

**Focus On: Worn Sharp Keys -
Rejuvenation / Replacement
Promo Set Preview**



The Piano Owner's Heads-Up Guide to Important Piano Maintenance

Focus On: Worn Sharp Keys - Rejuvenation / Replacement



A vintage ebony sharp after stripping and polishing.

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The condition of the thirty-six sharp keys of a piano is important in that it affects the appearance of the keyboard as a whole. Whether your piano is a vintage instrument with ivory naturals and ebony sharps or a more recently built piano with synthetic naturals and sharps, noticeable wear and tear of the black keys detracts from the keyboard as a whole. In extreme cases, severe wear and tear of the sharps may even affect performance, in that the uneven shape of badly rounded sharps can become a distraction during play. **The sharps keys on your instrument are worn to the point where either replacement or refinishing would certainly enhance the appearance of the keyboard of the piano, and would possibly even make playing the piano more pleasing.**

The decision of whether it would be best to replace or restore your sharps keys depends largely upon the condition of the existing set on your piano.

to be genuine, not overly to consider the option of stripping off the old finish and having them refinished. Sprucing them up and reusing them might make sense. Refinished ebony sharps can have a lustrous glow to them and can add greatly to a vintage keyboard.

However, if the wear and tear is more than surface deep, particularly if the corners (or the facets) of the front of the sharps are noticeably rounded, they should most likely be replaced with either new plastic or ebony sharp keys, as seen in the photo below. The sharp closest to the camera is real ebony. The other two are satin and high-gloss plastic.



Heads-Up Preview

About This Preview Packet

The 24 main topics available for your free personalized promo or newsletter set all come in 2 versions—heads-up and full-length, both of which are shown in this preview packet.

Heads-up versions (see example on previous page) are always 1 page in length and as such are very direct and to the point. These shorter versions work especially well for pianos which have a number of repair issues in that a packet of them can be included with an estimate without creating a perceived overload of information for the owner. For my own business, I print multiple copies of heads-up for every topic covered thus far and carry several of each with me in my briefcase on tuning rounds in case I need to put a packet together. I spend a little more on printing expenses to have them produced on heavy-weight card stock, but the extra expense is well worth it, at least in my opinion—the promos have a very substantial 'feel' about them on the heavier-weight paper.

With a written estimate accompanied by relevant heads-up promos, a well-informed decision can be made more easily at the owner's leisure. This is especially helpful when the decision (to repair or not to repair) involves a discussion between joint owners of the piano—a husband and wife for example. The couple can sit down at the kitchen table together and go over the materials in an informed manner. Also, heads-up promos are great for any situation involving committees. If a half dozen repair topics are involved in a proposed restoration of a church piano, for example, the heads-ups can be passed around among committee members for everyone to become involved in the discussion and decision making.

Full-length versions (see example on following pages) go into enough detail that even your most discriminating customer will be satisfied. For my own use, I've printed off a single copy of each full-length version that I have in a binder which I also carry in my briefcase. Occasionally, I get my binder out if the customer wants more information on the spot. More frequently, however, are situations in which I ask my customer if they would like me to send the full-length copies of the topics concerned via email for further reading and consideration. Quite often customers do opt to see the in-depth materials.

Whichever version of the promos are put to use, the fact is that they work! In my own business, since I have begun giving out promos with estimates, the percentage of clients having recommended repairs done has increased steadily. In 2011, over 90% of the estimates which I gave were followed through with. Before promos, those types of numbers were way beyond what I ever saw. Other users of promos (see testimonials) have experienced similar results. Technicians have reported back that because of the promos, their businesses are doing better than ever before.

But enough about my own experiences and those of other technicians. Try a promo set out for yourself! Pick out a topic for your free promo set, and let us help you start building upon your own success story! Best wishes to your future!

Full-Length Preview

The Owner's Guide to Piano Repair

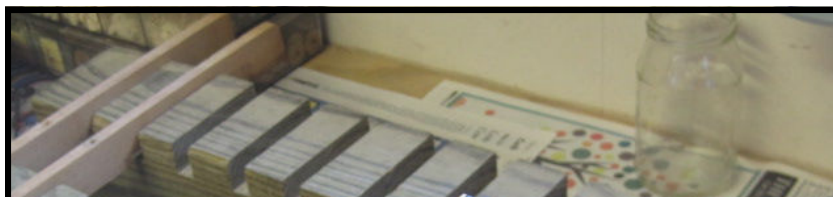


Focus On: Worn Sharp Keys - Rejuvenation / Replacement

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The condition of the thirty-six sharp keys of a piano is important first and foremost in that it affects the appearance of the keyboard as a whole. Whether your piano is a vintage instrument with ivory naturals and ebony sharps or a more recently built piano with synthetic naturals and sharps, noticeable wear and tear of the black keys detracts from the keyboard as a whole. In extreme cases, severe wear and tear of the sharps may even affect performance, in that the uneven shape of badly rounded sharps can become a distraction during play. **The sharps keys on your instrument are worn to the point where either replacement or refinishing would certainly enhance the appearance of the keyboard of the piano, and would possibly even make playing the piano more pleasing.**



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The following commonly asked questions have been answered to give you the information you need in order to decide whether to address the issue of the worn sharp keys of your piano.

How do I decide whether it would be better to replace or refinish my piano's worn set of sharp keys?

Many times the replacement of an old set of sharp keys is the best solution. If the wear and tear is more than surface deep, particularly if the corners (or the facets) of the front of the sharps are noticeably rounded, they should most likely be replaced with either new plastic or ebony sharp keys.

If, however, the original sharps prove to be genuine ebony (or pearwood) and are not overly rounded from wear you may want to consider the option of stripping off the old finish (above photo) and having them refinished. Sprucing them up and reusing them might make sense.

Aren't the sharp keys of older instruments all basically made the same?

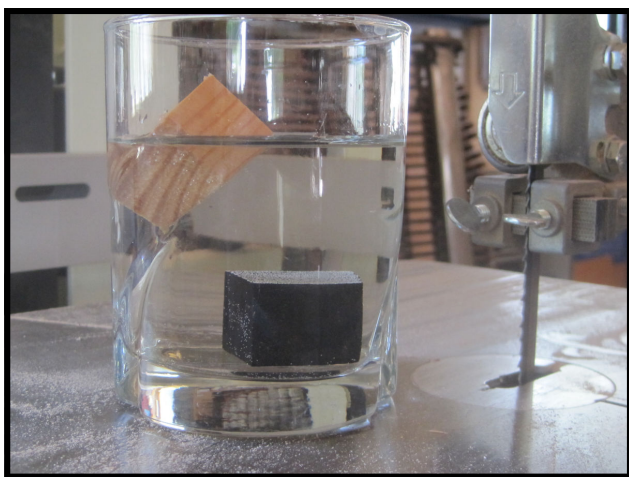
No. With vintage pianos there is a distinct difference in the quality of the woods used for the manufacture of sharp keys. Better quality pianos were more likely to have genuine ebony sharps (left example in photo below), or a high quality hardwood such as pearwood, dyed to take on the appearance of ebony (second from the left in photo). Lesser quality pianos would more than likely have a white wood or other cheap wood thickly lacquered to disguise the inferior nature of the product being used (right hand examples in photo).



If the key is to be ebony or as pearwood consider, and the repair will almost certainly be longer than for the simpler job of replacement.

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Why does it matter what wood was used if they are all black, or at least treated so that they are black on the outside?



In a word, durability. Ebony is one of the most resistant woods to wear and even after decades of use, will oftentimes show very little effect from the countless fingers that have made contact with its surface. Pearwood is a very durable substance as well, much more so than any white-wood.

Ebony's extreme durability is due to the fact that it is one of the densest of woods, having a high silica

content which makes it very heavy in comparison to ordinary woods (it actually sinks in water—photo left.) Because of this characteristic of the wood, ebony sharps (and pearwood sharps as well) are less likely to become rounded on the front from wear than those made from cheaper woods.

If the sharp keys of my piano are not worth saving, what are the options available for replacement sharps?

Most commonly, plastic sharp keys are used to replace original, worn-out sharps. Plastic sharps are available with either a satin or a high-gloss finish. New ebony sharps are also available for purchase from piano supply houses at a considerably higher price (10X) than the plastic versions.

When the old sharps are replaced with a new set, what is the procedure used?

Each key is first removed from the piano. The "sharp" is just the top, visible portion of the key, which is glued to the basswood keystick.

The basswood keystick is then secured in a woodworking vise, so that only the sharp is exposed. The sharp is tapped with a mallet to remove it, leaving the upper surface of the keystick

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For replacement sharps is genuine ebony worth the additional cost?

Although there is a discernible difference in terms of outward appearance between high-gloss plastic sharps and ebony sharps, the difference is less between the satin finish plastic and the ebony. In the photo below the sharp closest to the camera is real ebony. The other two are satin and high-gloss plastic, respectively.



Some pianists prefer the feel of the natural ebony over that of plastic, but it is a subtle difference. Most new pianos have plastic sharps, so for many people it's a very familiar feel.

If you appreciate fine vintage instruments, and if your piano has original ivory naturals in good condition, it would be nice to be able to say that the piano has genuine ebony sharps as well.

If the original sharps are in fact ebony with facets which are still clearly defined, are there reasons to put in the extra time that refinishing must take?

There are a couple of good reasons. First of all, by reusing the original ebony sharps you are helping to conserve a diminishing resource. Ebony is a rare commodity (photo shows a cross-section of an ebony log), and is considered a threatened species in Africa, India and Indonesia, where it grows wild.

Secondly, by restoring the original sharps, you're preserving some of the history of a piano which was built in a time when the raw materials we now consider luxuries (ivory, ebony, exotic veneers) were in abundance, and corners were not as likely to be cut in order to save money.



If the sharps

Yes, some pianists prefer When polished to a mirrorious silk

almost pure black, others may have deep reddish-brown or dark grey hues.

If a solid black finish is preferred, an opaque black lacquer may be applied over the wood. This is what traditionally was done, and is noticeable only when the lacquer starts to wear, revealing the true wood tones underneath (see cover photo).

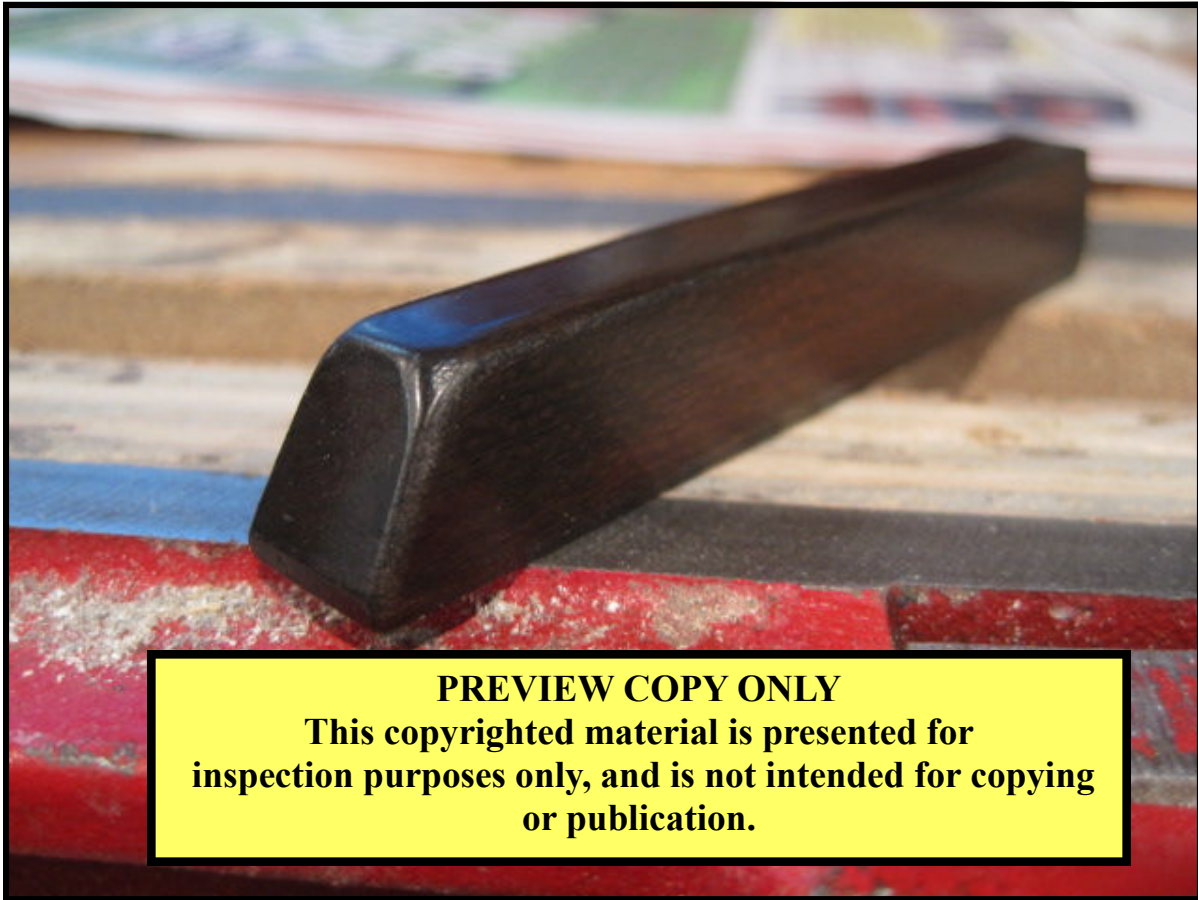
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Are there any other final considerations?

Whether the worn sharp keys of your piano need replacement or refinishing, attention to the repair will pay off in the appearance and touch of your keyboard. Having your newly refurbished set of keys leveled (photo) and the action regulated will bring the performance of your piano in line with its appearance.





A vintage ebony sharp after stripping and polishing—the warmth of real wood.

"In business to bring your piano to its full potential."

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