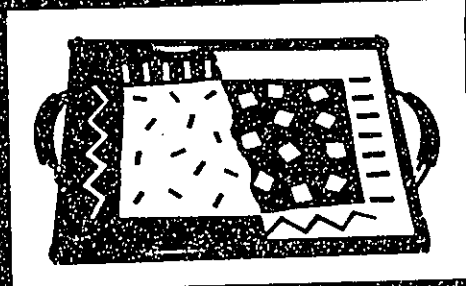


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TREASURE SEARCH

Baby, baby grand piano can give you butterflies



NANCY AND FRANK BOOS

Dear Nancy and Frank:
Please estimate the value of this Wurlitzer Student Butterfly baby grand piano which is 30 1/4 inches high by 31 inches deep by 30 inches wide.
M. Cooney,
Livonia

Dear M:
A baby grand piano is 5 feet 6 inches and under, so yours is really a baby, baby grand.

Most grand pianos have one lid that lifts from the right side, while the piano photographed has two lids that lift from the center like butterfly wings, hence the whimsical name "butterfly" piano. A butterfly piano was displayed in the movie "Housesitter" starring Steve Martin and Goldie Hawn. The piano has only 77 keys as compared to the regular 88 found on a traditional grand piano.

You know, of course, there are two sides to every story, and we got both on the "butterfly."

The "butterfly" was made by Wurlitzer, which was sold to Baldwin. Someone at Baldwin Piano told us that he had heard only 60 "butterflies" were made and given to Wurlitzer's best dealers to be used for promotion. However, in finally tracking down the Wurlitzer archival material at the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., manuscript archivist Craig Orr was able to help us with some detective work. Here's what we uncovered.

There were four different models, from a simple child's version to an elaborate Louis XIV model. These smaller pianos were intended for use by both children and adults who didn't have space for a regular size grand piano. The style photographed here is a 235, intended for quality introduction of

children to the piano.

Every piano should have a serial number that tells you when the piano was made. We found out the serial number on this butterfly is 221,183. The last serial number on record in the Wurlitzer catalogues (some of which are missing) at the Smithsonian ends in 1938 with piano number 161,161. Shortly thereafter, Wurlitzer suspended piano production and converted its production capabilities 100 percent to the war effort. When they resumed postwar production, one would assume that it took a few years to reach serial number 221,183 and therefore also assume that this piano was made in the late 1940s or early to mid 1950s.

Baldwin is now reintroducing the "butterfly" in the form of a digital or electric piano, reducing interest in these older versions as most people will want the "high tech" model. Every president of the United States has had his own piano made especially for his tenure in the White House. We believe most of such pianos are in museums, presidential libraries, etc. For some reason, Wurlitzer has never had the distinction of making a presidential piano.

The "butterfly" pianos can be bought at retail anywhere from about \$800 to \$3,000, depending on their internal and external condition. However, in our sleuthing we found a dealer who sold a restored Louis XIV version for \$9,000. Sherlock Holmes, Columbo and Monsieur Poirot have nothing on us!

Nancy and Frank Boos are with the Frank H. Boos Gallery, an appraisal firm and auction house at 420 Enterprise Court in Bloomfield Hills that has been in the auction business for more than 30 years. Do you have an item you would like to know about? Send in a good photo of it, along with its description (including size, working parts, etc.) and any known provenance (history) to *Treasure Search*, The Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009. Include your name, community and phone number.

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Oh, baby. This baby grand is called a "butterfly" piano because it has two lids that lift from the center like butterfly wings.