Last fall, students of Robert Grijalva, Assistant Professor and Director of Academic Programs in Piano Technology, were given the grand tour of the Steinway Factory, Steinway Hall, and the New York Metropolitan Museum’s keyboard collection.

Students in Grijalva’s piano technology class study the major theories that apply to the construction, manufacture, and maintenance of fine art pianos. Most significant is the knowledge they gain about tuning, voicing, and mechanical adjustment of the keyboard and how it affects them as performing artists.

“My goal is to broaden my students’ appreciation for the piano as furniture, instrument, and machine,” explains Grijalva. “Pianists are handicapped in comparison to their colleagues in the instrumental world due to their dependence upon the abilities and skills of a piano technician. I hope to arm them with the knowledge and confidence they need to better communicate with technicians throughout their professional lives.”

The trip to the Steinway factory was the high point of the class. David Kirkland, a Steinway representative, gave them the tour, and even made arrangements to have them witness the bending of the rim of a Model D nine-foot piano, the flagship of the Steinway line. Fourteen layers of maple laminate, are bent around a rim press by several prodigiously strong men. Working at a feverish pace, they coax the wood into the form of a concert grand before the glue begins to set. At the end of the factory tour, the students gathered around the famous 1838 “kitchen” piano, the first piano ever built by Heinrich Engelhardt Steinweg, who founded Steinway & Sons, in his kitchen in Seesen, Germany.

Later the class was given a private tour of Steinway Hall in Manhattan which included a visit to the famous basement, where immortals like Rubenstein, Horowitz, and Rachmaninoff roamed the rooms selecting a piano for a concert at Carnegie Hall.

The trip culminated with a visit to the Metropolitan Museum where they paid tribute to one of the three remaining instruments by Cristofori, inventor of the piano. The modest little piano, created some 300 years ago, sits as testament to the enduring influence of the piano upon the world of music.

Of the class and the trip, jazz performance and musical theatre major Michael Gacetta remarked, “I have definitely come away from this class with a different view and attitude toward my instrument. It was a real privilege to experience it all.”

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Steinway “Peace” Piano

On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Steinway & Sons, the Steinway Peace Piano, a recreation of a historic Steinway concert grand first exhibited at the New York World’s Fair in 1939, has been touring the world as a symbol of support for children’s charities worldwide. “There’s no better way to communicate peace and harmony than music,” said Bruce Stevens, president and CEO of Steinway. “Putting the Steinway Peace Piano on a world tour may be the most significant event Steinway & Sons has ever launched.” The piano came to Ann Arbor in February where it was part of a Michigan Chamber Players concert and was used by piano performance majors in a concert of solo and chamber works.