

Morris Steinert on How To Sell A Pianoforte

In order to fully illustrate the *modus operandi* that served me through music as the handmaid to my pocketbook, I will let my readers look at my art openly and squarely, and should I succeed in creating a new school for the unfortunate pianoforte seller, I think I would serve both art and salesmanship honestly.

First on my list is the churchman, a man who had served his apprenticeship in the Sunday-school. My appeal to him had to be made through suitable music. For instance, I usually played *Shall We Gather at the River*; but if my man was of middle age, having grown gray in his holy work, I substituted one of the tunes that once upon a time gave such hope and prospective happiness to the young Christian, as *Jesus, Lover O/My Soul*; this, played in the key of F, always clinched the bargain with the devoted citizen. Such program music to the Irish- woman who carried the price of the piano with her in her stocking would have acted very disastrously upon her merry temperament, for it is the Irish dance rhythm found in reels and jigs that interests her, and all I had to do was to keep my eye on her foot, and the moment she began to move her light fantastic toe in time to the jig I was hammering out of my instrument, the piano was sold and I had her money. The German piano customer is of a different class, and had to be subjected to an entirely different course of treatment. The *Sweet Bye and Bye* or *The Irish Washerwoman* "cut no ice" with him. He is a patriot; he loves his Kaiser and his beer. His movements in the dance are subject to the rhythms of the gliding waltz, and he who has once served as a soldier in the glorious army of the Kaiser still retains the echoes of martial music, and the German, not the Sousa March, is in his brain; and *The Beautiful Blue Danube Waltz*, *Die Wacht am Rhein*, or, as he is always a member of the Mannerchor Singing Society, he aspires high and envelops himself in Kreutzer's *Es ist der Tag des Herrn*, or *Die Kapelle*. If I gave my instrument such emphasis as to bring out the patriotic, the heroic, and the *gemuthliche* feeling of the Teutonic purchaser, the shekels ran into my coffers.

But the poetical forces, the refinement of the musical salesman can be beautifully demonstrated when an American woman of any age enters the wareroom in search of a piano,—she who dearly loves music, and hastens to assure you that she invariably falls asleep to its soothing strains; that she is so passionately fond of it that she can go without eating or drinking if she can only listen to sweet music, and that she never tires of it. She loves the opera, and she thinks singing quite beyond anything else in the world,—something simply grand. She has listened to all the operas she has ever heard of, and she can hum them all by ear or play them on the piano, and it is really not remarkable that she can do this because she so dearly loves music. She assures you that Paderewski's playing is heavenly, that she is simply dying to meet him, and that she would willingly walk ten miles to hear him play and pay five dollars for her ticket besides. She thinks that any one who has not heard Paderewski play does not know or appreciate what life is. She is so earnest in her love for the divine and heavenly art that she places her fingers caressingly on the keys of the piano and plays some snatches of Chopin, looking into your eyes the while, and growing more friendly. Finally, in a burst of confidence, she tells you that she comes from a very musical family; her father, who just died—she stops her soulful playing to brush away a tear—was a great musician, and leader of the choir, while her mother was one of the loveliest alto singers in the State, — that her voice was so powerful and yet so sweet and mellow, that it could be heard half a mile away, and furthermore —she has now commenced to play the Chopin C-

sharp-minor nocturne — that she has inherited her talent from her father's side, for her grandfather was a great performer on the bugle, and he also played the bass viol in the choir for fifty years. These and many more such assurances from the accomplished musician convince me that 'most any piano will do, and it is the cheapest plan to let her revel in her glorious art. Let her sit and play, for she will not permit any rivalry, and if I attempt to show her that I, too, can play on occasions, she immediately becomes angry and the sale is lost. After many years in the business, I assure you that all you have to do with such a customer is to praise her efforts, assure her that she is a great musician, and keep her playing. If you are careful not to say anything in praise of the piano, nine times out of ten you will get her money — if she has any, which is doubtful.

Then there is the Hebrew, who, having made a lot of money in America, wants to buy a piano for his daughter, and buy it cheap. For forty years I have tried to find some style of music that appeals to him, and although I have patiently gone through the entire list of composers, starting in with songs sung long before Moses wrote, or didn't write, the Pentateuch, I must admit my failure to ever, for a second, hypnotize him by music of any class. The Hebrew never looks beyond the polished case and the price. He wants the largest, by all means; so to those who are to come after me, I shall say, when the Hebrew comes in to buy a piano, show him one that is conspicuous by reason of its size and high polish, and then talk. Never mind opening the instrument, or playing upon it, or telling him the name of the maker. It's the price he wants, and if you are blest with the gift of gab, and if you have started in with a price sufficiently high to admit of many reductions, you may be able to drive a bargain before night,—that is, if you are sharper than he is.

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