

A nice article — well deserved! Congratulations.
Ann Schriber

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SHOPPING/DINING



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You can get a Steinway grand, at a grand price, from Dick King of King's Keyboard House on East Liberty Street in Ann Arbor. King also sells digital pianos, however, which he says put out good sound at a fraction of the cost.

Piano dealers didn't go Jurassic when keyboards went electronic

■ They've had to learn a few new words, however, like 'disklavier' and (gasp) 'digital.'

By CATHY O'DONNELL
NEWS SPECIAL WRITER

In 1971, when John Lennon came to town, the owner of King's Keyboard House, Dick King, supplied a piano. Lennon played it at Crisler Arena, and all went well.

When Rod Stewart came to town several years later, King again supplied a piano. Stewart applied a hammer to it as part of his closing act, and King had to sue for damages.

But things are calmer today. King and his family are in their 33rd year of selling grands, baby grands, and spinets on East Liberty Street. And still, most of their customers are parents with hopes for their kids. He ought to know. King is the father of seven, including four who are involved in the business.

The new thing, however, is the high-tech stuff going out the door. Take digital pianos, for example.

"They account for about 25 percent of our volume," said King recently. "We're also selling disklaviers — acoustic pianos in every respect except for the computerized player, which plays prerecorded music."

It also records what a person plays. "And when you turn around," said King, "you can't tell it's a recording."

His upright acoustical pianos start in the \$3,000 range. For those with big living rooms and deep pockets, there's the Yamaha grand, which starts at \$11,000, and the Steinway grand, which starts at \$26,000.

For the adventuresome, there are digital pianos, which start at \$2,000, and disklaviers, at \$8,500. The latter two instruments aren't fads, King says. They're here to stay, as many have good sound.

RETAIL REPORT

For folks not interested in spending big bucks on a piano, King recommends a used piano.

"But they ought to have it appraised by a piano tuner or technician. There are things she knows that ordinary people don't," King says.

At Pepper's Piano Sales & Service in Ypsilanti, owner David Pepper specializes in used instruments. He said his sales are up 50 percent from last year, mostly because he saw a used piano market that needed attention.

Sales also are up for new pianos at Evola Music Center in Plymouth. Manager Russ Tkac said his sales, mostly of Bosendorfer pianos, have increased from last year, "mainly because we sell a good quality piano. It's made in Vienna by hand."

But King doesn't recommend shortcuts, such as portable keyboards.

"People are finding out their limitations — no piano touch, not enough keys." And sometimes they sound weird.

When King went into business, there were six places in town that sold pianos and sheet music. "Now," he said, "there's one."

The reasons? "More places for people to spend their entertainment dollars: VCRs, movies, CDs..."

What matters, finally, is good sound. Dick King recalls that when he first went into business, promoters at Hill Auditorium came to him for an eight-foot grand, as the Philadelphia Orchestra was coming to town.

"My stock was small then," recalls King, "and my one and only grand had just been delivered to a couple here in town. I had to call them and ask could I borrow the piano back."

They agreed, and King's truck returned for the instrument. Delivered to Philadelphia director Eugene Ormandy at Hill, it did its duty, and King had satisfied customers — especially the ones who could boast the Philadelphia Orchestra had used their piano.