

The Buckeye Backcheck

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Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

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From the Editor...



Many thanks go to Ben Wiant for hosting the May 2003 meeting of the Columbus PTG and conducting a most interesting technical. We also thank Jon Chandler for ordering the delicious subs!

Meeting Minutes (excerpts)

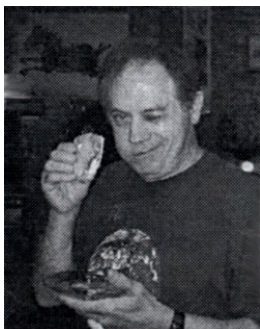
May 20, 2003

Committee Report. The Cliff Maurer Memorial Scholarship Committee, comprised of Ben Wiant, Kim Hoessley and Chris Altenburg met prior to the meeting to discuss how the scholarship should be organized and monies dispensed. In the design, an Associate who passes all three parts of the exam and wins the scholarship is eligible for reimbursement for the cost to take the technical and tuning exams. Those who take and pass the written part of the exam have two years to pass the technical and tuning exams to be eligible for the scholarship. Further details will be discussed in the near future.

Old Business. There is still no Delegate for Council for the National Convention, though Bryan Hartzler has agreed to serve should he go to Dallas for the Convention.

Butts and Flanges: Mark Ritchie presented the case of a 1968 Yamaha grand whose name board would not close on the bass side of the piano, due to the fact that it would hit the cheek block.

Additionally, the action would not shift. What was the problem? Did it have anything to do with the lyre? No. The answer: The leg bolts of this Yamaha were of different lengths, which were not atypical for Yamahas of this period. The front legs were supposed to have the 2 1/2" bolts, and the rear leg the 3" bolt. And, you guessed it, the 3" bolt had been used to fasten the left front leg of the piano...



Victor Wolfe gives a wink of approval as he dines after the meeting.

Ben's Technical...

Ben Wiant presented a marvelous technical following the meeting that was informative, musically illuminating, and, at times, somewhat controversial. I will elaborate somewhat on the first two, and, to avoid offending certain entities in the piano manufacturing field, I will sparsely report on the latter.

Ben McKlveen, who was supposed to co-head the technical with Ben Wiant, had to excuse himself from participation, because he had committed to play a concert in Cincinnati. His apologies were relayed to us from Mr. Wiant.

Ben Wiant began with his history of Ben McKlveen's involvement in the musical world. Mr. McKlveen went to the University of Cincinnati, where he obtained a Masters degree in Oboe. He also served in World War II, where he was involved in an engineering capacity. These two areas of involvement gave Ben McKlveen a unique perspective into the world of piano technology.

Ben Wiant followed with his own musical background. Ben's grandfather worked as a teenager in the later 1800's at O.S. Kelly, the piano plate manufacturer in Springfield, Ohio. (O.S. Kelly is now owned by Steinway & Sons.) Ben's father was a missionary who worked in China, the place where Ben was born. His father had a PhD in ethnomusicology- one of the first individuals to receive that degree. He also composed Chinese music, and he was involved as a conductor.

Ben himself returned to the States and attended Ohio Wesleyan. He studied music there, and his personal piano was a Baldwin studio that had been purchased by the family for \$725. As he moved to Cincinnati to work on his Master's degree, he ended up contacting Ben McKlveen, who had been the head of the Piano Technology department at the University of Cincinnati, to look into purchasing a grand piano. That was the beginning of their long friendship and association.

Mr. Wiant eventually obtained a Master's degree in Piano Performance at the University of

Cincinnati. Following that, he went to Wisconsin State College, where he not only held a teaching position, but he also took on the work of a piano technologist for the music department.

In 1969 Ben went to the University of Michigan for the purpose of obtaining a doctorate in Music Education. The Associate Dean questioned his intent of following that pursuit, perhaps wondering about his commitment to that field of study. Additionally, in this particular time period, funds for education were being cut throughout the country, and this reality affected Ben's ability to continue his academic career.

Following the time spent in Ann Arbor, Ben moved to Arizona, where he, among other responsibilities, worked on Indian Reservation pianos.

Ben was faced with a dilemma. He was now married, with children, and he needed money. What to do? He began working as a floor tuner with Fred Davis at a Wurlitzer store. He also worked in the same capacity at Terry Piano & Organ. As his skills and involvement increased, Ben decided in 1971 to take the Piano Guild exam, which he passed. Ben McKlveen was involved with the redesign of the test in this same time period.

Later, Ben expanded his business and his horizons. Among other things, Ben has been a piano buyer in Germany for Paul Graves. He has also been at the Sellen factory in Kitzingen, and he has visited the Bechstein factory. He has also been to Hamburg to look at the design and construction of the German Steinways.

During the technical itself, Ben talked about the importance of saving old materials in quality pianos-- specifically soundboards. Ben referred to a seminar he attended some time ago where Wendell Baton spoke of old wood, felt, buckskin and bushing cloth that could not be matched for quality in today's world. Ben himself talked of 100 year old pianos with key bushing cloth that had never been replaced and was still functioning well. (I myself have seen very old backchecks with nary a cut in them.) As far as soundboards are concerned, Ben said that he has tried to save virtually every soundboard he has ever encountered, and only one board in his memory has ever failed to reach the acceptable level through shimming and/or epoxy filling into the cracks of the board. Ben feels that technicians are far too ready to replace a board with wood that in no way can match the quality of a board which is not only older, but one that was cut from a far older tree in the first place.

Ben concluded his technical by playing CDs of piano performances from older pianos-- some of which have had extensive soundboard repair. Among the pianos used were a 1915 6' 3" Baldwin, an 1885 Steinway concert grand, a 1917 Steinway concert grand, a 30 year old Bechstein grand, the 20 year old Steinway concert grand that sits in the Ohio Theatre, and a 1963 Steinway concert grand. None of the pianos were lacking in power; they all exhibited character and warmth of an individual nature that many of us found appealing.

From Other Newsletters ...

Next is a technical tip from the April 2003 issue of The Nova Soundboard. The official publication of the Northern Virginia Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild. Andrew Margrave is the Editor

and the author of the following article.

TECHNICAL TIP OF THE MONTH

The old-fashioned way of backing out a tuning pin three full turns before stringing new wire into the pin has the drawback that it may make the tuning pin too loose- especially with an older piano. At the Washington, DC Chapter's "Butts and Flanges Day" on March 29, two of the instructors, Larry Bowen and Bill Resnick, both RPT members of the Washington, DC Chapter, presented a better method. First, back out the tuning pin only one turn. Then take a tuning pin from one's supply of tuning pins and hold the bottom (threaded) end in a vise-grip. (We assume that one has already cut the wire off at about 2 1/2" above the tuning pin.) Thread the wire into this dummy pin and put two full coils- no more and no less- on that pin. Then unhitch the coiled wire from the dummy pin and put it on the real pin. You are now just one coil away from having the string up to pitch. Turn the tuning pin up that final coil, and you have your three coils and the pin at the right height, and the pin is as tight as it ever was- or very close.

Larry advocated using a 1/0 pin for the dummy pin. I myself might prefer a 3/0 or 4/0 pin on the theory that a more spread coil might be less of a difficulty to switch from dummy pin to real pin. However, Larry does very well with a 1/0 pin, and he gets a nice tight coil thereby. On pianos with abnormally tight pins, the traditional "three turns out" practice is still preferable. At least there would be some pins that one could actually turn. Many thanks are due Larry and Bill for sharing this technique with us.

-Andrew Margrave, Editor, The Nova Soundboard

I would like to conclude with another piece from Andrew Margrave of The Nova Soundboard. I had the pleasure of meeting Andrew a few years ago at the Ohio State Convention, held in Cincinnati. He is an excellent writer, as you will witness below.

IN MEMORIAM

Jerome Hines

Born November 8, 1921

Died February 4, 2003

While Jerome made his mark in a different field, Ms obituary nevertheless merits inclusion in these pages, because he was a superstar performer, and one who was a phenomenal credit to the vocal art and the music industry, like so very few others. Blessed with a superb bass voice, Hines had a 41-year career (1946-1987) at the Metropolitan Opera, longest in history and a standard that no future singer will have any hope of surpassing. He was able to sing for as long as he lived. Though he was a bass, his remarkable upper range enabled him to sing, with success, such baritone roles as Wotan, Don Giovanni and Boris Godunov. He also was a composer of note. His opera, *I am the Way*, has been in circulation for more than forty years. The lead role in this opera is Christ himself, and Hines wrote that lead role for bass and sang it himself many times-- once in a 1992 performance at George Mason University that I attended. Jerome Hines was, justly, as renowned for his life and his Christian beliefs as he was for his music-making. His religious profile was at all times supported by

that utterly indispensable foundation of character and virtue that is such a lost art in today's America. He was holy without being holier-than-thou. Jerome Hines set standards for sheer saintliness and righteousness that few of us, including myself, can hope to approach. Heaven is all the richer for his presence there now. Earth was, and remains, all the better and more fortunate for his life here.

From Kent and Jean Brandt...

My parents, who live a good part of the year in Long Boat Key near Sarasota, Florida, recently attended a concert in Sarasota that they thoroughly enjoyed. I asked them to write up a brief account of that experience.

Sunday afternoon on May 8th we went to a benefit concert for Habitat For Humanity at our church, and it was superb! It featured Mme Elena Wollconsky at the piano playing opuses by Chopin, Borodin, Rachmaninoff, Mendelssohn, Schubert and Liszt with an encore by Khachaturian. She is an incredible pianist. Many of these pieces have runs that are dazzling in their speed and complexity. She now lives in Sarasota and New York. What gifted artists we have here in Sarasota! At the age of 12, Elena graduated from the school for Exceptionally Gifted Children at the Moscow Conservatory. In America, she became a full scholarship student at the Julliard School of Music and, there, received the coveted Frank Damrosch Award for highest achievement and talent. At the Tchaikovsky Competition, she was selected as an alternate performer to Van Cliburn. Isabella Vengerova became Elena's guiding star. Vengerova's students include Samuel Barber and Leonard Bernstein. Later, after extraordinary tours in the United States and Europe, she joined the faculty of the Julliard School of Music. Since 1990, Elena has also been serving as the the Artistic Director of cultural events at the Russian Center in New York. Elena married Prince Andre Wolkonsky and became the sister-in-law of Irene Rachmaninoff Wolkonsky. She has been featured twice at Carnegie Hall.

From Joel and Sheryl Reeve...

Thursday, May 15, 2003 1:30 AM

As usual, our life hasn't gone as we planned it this week! On Saturday night, I took Joel to the emergency room at Riverside (our hospital in Columbus, about an hour away) because he had a low grade fever, messed up speech, and had been getting progressively weaker as the day wore on. Within four hours of our arrival, he had had blood tests, urine tests, a chest x-ray, and a CAT scan, we had been given results, and he was admitted to a room on the oncology ward. The diagnosis was pneumonia. It really surprised us because he had exhibited none of the normal symptoms - no cough, chest pain or tightness, or shortness of breath.

He was given mega doses of antibiotics and started back on a low dose of steroids. He wasn't happy about going back on the steroids because they make him so puffy. He had just gotten weaned off and we were finally able to see his chin and part of his neck again! However, he grudgingly admitted that he thought the steroids were responsible for a large part of his speedy recovery. He was able to come home today, and he is doing great!

Another result of the illness is that a blood clot was discovered in his right leg (he had one in his left

leg at Christmas). He can't take blood thinners because of the increased risk of bleeding - with the chemo messing with his platelet counts, this would just be too high a risk. The good thing is that at Christmas, a filter was placed in the vein that connect to both legs so that if he were to develop anything in his right leg he would be protected. Now, we just have to pray that nothing gets through the filter, which can happen.

This whole adventure meant that we were unable to keep our appointment at Duke today. Fortunately, we were able to get an appointment for the same time next Wednesday! I was really afraid that we would have to wait a month or more for another appointment.

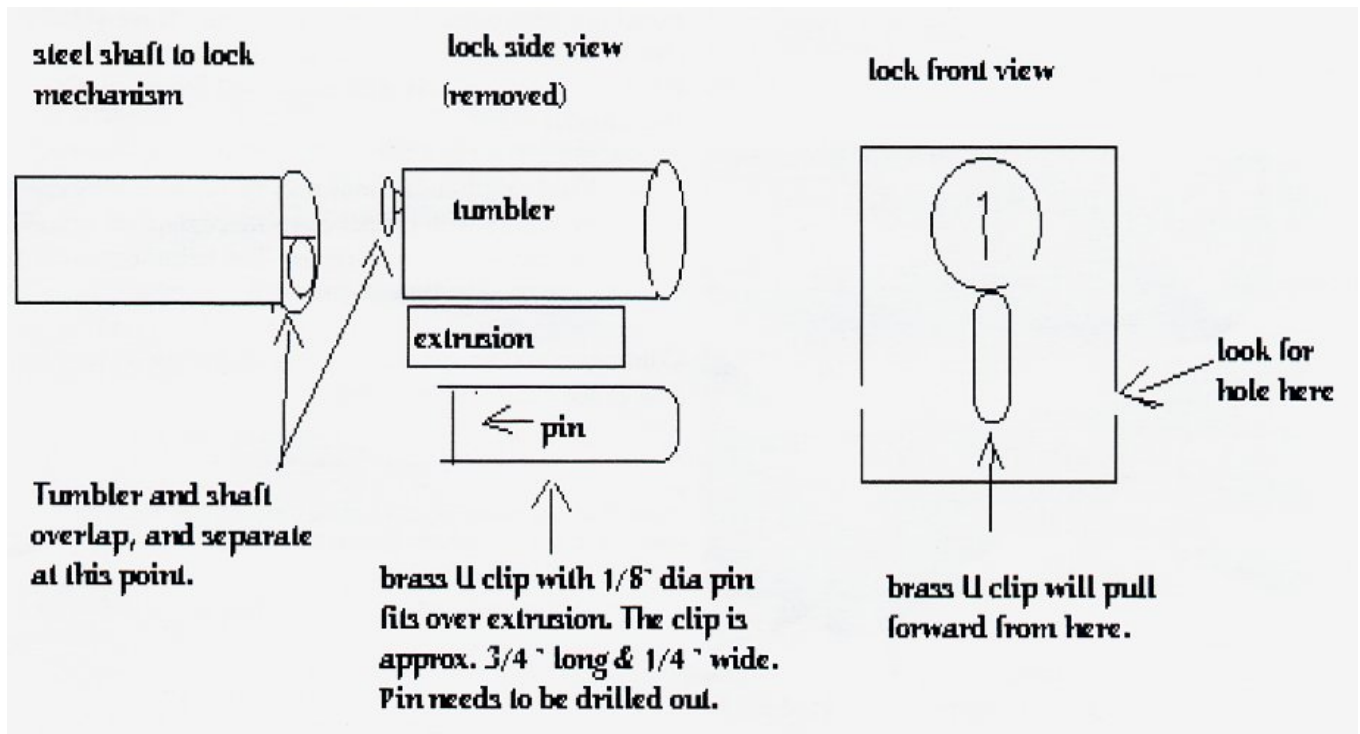
Joel is feeling really well. He even insisted on walking to Tyier's baseball practice tonight, a distance of almost 1/2 mile! He was completely worn out, and I drove him home, but the walk really did him good.

Thank you so much for all of the prayers! I just know mat part of the reason he is doing so well so quickly is that so many people are praying for him. We love you all!

Love,
Sheryl and Joel

From Mark Ritchie...

I recently had a "Hands-Off" fallboard lock on a school piano that the kids had somehow managed to disable. The key would not go into the lock. How do you get the lock assembly off? To my knowledge, this was the first time this problem had been encountered. With some guidance from Mark Bisso and Bob Marinelli, of *Pianotek*, a plan was devised to remove the lock. Part of the patented design is to make the two piece lock difficult to overcome. This procedure will ruin the clamp portion of the system. I would also recommend trying to lubricate the lock and the plunger before the next step, especially if the key can be inserted. There is a small hole visible on both sides of the (very hard) plastic clamp piece that contains the lock assembly. I first drilled through the hole with a sharp 3/16" drill bit. There is a thin brass "U" clip, with a small brass pin, which locks the tumbler unit into the clamp portion. The purpose here is to drill out the pin. I believe I missed the pin, or part of it on the first attempt. I then went to a 5/16" drill bit with success. The next step is to extract the clip from the front bottom of the lock. I got the clip started with an awl and it pulled out easily. With the clip removed the tumbler unit can then be pulled out. Having the tumbler out of the way will give access to the steel shaft behind it. The shaft can then be rotated with a screwdriver or needle nose pliers to release the plunger. (See Mark's bitmap drawing below)



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