

# **The Buckeye Backcheck**

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Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

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## ***From the Editor...***



I would like to start out by thanking Scott Jones, originator of the Pitchlock piano string coupling system, for coming to Columbus, Ohio to address our chapter this past month. Scott has come up with an innovative system that may well change the way we prepare some of our pianos in the future. I would encourage any chapter out there to invite Scott to speak to your group. He is a creative and likeable individual who is committed to improving the tuning stability of the world's greatest musical instrument.

It was also nice to meet Dean Nedvecki, prospective member of the Columbus Chapter. We hope to see him at our future meetings!

## ***Meeting Minutes (excerpts)***

### **Foundation and Auxiliary Events**

The Piano Technicians Guild Foundation will once again hold our annual auction during the convention. You never know what we'll have, but items previously on the auction block have ranged from piano music boxes and other decorative items to top-notch tools, advertising space, books, software, and piano-related wearables.

Stop by the foundation booth - learn about the Foundation and preview some of our auction goodies that you just can't live without. We'll also gladly accept cash donations on the spot!

Remember, the foundation is promoting and preserving your profession.

## **Announcements**

Kim reported that there is a three day "**Tune in to UWO**" seminar at the [University of Western Ontario](http://www.uwo.ca) from June 4-6. The cost is \$198 Canadian, which means about \$149 US. The accommodations offer two interesting choices. You can stay in the Spencer Hall Hotel for \$109 a night, or you can live dormitory style in Essex Hall for \$44 a night! Inquiries can be made to pianotech @ uwo . ca .  
Phone 519/661-3497.

It was reported that **Howard Vawters**, long-time piano technician, was recently in an auto accident. Howard was a member of the 338th Army Reserve Band. He is 84 years old.

## **Butts and Flanges**

Victor Wolfe reported an unusual configuration of plate and rim in an unnamed piano that was later identified as a Paul G. Mehlman grand.

## ***Scott Jones of PitchLock ...***

Scott Jones, inventor and president of PitchLock, the piano string coupling system, spoke to our Chapter at Hughes Hall at Ohio State on Tuesday, March 16. A friendly and knowledgeable individual, Scott began by giving us a brief history of his involvement in the piano business. (The following comes from his web site.)

Scott received a Bachelor of Music in composition in 1984 from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. After college he started his own business as a piano technician, serving the Raleigh, NC area. In 1989, Scott joined Steinway & Sons in New York City. During his 12 years at Steinway, Scott held positions as concert technician, manager of technical education and also worked in product development (R&D) where he authored four U.S. patents in the field of piano design. A fifth patent is pending with the development of PitchLock.

PitchLock piano string couplers. Two strings are coupled with a metal band in an effort to increase the tuning stability of the piano.



Scott said that he has always been searching for ways to make a piano stay in tune for a longer

period of time. He feels the Pitchlock system accomplishes this goal. The effect of the two coupled strings staying in tune is very similar to the effect of two pendulums of different lengths, or “pitches”, tied together to swing at the same rate. Coupled strings that are actually out of tune to each other have essentially the same pitch when coupled. There is a small loss in color from the two coupled strings, but the third uncoupled string does provide enough color to satisfy most ears. As Scott says, it is a trade-off between a piano with improved tuning longevity and one that might have more pronounced tonal beauty. The coupling system may not be tremendously useful in the concert world, but it may be a pragmatic solution to solve the problem of say, school pianos moving too quickly out of tune. I should add that Scott said that this system was tested on a grand piano at Seiji Ozawa Hall in Boston, and he reported that the results were very favorable. He also has this system on his own Steinway S, and he prefers the sound of the instrument with couplers installed. Scott says that the correct pattern for tuning a piano with the Pitchlock system is to first tune one of the coupled strings. Next, tune the other coupled string to it. Lastly, tune the uncoupled string to the other two.

Other positives for the system include Scott’s claim that the Pitchlock system can lessen false beat problems in the treble of the piano. When asked how many times he has installed the system, he answered that he has done about 75 pianos, with more verticals receiving it than grands. For those of you interested in reading further, I would suggest going to Scott’s web site at [www.pitchlock.com](http://www.pitchlock.com). This site contains information regarding the purchase of the couplers and associated tools, and it also includes visual and auditory displays relating to the system. Scott also has handouts which further elaborate on his Pitchlock system. We appreciate the long drive Scott took from State College, Pennsylvania to speak to us. It was an informative and enlightening evening.

Thank you, Scott Jones!

### ***From Other Newsletters...***

*The first two offerings come from The April 2004 issue of News & Notes, the newsletter of the Boston Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild. The first of these is a helpful guide for “ironing out tight damper rail bushings”, and the second is a creative idea for advertising “on the road.”*

#### **Tech Tip: Guild Rail Bushings**

By Cate Gallivan, RPT

I carry an upright damper wire (without the damper head in it) and heat it up whenever I need to take care of a tight guide rail bushing in a grand. The upright damper wire is bigger than a grand damper wire, and it does a nice job. Plus, it’s smaller than an umbrella!

#### **Business Tip: Driving Your Advertising**

By Ken McCallum

Here is a way to eliminate costly Yellow Page and Newspaper advertising. Most of us technicians require a vehicle to get from one job to the next, so why not drive around with a billboard? After all, the primary goal of advertising is to let as many people as possible know who you are and what you do.

Four years ago, I purchased a used 12-foot Chevy “Box Van” which needed some minor repairs. After making the necessary repairs and painting it bright white, I took my shiny, new looking van to a local sign maker, and had three sides lettered with my business name and description. Now, wherever I go, potential customers can’t miss seeing my 12'x 7' billboard.

This type of advertising is particularly effective while I’m parked at a service call. On many occasions, neighbors have come over to schedule service; and when I return home, it is not unusual to have at least one message from someone who saw the van.

It’s been four years since I’ve done any other advertising, and I’m busier than ever. The van has paid for itself many times. In fact, I wrote this tip about one year ago, and now I have a two year waiting list for rebuilding services. Three months ago, I stopped driving the van because I found it was becoming increasingly difficult to service new clients in a timely manner, so I’ve listed my van for sale. It was an investment I’m glad I made!

*The last entry is from The Nova Soundboard, newsletter of the Northern Virginia Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild.*

### **Technical Tip of the Month**

By Andrew Margrave, RPT

Virgil Smith, RPT, the great pioneering discoverer of the Virgil Smith Syndrome has long advocated the practice of tuning octaves by “the whole sound”, meaning the complete acoustical package of the two notes that form the octave. This is the opposite of the method of matching individual coincident partials. The matching of partials tends to be the norm among machine tuners. Virgil himself is an aural tuner. I myself, also a confirmed aural tuner, use in the real world a combination of the whole sound (the forest) and coincident matching partials (the trees). The octave must sound plausible as a whole sound. At the same time, individual coincident partials must match not too horribly at any and all parts of the tonal spectrum. If you think that a delicate balancing act is required for octave tuning, you are right.

Whatever system one uses for lining up octaves-whole sounds, matching coincident partials, or a combination of the two methods it is important not to be led astray by the chimerical Holy Grail of the beatless octave, or the still more fanciful notion that single, double, and triple octaves arising from the same note, such as F45-F57, F45-F69, and F45-F81, can have any hope of beatlessness. The inharmonicity of the modern piano, which ranges from considerable at best to horrendous at worst, rules out any hope of beatless octaves or beatless multiple octaves. If one set of partials matches really well, it is often at the cost of a severe mismatch of another set of partials. In octave tuning, and multiple octave tuning, there is always a certain inescapable amount of robbing Peter to prevent Paul from becoming destitute. At the same time, it is essential

that the octaves and multiple octaves project an illusion of apparent purity.

***From Cristina Kauffman...***

Would you happen to know of anyone interested in purchasing a Baldwin A (1924, I think). It needs a new pinblock...or possibly just oversized pins. We've offered her \$500.00 for it (we don't really want it because we have wayyyyyy too many rebuild projects lined up...it'd be years before we even got to it). She definitely wants more than \$500.00 for it, though I doubt she'd expect more than \$1,000.00. Any techs interested in a summer rebuild project? It's been well maintained, and I understand that Paul McCutcheon did some work on it in the 80's, though I'm not sure what all he did. Christopher Purdy has the specifics on it. His cell is 740-707-2044. Just thought I'd let you know!

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***From the Arts Journal...***

WATCH THE ROBOT CONDUCT BEETHOVEN Let's see - we've replaced musicians with "virtual orchestras" in theatre pits. And more and more movie scores are being synthesized. What's next? Conductors. A robot has successfully(?) conducted Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in Japan. "The 58-centimetre-tall humanoid robot led the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra in a unique rendition of Beethoven's 5th symphony during a concert held at the Bunkamura Orchard Hall in Tokyo on 15 March." New Scientist 04/05/04

WHAT IF THE MUSIC INDUSTRY IS WRONG ABOUT DOWNLOADS? The recording industry has been righting music downloads as piracy, saying that the recording business is being hurt by downloads. But "what if the industry is wrong, and file sharing is not hurting record sales? It might seem counterintuitive, but that is the conclusion reached by two economists who released a draft last week of the first study that makes a rigorous economic comparison of directly observed activity on file-sharing networks and music buying. 'Downloads have an effect on sales which is statistically indistinguishable from zero, despite rather precise estimates'." The New York Times 04/05/04

THE AMATEUR CLIBURN Time once again for the Amateur Van Cliburn piano competition. It's actually called the International Piano Competition for Outstanding Amateurs, and 75 pianists from eight countries and 27 states will compete in Fort Worth from May 31 through June 5. "The field of competitors, once again heavy on people from the medical professions, will perform in a three-part, elimination-style competition at Texas Christian

University's Ed Landreth Auditorium. The 75 were selected by the foundation from 110 recorded applications and written statements from amateur pianists age 35 and over." Fort Worth Star-Telegram 04/04/04

**LOST BACH MANUSCRIPT FOUND** A lost musical score by JS Bach has turned up in the estate of a Japanese pianist. "The 1728 composition, called "Wedding Cantata BWV 216," was found among the papers of Japanese pianist Chieko Hara, who died in Japan in 2001 aged 86." BBC 04/04/04

**MUSIC FOR MIND AND BODY** A new study says that you can improve your health (mental and physical) by working out to certain kinds of music. "According to the journal Heart & Lung, a team of Ohio State University researchers has found that exercising to music - at least to Antonio Vivaldi - not only improves physical conditioning, it also improves mental conditioning. People get smarter if they work out while listening to certain music." Los Angeles Times 04/04/04

### *From The Music Trades...*

#### **New Piano Playing Record Set**

With a throng of about 75 supporters cheering him on, David Sproule set an unofficial record for non-stop piano playing last September in Prince George, Ontario. The piano teacher finally called it quits after 53 hours and 37 minutes, beating the only standard in the Guinness Book of Records by one hour and 17 minutes. He credited coffee, fresh air during breaks, and plenty of support for keeping him going. During the time, he played over 1,100 songs. The record stipulated that no song could be played more than once during a four-hour period. (My calculations reveal that Mr. Sproule could have repeated songs 13 times over the course of his piano-playing marathon. Sounds tedious - even for a piano technician! - Ed.)

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