

The history of Gualala Arts' Yamaha Concert Grand piano.

(From an email from Larry Lobel)

I met David Lytle about 3 years ago (April, 2000), when he hired me to tune his piano on the kind recommendation of Dianne Rasmussen. At that time he had a Steinway baby grand, and the first time I came to work on it he had a detailed list of problems he wanted me to address. I had never had a customer give me such lengthy and specific requests; he wrote a diagram of his perception of the sound of almost every note on the piano and how he'd like it changed. This was somewhat intimidating, as we piano technicians do not normally have customers able to hear the extremely subtle nuances he was pointing out, and I worried I might not be able to satisfy his exacting requirements. I set to work and did my best. When I finished he tried the piano and said he was very pleased with the result, to my relief.

He said he wanted me to tune the piano every 3 or 4 months, showing uncommon concern with the proper maintenance (it's hard to get most customers to have theirs tuned even once a year). When I balked at making the four-hour roundtrip drive to Sea Ranch for one tuning, he graciously went to the trouble of getting other residents have me tune their pianos, to assure a full day's pay for my trip. Each time I came he again had a list of sounds he wanted me to adjust, which I wasn't always able to do. He must have sensed my uneasiness about this, and showed uncommon intelligence, sensitivity and thoughtfulness by reassuring me that he understood pianos are complicated and subtle, and that it could take many sessions to work out the problems. He questioned me at length about the capabilities and limitations of his piano, and listened attentively when I told him what I knew. When I finished, he would try out the piano by playing a few pieces, which I enjoyed hearing and was impressed with his musicianship. He also would listen to me play, and we would discuss with mutual enjoyment the pleasures and pitfalls of piano performance. In this way we developed a narrowly focused but satisfying friendship.

Since David & I had discussed the possibility of replacing his 5-foot Steinway with a larger, more satisfying instrument, when I bought myself a Yamaha concert grand I invited him to come to my home to try out my old 6-foot grand, which I thought he might be interested in buying. After trying the smaller piano he went to the concert grand, and from the moment he started playing he went into an almost trance-like state. He played for over an hour without stopping or speaking, and was obviously engrossed and ecstatic. When he finished, he simply said, 'I want to but THIS piano, not the other one.' I told him I wouldn't sell it, and he asked if I could help him find one just like it. I said I would do my best, and within a couple of weeks I located an almost identical one in southern California. David flew down to try it, and bought it immediately. As all his friends and family know, David was thrilled to own this wonderful piano and enjoyed it immensely for the last couple of years of his life.

David also had me check the piano at the Gualala Arts Center, which they were dissatisfied with. He was very concerned that they should have a good piano for the excellent artists who perform there, and several times we talked about how to accomplish this. After David passed away, when I learned that his son, Douglas was not sure what to do with the concert grand, I suggested it be donated to the Arts Center in David's memory. I was very glad to learn my suggestion was followed, and I'm sure David would have wanted this.

Larry Lobel, August 11, 2003