

Betsy Hirsch

SALES REPRESENTATIVE, STEINWAY & SONS

Next time you see your favorite pianist perform on TV, check out the piano. Most likely, it's made by Steinway & Sons, the most famous piano manufacturer in the world. And it's also likely that Betsy Hirsch helped that artist choose his or her piano. Betsy has been a sales representative at Steinway Hall in New York City for the past 9 years. Also a musician by night—she performs regularly at various piano bars and clubs, and composes pop, jazz, and theater music—Betsy has applied her musical talents and enthusiastic personality to become one of the most successful piano salespeople in the industry.



By Dianne Spoto Shattuck

How do you help people choose the right piano?

Every piano is different. I try to determine what each person is looking for, and to see what type of sound and tone he or she likes. For example, I personally like a really “alive” tone in a piano. A soft-spoken person often prefers a more subdued sound. Most people choose pianos that are like their own personalities. I get to know the person and find what I think will be the best piano for him or her. I’m like a matchmaker.

Do you get to practice on all these glorious pianos?

No, I hardly ever have time to practice here. But I do have a Steinway piano in my home. And when new pianos come in, I do play them right away, so I know the sound and touch of every piano in the store.

Do your musician clients respond to you differently because you are a musician?

Yes. And it’s nice to work with musicians because they already have an idea of what kind of sound they want. Also, I understand their needs. For example, an artist might need a

particular type of piano to best suit a specific concert program. Evgeny Kissin might want a mellower piano to perform a Mozart program, whereas Peter Cincotti might want to play his jazz music on a more vibrant piano. I understand things about the repertoire and the technique involved in playing it.

You must know a lot of cool piano facts—any you’d like to share?

Well, a Steinway has 12,011 parts that are put together by hand. There are actually 57 parts in each individual key. It takes a year to build a Steinway grand or baby grand. Many different woods are used to build our pianos, including spruce, hard rock maple, birch, and mahogany. We actually have our own huge lumberyard in Queens, New York, where we manufacture the pianos. There is millions of dollars worth of wood out there! And pianos last longer than we do—usually at least 100 years.

So do you have famous artists as clients?

Yes—Billy Joel, Tracy Chapman, Lang Lang, and even Chevy Chase came in to buy a piano. Harry


Connick Jr., Peter Cincotti, Ahmad Jamal, Ramsey Lewis, Diana Krall, Andrew Lloyd Webber—the list goes on and on. It’s fun to work with such talented people.

What about working with kids and families who want to buy a piano?

I make the purchase of a piano a family event, whether the kids play or not. I always put the kids on the bench and get them to jam with me. I’ll say, “On the count of 4, you play any white note.” Then, if I play in the key of C, anything they play on white keys sounds good, and they

get really excited. It’s important because parents usually buy a piano for their children and, in a way, the piano becomes part of the family—it’s in their home for years. I want the day they got it to be a great time that they’ll never forget.

What do you like best about your job?

I love to help dreams come true. That’s what buying a piano is—part of someone’s dream. And I am honored to be able to be a part of that. 



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