

# A Passion for Perfection

## *The Driving Force of James Reeder*

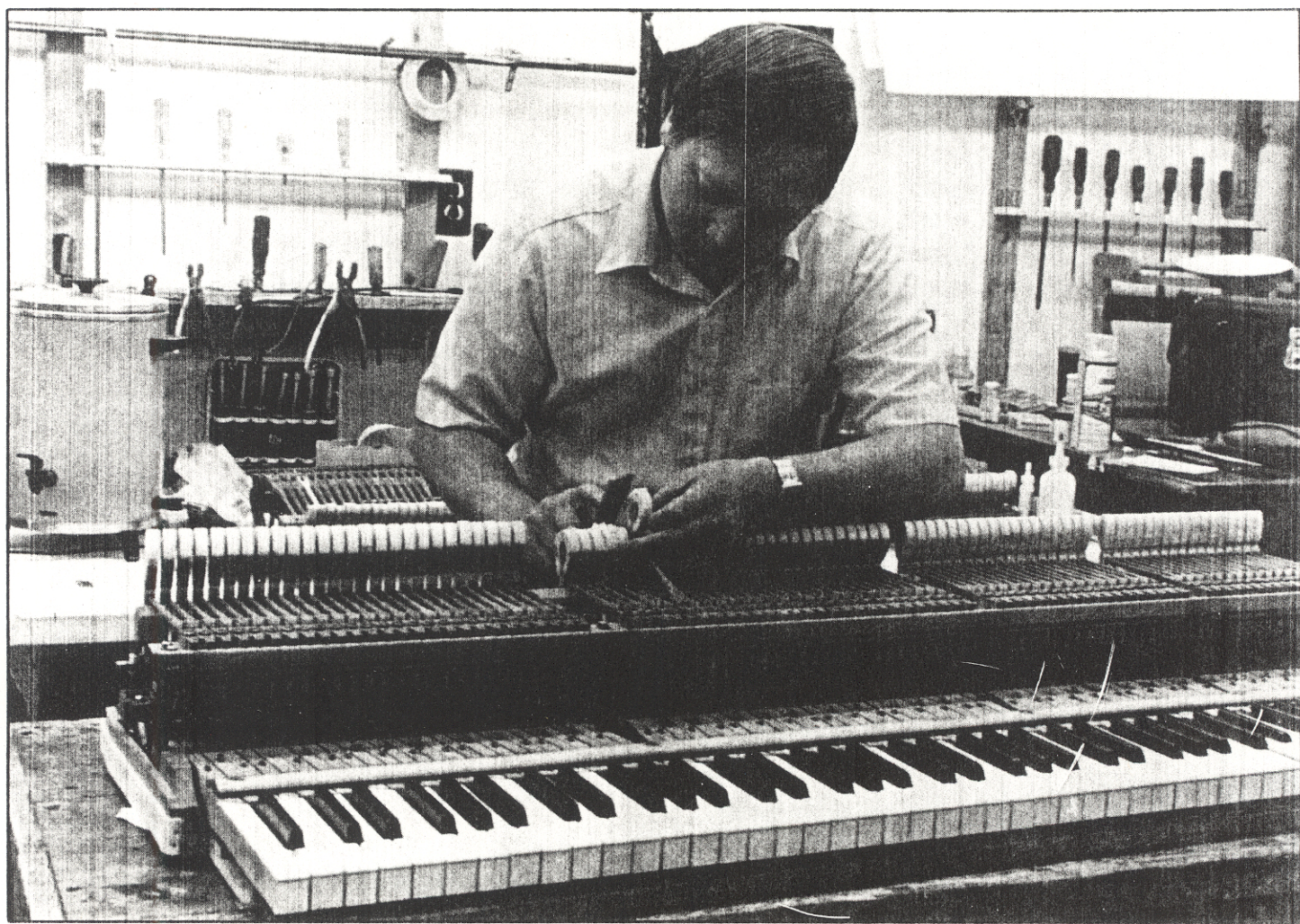
**T**he stately grand piano is one of the greatest driving forces in James Reeder's life. While others may share his passion for the powerful instrument, few have followed the difficult road he chose for himself. Reeder is one of a handful of craftsmen who are dedicated to the dif-

ficult task of restoring seemingly lost pianos to new magnificence.

The owner of Michigan Piano Sales and Service in Grand Ledge, he houses his piano restoration shop in a former saw mill behind his store. In the rambling building, technicians ponder over the thousands of delicate parts that

make up the heart and soul of the grand pianos. Working under Reeder's constant supervision, they spend long hours painstakingly rebuilding instruments that, in many cases, were originally constructed before the turn of the century.

"We don't consider a piano built in



*James Reeder performs the delicate task of filing hammers. This is an important part of regulating the piano's tone.*



*This beautifully renovated Steinway is the result of Reeder's meticulous craftsmanship.*

the late 1890s as old," Reeder observed as he walked through his bustling shop. "Pianos have not really changed much in the last 80 years. And, as a matter of fact, many instruments have remained unchanged for 100 years. For example, the string length and key specifications of an 1892 Steinway are exactly the same as a modern model."

Pausing next to an immense 9½-foot Victorian Mason and Hamlin grand piano, Reeder pointed to a large harp-

shaped iron plate that fits in the instrument's case.

"There is the heart of your piano," he said. "As long as the plate is intact, the chances of saving the piano are excellent. But, if it has been severely damaged, it's a lost cause. The only possibility open is to find an identical plate from another piano and use it in its place. In that way, you can put the two instruments together and come up with one beautiful grand piano."

The cost of renovating a vintage

piano is not cheap, according to Reeder. It can run from \$4,000 to \$10,000, depending on the size and condition of the instrument. Although the price sounds steep, it appears to be a bargain when you compare it with the \$26,000 cost of a new concert grand.

"In many cases," Reeder commented, "These older pianos sound much better than the new ones after renovation is completed. And a restored grand has very nearly the value of a