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 thank Bob Bussell, our Central East Regional Vice President, for driving to Columbus to lead our March 18th meeting at The Piano Gallery. Bob is exceptionally knowledgeable about both the workings of the piano and the workings of the Piano Technicians Guild. Among the topics Bob addressed was the proposition of a new Home Office building for the PTG. The Board, of which Bob is a member, is currently discussing the advantages and disadvantages of purchasing a new building, which would also house the Foundation Museum. Among other things discussed, Bob also talked about the possibility of holding the National Convention at the same site from year to year, or rotating the sites as is currently done. Again, there are advantages and disadvantages to each proposition, and further discussion will be required before final decisions are made. After Bob addressed the Columbus Chapter Members, he moved over to a Piano Gallery Yamaha grand and did a technical on his approach to tuning a piano. Bob uses a hand-held Reybum Cybertuner. He first calculates the amount of stretch he wants in the octave, and this is contingent on the quality of the 5th, which he wants as pure as he can get without an octave that moves too far out of the acceptability range. He also looks at the adjacent 4th to see if it is acceptable, too. Once the stretch is chosen. Bob proceeds with the tuning. Again, we thank him for coming to Columbus!

From Other Newsletters ...

The following is an excellent article that appeared in the January 2003 issue of ***Soundboard Buttons****, the newsletter of the Twin Cities Chapter of the Piano Technician's Guild.*

IF YOU PURCHASE IT WILL YOU GET WHAT YOU THOUGHT WAS ADVERTISED?

By Michael Drost

An article whose purpose is to create an awareness among those seeking career training in piano technology.

Ever since the concept of advertising appeared, it has been exercised in varying degrees of truth. A few years ago the government attempted to bring the rampant falsehoods of advertising into check by passing the "truth-in-advertising" statutes. The intent was wonderful but in reality, advertisers found new ways to circumvent the real truth. Thus, we continue to be bombarded with innuendoes, half- truths, and a wide variety of misleading information by which we are to be convinced to purchase a particular product or service.

Piano Technicians who have been servicing pianos for the past 40-60 years, can remember a time when there were no schools where they could learn the piano technology profession. In those days, infrequently, someone who wanted to learn would be fortunate enough to apprentice with an experienced technician who quite likely was trained in one of the more than 300 independent piano factories in existence prior to the Great Depression of the 1930s. More often than not, however, a person wanting to learn had to do so by "trial-and-error" (mostly error) as he or she attended The School of Hard Knocks. With the chartering of the Piano Technicians Guild, Inc., in 1958, there soon came into existence several schools devoted to piano technology. Some were strictly correspondence type schools while others ranged from exploratory to comprehensive coverage of all facets of the piano servicing industry. With the shift in commerce and the economic decline on a global scale that took place during the 1980s and early '90s, the majority of piano technology schools were forced to close their doors. The schools that continued to exist were forced into rather fierce competition in order to stay alive and viable. In the struggle to sustain their existence, some schools resorted to "extremely creative advertising" in order to lure people through their doors. Of the schools in operation today, a few have a long- standing track record of ethical practice and comprehensive content. Unfortunately, at the same time, there are also those who advertise in such a way that what is claimed, in no way matches the results of then-stated program offerings.

The point for having said all this is to draw attention to a trend that is currently taking place... an occurrence we have witnessed three times in the past thirty years. In the past year there is a noticeable increase in the number of people seeking information about and attempting to find schooling in piano technology, probably brought about by the current economic downturn and rise in unemployment. This, in turn, appears to have triggered an upsurge in advertising from piano technology schools. With another semester coming upon us just around the corner, those seeking piano service training might do well to consider the following points in their search and

selection of a school that will meet their needs within a financial framework he or she can afford.

1) How many years has the school been in continuous operation? What are their academic credentials? Are they accredited or endorsed... and by whom?

2) What is the student-instructor ratio? What is the background training and experience of the instructor(s)? How much one-on-one instruction might the student expect?

3) What is the overall time span of the program offering? Can a person be a part-time or full-time student by choice?

4) How much lecture time and laboratory time is devoted to repair, regulation and rebuilding aspects of piano service? How much lecture time and laboratory time is devoted to tuning aspects of piano service? When tuning is taught, is it aural or electronic in approach? What is the emphasis if both are taught?

5) What are the financial demands, i.e. tuition, !ab fees, tools/equipment, etc. Are wages paid during internships.. -if so, in what amounts?

6) Is there student insurance coverage should there be accidents during the training period?

7) It is not unreasonable to request a written outline of all courses offered along with a syllabus for each. When all is said and done, in the greater scheme of things, it should be kept in mind that:

A -- Things usually appear very understandable when read about, lectured about and even when demonstrated. However, when a student actually attempts to execute a particular technique, it is quite often a different matter. For example: Watching a skilled technician splice a string in a piano with functional results appears straightforward and is usually accomplished in 10-15 minutes. When the inexperienced student attempts the same technique, it wul quite likely take a minimum of 45-90 minutes to achieve functional results.

B -- In order to accomplish an acceptable, in-home type tuning in a 2 1/2-3 hour time span, the average student will have had to put in some 1500 hours of tuning practice.

C -- Achieving all the necessary skills and techniques needed to do satisfactory piano service work out in the "real world" usually requires approximately two years of rull-time effort. Following this, on an average, an additional three years of full-time effort will be needed to develop a clientele sufficient to sustain a livelihood from this profession.

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Next is a book review from the February 2003 issue of News & Notes, the newsletter of the Boston Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild.

Book Review By Austin Grimes
The Piano Shop on the Left Bank by Thad Carhart Random House $ 13.95 paperback

Thad Carhart's book The Piano Shop on the Left Bank, is a sometimes engaging and other times tedious account of the author's rediscovery of his interest in piano playing and subsequent exploration into piano lore and history (mostly Eurocentric). The tale begins with his curiosity about a storefront piano shop in his neighborhood to which he tries to gain entry. De- spite his sincerity, the owner repeatedly rebuffs him. Eventually, he secures the necessary introduction that is required in order to become a client of the establishment, and in short order all the characters are very chummy. As it is described in this story, it seems dial in France the piano shop is more fun than die neighborhood pub, with all die people stopping by to play and drink and debate politics. When a small grand piano is sold, more often than not it is delivered up the stairs on die back of a barrel-chested truck driver. Carhart scores with a guided tour of the Fazioli factory and historical nuggets like Oscar Wildes' observation that "nothing is more annoying than me sound of me piano being played by a sister or near relation". My interest wavered plodding through me soapy saga of the red-nosed lush piano tuner, whom we are told is brilliant in the early hours of the day until he succumbs to his habit as me afternoon progresses. He faces a climactic callback tuning, and later finds trouble sleeping in the railway yards and so on. Overall, it's a quick read that can serve to remind us that pianos and piano work maintains a level of mystique among those that play and enjoy music.

In the News ...

Rupert Christiansen ventures to a London club to sample the new phenomenon of "chill" music. "It sounded vile. I hasten to add that I write this without prejudice. I may be the paper's opera critic, but I am not a musical purist. Some opera bores me rigid, and there's plenty of rock and pop, from the Beach Boys to Coldplay, that I adore- But, as demonstrated by Anne Dudley and the BBC Concert Orchestra, classical chillout struck me as execrable- The Trades Description Act should be invoked: classical fallout would be a more appropriate and accurate tide. Essentially, the two-hour performance consisted of nothing more than a medley of tunes mangled through samplers and synthesisers and then spewed out at a pitch of amplified volume associated with nuclear explosions." - The Telegraph (UK) 04/01/03

DEATHWATCH ON CDs "The music industry braces for a future that will involve the death of CD stores and the rise of wireless, pocket-size MP3 players that will en- able consumers to access thousands of hours of music at the touch of a button.- The only real question is how long it will take for those scenarios to become reality. You'll see CD sections in stores decline quickly over the next few years because they will be replaced by technology that provides dirt-cheap storage and the ability to basically access and play any type of music anytime, anywhere. Wireless technology basically will create a world where we can have anything we want all the time." Chicago Tribune 03/30/03

As good a movie as Roman Polanski's "The Pianist" is, it fails in representing the music, writes

David Patrick Steams. "How could anybody emerge from five horrific years of hard labor and starvation in World War IIWarsaw with such clean, crisp, emotionally unclouded renditions of Chopin?" The answer? They couldn't, and the real-life Wladyslaw Szpilman, whose memoir was the basis of the film, was profoundly changed, and with it his performances. "Such performances gain impact because the music's lack of specificity allows it to be invaded by meaning in unpremeditated ways. Popular music, in contrast, has a verbal element that can serve as a political rallying point, but one that can render the music obsolete." - Philadelphia Inquirer 03/30/03

From Joel and Sheryl Reeve...

We finally have a bit of good news to report. Joel has been feeling some increased sensation in his right arm and hand. He also has more range of motion and control of his hand and fingers. Some of his fingers are able to move independently, not much, but we'll take all we can get! He has a regimen of exercises he does each day to strengthen his hand, and is improving all of the time. We have an appointment with a hand specialist in Columbus on Thursday - we're hoping that he can give Joel some Another bit of good news is that Joel had an MRI last Monday, and it showed that the tumor has decreased in size a little bit! We were really glad to get that word. However, he was supposed to begin his third round of chemo on Friday and couldn't because his platelet count was too low. According to the doctor, that is not uncommon and we will get another blood test on Thursday to see if the count has increased enough to begin mis Friday. My dad also received a good report from his doctor. It will be another six months before they can do any reliable blood tests or scans because die radioactive seed implants can give false readings. The scan he did have a couple of weeks ago showed a reduction of the size of the prostate, however, and he is feeling great - just a little tired. Joel's (and Tyler's) DI team had their regional competition on March 8, and did a great Job! They were the first performers of the day in their group, so I'm not quite sure how awake they were. They were fourth in their group, and Aaron's team tied for ninth in their group. Tyler's team was initially disappointed to not be going on to state, but considering all they have been through they were glad to have been able to perform at all. My semester ends on April 8, and I am eagerly awaiting that date. These classes have been more work than any of the others I have had so far. I have a break before I start a summer class that goes the entire month of May, then I have one the first week of June and another that goes for one week in July. I also need to complete my classes from fall semester during that April break - my professors were so kind and understanding about our situation-that they gave me a year to finish the classes. The sooner I complete them the better. By the end of summer, I will have 30 of the 45 hours I need to get my license so I'm hoping to be able to get a conditional teaching license and start teaching this fall. Thank you all so much for all of the prayers and good thoughts you keep sending our way. Keep them coming so that we can be rid of this tumor!

love, Sheryl and Joel

Hi All,

We are not enjoying our roller coaster ride right now. Joel has been having seizures, and we don't know why. He had a grand mal about three weeks ago and recovered from that in a couple of hours. It was really scary though - he was turning blue and all. The doctor doubled his anti-seizure medicine (Keppra), and he turned into a zombie. He cut it back a little bit, and Joel did great. A week ago today, he had a very minor one, and he still hasn't recovered from it. His speech was total garble the whole day, and on Monday it wasn't much better. We could understand some words, but many of them weren't in the proper context, and he wasn't understanding us very well. He was a little better on Tuesday, a little worse on Wednesday, and better again on Thurs- day. He hasn't changed much since then- His speech has improved but he still has a lot of trouble finding words. He also has a flapping sound in his ears and he is exhausted all of the time. The doctor increased his Keppra back up to the doubled amount, and there have been DO more seizures but no one knows what is keeping him from getting back to normal. Because he is so lethargic, he hasn't been exercising his right arm and hand and they are getting weaker again. The oncologist ordered an MRI on Wednesday, and it showed no change from the last one (which is a good thing).

He referred us to a neurologist in Columbus becuase he wants all of our records to be at Riverside. The neurologist in Columbus can't see him until April 24. I don't think we can wait that long, so I am going to call to see if there is someone else who can see him. I'm getting really worried about hismental.attitude. It has been great most of the time, but widi this setback he can't teach, play the keyboard, or do anydiing around me house. He is getting really depressed and that won't do anyone any good - least of all him. Please pray that we get an appointment soon!

Love to you all. Sheryl and Joel (Sun, Apr 6,2003)

Postscripts...

There was reportedly an incident during a BBC broadcast of "Messiah," specifically the "Hallelujah" chorus. The announcer was to make an air check at the end of "Hallelujah" and wasn't as familiar with the music as he should have been. If you don't remember how the piece ends, there are four Hallelujahs sung in quick succession, a one measure rest, then a slow syllabic "Hallelujah."
The radio audience was treated to:
Chorus: "Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah!"
Announcer: 'This is the BBC"
Chorus: "HAL-LE-LU-JAH!!"
The conductor was apparently not amused.

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The following are stories and test questions accumulated by various music teachers...

Agnus Dei was a woman composer famous for her church music.
Refrain means don't do it.
A refrain in music is the part you better not try to sing.

A virtuoso is a musician with real high morals.
John Sebastian Bach died from 1750 to the present.
Handel was half German, half Italian, and half English. He was rather large.
Henry Purcell is a well known composer few people have ever heard of.
When a singer sings, he stirs up the air and makes it hit any passing eardrums. But if he is good, he knows how to keep it from hurting.
Music sung by two people at the same time is called a duel.
I know what a sextet is but I had rather not say.
Caruso was at first an Italian. Then someone heard his voice and said he would go a long way. And so he came to America.
A good orchestra is always ready to play if the conductor steps on the odium.
In the last-scene of Pagliacci, Canio stabs Nedda who is the one he really loves. Pretty soon Siivio also gets stabbed, and they all live happily ever after.
Most authorities agree that music of antiquity was written long ago.
My favorite composer is Opus.

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Doug Brandt, Editor
1259-A Lake Shore Drive
Columbus, Ohio 43204
dougbrandt@hotmail.com

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