

IN TUNE—

Four pianos in one of the workrooms (at upper left) await their turn for restoration work to start. The job begins as (upper right) George Potter and James Reeder install the sound board in its case, and proceeds as (at center) Potter puts the seventh and final coat of lacquer on the top. After stringing, the bridge and iron

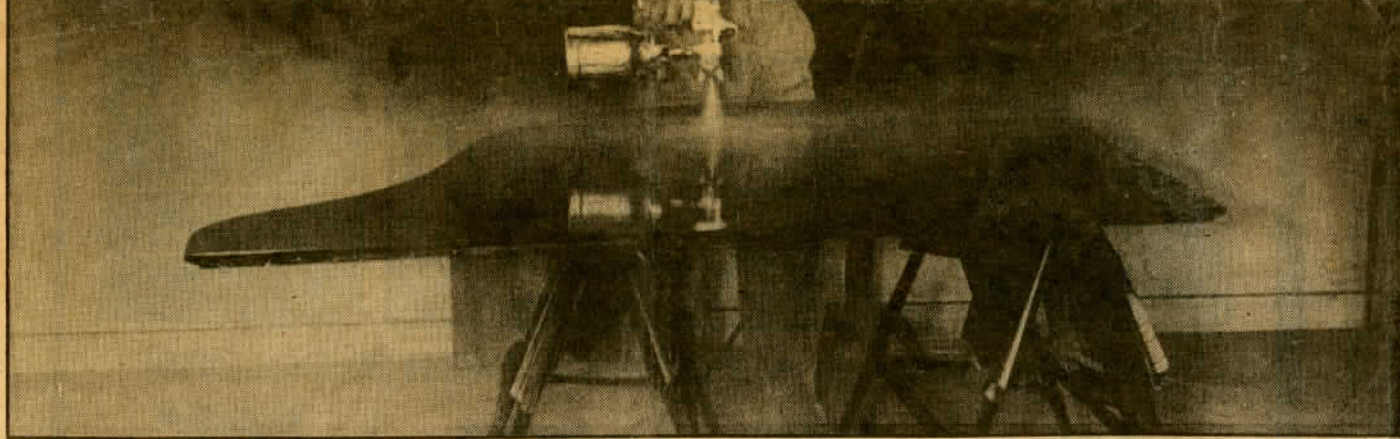


plate (lower left) are subject to 20 tons of pressure from the tension of 230 strings. Restoration will be complete after Reeder uses his keen ear and light touch (lower right) to give a grand the last of several tunings.

Grand Ledge's Grand Masters

The jobs that Grand Ledge's James Reeder and crew take on can take over six months to complete. But when the finished product rolls out, they can assure you it was well worth the time.

Reeder is the owner of Michigan Piano Sales here, but what many might not know is that in a shop out back from the showroom, he and his six-man crew specialize in restoring classic grand pianos. And Reeder, by his own estimation, is one of only two or three independent restorers in the country.

From stripping and refinishing the case to rebuilding the action to tuning in the final note, the craftsmen diligently go about turning what might look like a hopeless case into an instrument of beauty. And when finished, it sounds beautiful, too.

Each craftsman concentrates on a particular section. Todd Sotala strips and sands the wood, Wendell Link stains, fills and veneers it, and George Potter applies the luster finish.

The action is the responsibility of Darrell Booth and Wendell Hocking, who rework approximately 4,000 parts that make up the mechanism. The action is that maze of arms, levers and hammers which strike the strings.

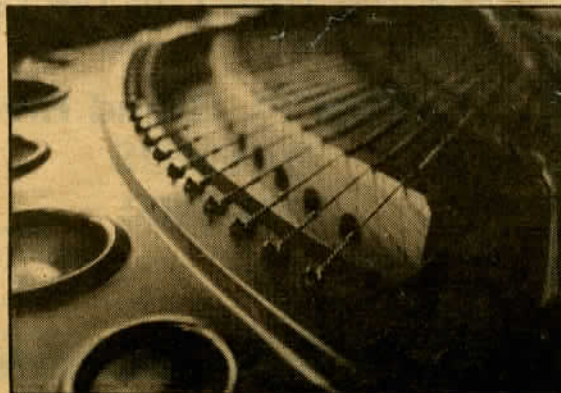
Elmer Reeder performs the task of rebuilding the guts of the instrument: the sound board, bridge and pinblocks. He also replaces the strings (230 of them), and tunes them to perfect pitch.

And James Reeder oversees it all. The result — a perfect piano.

Over the years, Reeder and crew have restored pianos for Van Cliburn, the Fisher family, and colleges and universities across the country.

At any given time, approximately 30 grands can be found in either various stages of restoration or in storage waiting for work to commence. When finished, the cost can range from \$7,500, to \$12,000 for a nine-foot concert grand. That may sound steep, but compared to the cost of a new Steinway (about \$32,000), a restored unit can become quite appealing.

Whatever the cost of restoration, Reeder and his employees make sure there will be no complaints about their work.



Photostory by Greg LaFountain