

The Buckeye Backcheck

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Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

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President's Message

Now that the seasonal rush is over, I guess it is time to settle in for the rest of winter here in the Ohio Valley. February is the short month but seems to drag on for well beyond its days. I would like to spend the whole month in the shop but alas, tunings still take me out in the cold.

I might suggest that this is the month to plan some of those “full service” jobs. Schedule some extra time so you may turn that crestfallen instrument into something that will please the owner and yourself. You know the pianos I am speaking of, and there is any number in your clientele. The vertical that need a good cleaning and voicing and some touch-up regulation, or that high quality grand that has lost its edge. A good candidate is one of the imports that never really got all the attention it needed at the factory or store.

While speaking with one of our colleagues I mentioned that, “all the lower priced import pianos in homes today would provide a qualified technician job security for some time to come”. Some of these instruments will be quite nice if given some extra attention to the finer details. Level strings, take care of all the tight bushings, level keys, remove some friction, do a good regulation, tuning and some voicing. Your customer will wonder if it’s the same piano they bought, and you are the hero.

Spending several hours or even a day on a piano like this will give you a sense of accomplishment and insight into what the potential of that instrument is. Best of all it saves you from driving all over town in bad weather. (I have also received the most “Thank You” notes from these customers.)

M. Ritchie



Holiday gathering Jan. 8 at The Columbus Fish Market

Chapter News & Notes

Our own Chapter member Ben Wiant will be performing a recital in February. Ben is playing as part of a Lenten Music Series, held Tuesdays during Lent. He will perform an all-Brahms recital at:

First Congregational Church
444 East Broad Street
Tuesday, February 22, 2005, Noon.

February Meeting

Feb. 15, 2005 @ 7:30 PM Graves Pianos & Organ , 5798 Karl Rd

For the February meeting Bryan Hartzler will provide the Chapter technical titled : “*Bringing together pianist and instrument*”

The objective of the program will be to remind us that we are in the relationship business. I am speaking of course of the relationship between a pianist and his or her instrument. In the case of a quality instrument and a good player, our job is to make this interface as seamless as possible. I'll present some of the techniques and philosophies that I use to make this happen for my customers.

Young Chang Files Bankruptcy

The Korean Fair Trade Commission has ordered Samick to sell its controlling stake in Young Chang, even if the move leads to the liquidation of Korea's largest piano maker. The commission ordered the divestment citing a violation of monopoly rules. The filing limits the involvement of Samick in Young Chang's day-to-day operations but apparently will not impact the exclusive agreement for Samick America to market all Young Chang and Kurzweil products in North & South America. This may signal the end of an era for Korean music manufacturing.

From Jon Chandler

In light of recent events, perhaps this is the time for an explanation of terms used in the Backcheck. Past issues of the Backcheck, announcing the Chapter Holiday Dinner, requested that members R.s.v.p. their intentions. As of 4 days prior to the event, only 2-3 members had telephoned whether they would attend, or not attend. With so few responding, a decision was made to change the venue to a local restaurant. Unfortunately, it appears that not everyone is cognizant of the definition for "R.s.v.p.": A few folks showed up for the Dinner, unannounced and unexpected, to an empty building, not aware of the change in venue.

Merriam-Webster defines R.s.v.p. as:

RSVP / abbreviation

Etymology: French *repondez s'il vous plat*

Reply Please

Since 1845, the usage of R.s.v.p. has indicated that a reply is necessary. Although some contemporary invitations may indicate "R.s.v.p. regrets only", this is rare, and in all other cases a reply is necessary... whether, or not, one is attending. It is unfortunate that a few folks missed the party, and hopefully this information will alleviate any feelings of "Hey, where'd everyone go... is it my breath?". No, it was just a difference of understanding and interpretation. In future issues of the Backcheck, the usage of "R.s.v.p." will indicate that a reply is requested.

Tech Tips

Thomas Harr CLEANING PIANO ACTIONS AND KEYS

Glad to see your article on restoring the Weber (nice photos too). Many of these old uprights show such high quality craftsmanship and materials that they well deserve resurrection. Anent your mention of shell-blasting, years back following a suggestion by Harvey Roehl, the Vestal Press publisher of many fine books on pianos and players, I adopted using low-pressure silica blasting for cleaning wooden action parts. Cleans very well, but it will slightly frost plated metal finishes, presumably not a problem with ground shells. Silica ("white sand") is so cheap you don't really have to recover it, screen out the dirt, and reuse it. It must be dry however!

Cleaning up keytops whether recovering them or not is no problem. What to do about the rest of the keystick? Okay, nobody ever sees it, but its nice to make it look as good as the rest, like new. Since the wood is either sugar pine or basswood it is very soft ruling out wire brushing; sanding is too tedious and time consuming; scraping tends to burnish the dirt into the surface. Many (as in many, many) years ago my grandfather obtained a 6" white tampico fiber brush on a 3" wood hub which he used to clean and polish his wooden golf club heads and shafts. Well I don't play so this was of no use to me as such, until I tried it out a really filthy set of keys. Magical! Whisked the dirt and surface oxidation right off leaving the wood almost pristine. And without raising the grain either. All this would be of little use if I happened to have the only such wheel available, and Sears (original source) quit carrying this item 65 years ago. As it turns out this type of wheel is used in the metal finishing industry so it might be obtainable from a supplier to such. Additionally I got an indication recently that Sears may still or again sell it, but I haven't

been able to confirm this for sure. Besides cleaning the wood, if you put a cloth buff on the other spindle of your buffing stand you can polish the capstans at the same time.

The Slotted Hammer Shank

Mark Ritchie

I came across this unusual hammer shank configuration on a circa 1898-1899 Ivers&Pond upright piano from Boston several years ago. The reduced pictures here are not real clear, but in the last couple of octaves the shanks are cut with a slit in the center starting approx. 6-7 mm above the hammer butt and to within 5mm of the hammer molding. The paper arrow is actually going through the shank. You may be able to see the shadow of light in the left photo. I am not aware the exact purpose of this seemingly time consuming effort, but I might take a couple of guesses. It made the shank quite flexible almost like a spring. It undoubtedly lightened the weight. I expect it to have an effect on the tone. I would like to hear any other comments or thoughts anyone might have on this unique shank. I have not see this on any other Ivers&Pond, or any other piano for that matter. I have seen treble shanks that are tapered on the sides, or half flat on the strike side. Makes you wonder about the imagination of these old builders. Amazingly, none of these shanks were broken.



From Thomas Harr

THE SOT-WEED FACTOR

A local customer purchased, at an estate sale in Columbus, a basic-black, no-fall-board WurliTzer spinet (just like Amy Tan's). Grandma's piano had been placed in storage in a garage pending release by probate court and had developed such swollen front-rail key mortices that the keys were frozen tight; some up, some down. Consequently half the dampers were permanently off the strings. So besides not playing at all the poor instrument sounded very distressed. The heirs evidently thought it was dead and sold it cheap. The buyer was in dread of having purchased a dud. Five minute's examination showed that it was in fact, a sweetheart. 1968 vintage so it did not suffer from the dread frozen flange bushings of slightly later date. Clean as a whistle inside except for - what's this? Beneath the keys, and nowhere else, was a dry, crumbly, brown granular substance resembling nothing so much as ground up walnut veneer.

My immediate suspicion was that rodents had been in residence, but no scats, no rust, no gnawing, and the (pencil sharpener shavings?) were confined to just the keybed and nowhere else. While cleaning up the case interior a dim recollection of a note in the Journal many years ago came to mind, the gist of which was that once upon a time the olde tyme tooners used to spread chewing tobacco under the keys to discourage moths! This was evidently pipe tobacco, very desiccated with age.

The piano dried out just fine and the action was freed up. It was nearly up to pitch as well (terrible unisons though). And no moths. [Apologies to John Barth for the title. Amy Tan's first piano is in The Joy Luck Club. The WurliTzer action problem of the early '70's is another article.] - T Harr

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