

# **The Buckeye Backcheck**

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Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

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



Welcome back to The Buckeye Backcheck; I hope you all had a great summer this year. I personally welcome the Fall, because this humidity has been pretty brutal in recent months. How many of you out there have faced hundreds of sharp pianos because of the elevated moisture in the air?

As always, I try to find interesting articles in the trade magazines and newsletters. Of particular interest to me is Illinois technician John Minor's clever method of determining the size and style of a Steinway grand, using only information from the plate and bridges. I also thought that the tools of fellow Central Illinois Chapter Member Craig Fehrenbacher would be intriguing to our Chapter Members. Read within.

Mark and Marilyn Ritchie have graciously offered to host the September 21st Chapter Picnic/Meeting, and we thank them very much. The Ritchies have some "stretching room" where they live, and it is a very comfortable environment to host an event such as the Picnic. Be there if you possibly can!

I would like to thank Norwin Mergler for hosting the June 2002 Chapter Meeting. The Piano Gallery has always been very supportive of what we do in the Chapter, and we appreciate their accommodation.

Finally, as we approach September 11th, let us all be thankful for what we have, respectful to those who lost so much, and hopeful that any people, or nations of people, never again find it

necessary to follow such paths of destruction

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

#### **Old Business:**

The Chapter website is up and running. Rick and Doug have some more work to do, but the groundwork is there. The Chapter decided to go with the Homestead Gold Plan which will fall well within the \$20 per month budgeted for the web site. The Chapter held some discussion on changes and additions to be made. Kim moved, and Mark seconded, that a Chapter Webmaster be added to the list of appointed positions listed in the By-Laws. Motion carried. The amendment will be posted in the Newsletter and voted on at the next meeting. Rick has agreed to fill that post in the interim and when the amendment is formalized. Please contact Rick with any suggestions or comments regarding the website.

Kim offered to contact the Cincinnati chapter about the tuning test. They have, in the past, offered the test annually in the fall and Bob Grubb is ready to take the exam.

Kim mentioned at the April meeting that the Central East Region now has a Regional Conference Organization. The CE/RCO is getting ready to help the Milwaukee Chapter host a regional Seminar in Oct. 2003. Any Chapter which would like to host such an event should contact Rolf VonWalthausen, the Committee Chair, about getting a chapter member on that committee.

#### **New Business:**

David moved and Kim seconded that the chapter again place ads in both the OMTA and the AGO directories. Kim will update the current ads and get them to the treasurer to mail to the proper places.

David Stang, Mike Varrone, Sam Stahl and Dale Logan, all of whom have attended the requisite number of meetings, were accepted as applicants to the Columbus Chapter. David had his application and fees which will be mailed this week. The others will get applications from Cliff so they can mail them to the Home Office. It was pointed out that of the \$30 fee, half goes to the Home Office and half to the Chapter. Applicants should make out 2 checks/money orders for \$15- one to the Columbus Chapter, PTG and one to the Piano Technician's Guild; sending the Columbus Chapter check to the current Treasurer and the other with application to the Home Office. Also, note that a Chapter officer needs to sign the application. David Gorsuch graciously offered to help Sam with his application. When all the paperwork is done, the Chapter will have four new members. Congratulations gentlemen.

After brief discourse, the following slate of officers for next year was approved by acclamation:

President: Kim Hoessly

Vice President: David Gorsuch

Secretary: Doug Brandt

Treasurer: Chris Altenburg

Previous officers need to make arrangements to transfer all their office material to the new officers.

Norwin Mergler addressed the Chapter saying The Piano Gallery was happy to host the meeting, and the Chapter was welcome anytime. He also wanted to express his admiration, appreciation and support for Cliff who has continued to work hard during his cancer treatment. The Chapter seconded these sentiments.

Announcements: The next meeting will be our “season opening picnic/ brief business meeting”. Mark Ritchie has offered to host the event on September 21st. Please note that this date will replace the Tuesday night meeting for September.

Respectfully submitted, Kim Hoessly, Secretary



Kim Hoessly stands next to Cliff Maurer at the June 2002 meeting at The Piano Gallery. Cliff is the head technician at this fine piano store.

### ***From the Trades...***

The first article comes from “Industry Briefings” of *The Music Trades*.

### **Do Musicians Have Bigger Brains?**

Musicians have bigger and more sensitive brains than people who do not play instruments, according to recent studies conducted at Heidelberg University in Germany. Researchers there have concluded that the auditory cortex, which is the part of the brain associated with hearing, contains 130 percent more “gray matter” in professional musicians than in non-musicians. In amateur players, the volume of the auditory cortex is between the two. The studies used scans and imaging techniques to compare the size and activity of the auditory cortex in 37 people. The professionals, who all performed regularly, showed 102 percent more activity in their auditory cortex than non-musicians. Activity in the brains of amateur musicians was on average 37 percent higher than in those who did not play an instrument, the researchers said in a report in *Nature Neuroscience*.

“Our results indicate that the morphology and neurophysiology of HG (Heschl’s gyrus) have an essential impact on musical aptitude,” said the report’s lead author, Peter Schneider. “The question remains, however, whether early exposure to music or a genetic predisposition leads to the functional and anatomical differences between musicians and non-musicians.” The Music Trades also reports of the International Piano-E-Competition, held two months ago..

### **First On-line Piano Competition**

The International Piano-E-Competition, with finals held simultaneously at Orchestra hall in Minneapolis and in Japan, featured pianists performing from around the world via the internet. As each artist played in the finals on June 30, the note-for-note performances were captured digitally and sent through the internet to Tokyo, where they were recreated on a piano for evaluation by a “remote judge.” That judge’s scores were compiled with those of seven other judges at Orchestra Hall for the results. American Mei-Ting Sun collected the \$25,000 first prize.

The August 2002 issue of *The Music Trades* has a large section on America’s leading music products retailers. Ohio ranked 7th in the nation in total music sales in 2001, with a total in the neighborhood of \$241,400,000. The number of music stores listed in the state for 2001 was 170. The average yearly sales per store in 2001 was \$1,420,000. California led the nation in sales with \$1,007,760,000. New York was next on the list with \$537,200,000. Texas, Florida, Illinois and New Jersey followed.

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The last item from *The Music Trades* is of a somewhat humorous bent.

### **Guitar Instructor Relies on Red Wine In Record Bid**

Martin Strel, a guitar instructor and world-recordholding distance swimmer is currently swimming down the Mississippi river in an attempt to break his own world distance swimming record. The intrepid Slovenian will be invigorated by a bottle of red wine a day during his swim along the 2,350 miles U.S. river. He began his swim on July 4. “We will take with us at least 70 bottles of Slovenian red wine- a bottle per day for me and, if something is left over, I’ll share the rest,” the 48-year-old told Reuters. “I hope to do it in some 66 days, swimming an average of 36 miles a day.”

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

The first offering comes from the June 2002 issue of *The Wippenpost*, The official newsletter of the Chicago Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild. It was written by Al Zajicek.

### **Al’s Two Cents**

Dear Wippenpost,

Here is a little hodge-podge today, concerning this wonderful trade that we practice. Piano

Technology is such a fascinating topic. It is no small wonder that we all are hooked by its mystery and majesty. I know of very few techs that have given up on the profession. Those that do usually have made some tragic business errors or They would still be active.

Despite what the papers say about musical instrument repair being one of the least stressful jobs around, I think they have never been pressured to get a job done like ours done right, and on time. Our customers demand high quality work, in a reasonable amount of time, and for as little pay as they can get away with. It seems as though the customers that I try to take it easy on, price-wise that is, are the first to call back if an octave just doesn't sound right, and, of course, you will come back out at no charge- A fellow tech, who will remain nameless, although his initials are Mark Foss, said that we aren't paid nearly enough for the amount of constant concentration that our craft requires- In the next breath he said that I charge a lot for my services. If folks want me to drive to their homes in my vehicle, service their instruments, maintain a database, call back with reminders, save for my own retirement (which doesn't look like it's going to be happening any time soon), I'm going to have to look for other sources of income, or raise my rates even higher.

Fortunately for us, we have PTG. It is a place to learn, to become inspired, to vent, to commiserate, to network, to share, etc. During the first dozen years of my piano service career I had no contact with PTG. All of my experience was hands on and at my customers' expense. One does have to learn by doing in this profession, but it sure would have been easier had I been in PTG from the get. At the business meeting in April, a new associate asked how we all learned our craft. Another nameless tech, whose initials are Paul Revenko-Jones, told me later, and I have to agree, that we learn on our customers' backs- These wonderful and sometimes desperate people so need us, that they are willing to let us learn every day on their instruments. We practice and hone our skills for pay. All in all, I think that that is a pretty good arrangement. When I think back on some of the jobs that I was not qualified to do, but with a willing customer to urge me on, I grabbed another bit of skill.

Let's all take a moment to thank our customers and PTG for being there for us at every turn, and let's all take full advantage of the convention this summer, which is right in our own back yard!

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Next are two interesting and informative items from *The A-Chord*, the Newsletter of the Central Illinois Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild.

### **Tips from the Field**

Here is a tip from John Minor, RPT on identifying Steinway Grand models using plate and bridge characteristics only:

A. Bass section with 20 notes (models A, B, C,D) ... go to B.

B. Soundboard with three bridges - Model A, style I, Soundboard with two bridges.... go to C

- C. Plate without removable diagonal brace ... go to D
  - D. Bass bridge straight - Model A, style II (6' I'). Bass bridge curved - Model A, style III (6'4")
- C. Plate with removable brace ... go to E
  - E. Row of agraffes in tenor section uninterrupted - Model B
  - E. Row agraffes in tenor section interrupted near the center by short bar in plate..... go to F
  - F. Plate having eight raisedrim holes in web - Model D
  - F. Plate having six raised-rim holes in web - Model C
- A. Bass section with 26 notes (models S, M, L,O) ... go to G
  - G. Plate with four holes in plate web ... go to H.
    - H. Holes in plate web each surrounded by a single raised ring - Model O
    - H. Holes in plate web each surrounded by two raised rings - Model L
  - G. Plate with more than four holes in plate web ... go to I
    - I. Plate with five holes in plate web. - Model S
    - I. Plate with six holes in plate web - Model M

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The second submission is their "Tool Corner".

### **Tool Corner**

Craig Fehrenbacher, one of our own Central Illinois Chapter members and a Yamaha Consultant, manufactures some very useful tools for piano technicians. He will be at this year's National PTG Convention in Chicago as part of the Yamaha Team, and he will have a supply of these tools with him. (I use the hammer voicing file almost every day and have found it to be extremely useful- ed.)

A list of Custom Technician Tools offered by Craig Fehrenbacher:

***Jack Centering Tool:*** Aligns grand jacks without removal of the wippen. Cost: \$25

***Key Spacing Tool:*** High-leverage tool used to easily bend front rail pin when spacing keys. Fits between felt punching and key-won't scratch pin. Cost: \$25.

***String Seating Kit:*** Used to seat strings to bridges, hitch pins, etc. 5-piece tool set made of

polished brass. Will fit universal handle. Cost: \$45.

***Hammer voicing file:*** Small, specially designed tool that allows easy riling or shaping of vertical hammers without removing the action. Very convenient! Cost: \$20.

You can order these tools from Craig (Shipping \$3 per order) by contacting him at:

Craig Fehrenbacher, Yamaha Piano Service Consultant  
1507 N. MeadowbrookDr.  
Robinson, IL 62454-2527  
618-544-3038  
800-322-4322 X5036 VM  
618-553-5079 (cell)  
Cfbt@shawneelink.net

### ***In Conclusion...***

#### **One Sharp Piano**

In July of this year, Mark Ritchie and I met at the home of an Upper Arlington couple to assess the possibilities of his rebuilding their 1878 rosewood Steinway upright- The piano, which had never been rebuilt, still had a nice looking case after 125 years- a tribute to the lasting power of rosewood. The ivories were in rough shape, and it was probably time to replace them with a good set of plastics. Many of the treble strings were broken, too. A previous technician had pointed out to the family that the sharpness of the edges of the old tuning pins had probably sheared off the strings. This was plausible, but closer inspection revealed that the strings had broken off a good bit away from the tuning pins. The pressure bar was not involved either. With some curiosity, Mark decided to bring out his Verituner 100 and check some pitches. The family had informed us that me piano had not been tuned in well over 15 years so I fully expected to have Mark report that the piano- given the age and the lack of tuning- was a semitone flat. Imagine our surprise: The piano was a semitone sharp! We surmised that the previous tuner - whoever that was- might have used his tuning fork on the wrong note and tuned it as much as a whole step sharp way back when. Time had made the piano “drift” back down to a half-step sharp! This is conjecture, but the facts remain: The piano was a half-step sharp, and it certainly explains the fact that most of the strings, which did not look rusted, broke because of excessive tension. Question: How many of you out there have found an 1870's vintage Steinway, which had not been tuned in 15-20 years, with A= 466?!

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