PIANO TECHNOLOGY: CARE AND MAINTENANCE GUIDE

In recent years, the Yale School of Music has added more than fifty new and rebuilt pianos to its facilities. The area of Piano Technology has also received a number of new resources, elevating the quality and maintenance standards for the 130 pianos at YSM. Maintaining and updating this number of instruments is an ongoing process.

It is a privilege to be able to practice and perform at an all-Steinway school. As technicians, we ask that students and faculty treat these instruments with respect and mindfulness. Please do your part as performers and observe the following practices to keep the quality of our instruments at the highest possible standard for you and future generations.

With thanks,

Robert Crowson
Brian Daley
William Harold
Yale School of Music Piano Technicians

PIANO MAINTENANCE

Treat pianos as you would your own instrument.

Students are expected to do their part by keeping food and beverages away from the pianos at all times. Only water is allowed in practice rooms. You will incur a $100 fine if you are caught entering a practice room with a beverage other than water.

The following items should never be placed on a piano or music desk:

- Coffee, soda, water, food
- Jewelry
- Keys
- Instrument cases
- Coats or clothing items with zippers, buttons, etc.

By keeping these items away from the pianos, you will help preserve the regulations, tunings, and voicing.

Many of the case-parts – or “outer shells” – of practice-room pianos have not yet been restored. This is not an invitation to treat them with any less care than a piano that looks brand new. Case-parts are very expensive and time-consuming to repair. Please help us by taking responsibility in preserving them.

The photos to the right illustrate what happens when coffee is spilled in a piano:

In order to resolve this spill, the music wire has to be removed and cleaned, the bridge has to be cleaned, damper felts have to be replaced, and hammer felt needs to be filed away. All of these processes destabilize the piano, change its tone, and can require multiple days of work.

Dampness from the liquid leads to oxidation (rust) on the strings and felt that is stained and hardened.
In some cases, liquids get spilled into the pin-block and cause damage beyond what we can repair in-house. In such cases, the piano has to be sent to a rebuilder. You do not want to be responsible for such easily avoidable damage.

Do not touch tuning pins or strings with bare hands.

Touching tuning pins or leaving anything damp or greasy near this area will cause the strings to oxidize very quickly. Cleaning rust off the strings is a temporary solution and in either case the wire has lost much of its tensile strength and will be more prone to breaking. If you are performing a prepared-piano piece, you must wear gloves while touching the strings: NO EXCEPTIONS.

**PREPARED PIANOS**

Preparing a piano – altering its sound by placing objects between or on the strings – requires special attention and care. The following practices must be observed at all times, regardless of what the setup calls for:

- Wash your hands and use unscented talc powder before touching objects that will be threaded between strings.
- Always wear gloves when touching the piano strings.
- Use small coding labels to label the dampers. Check to make sure they are light in adhesion, and leave a slight overhang of the tab at the edge of damper so that it can be removed without the need to use fingernails. Do not use chalk to write directly on the damper head.
- Dampers are very fragile, the slightest movement from side to side can affect the damper regulation, causing buzzing and zinging. Use two fingers to stabilize the damper when applying the label, using close to no force.
- Before putting objects on or between the strings, please depress the damper pedal. If you do not do this, the strings will displace, pushing the damper felt in multiple directions and causing traveling issues with the dampers.
- If a piece calls for touching the string nodes, you must wear gloves (latex or otherwise).
- Using mallets on the strings is prohibited in the concert hall. You will eventually hit a plate strut, causing the plate to chip. One fatal blow to the bridge could put the piano out of commission for weeks, leaving us with one stage piano.

Questions about preparing a piano properly? Please contact robert.crowson@yale.edu.
**REPOR TING A PROBLEM**

As piano technicians, we follow a rigorous maintenance schedule, but heavy use and seasonal changes can create issues. We encourage feedback on how pianos are performing, including:

- Tuning
- Action
- Spills and damage
- Rooms that are very hot or very cold

Students will not be penalized for reporting an issue.

Please report any maintenance needs using the following form: [music.yale.edu/piano-services](http://music.yale.edu/piano-services)

**QUESTIONS**

Please contact a YSM piano technician:

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