



PASK: PIANISTS FOR ALTERNATIVELY SIZED KEYBOARDS

An international movement committed to choice in piano keyboard size

MEDIA SUMMARY

The current piano keyboard was not designed to suit most pianists. It dates from the 1880s and suited certain famous European male virtuosos of the time. Piano keyboards before then generally had narrower keys.

PASK encourages manufacturers to produce keyboards in three standard sizes – the current ‘large’ size and two smaller ones.

The ‘one-size-fits-all’ piano keyboard is too big for most pianists

Those with smaller hand spans are at greater risk of pain and injury, mainly from playing large chords and fast octave passages which put hands in a stressed position. The increasing numbers of pianists who are trying keyboards with narrower keys are finding the experience to be a revelation. A mismatch between hand span and keyboard size has profound impacts on technical and musical outcomes for a pianist who wishes to play across a wide range of repertoire. Narrower keys effectively give a pianist larger hands!

Benefits of piano keyboards with narrower keys

- Faster learning
- Access to more repertoire
- Hands are closer to ideal playing position – ergonomically neutral
- Improves performance quality - tone control, extra power and speed where needed
- Technical problems are reduced or disappear
- Initial adaptation to a smaller size normally takes no more than one hour
- Pianists who play these keyboards can swap easily as needed - just like string and woodwind players.
- Reduced tension and pain, greater security
- Greater enjoyment!

Piano keyboards with narrower keys manufactured by Steinbuhler & Co¹ are now being used in several universities and an international piano competition in the USA.

Recent hand span research findings

- Adult males have a significantly larger span than adult females. On average, the gender difference is 1 inch (2.5 cm) – more than the width of one white key!
- Caucasian spans (for each gender) are about one quarter of an inch larger than Asian spans.
- Esteemed international soloists and competition prize-winners who perform across a wide range of repertoire tend to have larger spans than others.
- Based on new hand span data and objective criteria, about 87% of adult females and 24% of adult males (and nearly all children) have hands that are ‘too small’ for the conventional keyboard!

Dr Carol Leone, Chair of Keyboard Studies at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, says: *‘I often witness pianists place their hands for the first time on a keyboard that better suits their hand span. How often the pianist spontaneously bursts into tears. A lifetime of struggling with a seemingly insurmountable problem vanishes in the moment they realise, “It’s not me that is the problem; it is the instrument!” Following on that, the joy of possibility overwhelms them.’* (*Piano Professional*, EPTA UK, Summer 2015.)

Suggested angles for media stories

- Personal stories from pianists (see document: ‘PASK Quotes and Personal Stories’: www.cicadabay.com/pianos)
- An industry resistant to change.
- The power of the internet in connecting people and challenging a century-old tradition.

Further information

www.paskpiano.org, [Copies of this and other handouts: www.cicadabay.com/pianos]
www.youtube.com/channel/UCdiQ0iwCWFsGjZ1QI41KSBg [PASK YouTube channel: See ‘PASK videos’ playlist]
www.smallpianokeyboards.org
www.steinbuhler.com
www.carolleone.com/ergonomic-keyboards/
www.facebook.com/pask.piano/

For further assistance, contact: info@paskpiano.org

¹ Steinbuhler & Co from Pennsylvania, USA, has adopted the names DS5.5[®] and DS6.0[®] for the alternative sizes, reflecting their octave sizes in inches. The current ‘standard’ keyboard (DS6.5) has a 6.5 inch octave.