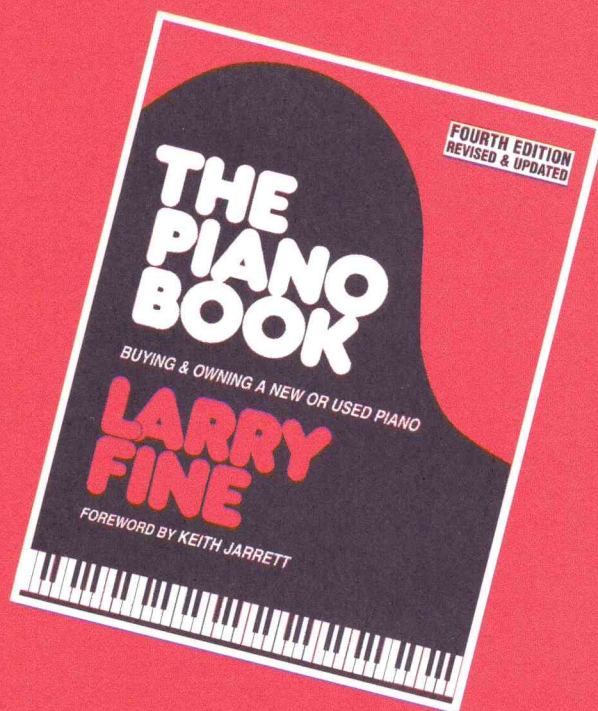


The Piano Book
2007-2008



The Piano Book 2007-2008
Larry Fine

Group 1: Highest quality performance pianos

These pianos are for those who want the best and can afford it. They utilize the very best materials, and the manufacturing process emphasizes much hand labour and refinement of details. Advanced designs are painstakingly executed, putting quality considerations far ahead of cost and production output. They are suitable for the most advanced and demanding professional and artistic uses. Most of the pianos in this group are made in the U.S. and Western Europe. *Comparison with automobiles: think Rolls-Royce, Bentley, Mercedes-Benz.*

Verticals: \$14,000 to \$34,000
Grands 5' to 7': \$40,000 to \$90,000

- Group 1A:** Blüthner
Bösendorfer
Fazioli
Steingraeber & Söhne
Steinway & sons (Hamburg)

- Group 1B:** Bechstein, C. (Concert series)
Förster, August
Grotrian / Sauter

- Group 1C:** Kawai, Shigeru
Steinway & sons (New York)

Group 2 High-performance pianos

These instruments are built to a standard favouring high-performance design features, materials, and workmanship. They are suitable for home, institutional, and some professional and artistic uses. Greater hand labour is put into refining touch and tone during manufacture, although perhaps not quite as much as some in Group 1. Cost considerations, virtually absent for Group 1 instruments, may affect decisions regarding materials and production methods to a limited extent. For a variety of reasons, these pianos have not received as much critical acclaim as those in Group 1. Although the difference in quality between the two groups is small—and for many buyers will be undetectable—the price difference is substantial, making these pianos a great value for those who can settle for “almost the best.” Most pianos in this group are made in the U.S. and in Eastern and Western Europe. *Comparison with automobiles: think BMW, Saab, Volvo, Audi, Lexus.*

Verticals: \$6,000 to \$20,000
Grands 5' to 7': \$18,000 to \$50,000

- Group 2A:** Estonia
Mason & Hamlin
Schimmel (Konzert series)

- Group 2B:** Bechstein (Academy series)
Haessler
Schimmel (Classic series)
Schulze Pollmann
Seiler
Steinberg, Wilh.
Walter, Charles R.
Yamaha (“S” series)

- Group 2C:** Baldwin (grands)
Bohemia
Irmler
Kemble
Petrof
Vogel

Group 3: Better quality consumer-grade pianos

These instruments give roughly equal weight to economy and performance. The dominant pianos in this group are by Japanese-based companies manufacturing in Japan, the U.S., and Indonesia. They are mass produced but with few defects, suitable for both home and institutional use. For decades they have been legendary for their high quality-control standards and commitment to excellent warranty service. Also in this group are the higher-level pianos made by Korean-based companies in Korea or Indonesia, with more variation in quality, but enhanced by some advanced design features. *Comparison with automobiles: think Honda, Toyota, Subaru (Group 3A); upper-level Kia, Hyundai (Groups 3B and 3C).*

Verticals: \$3,500 to \$12,000
Grands 5' to 7': \$9,000 to \$34,000

- Group 3A:** Boston (Kawai with Steinway)
Kawai (verticals and RX series grands)
Perzina (verticals)
Pramberger, J.P. (Samick)
Weber, Albert (Young Chang)
Yamaha (vertical and C series grands)
Young Chang (Platinum Edition)

- Group 3B:** Baldwin (verticals)
Essex (Young Chang/Korea with Steinway)
Kawai (GM and GE series grands)
Knabe, Wm. (Samick)
Weber (sovereign series) (Young Chang)
Yamaha (GB and GC grands)
Young Chang (Professional Artist series)

Group 3C: Kohler & Campbell (Millennium series)
(Samick)
Pramberger, J. (Samick)

Commentary on Group 3:

Group 3A consists of most pianos made by the Japanese-based companies Yamaha and Kawai and the highest-level Korean-made pianos of Young Chang and Samick. The latter are built to advanced designs, and when expertly prepared by a technician, can play as well as some pianos in the higher categories.

However, their quality is more variable and most dealers do only enough make-ready to make them acceptable.

Also in this category are Perzina verticals, the only pianos made in China thus far to make it out of Group 4. They have excellent tone and action, and have been out in the field without problems long enough for me to feel comfortable recommending them.

Group 3B consists of the smaller Kawai and Yamaha grand models with simpler case construction and features, mid-level Korean-made models from Young Chang, and mid- to upper-level pianos from Samick (Wm. Knabe) made in either Korea or Indonesia. I've also put U.S.-made Baldwin verticals in this category though, to be honest, Baldwin has been keeping a low profile of late, and feedback about the verticals is sparse.

Group 3C are mid-level Samick pianos made in Korea or Indonesia (Kohler & Campbell Millennium) and upper-level pianos entirely from Indonesia (J. Pramberger). The same comment made about Korean pianos in group 3A also apply to the Korean and Indonesia pianos in Groups 3B and 3C.

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Group 4: Medium quality consumer-grade pianos

Most of the instruments are somewhat more oriented toward economy than performance. In general, Quality control is not as perfect as many in Group 3, so the pianos may need a little more attention by the dealer both before and after the sale. For some upper-level Chinese brands, the quality control and features might normally make the piano a candidate for a higher-level group, but their track record is short, so as a precaution, I am leaving them in this group for the time being. These pianos are suitable at least for average home and lighter institutional use, and sometimes more. Students with smaller models of some of these brands may wish to upgrade to a larger or better instrument

after a number of years. Pianos in this group are made in China, or in Indonesia by Korean-based companies. *Comparison with automobiles: think Kia, Hyundai (and Chinese-made cars).*

Verticals: \$2,500 to \$7,000
Grands 5' to 7': \$6,000 to \$19,000

Group 4A: Brodmann
Heintzman
May Berlin
Perzina (grands)
Steinberg, Gerh. (Perzina)

Group 4B: Everett (grands) (Dongbei)
Hallet, Davis (grands) (Dongbei)
Nordiska (grands) (Dongbei)
Story & Clark (grands) (Dongbei)
Weinbach (grands) (Dongbei/Petrof)

Group 4C: Bergmann (Young Chang)
Essex (Pearl River or Young Chang/
China with Steinway)
Hailun
Kohler & Campbell (except Millennium series) (Samick)
Miller, Henry F. (Pearl River)
Palatino (AXL)
Pearl River
Remington (Samick)
Ritmüller (Pearl River)
Samick
Steigerman (Premium series) (Hailun)
Weber (Legend series) (Young Chang)

Group 4D: Cable, Hobart M. (Sejung)
Cristofori (Sejung)
Everett (verticals) (Dongbei)
Falcone (Sejung)
Gulbransen (Sejung)
Hallet, Davis (verticals) (Dongbei)
Hamilton (Sejung/Baldwin)
Hardman, Peck (Beijing)
Meister, Otto (Beijing)
Nordiska (verticals) (Dongbei)
Steck, Geo. (Sejung)
Steigerman (Beijing)
Story & Clark (verticals) (Dongbei)
Suzuki (Artfield)
Vivace (Sejung)
Wurlitzer (Sejung/Baldwin)
Wyman (Beijing)

Commentary on group 4:

Many of the Group 4 piano brands are new or rapidly improving. I have tried as best I can to estimate their relative quality positions, preferring to err slightly on the low side rather than overstate their quality. I expect the future will bring many changes to this list.

Group 4A consists of the best Chinese pianos. Some of these actually have the performance characteristics of higher-grade instruments and, like Perzina verticals in Group 3A, may eventually migrate upward on this chart as their track record and reputation warrant. The pianos in this subgroup are distinguished from those in lower subgroups by superiority in a combination of design, materials, and execution. Most use a large amount of parts and material imported from Europe or North America. They also excel in the oversight given them by the sponsoring company. Schimmel, for example, reportedly rejects a substantial percentage of the May Berlin pianos it receives as not meeting the company's rigid standards, and returns them to their origin. It then prepares the remainder of the pianos to even higher standards before sending them on to dealers. My contact generally gave cautious praise to these brands, recognizing that they provide tremendous value for the money, but were not yet ready to abandon better-known, established, more expensive brands from other parts of the world in favour of them.

Group 4C consists of the large, middle ground of Chinese pianos—those from the Young Chang, Pearl River, Hailun, and AXL factories—and the lower-level pianos from the Samick factory in Indonesia. These pianos are not likely to win awards for anything in particular, but with proper dealer make-ready and some follow-up home service, they should be fine for casual home use and sometimes more.

Group 4D pianos are a little less advanced in design or execution than those in higher categories. The smaller sizes of grands and verticals in particular are for those buyers for whom low price or furniture are the most important considerations. With thorough dealer prep, good after-sale service, and realistic expectations, these brands can be successfully purchased by buyers with simpler needs.

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Trends

Pianos made in China continue to improve and make inroads into the North American market. By some estimates, more than one-quarter of all pianos sold in the U.S. in 2003 were made in China. As recently 2001, most pianos from China, though technically acceptable, were not musically desirable. Over the past couple of years, however, the musical qualities have taken a big leap forward. Though nearly all makes have improved, and most are acceptable, **the best vertical pianos are those from the Yantai-Perzina factory**, sold here under Perzina, and Gerh. Steinberg labels;.....

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In addition, the Perzina verticals have several interesting features rarely found in other pianos, including a "floating" soundboard that is unattached to the back at certain points for freer vibration, and a reverse, or concave, soundboard crown. (there may be something to this, as Perzina verticals are the best sounding verticals from China. The bass being particularly notable.)

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