

The Buckeye Backcheck

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Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

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From the Editor...



It's September again, and I am furiously typing/inserting/cutting/pasting to get the newsletter out before the deadline. Nonetheless, it is good to report on the various activities of the Columbus Chapter of the PTG. And I do particularly enjoy handing off the finished newsletters to the folks at the post office!

The Chapter Picnic was a fun time had by all. We had a good turnout, and it was nice seeing some faces that we hadn't seen for awhile. Ruth McCall was one of those people, and we were very happy she could make the event.

I would like to thank Kim Hoessly for hosting the June Chapter Meeting AND the August Chapter Picnic. And special kudos go to Bud Hoessly for his expertise at the grill!

Meeting Minutes (excerpts)

The following Chapter Officers were "accepted by acclimation," to serve for the following year.

Kim Hoessly: President

David Gorsuch: Vice President

Chris Altenburg: Treasurer

Doug Brandt: Secretary

Announcements. The Central East Regional Conference will be held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

from October 9-12.

The Chapter Picnic...

The Chapter Picnic was held on August 23rd at the home of Kim and Bud Hoessly at 3411 Clearview Ave. In addition to our hosts, those present included Ruth McCall, Chris Altenburg, Dave Gorsuch, Phil Walters, Bob and Lou Grubb, Bryan Hartzler, Ben Wiant, Mark and Marilyn Ritchie, David Stang and Mike Varrone. Bud and Kim have hosted on a previous occasion, and they once again did a great job providing a nice venue and grilling up some great brats and burgers. Kim's garden, located in a small plot in the back yard, was the provider of delicious tomatoes and other vegetables. I particularly enjoyed the home-grown peppers!

From Other Newsletters ...

The first offering is from Good Vibrations, the excellent newsletter of the Rhode Island Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild. Although it does not deal with the repair and servicing of a piano, it does have a peripheral connection that might be interesting/or those would-be gardeners out there!

TECH/TOOL TIP

As Spring gardening is upon us, I'm reminded of a tool that the late John MacDonald would make to aid in dealing with hopelessly small seed planting. John would take an upright hammer shank and drill a hole lengthwise in the end. The hole would be the right size to accommodate an upright damper spoon. The resulting tool would handily keep too many seeds from ending up where you didn't want them.

You can dress it up a bit by putting on a coat of polyurethane, and handing them out to all your technician /gardener friends. John would keep the local garden shop supplied with them, and pick up a couple of bucks for each one. They sold well.

-David Flanders, Editor, Good Vibrations

From Chris Altenburg...

Chris Altenburg was nice enough to relate his experiences/row the MARC to us with the following write-up. Thanks, Chris!

It is more than a full week since returning from the PTG's Mid-Atlantic Regional Convention (MARC) in Pittsburgh, PA (April 3rd - April 6th) and I am finally back in my daily routine and have the time to pen a few words about this year's event. The PTG chapter which sponsors this event does a very professional job in all respects. I received more than my money's worth in entertainment, education and in socializing with other technicians I already know, as well as those I met for the first time this year.

There are many reasons to attend conventions like this, not the least of which is the challenge it presents to us by questioning our beliefs as to the proper (best?) way to do any number of tasks a technician finds himself involved in. From tuning, to voicing, regulation, repairs, troubleshooting, rebuilding and the various options (Disklavier, PianoDisk, etc.) available for pianos, there were over 140 class sessions available from which to select, and almost as many variations in opinion of the "right" way. In closing, I enjoyed myself tremendously at this year's MARC and plan to continue attending in the years to come. I hope to see you there next year. ing a hotel room with Joe Murphy, another technician. His company was appreciated. I decided that, as a new piano technician, I would attend as many forms of instruction as possible for exposure to the many facets of piano repair, maintenance and tuning.

Taking four days off to attend a regional convention represents a major commitment of time and money for any of us, myself included. While I don't yet enjoy the amount of business and the income level many in our chapter do, I know that I lost at least two tunings on me first day of the MARC, tunings that had to be done that day. And, being in the early days of my career, the \$700.00 it cost me to attend was a large outlay. That total doesn't include the approximately \$150.00 in income from tile lost tunings, nor the \$650.00 in tools purchased at die conference.

The only reason I've slated my expenses here is to make the point that I am a firm believer in continuing education and will make the expenditure to learn. We're told it takes money to make money; well, it also takes money, time and sweat to educate oneself. Having attended three MARCs, two National Conventions, a week of training by Randy Potter, Yamaha's Little Red School House and its Disklavier Seminar, and finally, a one day seminar in Kentucky about plates and bearing, I remain enthusiastic about the various avenues we have for learning and refining our skills.

The apparently high cost for the convention included a full-day class on Thursday for exam preparation and the fee for the tuning exam. I decided to take the tuning exam at MARC to uncover my weak points and to better prepare myself for retaking it and passing it in July at the Dallas convention.

Lady Luck also played her role in making this year's MARC a memorable event for me. At my first MARC in 2001, I won three door prizes, two packages of Dryburgh CA glue and a digital thermometer/ humidity meter from Allied Piano. In 2002, I think I won a coffee cup. But, this year I really cleaned up. In addition to winning a very nice Yamaha shirt, I also scored by holding the winning door prize ticket for the Grand Prize, \$1,000.00 in Mobil/Exxon gas cards! I was in shock for several days afterward, but I got over it, and am happily using the cards to fuel our cars.

As I write this, it is almost two weeks since the PTG's Mid-Atlantic Region sponsored its annual convention (MARC), this year in Pittsburgh, PA. April 3rd through the 6th were the dates and the Radisson Hotel on the south end of the city was the

I have been fortunate enough to attend MARC in 2001, 2002 and again, this year and its value, in my estimation, remains as great or greater today than it was the first time I attended. From the

technical classes (more than 140 class sessions were available), to sponsoring PTG exams, to the chance to meet and socialize with fellow technicians from all over the region and beyond, to the opportunity to review and buy tools and other supplies, the Mid- Atlantic chapter once again performed an outstanding service for us all.

I have no idea of the actual numbers of technicians and their families who attended, so I cannot say if the event was a financial success for the sponsoring chapter, but it seemed to be as well attended as it was the last two years I attended. Three members of our chapter were there, causing me to realize that many more were not. I am enthusiastic about MARC and other PTG conventions, their intent and their execution, and I wholeheartedly recommend Them to piano technicians. There is so much to learn about pianos and so much to do at each, at least the ones I've gone to, that I'm sure all PTG members, from the greenest to the most experienced, can find any number of enjoyable and educational things to do.

After six conventions and other piano-related training during the past 2 1/2 years, I am finally able to comprehend and analyze what the instructors are telling us in the classes I attend. Well, at least much of the time. Intellectually, I was absolutely lost at MARC, in 2001, but this year it was very much a different story. I still listen a lot more than I talk, a practice I need to continue, and I continue to learn. It is also fun to try and figure out the "best" explanation about something, or the "best" way to do something else, from the often diverging opinions offered by instructors in class, or fellow technicians over a cup of coffee or a beer in the evening. We've all got opinions, some of which seem well-grounded in science and others which do not. In fact, the word voodoo comes to mind as I search for a way to describe some views and practices I have heard. Of course, at my first MARC, most of It seemed like voodoo, so I think I had better pay attention, as some of these opinions may grow in validity as I gain experience and can better evaluate them.

I benefited from attending MARC this year in several ways. I've already mentioned its educational value, which ranks highest in my mind. Second, my stock of tools and supplies swelled yet again this year, as I dipped deeply into largely non-existent reserves to buy some items that will hopefully be used as my business grows. Third, I met a number of folks for the first time and renewed friendships from past events. Joe Murphy, from the Philidel- phia area, comes immediately to mind, as he was kind enough to share his room with me for the three nights I was there.

Fourth, I continued advancing toward RPT status, by taking the tuning exam on Friday afternoon. I passed the second part, though not the first (came within shouting distance, though). The National convention in Dallas, TX, in July is where I intend to successfully complete my testing, as part one of the Tuning Exam is all that remains.

Fifth, and finally, I was lucky enough to win the grand door prize - \$1,000.00 in Mobil/Exxon gasoline cards. In 2001, I won two Dryburgh CA glue kits and a thermometer/humidity meter from Allied Piano. 2002 was a dry year, as I won only a coffee cup. But 2003 made up for it, with a fine Yamaha shirt and the grand prize. The purchase of a couple of very expensive tools was thus made possible by the \$1,000.00 offset. In all, winning the gas cards paid for the entire

trip as well as some of the tools and supplies I bought. Can't beat that.

In closing, I enjoyed myself tremendously at this year's MARC and plan to continue attending in the years to come. I hope to see you there next year.

from Arturo Benedetti Michelangelo ...

(The following is an old article that I found that illustrates the ingenuity of certain piano technicians who solve problems for world class pianists.)

Between 1946 and 1961 he held eleven concerts at the Lyceum, a prestigious musical institution in Catania, Italy, founded and directed by Donna Amalia Lanzerotti Pantano since 1928. The first time he came and visited mamma Amalia, as he used to call her, the servant left him at the entrance, mistaking him for a tramp.

When he played at the Lyceum, a small club, he used to perform on a baby grand piano, whose action he judged perfect. When he was requested to give a concert for the larger auditorium of the Teatro Massimo "Vincenzo Bellini" in Catania, obviously he could not use the same piano, since the intensity of its sound was not adequate. A grand piano was then hunted for in the whole Catania. One such piano was found in a private residence, and it was carried not without difficulties, onto the stage of the Bellini's. During the final rehearsal, however, Benedetti Michelangeli drew himself back, even questioning his own performance: the sound of the grand piano was powerful enough, but its action was not altogether perfect.

Quite ingeniously, Benedetti Michelangeli's favourite tuner in Catania found a solution. He moved the baby grand piano from the Lyceum to the stage of the Bellini's, put it on the side of the grand piano, whose harmonic table he disconnected from the mechanics, so that it was free to resonate. Thus, Benedetti Michelangeli could employ the perfect mechanics of the baby grand piano, though making use of the power of sound of the grand piano.

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