

Chapter 8

Moving a Grand Piano

“Piano moving may conjure up images of men with monstrous arms and huge torsos, but actually two or three people of average build can do most piano moving jobs—even grands—if they have some brains, experience, the right equipment, and a knowledge of just when and where to apply a little force.”

—Larry Fine, RPT, author of *The Piano Book*

More involved repairs and rebuilding procedures require moving the piano to the shop. In this chapter you will learn how to prepare a grand piano for loading on a truck, and how to reassemble it. For information on how to remove case parts from a vertical piano, turn to “In Vertical Pianos” on page 137.

If you are shipping the piano long distance, be aware of the following:

- Trucks and containers can get very hot in the summer and below freezing in the winter. Use only moving companies that can guarantee climate control.
- Use long-distance movers that specialize in moving pianos. See Appendix D, “Resources,” on page 517 for a list.
- Even with climate control, wrap the piano in plastic sheeting to protect it from leaks and condensation. Place a container of moisture-absorbing material, such as large bags of silica gel, inside it.
- Avoid shipping to a cold-climate destination during winter. If a truck gets stuck in a winter storm, the piano may freeze. While lacquered finishes tolerate freezing, polyester doesn’t: you may end up with a cracked finish. Cold weather also stresses the soundboard. Metal parts may rust from condensation that forms during rapid drops in temperature and during thaws.
- Crate the piano well. Follow the advice of a long-distance piano mover.
- Use high-quality, *clean* mover’s blankets. Dust will act as an abrasive and mar the finish.
- Ship the piano on a skid board. Remember that you may not get the board back for months, if ever. You can

build a board yourself, but make sure it’s capable of carrying the piano’s weight over ledges, on dollies, etc. Piano-supply houses sell sturdy, well-padded boards.

- Remove all loose hardware, bag and label it clearly, and affix it where the piano movers or the piano technician will find it easily. The best place is on the plate.

Learn from professional piano movers: Simply hire them and observe what they do. Upgrade your health, property, and business insurance policies if necessary. Remember that a piano weighs between 600 and 1,300 lbs [250–600 kg].

Music Rack, Fallboard, Key Slip

The first thing to remove from a grand piano is the music rack. Wrap it in a mover’s blanket and tape over the blanket so it doesn’t open. Secure the fallboard and key slip by inserting rubber tuning wedges or soft cloths between it and the case, or tape them to the case with light adhesive tape, such as 3M ScotchBlue™ Delicate Surface, that won’t lift the finish or leave residue.

For a long-distance move, it’s a good idea to tie down the hammer shanks by placing a wooden rail or dowel over them and tying them to action brackets and/or the wippen rail with long tie wraps.

For complete instructions on removing the fallboard, key slip, and action, turn to “In Grands” on page 136.

Grand Lids

If you are putting the piano on a piano board, the main and front lids can remain on the piano—they will hang over the edge of the board. With this technique, risk of damaging the hinges is minimal, but it does exist. If you want to move the lids separately or need to remove them for any other reason, here is how to do it.

Open the front (smaller) lid and lay it onto the main lid. With the main lid closed, remove the pins from the hinges that attach the main lid to the rim, and, with the help of an assistant, carefully lift the lid. Keep the pins marked, put them back into their own hinges, and tape over them so they don't fall out.

If the hinges are deformed or bent, detach the hinge from the rim instead of removing the pins—that will make reassembly easier. Remove hinge screws while an assistant supports and holds the lid open (watch the chandeliers, light fixtures, fans, and ceiling).

Before reinstalling the lid, coat each hinge pin with cork grease or a thin coat of petroleum jelly.

To prepare the lids for moving, pad them with at least two layers of mover's blankets, and an extra double layer of blanket on the bottom. Tie them with mover's straps or strong adhesive tape. If the finish is high gloss, wrap the lid in plastic sheeting followed by foam wrap, a soft packaging material used for crating new pianos.

Putting Piano on Skid Board

This involves removing the legs, which is physically difficult and potentially dangerous. Have at least one assistant.

A grand piano is lowered onto a piano skid board by removing the left front leg and placing the left front corner of the piano on the board. The lyre should be out of the way. Some technicians use the lyre as a fulcrum when lowering the piano on the board. Although this will work in most cases, you risk breaking the lyre and hurting the people involved, and damaging the piano and floor in the process. Placing the weight of the piano on the lyre can also damage or slightly alter the curvature of the key bed, which affects keyboard bedding and action regulation. It is much wiser to use a device specifically designed for lowering a piano, such as the Moondog Grand Piano Tilter,²⁹⁶ which temporarily replaces the lyre; PianoHorse™;²⁹⁷ or a shop truck/tilter. The following instructions describe lowering the piano *without* any of those devices.

TOOLS

- Skid board (longer than the piano)
- Optional: blocks or boxes to support the skid board
- Optional: piano tilter

²⁹⁶ See <http://www.moondogmanufacturing.com>.

²⁹⁷ Invented by Gordon Crail, founder of the Piano Wrangler Equipment Co. Available from Paul L. Jansen & Son, Inc.

- Two or three sturdy portable sawhorses
- Rubber mallet
- Large flat-head screwdriver for cams
- Set of hex wrenches
- Small hammer
- Appropriate wrenches/sockets to remove bolts, if used
- Several mover's blankets
- High-gloss finish: large sheets of foam wrap
- Several large rubber bands for securing the front lid
- Web straps, cargo straps
- Piano moving dolly

MATERIALS

- If lid is not removed: painter's tape
- Cork grease or petroleum jelly for hinge pins

1 Remove the music desk and immobilize the fallboard by inserting rubber wedges or folded pieces of soft cloth between its ends and the rim.

2 Remove or immobilize the lid: Either remove the lid (see above) or secure the front lid to the piano with a large rubber band (available from piano supply houses). Unless the finish is fragile, tape the lid to the rim with painter's tape.

3 Prepare the skid board, straps, several mover's blankets, and a dolly. Optionally, place the skid board on the dolly (it should be at approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of the distance from the front and $\frac{2}{3}$ from the back of the board), and use a sturdy box, cinder block, or other support to prop up the front end of the board just slightly higher than the dolly. The block will prevent the piano and the board from sliding as you prop up the piano, and you won't have to lift the board onto the dolly later. Thread the straps through the openings on the board's sides, and lay the board on the floor to the left of the piano, with the board's raised flange on the keyboard end (Figure 453). Fold one end of a mover's blanket over the board. The rest of the blanket should lie on the floor, away from the piano. Repeat this with another blanket, putting it over the first one. The unfolded ends of the blankets will protect the lids from the straps. For high-gloss finish, place several foam wrap over the blankets.

4 Remove the lyre (page 271).

5 Lower the piano onto the skid board: Place thick padding material (a folded blanket, for example) under the front right and rear legs, and turn their casters to the right, away from the piano. Make sure the raised flange on the skid board is aligned with the piano's front left edge. Have a sawhorse ready to support the piano when you remove the leg. Remove the left front leg by knocking out the wooden cam or wedge and removing all bolts or screws that hold the leg in place (see page 31), then lift the left front corner of the piano onto the sawhorse. If the leg is equipped with a **lock plate** (as in most vintage American and European pianos), hammer it toward the middle