

# **The Buckeye Backcheck**

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Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

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



The Columbus Chapter thanks Don Stephenson, North American Representative for Seiler Pianos, and Anne Fleming-Read, Coordinator for Piano Technology, for a marvelous session at Graves Piano & Organ. Don led us through an interesting lecture, and he followed with an interesting and informative PowerPoint tour of the Seiler piano factory. Afterwards we headed to the Seiler pianos - including the "Split Piano" for further discussion and pictures. We concluded with snacks and refreshments - courtesy of Graves. Thanks to Don, Anne, Paul and Cristina for a great evening!

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

October 21, 2003

On the subject of future technicals, Franz Mohr will be the guest speaker at the January 2004 Chapter Meeting at Graves Piano & Organ. Cristina Kauffman has asked that we hold our meeting in the afternoon, for Franz will be speaking to a group of music teachers that Tuesday evening. Franz will also be featured on a local radio program to speak of his working

relationship with Vladimir Horowitz and other luminaries.

### **Cliff Maurer Scholarship...**

Here is the copy of the committee's recommendation for the Cliff Maurer RPT Exam Prize.

The scholarship committee is submitting this proposed addition to the standing rules of the Chapter By-Laws. We will vote on this at the November meeting. We can discuss the awarding of the prize this year upon approval. To be added to the Standing Rules of the By-Laws upon voting at the June Meeting.

#### **4. Cliff Maurer RPT Exam Prize**

In November, the testing committee will nominate no more than 3 new RPTS for the Cliff Maurer Exam Prize. The new RPT being defined as a technician having completed the exams since the previous November. The committee may decide not to nominate anyone at their discretion. To be eligible, the nominees must:

Be in good standing (member is current with dues and in compliance with Article V, Paragraph A of the Columbus chapter by-laws: All CPTG members shall pursue their professional activities in a manner consistent with PTG Code of Ethics and with the laws of the nation, commonwealth and community.)

Be active in the chapter (attends meeting and participate in chapter activities)

Have passed all three exams within a 2 year period beginning with the successful passing of the written exam. RPT (members not nominated) members present at the November meeting will vote for the recipient of the prize which will consist of \$180 or the current cost of taking the technical and tuning exam.

### ***The Olympia Piano...***

The following information was provided by Cristina Kauffman.

The Dale Chihuly designed Steinway piano, named "OLYMPIA", is currently installed at the Franklin Park Conservatory downtown as part of the Dale Chihuly exhibit. I encourage everyone to take the time to enjoy these last few days of beautiful weather and head down to the Conservatory for a gander at this amazing piano. It'll be on display at the Conservatory for approximately 4 weeks.

### ***A Visit from Seiler...***

Our guest speaker at the October 21 Chapter Meeting at Graves Piano & Organ was Don Stephenson, the North American Representative for Seiler Pianos. Don himself started out as a piano technician, handling a large private tuning clientele and doing concert and performance

work. He eventually went to Germany and became involved with the Seiler organization. Seiler, according to Don, is the oldest piano factory in the world, having been established in 1849. It is still owned by the same family, and Ursula Seiler is the president today, Enrico Caruso, Ray Charles and Luciano Pavarotti have all endorsed the Seiler name. Seiler makes approximately 800 grands and 1900 uprights a year, and they are exported to over 50 countries throughout the world. Renner actions, Kluge keyboards and Abel hammers are installed into their pianos. Seiler also uses the same foundry as the Hamburg Steinways. They also have the Magnetic Repetition Action for their uprights, using magnets that are installed into the wippens to increase repetition speed. Interestingly, piano builders at Seiler have to play the piano to work there. Lessons are provided for those who do not know how to play the instrument! You also may want to go to [www.seiler-pianos.de](http://www.seiler-pianos.de) and hit "customized" to see their famous art pianos. They are truly works of beauty!

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

#### **PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE IN FLORIDA**

The Florida Philharmonic is gone, a victim of the bad economy and public indifference. But, like so many other communities which have lost symphony orchestras, music fans in South Florida are holding out hope that a new ensemble will eventually rise from the ashes of the Phil. This week, the Dade Community Foundation struck a deal that makes such a revival much more likely: it's purchasing the Philharmonic's music library for \$180,000, and storing it until a new orchestra can take it back. An orchestra's music library is its most irreplaceable asset, and building one from scratch takes years of careful purchasing, so the preservation of the library was a major priority for the musicians of the defunct Philharmonic. Palm Beach Post 11/04/03

#### **DIGITAL SINGLES OUTSELL CDS**

"Digital tracks are outselling physical singles by a growing margin, a sign that consumers increasingly are embracing the brave new world of Internet downloading. Digital download sales outpaced physical singles 857,000 to 170,000, according to Nielsen SoundScan figures for the week ending Oct. 26- That's slightly more than a 5-to-1 ratio." Washington Post (Reuters) 11/02/03

#### **PIANIST PERFORMS ALL BEETHOVEN'S 32 IN ONE DAY**

British pianist Julian Jacobsen performed all 32 Beethoven sonatas in one day Friday. "As the pianist began the challenge in St James' church, Piccadilly, at 0915 GMT, he said: It's pretty crazy isn't it?" He told BBC Radio 4 it was a 'self-test to see if I can get through it all and keep my concentration', and a chance to raise money for his favorite charity." BBC 11/01/03

### ***Ivan Moravec: Taming the Piano With Touch and Tools***

*Next is an article about a world class pianist- Ivan Moravec. Moravec was an adept piano technician in addition to being a great artist.*

November 25, 2001 By BEN SISARIO



WHEN the Czech pianist Ivan Moravec visited New York before the start of his current tour, one of his first stops was at Steinway Hall, on West 57th Street, to test pianos. Waiting in the elegant, silent showroom before being led downstairs to the workshop, Mr. Moravec couldn't resist trying out a nearby instrument, an expensive-looking baby grand with elaborate golden trim. He touched the keys gently, just enough to feel the action but not hard enough to make a sound.

"Can you feel this?" he said in an animated whisper, moving a white key and a black key up and down. "This one is much looser than the black key. They should be even." He lifted his fingers off the instrument and moved on to the next one.

He carried a small black leather satchel filled with special tools for correcting irregularities in pianos, tools he has collected over the years from tuners and technicians. He takes extras to give as gifts to pianists and technicians he meets on the road.

Mr. Moravec, 71, is renowned for his gentle, unhurried touch in Chopin, Debussy and Mozart. But when he starts talking about the piano, he sounds like a mechanic discussing his favorite engine. He raves about the miracle of its design and the heroes who have raced it, and pores carefully over its humanlike weaknesses, which require endless vigilance and maintenance.

"The piano is built from very unreliable materials," he said, sitting with his wife, Zuzana, who accompanies him everywhere and coaches him on his English. "Wood, felt, leather. These materials are very hygroscopic. They can change in one humid night."

To counteract those effects, he spends several hours with his piano before a concert, warming up to its kinks and making adjustments by himself and with technicians, whom he befriends wherever he goes. Before his recital on Tuesday at Carnegie Hall, he will work on his chosen piano with Ron Conors, the chief concert technician at Steinway & Sons and Mr. Moravec's friend and trusted aide for more than 20 years.

"He's very particular about voicing," Mr. Conors said. "He'll even do his own voicing on the sly and get himself into trouble with that. There are only five or six major artists in the world who would go to that extent." Mr. Moravec learned to adapt to difficulties out of necessity. As a musician in the former Czechoslovakia who was not a member of the Communist Party, he

received little support from Pragoconcert, the state agency that controlled musicians' careers. He was often kept from touring, and he says his passport was "lost" by the agency at the last minute more than once. "It did harm my so-called career," he said. "But it did not do harm to my self," he added with an earnest, boyish smile.

He may have been held back in Prague, his lifelong home, but he made his recording debut in New York. In 1962, the two young founders of the Connoisseur Society label, E. Alan Silver and James Goodfriend, intrigued by positive reviews of Mr. Moravec from London, wrote to Pragoconcert asking that he be allowed to travel to New York for a session. The agency declined and suggested other, state-approved pianists. But after persistent requests by Mr. Silver and Mr. Goodfriend, a date was made. "We finally made them understand that we were not interested in recording a Czech pianist," Mr. Goodfriend recalls. "We were interested in recording this Czech pianist."

These sessions made Mr. Moravec's career, and the recordings continue to be treasured for their warm sound and delicate performances. In Mr. Moravec's hands, the Chopin mazurkas are ghostly dances suspended in time, and Beethoven is a dreamer whose chords, even at their most thunderous, have a faint quiver.

He later made some excellent recordings for Supraphon, Vox and other labels, which have drifted in and out of print. And Peter Shaffer selected Mr. Moravec to play the music for the 1984 film version of his play "Amadeus," a perfect choice: no other musician could better bring out the serenity of Mozart's piano music to contrast with his harried life.

But Mr. Moravec has kept a low profile even since the fall of the Communist regime. He tours more often than he used to but has not recorded much - He has no major projects planned. In the last decade he has made only two new discs: Mozart concertos with Neville Marriner on the German label Hanssler. Now, as with many worthy artists who have been squeezed out of the classical recording business, it seems that if anything is holding him back, it is rampant capitalism.

He adheres closely to a limited repertory: his beloved Chopin, Debussy and Mozart, and some Czech music. He has done no major recording retrospective in his career, no big survey of a single composer's works. The program for his Carnegie recital is typical, and it reads like the lesson plan of a piano teacher on color, pedal effects and rubato: Janacek's "1.X.1905" Sonata and two pieces by Debussy, followed by the 24 Chopin Preludes and a ballade.

Mr. Moravec studied with Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, but his real inspiration came from recordings. His heroes - Dinu Lipatti, Alfred Cortot, Walter Gieseking, Michelangeli are obvious choices, all known for a delicate touch and looming spirituality. He raves about them unabashedly. In Gieseking's case, Mr. Moravec speaks with wonderment of the "extreme subtlety" of a man who had huge, powerful hands yet had "a touch like a cat."

The Connoisseur Society recordings were made on a small budget in unusual environments, like the ballroom of the Manhattan Towers Hotel. Mr. Goodfriend recounted that during one

recording session there, “the door opened, and a little old lady poked her head in and asked if bingo was on.”

Yet they have become Mr. Moravec’s definitive work on record. They make up about half of the tracks in his entry in the Great Pianists of the 20th Century series on Philips, and starting in 1993, VAI Audio released the complete Connoisseur Society recordings on six CD’s. This year Supraphon issued a selection of Chopin, Mozart, Beethoven and French music from the Connoisseur Society sessions in a four- disc set.

MR. GOODFRIEND praises the technical achievements of those sessions, which used unusual microphone placement, among other innovations. But for Mr. Moravec, the intimacy of the recording sessions was what made them magical. With the immediate feedback of his two friends and close attention to the pianos at hand - Baldwins, he says, noting sadly that it was a bad time for Steinways - he could bring out his best. Then, as now, he tinkered with pianos to come to terms with them - irregularities, but he bristles at the suggestion that his techniques are unusual. “I hate when people say I am a fanatic,” he said. “I only don’t want to be molested by mistakes in the instrument. The aim is to be free.”

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