



**Master's touch:** Antal Lang expects the piano he is currently constructing to sustain a note for more than 20 seconds. The length of time a piano can hold a note is one factor used to determine its caliber and worth.



**Seeing sound:** Antal Lang explains how sound travels through a piano. The Lake Orion resident says he can even visualize the path of sound waves through a piano. His latest project, at right, may be like no other piano in the world.

# Sounds of music

Lake Orion piano man can 'see' them as he builds his own classic grand

BY NICOLE STAFFORD  
STAFF WRITER

Piano man Antal Lang sees what we can only hear.

The Lake Orion man is best described as a piano man because he not only plays and tunes pianos but also builds them.

Better yet, ask him a question about the instrument. Chances are he'll open up his well of knowledge on the subject and throw in a few stories about the many famous performers he has encountered in his profession.

"I've never tuned Elton John,"

**■ Sound carries 15,000 feet per second when it moves in the direction of a wood's grain and 5,000 feet per second when traveling against the grain.**

he says, looking up from the floor of his crowded basement, a virtual piano factory.

In the center of the room is a pile of sawdust, flanked by tables of the usual shop accoutrements. Threatening to overtake the room are Lang's projects — a harpsichord in one corner, an unfinished 8-foot grand by the window and the inner, iron workings of another piano, still without legs, on the floor.

Piles of wood, large oddly sized boxes and two saw tables are nearby. Lang is peering down at his latest project — a

large grid of iron holding a series of tightly stretched strings.

"It's going to miss a little growl. But I'm not going to apologize for how this sucker sounds," he says. "This sucker is going over twenty seconds," he continues, referring to the length of time a musical note will carry after a pianist has hit a key.

Admiring the half-completed instrument, Lang seems to track the waves of sound that will issue from it.

Later he describes sound's pathway from its inception point on one of the piano's strings through the length of its wooden structure and into the air.

Sound carries 15,000 feet per second when it moves in the direction of a wood's grain and 5,000 feet per second when traveling against the grain, he says.

But, those are the matters that occupy the piano man's thoughts. "If you have to ask, you'll never understand," says Lang, 45, of his passion. In fact,



**Time out:** Lang takes a break from his work and passion — building pianos. Lang also tunes pianos and considers himself a fairly accomplished musician.

STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HOFFMAYER

it's not unusual for him to work on his projects into the early morning hours, he adds.

"When I do work on it, I put in about six hours a night," he says. "Then there's the four hours of just staring at it in the middle of the night wondering what I did wrong."

Without getting into the details, the relevance of Lang's current project is the possibility that he is building a six-foot-four-inch piano like no other in the world.

Although every piano is a one-of-a-kind due to the instrument's complex construction, Lang's project is unique by virtue of the parts that will make up his masterpiece.

For one, most piano companies, especially the prestigious ones, don't allow individuals to buy parts even for restoration or repair. In Lang's case, he was able to obtain parts from piano companies that have long been out of business. He's also combining parts from different makers.

You remember when they were putting Chevy engines in Oldsmobile cars, he says, trying to convey the exact nature of the project, a rebellious experiment in combining elements that weren't made to go together.

The impossible, he says with a belly laugh that heaves beneath a gray sweatshirt personalized by his children's handiwork with paint. "I've done the impossible."

But Lang will just as easily tell you the project may not yield an original work. "I could be

building the first one, but anytime you think you're doing something first, you're not."

And although Lang is confident his labor will net a premier instrument, he's also aware of the downsides of his boldness and the fact that anything could happen.

"Yeah, I think I'm arrogant. I like to do things that other people don't do. There's a certain kind of arrogance that comes with those of us who do things that are unique," he says.

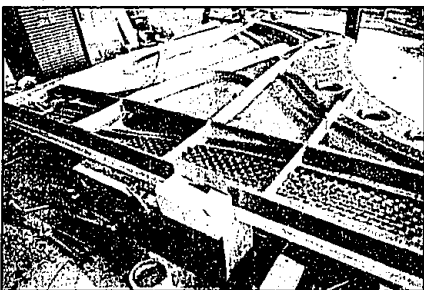
But starvation would be preferable to not attempting the project, not to mention, others. (Future plans include construction of a 12-foot grand piano.)

Besides, Lang's background — having tuned pianos for individuals ranging from Liberace to Leonard Bernstein — seems to warrant having a little arrogance.

He even recalls Frank Sinatra's body guards escorting him out of the "Chairman of the Board's" dressing room prior to completing his tuning job on the star's practice piano.

Lang also grew up under the spell of music. His mother was an opera singer and family friends were primarily musicians. He started piano lessons at age 8 and attempted to tune his own piano when he reached 15.

"I was practically six years of age before I realized that everyone couldn't play the piano," he said. "I consider myself a fairly good musician... But I don't know what I like better — building or playing."



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