

The Piano Owner's Heads-Up Guide to Important Piano Maintenance

Focus On: Worn Sharp Keys - Rejuvenation / Replacement



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The condition of the thirty-six sharp keys of a piano is important in that it affects the appearance of the keyboard as a whole. Whether your piano is a vintage instrument with ivory naturals and ebony sharps or a more recently built piano with synthetic naturals and sharps, noticeable wear and tear of the black keys detracts from the keyboard as a whole. In extreme cases, severe wear and tear of the sharps may even affect performance, in that the uneven shape of badly rounded sharps can become a distraction during play. **The sharps keys on your instrument are worn to the point where either replacement or refinishing would certainly enhance the appearance of the keyboard of the piano, and would possibly even make playing the piano more pleasing.**

The decision of whether it would be best to replace or restore your sharps keys depends largely upon the condition of the existing set on your piano.



A vintage ebony sharp after stripping and polishing—the warmth of real wood.

If the original sharps prove to be genuine ebony (or pearwood) and are not overly rounded from wear you may want to consider the option of stripping off the old finish and having them refinished. Sprucing them up and reusing them might make sense. Refinished ebony sharps can have a lustrous glow to them and can add greatly to a vintage keyboard.

However, if the wear and tear is more than surface deep, particularly if the corners (or the facets) of the front of the sharps are noticeably rounded, they should most likely be replaced with either new plastic or ebony sharp keys, as seen in the photo below. The sharp closest to the camera is real ebony. The other two are satin and high-gloss plastic.



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