

Keyboard Confidential

The diary of Music Inc.'s editorial director as piano buyer

I bought a piano. That simple, declarative statement doesn't begin to explain the months of research, discussion, debate, shopping, miscues, misinformation and general confusion that went into this Oprah-worthy saga.

The following is my tale. For retail owners, managers and sales people, it serves as an honest glimpse into the psychology of at least one shopper. For their customers, perhaps it can serve as an endorsement that buying a piano is worth the effort.

Child's Play

First, let's be clear. I didn't buy the piano... we did.

My wife and I have a seven-year-old daughter who has been taking piano lessons for two years. The piano is for her. This was a family decision.

My wife and I agreed that our daughter should start playing the piano at a young age. As far as I'm concerned, she can stop playing when she graduates high school or performs at Carnegie Hall.

For the past 12 years, I've read, studied and reported on music-brain research for Music Inc. The evidence is clear that learning to play a musical instrument helps develop a child's brain, confidence and poise in a way that no other activity can. So, my daughter will continue to study music throughout her formative years, or be shuttled off to military school.

I hope she'll be a lifelong music maker, and not a future contestant on *American Idol*.

My wife, who grew up taking piano lessons from her mother, agrees wholeheartedly. She wouldn't mind the *American Idol* angle, though.



The reason for our piano purchase

Keyboard Confessions

For those first two years of lessons, our daughter practiced on an old 49-note Miracle Piano, a portable keyboard with half-sized keys that my mother-in-law purchased at a garage sale.

There, I've said it, and the piano retail gods have not struck me dead.

I told my lovely bride that we had to get rid of "that thing" from the moment our daughter started playing. A more noble man would have said it was for the good of their child because having half a keyboard with really crappy plastic keys didn't help develop the strength, dexterity and technique necessary to play the instrument.

In reality, I could no longer bear the professional embarrassment. Month after month, Music Inc. reports on the fact that the quickest way to kill a child's interest in music is to have them play on an inferior

instrument. And there in my living room sat a wind-up toy posing as a learning tool. My wife and I rationalized our poor musical parenting by saying that our daughter was just

starting out, that she wasn't playing anything technically difficult, yet.

But it soon became obvious during her lessons and recitals that songs she played with ease at home were much more difficult on a full-sized keyboard.

In truth, we were just being cheap.

Ah, the evil cheapness gene. It rears its ugly head again in a few paragraphs. Try not to be too horrified.

Asking our daughter to learn piano on that keyboard was like having her play basketball in high heels. If she were in med school, it would be like learning surgery with a plastic knife.

The Editor as Market Researcher

Beyond that, I have friends in this industry. What if someone saw that faux keyboard in my living room? I wasn't above hiding it away, but to the shame!

So, I did what any self-respecting father and husband would do. I sent my wife out shopping.

Lazy? Perhaps, but I knew exactly what direction I wanted to go with this purchase. I was also extremely interested in how my wife would approach the task. This could be market research and an article! Two birds, one stone.

The Wife as Über Shopper

At the risk of potential divorce, I