

Huckle, Dudley

By Jennifer Bell

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Dudley Huckle says tuning a piano is both an art and a science.

"You have to have an ear for music, because every good tuner relies on their ear," said Huckle. "You can have all the technical equipment in the world, but ultimately you test whether a piano is tuned by how it sounds."

The 55-year-old Belleville resident has tuned thousands of pianos in his 23-year career, including concert pianos for well-known names such as Frank Mills and John Arpin.

But 80 per cent of his business comes from residential customers who want their ivories adjusted every year.

Tuning takes just over an hour, but can take longer if a piano is badly out of tune or needs additional cleaning.

Regardless of what instrument he's tuning, though, Huckle uses a computerized piece of equipment called a Sanderson Accu-tuner, which retailed for \$2,600.

"It's an amazing machine," Huckle said, hooking it up to the piano at Harry J. Clarke Public School. "You begin with middle A, and adjust all other notes to

Even with an Accu-tuner, Huckle never discounts what his ear tells him about a piano.

"The machine can precisely tell me what the note should sound like, and it's usually right. But there are times

A matter of sound

harmonize with it."

when I tune a note a fraction up or down, because it sounds better to me."

It took about a year after his training and apprenticeship (by correspondence and at McAdoo Piano and Organ in Kingston) before Huckle was experienced enough to begin tuning, and it was several years later before he was qualified to tune concert pianos.

Huckle tunes approximately 1,200 pianos a year, mostly in Quinte and the neighbouring municipalities.

"I'm very busy, partly because there aren't enough piano tuners in the area. It's

Dudley Huckle uses an electronic tuner as well as his ear when tuning pianos.

really a very interesting career. I'm surprised more people don't want to get into it."

Huckle works closely with Stephanie Bird, a piano tuner in the Brighton area, exchanging ideas and information, and gets lots of support from area music teachers. Many of them refer him to clients, and indeed, 60 per cent of his business is repeat customers.

He's seen just about every kind of piano, made, but the ones that stand out in his mind are the rare and unusual pieces.

"The strangest one was a Heintzman transposing piano. The keyboard actually slides

side to side, so that the player can play in the key of C anywhere on the piano."

He's also tuned some beautiful Steinways — considered the premiere piano by many — that ran upwards of several hundred thousand dollars, including a rare Steinway player piano made in the 1920s.

And although he works with pianos every day and occasionally tickles the ivories himself, Huckle, oddly enough, doesn't own one.

"I'm too busy to play it," he chuckled. "It would just sit there most of the time, so there's really no point."

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