

Pleyel goes upmarket

A Frederic Chopin waltz played by top French musician Marc Laforêt on a Pleyel piano. Like many professional pianists, he believes a Pleyel produces the best sound in the world.

“What we find in each of these pianos, what makes the pleyel touch, if you like, is the cult of a good sound; a sound that is delightful, velvety.”

Each Pleyel instrument starts its life in this warehouse in a northern Paris suburb. Only 15 employees work here, assembling each piano piece by piece. A Pleyel was *the* piano to own when the company was first set up 200 years ago. But times changed, and the company almost folded after China and Korea cornered the market with cut-rate instruments. To survive, Pleyel moved upscale, producing *less** pianos, but in the top end of the market. It also dusted off its toughy image.

“Pianos have had the same shape for 150 years: they're black, made of walnut, cherrywood or mahogany, which were perfect for home interiors 100 or 150 years ago because that's how they were. But today, our homes have evolved, and we wanted to give our piano a design and aesthetic which would fit into contemporary interiors.”

To do that, Pleyel called in several big-names designers like Hilton McConnico. The result: haute-couture pianos with contemporary looks that can cost up to €200,000. The manufacturing process is still the same, though. It takes two and a half months to build the keyboard, and of course it's all tailored to the client's needs.

“We work with musicians and music experts who come and say 'I want my piano to have a drier or a rounder sound. I play more jazz or I play more classical music.' This part of the process is very important. 88 keys to calibrate with three lead weights for each key so the balance is perfect.”

Perfection that has appealed to countless musicians over the centuries, long before this contemporary pianist. Chopin himself, who used only Pleyels, thought it was the finest instrument to play.

* Grammarians would say that this use of **less** is wrong. The rule in standard English is to use

- **less** for mass nouns, such as *milk* and *information*, plus numbers in mathematics (“*a is less than b*”) and everything that goes with a measuring unit, as in *less than 3 metres*, *less than €200*.
- **fewer** for everything you can count (such as pianos).

However, this rule is not always observed, not even by native speakers.