



# *The Craft of Piano Tuning*

by Dan Levitan, RPT

Reviewed by Ben Gac, RPT

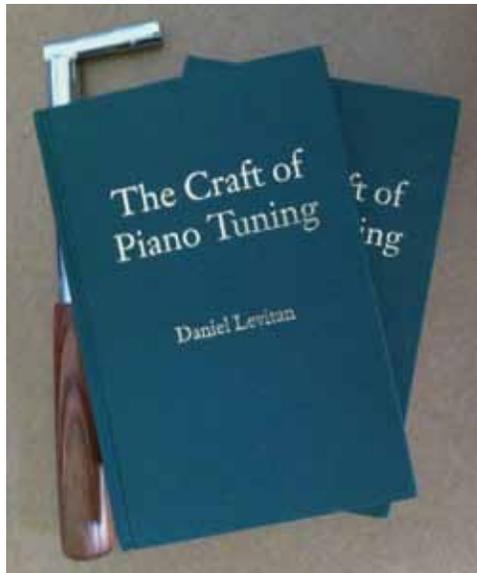
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The name “Dan Levitan” comes up commonly in the conversations we piano technicians have with each other; his thoughtful writings in the *Journal* and his convention seminars embody his deeply conscientious approach to piano tuning. His book *The Craft of Piano Tuning* is a reflection of that same approach to the trade: deliberate, studied, and ample in material.

When first holding the book I noticed its binding and cover; it feels like a work of craft itself. The deep-green woven hard cover with embossed lettering foretells that this work will remain in libraries of piano technicians for years to come. The layout, organization, and illustrations are likewise done with just as much thought as the written content—clear, descriptive, and instructive.

The book is divided into roughly two sections, “The Tuner’s Ear” and “The Tuner’s Hand,” with many subtopics contained within each segment. Instead of organizing the book by chapters or numbers, the author chose the alternative of naming each topic as a “lecture” essay, followed by “supplements” which go into greater detail about particular items in each of the lectures. Although perhaps a little unconventional, the subjects flow from one to another quite naturally.

“The Tuner’s Ear” begins at square one, explaining the fundamental science behind tuning theory, approaching it from a surprisingly fresh perspective. Building upon each lesson, Dan constructs the basis for our approach to modern piano tuning. We learn about the importance of the unison, and how its significance goes much deeper than just tuning two strings together. We can visually perceive—quite well, in fact, thanks to the book’s excellent illustrations—how inharmonicity affects a piano. Moving along from simple to more complex material, the last few supplements are loaded with esoteric ideas for attaining an optimal temperament or stretch (while indirectly addressing many truth claims made by contemporary tuners), to utilizing virtually every interval possible when tuning across the keyboard. This first half of the book will be a delight to both new and old technicians alike; though I was familiar with the



*The Craft of Piano Tuning* by Daniel Levitan. New York, The Soundboard Press, 2011.

subject matter, I found his innovative point of view revitalizing.

“The Tuner’s Hand” portion of the book addresses the multiple facets of tuning technique. Beginning with addressing the pros and cons of today’s piano manufacturing, Dan provides practical insight for optimum ways of setting the pin. Did you realize that your body is three times removed from the speaking length that you’re trying to tune? Your hand moves the tuning lever, which moves the tuning pin, which changes the tension of the front length of the string, which finally changes the tension of the speaking length.

Addressing the perennial problem of pin twisting and torquing, the factors that account for tension adjustment at each portion in the tuning sequence are exceptionally explained. Dan provides his own unique solution to unintentional pin bending, all the while giving face time to alternate solutions other innovative technicians have come up with. After addressing the method of adjusting the front string when tuning, the book goes on to make delightfully interesting explanations of why pianos go out of tune in the manner they do, followed by recommendations for ways to make major pitch adjustments. Finally, the book concludes by making recommendations for optimal muting methods and time efficiency techniques, carefully weighing several possible approaches depending on one’s tuning sequence. A short section is also dedicated to ergonomic tuning, helping the technician learn about better ways to tune for physical longevity (hand, body, and ear).

*The Craft of Piano Tuning* is an excellent, full-bodied exploration of the many elements of piano tuning. Beginners and veterans alike will find much useful and intriguing material in these pages. Those who are already familiar with Dan Levitan’s approach to our craft will find rewarding reinforcements of his eminent tuning technique. The unique and interesting information to be found throughout the book makes it a treasure trove for any piano technician.

*The Craft of Piano Tuning* can be purchased for \$75 from Pianotek or Amazon.com. ■