

The Buckeye Backcheck

May 2003

Volume 27, issue 4

Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

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From the Editor...



Our thanks go out to Paul Graves, owner of Graves Piano & Organ, for allowing the Columbus Chapter to hold their April 2003 meeting at his facility. Graves Piano has hosted numerous times in the past, and they always provide an excellent venue for our meetings, and they always have an excellent layout of food for us, too! We also appreciate the efforts of Christina Kauffman, Director of Institutional Sales at Graves, for her involvement in making the evening a success. Also present was Mike Spain, a skilled and personable member of the Graves sales team. It was also a particular pleasure to meet the executive vice president of Kawai America Junichi Ando, and his concert technician, Yashuhiro Kitamura. These gentlemen were in Columbus to prepare two Kawai concert grands for the renowned local pianist Earl Wild. Mr. Wild later chose one of the two instruments housed at Graves for a recording session in Buffalo, New York. Having heard and played one of those grands, I can attest that Mr. Wild had a superb piano to use for the recordings!

We look forward to future meetings at Graves Piano & Organ -- especially the meeting in January 2004. Franz Mohr will be the guest speaker!



Bryan Hartzler, who is an accomplished pianist, plays one of the two Kawai concert grands on display at Graves Piano & Organ.

Ron Kenreich stands in front of the Shigeru Kawai grand.

Kim Hoessly becomes another of a series of technicians who test out a Kawai nine-foot grand.

In the News...

CSO NEWS OF THE WEEK

from the President & Executive Director May 2, 2003

Musicians Make Unprecedented Show of Support: Below is our press release that went out yesterday with some exciting news from our musicians. It has already run this morning on NPR! I want to personally thank them all for their support!

In an amazing show of support, the musicians of the Columbus Symphony Orchestra voted today to collectively donate back to the symphony the fees for their services for the May 7, 2003 Beach Boys concert. The impact of their combined gift totals more than \$20,000 and is the first time in the history of the CSO that the musicians have come together to make a donation of this magnitude.

“At a time when major orchestras across the country are experiencing great financial distress, the musicians wanted to publicly demonstrate their commitment to the continued health and growth of the organization,” said Douglas Fisher, second bassoon and President of the Central Ohio Federation of Musicians Local 103, A.F.M.

The CSO has consecutively balanced its budget for the past 5 years, however, this year the symphony is struggling to close a \$300,000 budget gap brought on by declines in government support, the downturn of the stock market, and sluggish ticket sales. The CSO has an annual operating budget of more than \$10 million. In response to these issues, the organization has implemented several strategies to ensure the financial viability of the organization including: reducing staff payroll and restructuring staff; cutting expenses in all budget areas; and seeking out additional earned revenue and contributed income opportunities. Board members have increased their personal financial support of the organization and are actively raising additional funds in hopes of balancing the budget for the sixth consecutive year.

“The CSO Staff, Board of Trustees, and Musicians are all committed to maintaining the high level of artistic excellence and financial stability that the Columbus community has come to expect from us,” said Linda Kass, Chair of the CSO’s Board of Trustees. “I hope that our community will appreciate the importance of the musicians’ gift and also commit themselves to helping ensure the future of the arts in Columbus through their own gifts and ticket purchases.”

“The orchestra is currently in the middle of a growth cycle and we re happy to be able to make this contribution as a group to show our support of our Board of Trustees and their leadership,” said Philip Shipley, principal percussion and Chair of the CSO Orchestra Committee. The release is also posted on the musician’s webpage at: <http://www.symphonymusicians.com/>

FLORIDA PHILHARMONIC EXTENDS DEATHWATCH DEADLINE

The Florida Philharmonic didn't make its self-imposed deadline of raising \$20 million by Friday; it came up with only \$3 million. So is it filing for bankruptcy, as threatened? Not quite. The orchestra has stopped selling tickets for concerts after next weekend, said it needs to raise \$4 million to keep going instead of \$20 million. And it extended a self-imposed deadline for a bankruptcy filing. "The Philharmonic's board has authorized management to shut down the symphony as early as May 10... unless there is a groundswell of public support providing immediate commitments of at least \$4 million." Miami Herald 05/03/03

ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY DIGS OUT

The St. Louis Symphony, which earlier this season said it was in danger of collapse if a major emergency fundraising campaign wasn't successful, says it has raised three-quarters of the \$40 million it needs to survive. "With \$30 million pledged or in hand, the Symphony has 20 months left to bring in the remaining \$10 million. But to be really healthy, the Symphony needs more than the \$85 million to \$90 million in endowment that it will have by the end of the campaign - somewhere more in the neighborhood of \$150 million." St. Louis Post-Dispatch 05/02/93

BUFFALO, ROCHESTER ORCHESTRAS DISCUSSING MERGER?

Are the financially-ailing Rochester and Buffalo Philharmonics discussing a merger? That was the indication this week from Buffalo Mayor Anthony Masiello. "There have been conversations between Buffalo Philharmonic and Rochester Philharmonic about joint ventures or merging. Those are some difficult issues." But the orchestras say nothing's in the works. Rochester Democrat Chronicle 5/01/03

From the Trades...

The May 2003 issue of The Music Trades reports in their "Industry Briefings" section of a juke box computer program that can predict if a song has the potential to reach the top of the charts. The program is entitled "Hit Song Science", and its recent claim to fame is that it correctly predicted that jazz singer Norah Jones would succeed in the music world. Norah went on to top the music charts and win eight Grammy awards. (Record companies started to pay close attention

at that point.) Five major labels decided to try "Hit Song Science", New Scientist magazine reported. HSS, which is produced by the Spanish company Polyphonic HMI, looks for songs that have similar traits to known hit songs. Each song is run through signal filters that identify and measure numerous musical patterns, including melody, harmonic variation, beat, tempo, rhythm, pitch, chord progression and fullness of sound. The designers of the program found that past chart toppers in Billboard magazine shared a number of similar musical traits. Polyphonic HMI Chief Executive Mike McCready said: "There are a limited number of mathematical formulas for hit songs. We don't know why." Peter Bentley, of University College London, who also designs musical software, said it may only reinforce tried and trusted formulas for success. "The music industry is not exactly renowned for its daring exploits."

From other Newsletters...

The following two articles come from a past issue of HammerTales, the newsletter of the Minn-Kota Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild.

The Keybed (a sticky problem)

By Dennis Beiryhill, RPT

At first glance the keybed seems simple enough. It is the panel of wood that the grand action sits on. All it has to do is not move and allow the action to sit on top of it. I wish it were that simple.

Made of wood, the keybed, can react to humidity changes. Most manufacturers try and use the wood grain orientation to minimize the humidity effects. Even with best efforts things can still move. What can go wrong if the keybed moves? The keybed is the foundation of the action regulation. If it moves the regulation changes. The problems I have come across include, too much or too little key dip, hammers blocking against the strings, the unicorda pedal does not work, drop screws touching the pinblock- the regulation turns into a general mess. If you regulate the action to cure the symptoms, you discover that at the next humidity swing a whole new set of problems show up.

The keybed must be made stable! What tools do we have for this task? The first one that comes to mind is a good Damp Chaser System. Install a dehumidifier bar under the keybed. If you can eliminate the humidity swing you will probably stabilize the keybed. This should solve most if not all of the problems. Let the keybed settle down and regulate the action. What do you do if this does not solve the problem? Try beating your head against the keybed. Next try doing a study of the keybed to see where the thing is moving and why- You may be able to cut narrow channels into the keybed and insert angle iron into the cuts screwing the angle iron to the bottom of the keybed to pull it straight and stable. If this repair of last resort fails, I don't have other tricks in my bag. I would leave someone else's business card and sneak out.

The unicorda pedal, sometimes, will not work, and the action gets stuck. Check the keyblocks action frame hold downs for too much tightness. You should also inspect the action return spring

for problems. The surface of the keybed needs to be clean, smooth, and slippery. A very light (do not over sand!!) sanding with 400 grit sand paper to polish it up then lube it with a dry clean Teflon spray or Mclube 444. (do not use graffite or anything that is dirty) I am not a fan of talc or other powders that will drop to the carpet every time I pull the action.

The surface of the keybed needs to be a perfect fit to the bottom of the keyframe. Start by setting the balance rail studs. Remove the action stack from the keyframe. Pull keys from around the studs. Put the action stack back on, slide the action back in and lock down the key frame with the keyblocks. Raise all the studs so they do not contact the keybed. Use a strip of newspaper to place between the keybed and the studs. Make certain that a minimal contact is made, and then check the studs with the damper pedal depressed, because this can lift the frame from the keybed. You can check the stud adjustment by lifting on the studs with one hand, while tapping down with the other. A slapping sound should happen when you lift up and should go away when you stop lifting.

The front of the keyframe needs to be in contact its whole length. Any noncontact will cause a slapping sound during heavy playing. Check for gaps by tapping along the front rail and listen for the offending sound. The gaps are cured by careful sanding the keybed high spots that are holding the front rail up.

The keybed is the foundation on which we build the regulation. If you solve its problems you will have a stable platform to build your regulation.

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The following article ties into one of the most important celebrations of the year

by Kris Anderson, RPT May 2000

I wish I knew the name of the tuner who came to our home years ago to service my mom's spinet. I was a teenager then, the oldest of three kids, and we lived in a small mobile home on a very tight budget. My salary, and New England was just entering a long recession. My mom rationed everything: bath water, meat, everything - she had to. But everyone needs music, and from somewhere my mom had gotten a spinet; and after a year or two she called a tuner.

He came, checked the piano over (I had only the foggiest notion of what he was doing), and then came over to my mom. We kids were all just trying to "be quiet while the tuner's here"; we watched and listened as he explained something to mom. Evidently the piano was very badly out of tune and would need more than just the usual tuning -- and that would cost more than she had planned on. She stood there in the living room, thinking. We watched her. She was thinking for a long time. At the time, I thought she was trying to decide whether to have it done or not; now I think she was also probably trying to decide where the money would come from, where could she cut back even more to afford this unexpected extra. Finally she nodded to the tuner and said yes, he should do what the piano needed. He nodded and went back to work. We kids were quiet.

Eventually we drifted away to our rooms, and sometime later he finished, was paid, and left quietly. Mom sat down at the piano, and played. It was only a spinet, and probably quite dusty inside - the "streets" in our trailer park were not paved and mom fought an endless battle with dust - but somehow it always comforted her, to play the piano. We sat in our rooms and listened to the music coming through the cheap paneling that was our walls.

I was so impressed by that tuner's honesty. Mom was a woman, alone; he could have just done the work and then given her the bill, but he didn't. He first explained the situation, and then he asked her what she wanted him to do.

I didn't know enough then to be able to appreciate a good tuning, but I could appreciate honesty. Dear tuner friend, whoever and wherever you are, it was your integrity that impressed me so much. I am sure you did good work -- your own conscience would have required it of you -- but it was me honesty that I remembered years later when I was casting about for "something" that would pay back the college loans I was taking out. I was nineteen, and idealistic; I was majoring in music; I wanted to sing. But I had to take out loans, something pretty scary for a kid who knew what it was like to live on a tight budget. I decided I would have to take time out to learn something that would pay the bills. I wanted to do something that would keep me in touch with music and music people.-.and that's when I remembered that quiet tuner. I have been so fulfilled in piano work, I never did get back to college. But I am still idealistic, and still trying to always be honest and kind. You Just never know what effects you may have on people, even years down the road.

Happy Mother's Day, Mom.

Postscripts...

Music Education (Part 2)

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

A harp is a nude piano.

A tuba is much larger than its name.

Instruments come in many sizes, shapes and orchestras.

You should always say celli when you mean there are two or more cellos.

Anomer name for kettle drums is timpani. But I think I will Just stick with the first name and learn it good.

A trumpet is an instrument when it is not an elephant sound.

While trombones have tubes, trumpets prefer to wear valves.

The double bass is also called the bass viol, string bass, and bass fiddle. It has so many names because it is so huge.

When electric currents go through them, guitars start making sounds. So would anybody.

Question: What are kettle drums called? Answer: Kettle drums.

Cymbals are round, metal CLANGS!

A bassoon looks like nothing I have ever heard.

Last month I found out how a clarinet works by taking it apart. I both found out and got in trouble.

Question: Is the saxophone a brass or a woodwind instrument? Answer: Yes.

The concertmaster of an orchestra is always the person who sits in the first chair of the first violins.

This means that when a person is elected concertmaster, he has to hurry up and learn how to play a violin real good.

For some reason, they always put a treble clef in front of every line of flute music. You just watch.

I can't reach the brakes on this piano!

The main trouble with a French horn is it's too tangled up.

Anyone who can read all the instrument notes at the same time gets to be the conductor.

Instrumentalist is a many-purposed word for many player-types.

The flute is a skinny-high shape-sounded.

The most dangerous part about playing cymbals is near the nose.

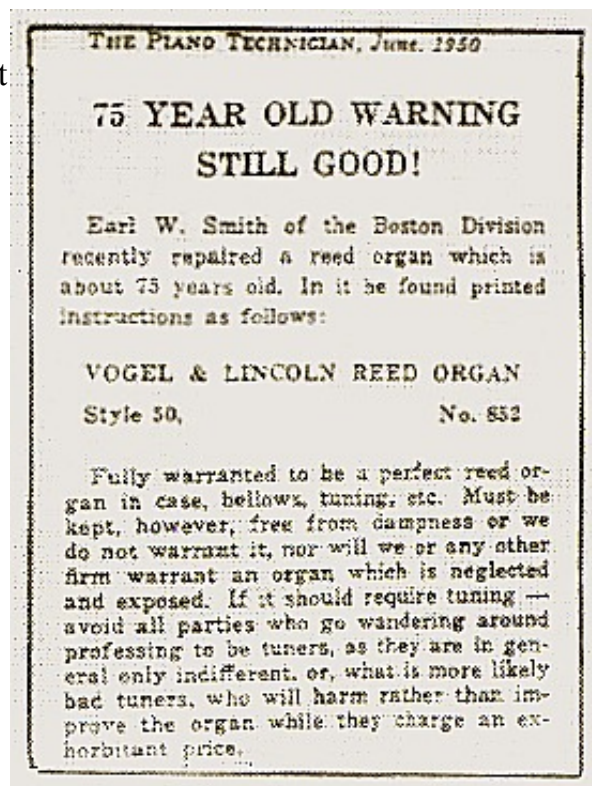
A contra-bassoon is like a bassoon, only more so.

Tubas are a bit too much.

Music instrument has a plural known as orchestra.

I would like for you to teach me to play the cello.

Would tomorrow or Friday be best?



This article is reprinted from *The Piano Technician*, June, 1950. That makes the advice over 125 years old, and it still holds true. (From the Dallas Chapter).

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The Buckeye Backcheck is published monthly, excepting the summer, and it is available to all Columbus Chapter members as part of their dues. It is available to others for a subscription fee of \$12.00 per year or by exchange with other chapter newsletters. Make your checks or money orders payable to Columbus Chapter PTG and send to Chris Altenburg, 340 Stonewall Ct., Dublin, OH 43017-1333.

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