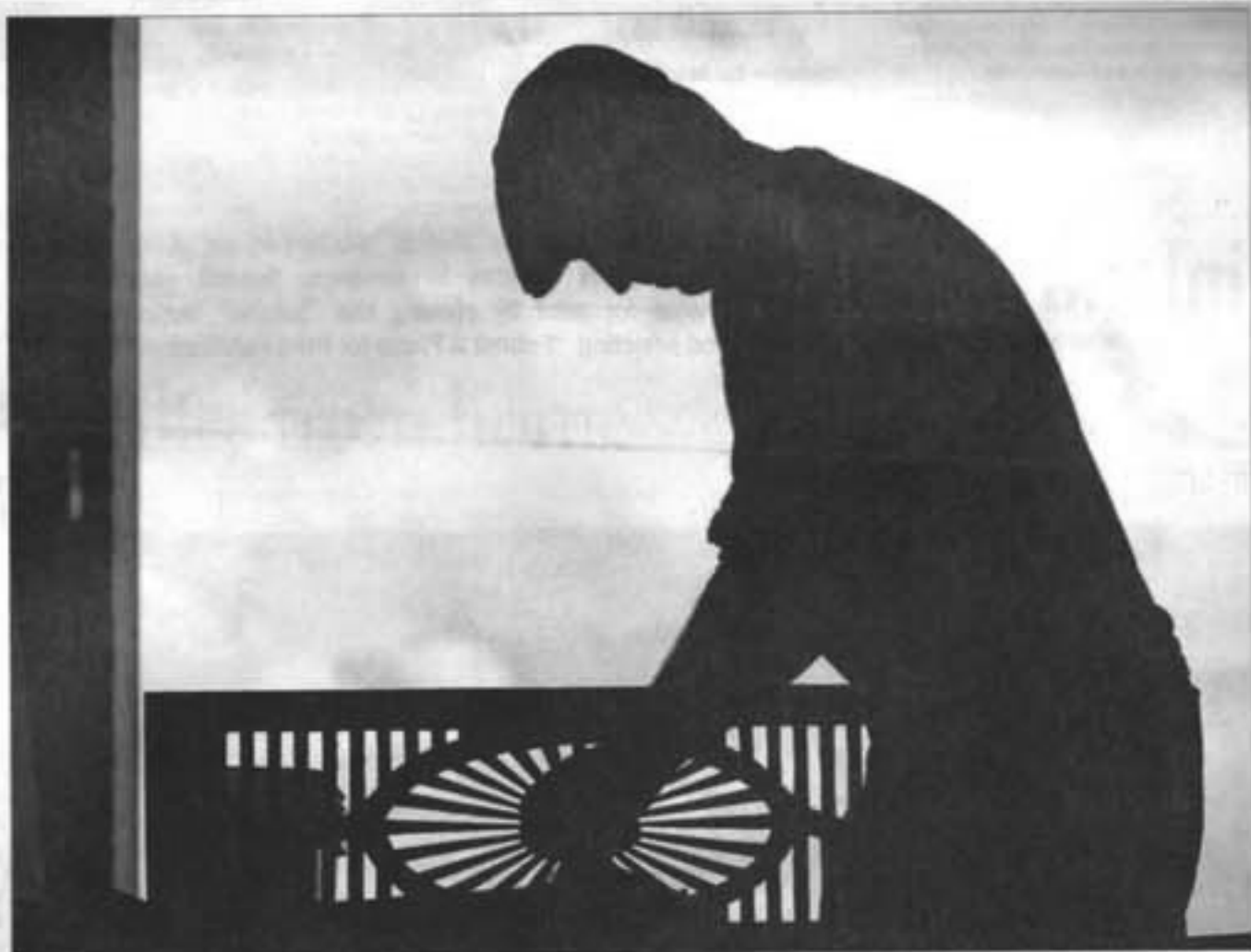


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The soul of an old machine

Piano restorer resurrects instruments from the 'Golden Age'

By Geoff Crimmins
Daily News photo editor

"The soundboard is like the soul of a piano," Clint Hughes explains. "It's what vibrates, it's like the speaker of the piano."

Saving those souls is the core of Hughes' Moscow business, Grand American Pianos. While Hughes works on many types of pianos, his passion is for those made between 1900 and 1930, a period he calls the "golden age" of American pianos, when they were the focal point in many American homes and skilled craftsmen were plentiful.

About 20 years ago, when Hughes was selling pianos in southern California, he discovered that vintage restored pianos had better sound than new pianos from Japan, and in some cases better than new pianos made in America. He met Daniel Ene, a German piano technician who taught Hughes his trade. Hughes kept learning and about 15 years ago opened his own piano repair and restoration business in California.

"I knew I wanted to work with my hands," Hughes said. "First and foremost I enjoy that."

About five years ago, Hughes and his family moved to Moscow so his three children could attend Logos School.

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Evan Belschner (above) uses steel wool on Sept. 18 to hand rub the lacquer finish on the lattice-cut front panel from an 1880s Bechstein upright piano being restored at Grand American Piano in Moscow.

George Harrell (left) tightens screws that secure a hard-maple pin block to the cast-iron plate in a 1936 Steirway Model B piano.



Clint Hughes (left and far left) checks the string specifications before installing new strings on a 1902 Steirway Model A piano.



Grand American Piano owner Clint Hughes (above) regulates the action from a 1936 Steirway Model B being restored.

Harrell (left to right), **Belschner** and **Hughes** hoist a cast iron plate into a 1936 Steirway Model B piano. The plate was removed to replace the pin block.

Soul

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Hughes said many customers ship their pianos to him for restoration, so Moscow is as good a location as any for his business.

After 80 or 90 years, a typical piano is worn out. The maple pin block that holds the tuning pins is worn and no longer holds the pins tight enough to keep the piano in tune. The piano's action is worn and imprecise. And its wood finish

is chipped and worn. Restoring a piano takes Hughes three to four months. While the work is expensive, it costs much less than a new piano of similar quality.

Hughes compares his love of the restoration process to his Christian faith.

"When I bring a piano in, it doesn't play and it's basically dead. Then I bring it back to life like when it was new, or even better," he said. "That's what God did to me, made me better than new."

Hughes can be reached through his website www.grandamericanpiano.com.