



New baby grand player pianos, such as this Story & Clark version at the Player Piano Shop, play using CDs to operate the piano. Many of the CDs include vocal tracks that feature famous musicians singing along to the music created by a home piano. Music from Beethoven to Britney Spears is available for \$28.00 to \$58.00.



Player Piano Shop owner James Hockenberger sits at an upright player piano. The instrument can be played like a regular piano or be made to make its own music by pumping foot pedals. It is just one of the many player pianos at the shop.

MIRROR PHOTOS BY KERRI RALLS

## Holland Store Provides A Great Selection Of Keyboards

# Player Piano: Play Us A Song, You're The Piano Man

BY KERRI RALLS & LAURA KILISCH  
MIRROR REPORTERS

If you're looking for fun, James Hockenberger is selling it.

The owner of Player Piano Shop offers a variety of piano options to suit everyone's needs.

"It's fun," Hockenberger said. "That's what the ads say, because it is."

Player Piano Shop, located in Holland, offers baby grand player, upright player and nickelodeon pianos, both new and old.

These types of pianos literally play themselves. They include a mechanism that moves the keys from inside the piano, as if a ghost is tickling the ivories.

That's not all they do, though.

"They are pianos first," Hockenberger said.

All the pianos in his collection can be played like regular pianos. That collection does, however, display much of the history of the player piano.

Nickelodeon pianos operate when a nickel is inserted,

and some also have other instruments, such as a xylophone, inside the top of the piano that play as well.

An orchestrion is an amped-up nickelodeon, which plays on its own and includes music from a wide array of instruments inside the box.

Hockenberger's orchestrion includes an accordion, triangle, drums and bells.

The upright players require slightly more work. They use a roll of music that rotates in the front of the piano. The roll contains holes, which cause bellows inside the piano to close, pushing up on the keys.

All one has to do is pump the pedals and a hands-free tune plays loud and clear.

Finally, technology hasn't ignored the piano industry. Pianomation is the latest piano technology.

The player pianos have CD players installed under the keys. When a CD and a specially made flashcard are inserted, the piano will activate solenoids, the updated version of bellows, and play.

Hockenberger, a licensed Pianomation dealer, said all



An orchestrion plays music from various instruments when coins are inserted. This one, part of Hockenberger's own collection, includes music made by the piano itself, an accordion, a triangle, drums and bells. Hockenberger is in the business of restoring, repairing and rebuilding instruments like this.

kinds of music are available, from classic to contemporary.

The new player piano CDs also include vocal tracks, meaning vocalists such as Norah Jones and Rod Stewart can sing along to the piano music in the living room.

If that's not enough, some pianos are accompanied by plasma screens that display images of the artist performing.

"What's next?" Hockenberger asked. "Is there going to be a hologram of the artist sitting on your bench?"

Not yet, but what Hockenberger is offering right now is pretty entertaining itself.

"You can't not smile while (the pianos) are playing," Hockenberger said.

He is helping to make more people smile, as he not only sells player pianos, but he also tunes, repairs, rebuilds and restores them.

Surprisingly, Hockenberger has had no formal training, just a love of the instrument and a lot of practice.

"I just bought an old one, and it didn't work," he said.

Pianomation technician, his business continues to boom.

A piano generally comes with just a one-year warranty, he explained, but any piano Hockenberger works on automatically comes with a three-year warranty.

It's a lot of work, he said, and it doesn't always come cheaply.

Typically, the price of a restoration comes in at around \$3,500, although the condition and type of piano could sway the cost to as much as \$5,000.

"Prices vary according to what (the pianos) need," Hockenberger said. "Some need new keys, for example, and others don't. It all just depends."

Restoration projects performed by Hockenberger begin with removal of the piano's original bellows and cloth, followed by replacement of the cloth.

"Then, I have to glue all of the bellows back on, times 88, and sometimes restore all of the tubing," he said. "It can get to be a timely process."

Customers from all over the state have found him — he

recently sold a piano in Columbus — and Hockenberger is not afraid of travel, either, once driving all the way to Ottawa, Canada, to pick up a piano.

"If it's something I really want, I'd drive all the way to California to get it," Hockenberger said.

His passion for the instrument and the music is obvious.

He promotes the pianos and said everything he has is on sale, including rolls of music for the pianos, replica Tiffany lamps and other knick-knacks.

Single rolls of every musical variety are available at Hockenberger's shop for \$10.00.

He periodically runs specials such as the one going on now, in which a Story & Clark baby grand player piano is on sale for \$9,400. To Hockenberger, the newest technology to hit the piano world is clearly worth the price tag.

"It's a brand-new phenomenon," he said. "It's the newest system out there and it really is incredible."

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