

TUNING PAST AND PRESENT

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In Western music the dominant tuning system is Equal Temperament, which evolved, largely empirically, along with the development of musical composition. It was not fully realized until the twentieth century when the technology became known. Previously, many attempts were made to expand musical possibilities, gradually using more and more of the remote keys, resulting in what we regard today as historic tunings.

It is intended to demonstrate, via recordings and piano tunings, a few of these earlier systems, including Just Intonation as a starting point, particularly Meantone tuning, which was used as late as the early part of the nineteenth century. These tunings will have been performed aurally in order to give authenticity to the exercise.

The Sanderson Accu-tuner is an electronic tuning aid used by many piano tuners; Denis has developed a method of employing one to predict the beat rates of the most used musical intervals in tuning. This could have significant use in the aural training of tuners. This will be demonstrated.

Other aspects of tuning include the effects of inharmonicity of piano strings on tuning and the arithmetic of Meantone and Equal Tempered tuning.

Piano tuning is essentially a craft and very much a way of life, and while individual experiences vary widely, we feel sure a few anecdotes will provide a glimpse of what it is sometimes like to be a piano tuner-technician.