



DaVinci Center for MUSICAL Arts

Ideas for Purchasing an Acoustic Piano or Digital instrument

You may be looking for an acoustic piano that provides live sound vibrations as opposed to electric keyboards or digital pianos. Live vibrations are always best, but at times, digital instruments may be preferred (for portability, etc.) You may have good luck with Craigslist or Facebook Marketplace, or another online source, and sometimes good deals can be had. Best to really be careful and ask lots of questions (see below). Here is a link to a LONG document that we refer to often when shopping for our acoustic pianos at the music school. http://www.marthabeth.com/piano_brands.html.

Questions to ask for acoustic pianos:

1. How old is the piano? Are there dates on the piano?
2. How tall is it? (The taller, the better for an upright piano, and the longer, the better for a grand). Console Piano – piano height typically 40-43 inches. Studio Piano – ranges from 44 to 48 inches in height. Upright Grand Piano – 49 to 60 inches in height. – **DO NOT PURCHASE a spinet piano if possible! It is the shortest of all upright pianos, and although sellers say it's good for beginners, we feel it is best to shop for a good digital piano (not a 'Keyboard') instead, which likely would be more useful than a spinet.**
3. How many owners? Who owned it, a piano teacher, a musician?
4. Where has it been stored/played? (Humid climates are rough on pianos, as are changes in humidity and temperatures, so a garage piano may have some issues.)
5. What is the serial number? You can check it out in the blue book of pianos below.
6. When was it last tuned? Are there records?
7. Do all the keys play? All of the pedals work? etc.
8. NO cracks in the sounding board or the pin block, PLEASE! These often are irreparable.
9. Check out the quality brands with the links in this document.
10. IMPORTANT: Are the bridal straps and felts in good shape? (see discussion below)

Bridal straps are leather straps that can be seen when taking off the kick plate for each key. If they look old, broken, or moldy, beware.

Felts are “baby thumb” sized felt pads, rather thick and cream-colored that you can see striking the strings when you take the top parts of the cabinet off. Felts are also on the dampers, which stop the vibration of each string when the finger is released from the key. Make sure the felts have no more than about 1/16th of an inch permanent indentation. Deeper indentations mean you will need to replace the felts soon.

It is always best to pay a professional piano technician to check the piano before buying or accepting it as a gift. Pay the price to have it investigated first, and you may save lots of expense and headache in the long run and avoid getting a piano that is mostly just good for “firewood”.

We use Ray and Priscilla, piano rebuilder (preferred) 720-275-2765 or Mike Thompson, tuner technician, 303-408-1951

<http://www.bluebookofpianos.com> is another helpful site.

For piano stores around town, try American Classic Pianos, Rockley Music, Boulder Piano Gallery, Woods and Son Piano Co., and Schmitt Music. Onofrio Pianos in Englewood also has some nice pianos. Again, if you are getting an upright, we do NOT recommend a spinet. Go for at least a console or studio size (42" or taller.)

Questions to ask for digital pianos and keyboards:

1. How old is the instrument?
2. What are the warranties?
3. How many keys? (88 keys is preferred, full sized)
4. Do the keys light up (avoid like the plague)?
5. Are there reviews online from MUSICIANS saying that it has a good "piano" sound and feel? Ads stating the keys are weighted (a good thing) are not always true.
6. Is it a reputable brand name, like Roland, Kawai, Casio, or Yamaha? There are tons of off-brands made in China with no warranties or quality guarantees.

Good Digital pianos are best for long-term use and for developing good playing technique (plan on paying around 1K-4K), whereas most keyboards are okay for short-term "learn the notes" style education (anywhere from \$200-\$800). Make sure to get a bench and speakers if the digital piano does not have built-in speakers. The Roland cube monitor is a good speaker for this. For keyboards, make sure you have a stand for it and seating where the student's knees/waist are at a 90-degree angle when sitting, and the elbows are slightly higher than the wrists when hands are playing the keys. It's worth taking the time/expense to ensure the student has the best start possible, which includes proper seating.

I hope this helps...

Maria Jyllian

DaVinci Center Founder