

Ask Frau Dulent (Fragen Sie Frau Dulent):

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Pouring Beer into a Piano? Sacrilege! I would argue that all legends have a modicum of truth at their core. What is at the root of the old spaghetti-western cliché of “pouring beer into a honkytonk piano”.

It is a reasonably well known fact that a good concert piano must be kept at even keel with all atmospheric environments that threaten to distort, detune or otherwise alter its blissful state of pristine dimensional stability for the sake of consistent, rich, sound. It is to this end that after each performance a person endowed with special skills and awareness of environments has their way with an abused piano as he applies a modicum of liquid into the piano with a watering implement. While this activity fills the less acquainted observer with absolute horror it is necessary. At the same token it comes as no surprise that assorted dilettantes (e.g.: Anyone with a bucket or some such) might willfully or inadvertently abuse this activity in service of their own particular ends.

I Think it was a stroke of marketing-genius on part of the Steinway piano company to add a drain hole complete with a stopper and a hose attachment to their concert pianos; just in case. A brilliant thought in piano engineering, especially in view of California piano sales. Keep in mind that in California the roofing- and water proofing- industry still hasn’t come to grips with roofing versus the rainy rain seasons. Roof leaks are responsible for much of the damage that results to left-open concert pianos. Alas, roofers and architects alike blame such damage on tears, owing perhaps to bad performances or operas, like “Bluebeard”. Bela Bartok would have incorporated tears differently into his Bluebeard-opera had he been aware of all the options (“Tears Judith, tears”). I am reasonably certain that Keith Jarrett is one of the true beneficiaries of this knowledge. He is one of the few pianists who has truly gone beyond the keyboard, or I should say below, into the nether regions, where he had to seriously contemplate the extended possibilities that such a plumbing feature offers. This is especially true in view of the fact that he owes much of the success of his “Cologne Concert” largely to a happy accident involving an undelivered concert piano and a well soaked substitute piano that had been stored in a damp and obscure hiding place deep in the bowels of the Cologne concert hall, where no self-respecting, or should I say respectable, concert piano should ever be kept. At the time the incident forced Keith to improvise extensively using an inferior, spongy, wet instrument; the “Rosinante” of pianos. A roaring success it was none the less by all accounts, seriously defining his career. The rest is, as they say: History.

But, I diverge, back to the extended piano plumbing feature: The drain is, of course, so well camouflaged that it can only be found by a select and dedicated cadre of piano plumbers. Indeed a rare breed of men or women that also play piano in their off time, when they are not plumbing and who’s curiosity usually extends beyond the mere “tinkling on the ivories.” This requires a kind of professional curiosity that takes them to their knees and gets them to fiddle about below the key line, into a world of what is commonly beyond proper piano etiquette. The drain is, and that needs to be pointed out, meant to be used sparingly. Now, pouring beer into a piano, as is the custom in certain parts of the world, is strongly and in the most certain terms discouraged. Primarily because of fears that the strings might well develop a taste for certain liquids and become, pursuant to such abuse, unruly; saddling the makers of

the instrument with an undeservedly dubious reputation. Furthermore it is likely that such practices, although advantageous to liquid vendors, may inevitably necessitate re-tuning of the instrument resulting in undesired expenditures for the owners of said instrument.

Procedures for recovering from such liquid abuse generally require the lifting of the furthest leg of the instrument by a few inches (yes, much like what a dog might do to relive itself.) Depending on the expected flow and the present state of the liquid level, viscosity and such. Appropriate caution is advised. All the while it will be essential to move slowly and deliberately while exercising the greatest of care with an eye on the possibility that the liquid may yet slosh forward towards the keyboard side, an unthinkable occurrence which is even more undesirable. Once the instrument is stable, a large bucket should be placed under the drain (in anticipation of some mishap) thereafter a common $\frac{3}{4}$ " garden hose shall be attached to the drain spout with its other end leading into a convenient receptacle of sufficiently large capacity. Some further attention needs to be invested into making sure that the outlet of the hose is actually positioned lower than the fluid level in the piano so as to avoid any kind of reverse flow as this might lead to yet more seriously unpleasant damage and the need for yet further re-adjusting of the instrument. *Caution:* The use of a hair dryer on the instrument, to hasten the curing during or after this procedure, is strictly discouraged under any and all circumstances. This, and similar actions such as this, would categorically void any kind of warranty all together.

The greatest of care has of course been afforded by the manufacturer in making the instrument waterproof by using all the appropriate lacquers and state of the art water sealants. All the same, aging of the wood and changes in temperature may have taken their toll on the previously pristine conditions rendering the piano body vulnerable, these are considered *an act of god*. Please refer to the small print in section C of your manual.

I sincerely hope you have found these instructions useful and I do recommend a few trial runs at filling and draining the piano as practice. The manufacturer is, at any rate confident that you are fully aware that "practice makes perfect". Thus, at the same token, I feel obliged to point out that the warranty does not cover such tests and any tuning and re-tuning of the piano is, after any such trial runs, strictly the responsibility of the user.

In closing, perhaps I should explain how these thoughts came about. When I coughed myself into awakening this morning, I was greeted by a reddish dawn, owing to emissions from assorted wild fires all around California. The twilight eventually spilled her watercolors to the floor and mixed her spectra into a hazy composite of near white, as if reflecting from a blank page, a blank sheet of paper sprang to mind which I quickly procured. The Harvest of near insomnia: Memories, thoughts and ideas that have festered all night in a half-wake-twilight between trips to the porcelain, were aching to be written down quickly, to avoid being forgotten, and yet they probably should be forgotten on account of their apparent pointlessness.

In these moments, my every latent thought feverishly attempts to escape from consciousness. A certain residual clarity none the less emerges coupled with an ample bouquet of hazy doubts that arise while writing things down. Amidst this twilight haze while committing thoughts to paper one suddenly realizes that the old piano music has already come to a screeching halt as many new concert pianos have gathered all around, like a wagon burg. They are waiting, mimicking a herd of leaderless Hippopotami frantically outdoing one another with new approaches as to how to stage another new Sonata for

boiling water and whistling tea kettle; one that is to be performed by entirely too many instruments and to be hoisted at viewers via YouTube, Skype or Zoom! Twelve-tone music; too many notes!? You ask! But are: *"More notes for yet more people"*, really an answer? Or might: *"Simple notes for simple people "* be better, to make way for new forms of escape?



You will have to decide.

In any case: It's time to prepare for tears!