

Good Evening and Happy Halloween – albeit one night early. Although there are no other references tonight to anything particularly spooky, I thought I might get a few chuckles with my mask here...

[Smile...]

On behalf of my colleagues, Professor Ruben Gutierrez and Dr. Oscar Macchioni, I'd like to welcome you to the UTEP Piano Area *Ivories on the Borders*' 5th event this semester. Other piano concerts and projects included the presentation of jazz pianist Ruben Gutierrez's newly released DVD "My Story," a return visit and concert from alumni pianist Mr. Thomas Azar, and guest artists Dr. Natalya Shkoda from the University of California in Chico, as well as Italian musician Luca Ciarla presenting his "Fiddler in the Loop." As a means to showcase our piano guild's projects, we've entitled this year's season "88 Keys," particularly honoring the two stars you see here tonight: our recently refurbished Steinway Concert and Imperial Bosendorfer Grand Pianos.

[gesture to the instruments]

Just a little background on these pianos:

When I came for my job interview at UTEP in 2002, I was offered the choice between performing on either instrument. After sitting down behind both, I believe if my memory serves me correctly, I chose to play the Bosendorfer. It obviously treated me well, as I stand here before you seven years later. UTEP has continuously offered both instruments to a plethora of pianists at all levels, including faculty, students, staff and guest artists. And both instruments have served their constituencies well.

Approximately two years ago, both instruments started to suffer a bit. They became temperamental, difficult to control – the pianist had to work beyond "normal" to produce amazingly beautiful sounds. They were getting old, they had been used – "loved to death" perhaps and all pianists were starting to take note and verbalize the challenges.

They were sick.

And so we went to work. The first job was to find a company who would rebuild the instruments to our satisfaction. I began hunting, searching, making phone calls: everyone with whom I spoke wanted to take both our older instruments and give us one, new Steinway concert instrument in return. Working with the chairman of the Department, Dr. Lowell Graham, we contemplated this scenario. Please don't get me wrong: I would have really loved a new instrument in addition to keeping the Bosendorfer. But in retrospect, I think we made the right choice. Dr Graham asked me, "Why are all of these companies offering this? What's the deal with the Bosendorfer." After some more searching, I realized that these companies couldn't rebuild the Bosendorfer. And this is why:

The Model 290 Imperial Bosendorfer you see before you was originally built following a suggestion by composer Ferruccio Busoni: that this instrument have 97 keys, or eight full

octaves, as opposed to the conventional 88 keys, a little over seven octave, construction. And you can see... This expanded range allows faithful performances of a number of twentieth century compositions, including works by Bartók, Debussy, Ravel and, not least of all, Busoni.

This piano also combines a very powerful soundboard with a high proportion of mountain spruce from the Alps, producing what many deem as this piano's sound being labeled almost orchestral. The Bösendorfer "resonating box principle," – this is a term that the Bosendorfer company itself coined -- which views the entire instrument as a cohesive whole, generates unsurpassed power and a poignantly full tone.

This model was first built in Vienna, Austria around 1900, (although the Bosendorfer company itself has been producing pianos of other models since 1828). Today they are continued to be made by hand, still there in Vienna. Nearly 10 feet long and with a weight of approximately 1, 255 pounds, this extraordinary instrument has been called a "boutique" piano – referring to its unique craftsmanship and almost elite status.

Due to these specifications—its size, its uniqueness in regard to the finish on what we call the cabinet of the piano, the way it plays, the way its strung, etc., etc., etc., not every piano store can refurbish any Imperial Bosendorfer—let alone one that has done its job at the University of Texas at El Paso.

I have been told numerous times that the instrument was first presented to the University by a dear friend of mine, Mr. Michael Salzman, who through his store actually sold it to the UTEP Department of Music. How he acquired it, I still do not know. What I do know is that he had a love for the Bosendorfer instrument. In his home, his wife Wilma enjoys either the model 185 or 200 Bosendorfer – a smaller, baby grand, in their front room. In my personal opinion, it is one of the most gorgeous instruments in town. And now, this instrument matches its beauty.

So why is it here if no one could fix it? Well: we found someone who could. Zuill Bailey, our professor of cello here at UTEP, who spends a fair amount of time in his former city of residence – NYC, tipped us off about a piano store in New York called *Klavierhaus*. I phoned them immediately. It seems that *Klavierhaus* used to be the dealership for selling and rebuilding Bosendorfer instruments. Now they specialize in Steinway, Fazioli and Sauter pianos. Soon we had found our company who could and would rebuild both the Bosendorfer and Steinway pianos, and they visited our campus.

The match had been made.

And then there was another little part of the puzzle, which happened to be the cost of repair. Ladies and Gentleman, you are looking at two instruments that have had every part replaced: from the outside casing, to new soundboards, keys, hammers, pedals— from the tiniest metal part to the largest wooden lid – all are vital to the success of sound heard from these instruments. Needless to say, it was not inexpensive to have these pianos repaired. And through our gratitude, we honor tonight the diligent work of Dr.

Lowell Graham, Chair of the UTEP Department of Music, the UTEP Office of Institutional Advancement, Dr. Howard Daudistel, Dean of the UTEP Liberal Arts College and Dr. Diana Natalicio, President of the University of Texas at El Paso. Without their support, hard work and continued efforts for excellence in regard to faculty and student resources, we would not have our stars here tonight.

The pianos left our campus last April and returned to us this past August. And now to share with you just a little bit about the Steinway...

Since 1853, Steinway pianos have set an uncompromising standard for sound, touch, beauty, and investment value. Handcrafting each Steinway requires up to one full year – creating an instrument of rare quality and global renown. Not surprisingly, Steinway remains the choice of 9 out of 10 concert artists, and countless pianists, composers, and performers around the world. Ours is the Model “D”, which is the overwhelming choice of concert artists and educational institutions throughout the world.

Steinway & Sons is an American and German manufacturer of handmade pianos and its founder was German immigrant Heinrich Engelhard Steinweg (who later changed his name to Henry E. Steinway). He established three basic principles at his companies (both in NYC and in Hamburg): 1) "Build to a standard, not a price", 2) "Make no compromise in quality", and 3) "Strive always to improve the instrument". Although arguably some of these improvements were not successful (I mention the word Teflon here)– no one can argue that this instrument and this company has withstood the test of time in producing one of the finest brands of pianos throughout the world.

After merging with the [Selmer Company](#) in 1995, Steinway's current affiliates include the Boston and Essex lines of pianos. The Selmer Company, today named [Conn-Selmer](#), is a subsidiary of Steinway. And UTEP, by the way, is a Conn Selmer School.

Tonight's program is set to highlight these instruments. I'm going to play the Bosendorfer on the first half of the concert, and the Steinway , on the second. Tonight we remember: Alicia de Larrocha, famous Spanish pianist, our dear friend Miguel Solis, whose wife Felipa, is here tonight with her mother Rita Triana. We also remember Rocio Ponce, mother of my student Enrique Ponce. And we celebrate the power of music and the power of the piano.

So. I'm glad you're here. I hope there will be a lot of buzz about which instrument you prefer and for various reasons why: volume, timbre, attack, tone color, etc., etc., etc. or hey: I think it just sounds better.

Enjoy tonight's concert.

Thank you.