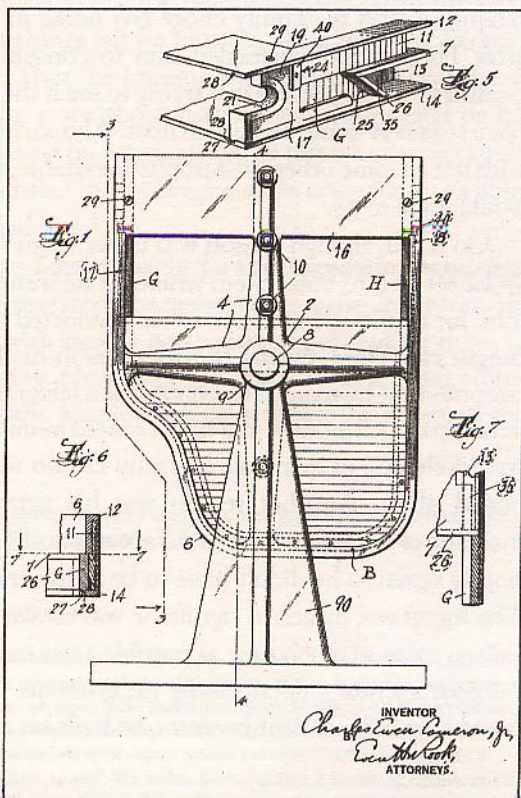


GIVE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT

# THOMAS EDISON'S CONCRETE PIANO

1847-1931

.....  
The Lauter Piano  
Company took out a  
patent for a piano  
made of concrete and  
began manufacture in  
1931.  
.....



which they describe as cool in the summer, warm in the winter, with maintenance costs of "zero."

Eventually, a manufacturer did indeed take up Edison's piano vision, too. The well-respected Lauter Piano Company, which manufactured pianos from 1885 through the 1930s (and beyond) in Newark, New Jersey, produced a version of the concrete piano. The model looked for all intents and purposes like any other 5-foot baby grand. A patent for the manufacture of a piano case mold was issued in 1931. The patent describes a system whereby a mixture of materials, including sawdust and Portland cement, an inexpensive alternative to wood, are poured into molds to form the case of the piano. The inventor, Charles Ewen Cameron Jr. of the Lauter-Humano Co., describes the design as producing an "exceptionally pure, full tone."

Records of this beast are scanty, but there are several people alive who have survived an interaction with one. Kim Hunter of Orange Coast Pianos in Santa Anna, California, used to own one of them. He describes it as having standard piano keys, harp, and soundboard. It was Louis XV in style, with curved legs and music rack. Its parts were all the same thickness as a wood piano, and it was painted brown with faux finish. One thing against it: it weighed a ton, literally. Hunter says, "the piano sounded like a terrible spinet"; with no musical value it would be "better as an anchor."

Then there is the story told by Arthur Mirano, a piano technician from Florida, who worked at a piano shop in Bayonne, New Jersey, a hop, skip, and a jump from the Lauter factory in Newark. It was the late 1950s, and Mirano was 18 years old. He was restringing a piano finished in fruitwood (brown paint with flecks of black), when a fellow technician accidentally knocked a corner. A chunk of it fell off, revealing its concrete interior.

It is unknown when Lauter stopped producing this model.

It seems logical that the sound of a piano depends on the properties of its body. Whereas the wood body of a wooden baby grand resonates *with* the wooden soundboard, the **concrete** of a concrete baby grand absorbs the sound, deadening it. However, Professor Joe Wolfe, a physicist who specializes in music acoustics at the University