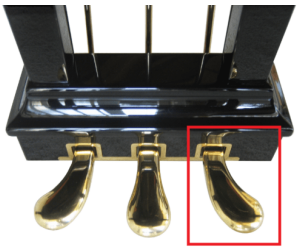
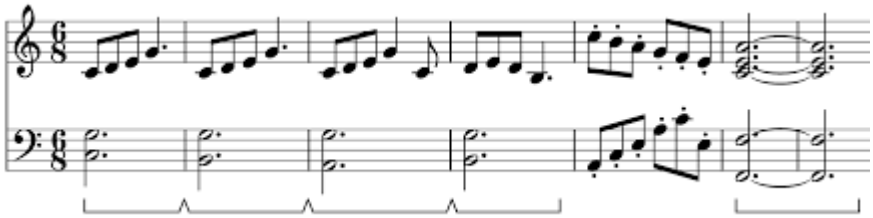
# Piano Pedals



The right pedal is called the **damper** or **sustain** pedal. It releases the dampers from the strings and allows a tone or multiple tones to be sustained. This is one function. The other is the fact that it opens harmonic string resonance. A chord for example played with the sustain pedal down sounds fuller since related strings also vibrate slightly even when not activated by a hammer.

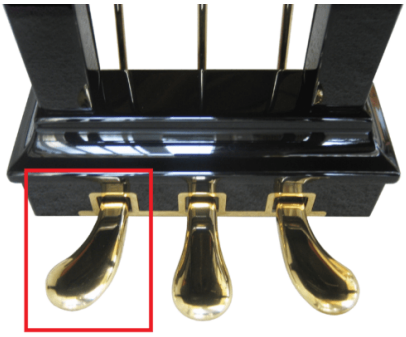
For composing the following symbols are used:

Ped. pedal down. ✻ pedal off. Sometimes horizontal brackets are used.



Since the piano was invented around 1700 by ***Bartolomeo Cristofori*** the instrument at that time did not have pedals. The first damper pedal was introduced in 1777. This explains why composer such as Bach and Mozart did not have any pedal notation in their piano scores.

As a composer and pianist, Beethoven experimented extensively with pedal. His first marking to indicate use of a pedal in a score was in his first two piano concertos, in 1795.



The **Soft Pedal** is the pedal on the left side, and it's also called the *una corda ( one string)* pedal. This pedal changes the tone of the piano to a slightly softer sound.

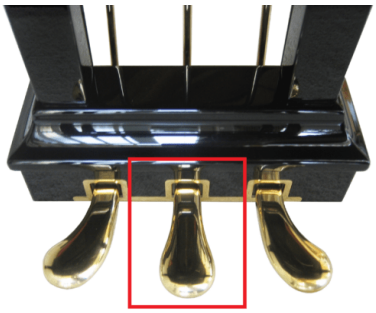
Normally, when you play a piano key, the hammer strikes three strings for each given pitch in the middle and upper section of the keyboard. Depressing the soft pedal causes the keys and hammers to shift slightly to the right, allowing the hammer to reach only one or two strings. This is true for the grand piano.

Most upright pianos use another technology. They move the hammers slightly forward so the travel distance to the strings is shorter. This also causes a slightly softer tone when activating the soft pedal.

The notation for the soft pedal is very rare. Composer use:

**UC** (una corda = 1 string) for soft pedal down and

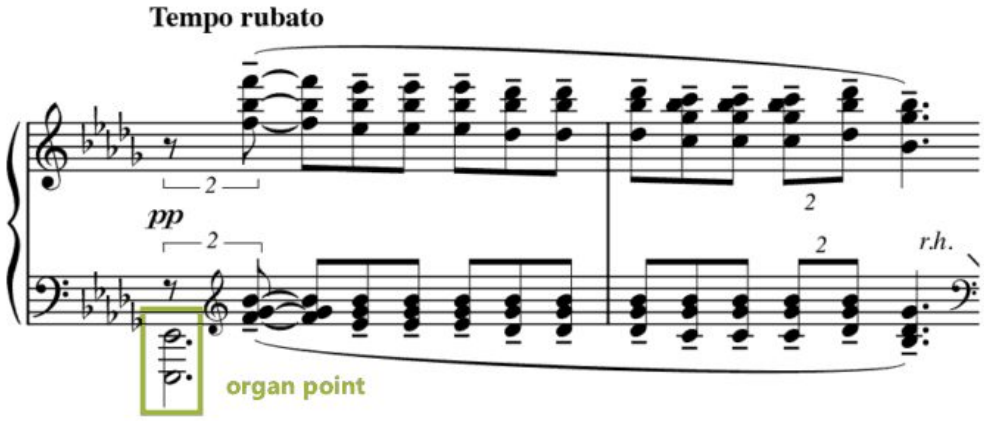
**TC** (tres cordas = 3 strings) for soft pedal up.



This is the ***sostenuto pedal.*** It works similarly to the sustain pedal with a couple of important differences. First, it only sustains notes from Middle C and lower.

And second, it only sustains notes that you are already playing when the pedal is depressed. No other keys on the piano would sustain while the sostenuto pedal is down unless you are also using the sustain pedal.

The sustain pedal can be used to perform an ***Organ Point*** when both hands can no longer hold the bass tone. An organ point is a sustained bass tone over several measures.




For notation the following abbreviations are used: “S .P.", "Sost. Ped.", or "ThP."

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**Final remarks:** While the sustain pedal can create beautiful, harmonious sounds on the piano, it’s common for pianists to ***overuse*** it. Never allow your foot to rest continuously on the sustain pedal unless called for in the music. Pianists often get in the bad habit of using the sustain pedal as a crutch to cover mistakes or play with sloppy technique. Be careful not to fall into this trap. It can make your music sound too heavy and messy.