboard.

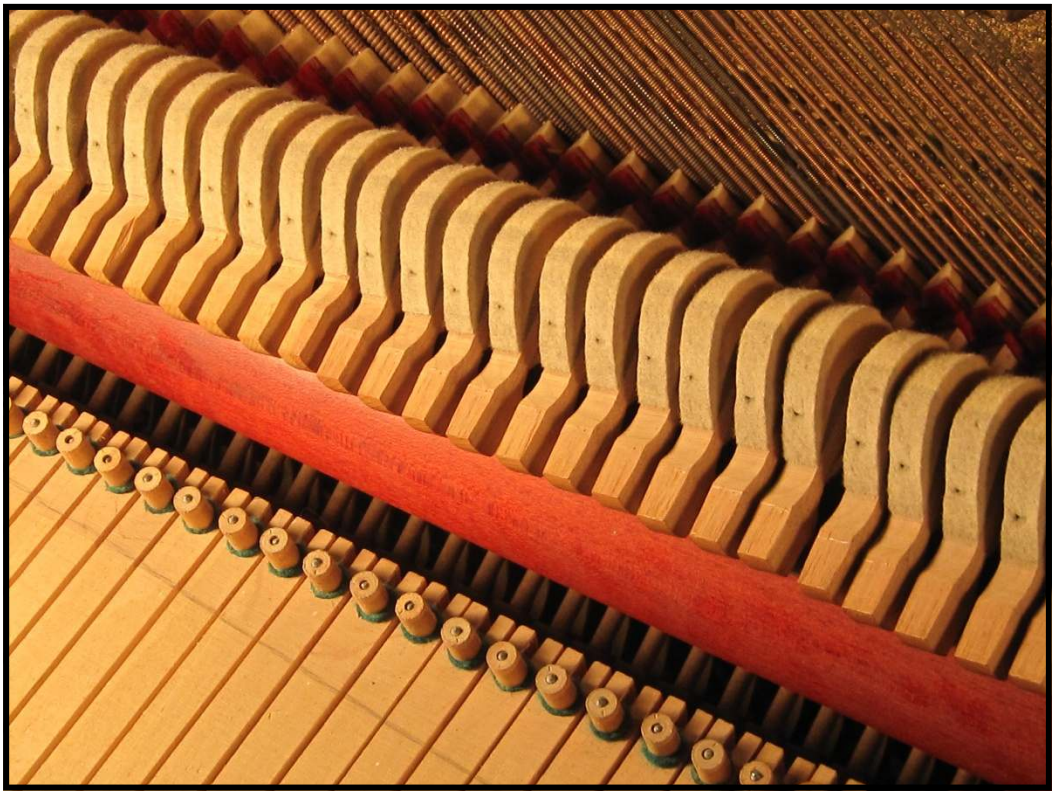


2. Drafty windows.

Note: Effective humidity control equipment, either for the home in general or the piano in particular, will aid in keeping your piano in top form.

In conclusion: To keep your spinet piano performing at its best so that everyone who plays it and hears it will enjoy their musical experience, it makes sense to come up with a piano maintenance plan which fits both your budget and expectations. I would be happy to schedule a time that we could sit down together and go over the specific repairs your piano would benefit from and come up with a maintenance schedule for both tuning and regulation.





A newly regulated spinet piano action, ready to be played and enjoyed.

"In business to bring your piano to its full potential."

Please advise me when you wish to have this repair professionally done.

Lee Gordon / The Piano Shop
Member: Piano Technicians Guild
P.O. Box 22958
Honolulu, HI 96823-2958
Phone: (808) 722-0618
Email: leegordon53@gmail.com
Web: www.hawaiipianoshop.com