

The Buckeye Backcheck

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Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

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From the Editor...



Doug Brandt poses with the concert pianist Lang Lang after his master class at Capital University on March 31.

As you folks peruse this issue of The Buckeye Backcheck, you may notice that there are no meeting minutes. There is good reason for this- there was no meeting last month. Impending chaotic weather and a related cancellation by the keynote speaker led to this unfortunate occurrence. Rest assured that our next meeting will be held at the home of Kim and Bud Hoessly at 3411 Clearview Ave. We have Chapter elections, and we have information to disperse to our National delegate, Chris Altenburg. Barring weather that would make a storm chaser dive for a ditch with a rosary clenched firmly in hand, we will have our meeting.

This issue of The Buckeye Backcheck will most likely be my last as editor, for I am ready to pass the mantel on to that individual who would sacrifice hours of personal freedom to put it together every month. I have enjoyed my tenure, and I have been gratified by my participation

From the Arts Journal...

VIOLISTS ARE ALWAYS BETTER NAMED LATER "The world of classical music was in turmoil this morning when officials of the Professional Orchestra League revealed that seven principal players of the New York Philharmonic had tested positive for steroids and would receive automatic life suspensions from the league." In other surprising industry news, the principal clarinetist of the Cleveland Orchestra has been demoted to the minor leagues, and San Francisco has traded its concertmaster to St. Louis for "its entire flute section and a violist to be named later." Broken Newz. 06/02/04

ADAMS WINS INAUGURAL NORTHWESTERN PRIZE "The Pulitzer Prize-winning American composer John Adams is the first recipient of Northwestern University's Michael Ludwig Nemmers Prize in Musical Composition. The biennial award carries a cash award of \$100,000 and honors living composers of widely recognized achievement. It is one of the largest in classical music." Chicago Tribune 06/02/04

THE RING TONE CHARTS A new music chart will track the popularity of phone ring tones. An estimated £70m of ringtones were sold in 2003 - up from £40m in 2002. The fortnightly chart will count down the 20 most popular tones downloaded onto mobile phones and will be published in Music Week magazine. Most current pop hits are available to buy as mobile phone rings for between £1.50 and £3.50." BBC 06/01/04

BARENBOIM SAYS HE'LL BE DONE IN CHICAGO Daniel Barenboim says he won't appear with the Chicago Symphony again as guest conductor after his contract runs out in 2005-2006. He has said he "disliked guest conducting, preferring to work with orchestras on a longer-term basis." Chicago Sun- Times 06/01/04

PULITZER MUSIC CHANGES DEBATED Changes in the criteria for the Pulitzer Prize for music to broaden it are provoking controversy. Defenders say: "The board has been concerned for many years that the full range of excellence in American music was not somehow getting through the process in such a way that it could be properly and appropriately considered. The changes in the wording are intended to make sure that the full range of excellence can be considered. The prize should not be reserved essentially for music that comes out of the European classical tradition." Boston Globe 06/01/04

NY PHIL TESTS HANDHELD CONCERT PDA The New York Philharmonic tests a new handheld device that beams information to audience members while the orchestra performs. "The device, nicknamed CoCo by its creators, also features program notes and video images, all delivered in real time from a computer backstage. Think of Cliff Notes for the musically challenged." The New York Times 05/29/04

SPLIT SHIFT - LEVINE PREPARES FOR BOSTON James Levine's job at the Metropolitan Opera will change as he heads to Boston. "What is the prognosis now that he is about to take over the music directorship of the Boston Symphony Orchestra? His title at the Met is being notched down from artistic director to music director, an acknowledgment that he will be away in Boston too much (12 weeks of concerts in addition to tours) to maintain the involvement he has had at the Met for more than 30 years. At the least, he will be less present to press for his vision with the executive committee of the board." The New York Times 05/30/04

A CALL FOR ELITISM Classical music's audience needs to get younger, and fast, writes John Bennett, and getting the educated youth into the concert hall will require a controversial tactic. "Classical music has never been, nor should it be, a mass culture staple, but that doesn't mean its audience has to be doddering. High art has always been created to be enjoyed by those who are educated to appreciate it... So if the classical music establishment wants to lure young listeners, the real task is to reassert the absolute value of the Western art music tradition. In other words,

classical music leaders must challenge today's entrenched post-counterculture relativism that sees a Schubert symphony as the equivalent of the latest White Stripes album." Boston Globe 05/27/04

CLASSICAL SALESMANSHIP & THE CURSE OF BEAUTY The classical music world has always liked to consider itself above such plebeian niceties as marketing or salesmanship. Still, artists like Lara St. John, who appeared on her first album cover wearing nothing but a violin held across her bare chest, force everyone to confront the fact that sex and physical beauty sell albums, whether you're hawking Bach or rock. But for St. John, her lithe and alluring frame has been a double-edged sword. Yes, it got her noticed, but classical snobs have a habit of dumping everything that looks pretty into the much-derided "crossover" bin, and for St. John, a serious artist who plays serious music, that creates a distressing image gap. The New York Times 05/27/04

PAVAROTTI: 1.5 BILLION IN THE AUDIENCE - TOP THAT! Lucian Pavarotti on tenors singing pop music: "Some say the word 'pop' is derogatory and means 'not important' - I do not accept that. If the word 'classical' is the word to mean 'boring', I do not accept that either. There is good and bad music. With one Three Tenors concert, we sang to one-and-a-half billion people. I don't think Caruso sang to more than 100,000 people in his entire career." The Guardian (UK) 05/27/04

TERFEL WINS CLASSICAL BIT PRIZE "Welsh bass baritone Bryn Terfel won the prizes for best album and male artist at this year's Classical Brit awards. Italian opera star Cecilia Bartoli was named best female artist at the event, held at London's Royal Albert Hall. British conductor Sir Simon Rattle won orchestral album of the year for his recording of Beethoven's Symphonies with the Vienna Philharmonic." BBC 05/26/04

From Other Newsletters...

*The first selection comes from **Good Vibrations**, the Newsletter of the Rhode Island Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild.*

By Pat Selemon, RPT

Don Mannino, Director of Technical Education of Kawai, certainly made our drive to the meeting worthwhile. We began with a little history on the father and son and from there delved into the R&D laboratory where in the anechoic chamber over 600 EX concert grands have been tested with only one change being made and analyzed on each piano. His high speed photography (14,000 frames per second) allowed us to see the stress the action is under as played. The shank bends, the hammer bobs, the jack flutters, and the string ripples considerably. The energy of the string is quite visible with an upward movement at the agraffe which is why strings so often break at the agraffe. And the energy is thrown back and forth like a wave between the agraffe and the bridge.

Their new action is called the Millennium III and features a carbon fiber ABS wippen which is lighter and allows faster repetition and a lighter feel.

One highpoint in technical example was when Don pulled an action after finding two notes evenly voiced and increased the drop on one. We found the volume of that note increased, causing a perceptible difference between the two notes. His point being drop is important in proper tone production and his brochure recommends the hammer falls about 1mm below letoff. We might all gain a greater respect for the EZO spruce soundboard in the Shigeru pianos as Don says it takes 100 years to harvest a spruce tree. Then add 5 years minimum air dried before kiln curing. Shigeru Piano Company is now making about 300 pianos a year. Thank you, Don, for taking the time to share information with us.

*Next is a technical tip from the April issue of **The Nova Soundboard**, official publication of the Northern Virginia Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild.*

In some newer grand pianos, the damper pedal hangs up when the soft pedal is down, for no apparent reason. The most common explanation is that someone at the factory failed to provide sufficient clearance between the front-to-back wooden lever that the damper pedal rod rides and the side-to-side metal bar that the soft pedal's rod activates. When the soft pedal is down, the wooden lever will catch on the metal bar, and the damper pedal cannot return to its starting position. All hope of proper damping is lost, because the dampers are unable to drop back to the strings. The solution is to sand wood off the front edge of the wooden lever, the part that lever nearest the player. (The Editor is indebted to fellow chapter member Steve George, RPT, for providing this vital information that I can now make available to the whole chapter. Thanks very much, Steve!.... Andrew C. Margrave)

*The following technical tip also comes from **The Nova Soundboard**. This is from the May issue of that fine publication.*

As well as presenting a magnificent session on agraffes at our April 21 meeting, Washington, DC Chapter RPT Larry Bowen also gave us a great tip about settling strings while tuning. Larry's rule, borne of vast experience and much skill and common sense, is never to pound away on a note until the string is above the final goal pitch. If the speaking length is still below the destination pitch, there will be more tension on the back end of the string, beyond the bridge, than on the speaking length, and this added tension will pull the speaking length down when one pounds the note in. If the speaking length is above the desired pitch, the back end of the string will have less tension on it than the speaking length will, and the pounding will bring the back end tension up to the level of the speaking length tension, producing the desired and required equalization of tension throughout the entire length of the string. Thank you, Larry, for sharing that remarkable insight on string settling with us.

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Doug Brandt, Editor

1259-A Lake Shore Drive

Columbus, Ohio 43204

dougbrandt@hotmail.com

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