

# The Buckeye Backcheck

*Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild*

**Volume 32 Issue 3 April 2007**

## **CHAPTER MEETING March 20, 2007**

Thank you to Ben Wiant and Jonathan Chandler for inviting us into their lovely home for the meeting, and also for the refreshments.

Attendance: Chris Altenberg, Mark Ritchie, Bob Grubb, Ben Wiant, Victor Wolfe, Doug Brandt, David Stang.

### **Treasurers Report:**

\$1566.58 in the checking account. \$500. is in the CD account.

### **Old Business:**

Bob Grubb was unanimously approved as our chapter delegate to the PTG National Convention.

Everyone should have received the regional newsletter from Bob Bittner. Note that dues have been raised again.

Also note that \$30 from each member's dues comes back to the local chapter from the national office.

Dues have been received by all members of the Columbus chapter except for Don Carle, who plans to move out of the area.

### **New Business:**

The American Guild of Organists is holding a regional meeting in Columbus, June 25-29. The issue of advertising in their program was raised, but no decision was made to do so.

There will be a number of organ performances in the area during their convention. Be sure to visit their web site for more information.

Respectfully submitted,

David Stang

### **Butts and Flanges:**

#### The Una-Corda Upright

The transposing piano featured in last month's newsletter reminded Ben that there are upright pianos with an una-corda mechanism. He is familiar with an old German maker with this feature. The entire action (not the keyboard) moves to the right similarly to the una-corda movement in a grand.



*David is suspiciously not surprised to learn that he is the Buckeye Backcheck's contest prize winner*

David Stang wins Contest prize.

The contest from February's newsletter was won by David Stang. The swell prize was for the best guess about the purpose of the "mystery key" with two capstans. (David's answer was rather silly in this editor's opinion, so it will not be repeated here.) The prize was a wooden and brass lid prop, similar to the Steinway kind, but much better because it was hand made by Tom Harr from a tree in his back yard. Thanks, Tom. Thanks, Mark.

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### The Brett “Micrometer Upright Grand”

From Doug Brandt: Quick fix for a missing jack.

A Kawai upright at a local school has a wippen in the middle section missing a Jack. (The teacher found the jack, put it on her table, but it disappeared). You have no replacement, and the piano needs to be used within the hour. Doug had this situation and devised the following solution:

1. Remove the broken wippen.
2. Remove the wippen from the highest key with a spoon (this being the highest damped one).
3. Remove wippen #88.
4. Replace the middle-section wippen with the one taken from the highest damped key. Some spoon adjustment may be required.
5. Replace the highest-damped wippen with the one from #88.
6. Take the broken wippen you removed and:
  - a. Give them back in the hopes that they, too, do not disappear.
  - b. Put them in the bottom of the piano in the hopes that the students don't prowl around.
  - c. Take them home and replace the jack - or the entire wippen - without losing any parts or forgetting what piano they came from, then later remember to pack a lunch to sustain you on the 60 mile round trip.
  - d. Throw them away and argue the merits of an 87-key piano with an extra singing note.

When is a Steinway not a Steinway?

A question was raised about music schools and conservatories earning the “Steinway School” designation. In order for an institution to be considered a “Steinway School”, 80% of the pianos they own must be Steinways. The question is, what does Steinway consider a “Steinway” piano? Must it contain absolutely all Steinway parts? The consensus was, probably so.

Doug Brandt happened upon a very unusual piano last month. He has a customer who owns an upright made in 1896 by the Thomas Brett company, which has a unique tuning mechanism. The mechanism consists of a screw pushing against a metal crescent-shaped tension hook which pulls on the string. It's so unique, it led him and Mark Ritchie on an internet search to find Brett's original patent. An excerpt follows:

My invention relates to improvements in string instruments, more especially piano fortes, in which mechanism at the one end of the strings for holding and tightening the latter and the fastenings for such mechanism are wholly of metal, to the end that the tone of the instrument is not materially affected by moist or dry atmosphere. - The member of a respective adjustable fastening for tuning to which the string is attached consists, essentially, of a tension-hook located in such close proximity to the bridge as will prevent material vibration of the string between the bridge and tension-hook, to the end that so-called "overtone" is not produced. The tension hooks are respectively connected with carriers, and the latter are adjusted and held in adjustment in tuning the strings by adjusting-screws, to the end that the tuning is more easily, quickly, and accurately done, and the adjustment held more permanently than with the devices heretofore in use.

The location and action of the tension hooks are such as to draw the strings down upon the bridge, so that the pressure-bar usually employed for this purpose is dispensed with, to the end that the extra strain given to the tuning-pin to overcome the friction on the string in passing the pressure-bar is not required. The bridge next to the tuning mechanism is preferably of bell metal and is elevated on legs, to separate the bridge from the frame of the machine, to the end that with such construction a more brilliant tone is produced. In pianofortes as usually constructed the one end of a string is secured to a metal frame-work by means of so-called "hitching-pins," and heretofore the other end of the string has been wound around a tuning-pin, the latter being

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driven into the wood, and the wood made fast to a part of the metal frame. This wood would swell and shrink with moist and dry atmospheres, the result of which was a change of tone in the instrument with such climatic changes. Such tuning-pins were somewhat difficult to adjust with the nicety required, and these pins, after having been in use a long time, sometimes become loosened in the wood, so that they can not be depended on to hold the tension of the strings.

Some of the language is odd: for instance the word “overtone” for what we would normally describe as sympathetic ringing. He seems a little contradictory, also, by first saying his invention prevents “overtones”, but also produces a “richer” sound. Nevertheless, this is quite a unique and interesting instrument.

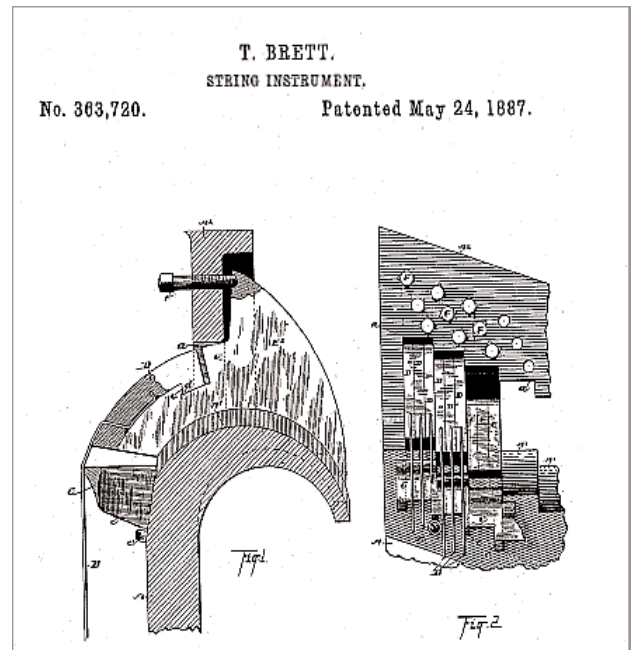


Mark also discovered a number of tuning mechanism patents from the early 20th century, mostly variations of a screw or gear system. The advantage, compared to the familiar coiled pin, is that tuning can be much finer. The disadvantage is that manufacture and repair are more difficult. Replacing a string on the Brett piano would be quite a challenge.

The Brett patent can be found at:

<http://patft.uspto.gov/netahtml/PTO/srchnum.htm>

Then enter the patent number: 363720



*Drawings from original patent. Note how screw adjusts the metal crescent string hook.*



*Photos by Rusty Johnson. Stay tuned to the PTG Columbus web site for more photos and links.*



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## TOOLS (again) by Tom Tuner a.k.a. Tom Harr

### Adjusting key rockers

A question on the UK-Piano Page forum about how to regulate lost-motion on uprights with key rockers prompted this response from "TT": Shown are several tools suitable for getting at awkwardly placed screwheads on rocker-type substitutes for capstans. The one on the bottom is available from suppliers as a "rocker screwdriver". This works, but is not hugely convenient and rather slow and tedious to use. Next up is "OFFSET SCREWDRIVER NO 850 MAUN INDUSTRIES LTD MAKERS ENGLAND" This probably belonged to my great-grandfather and is perhaps 80 or more years old, so don't ask about availability. More recently, General Hardware offers a shorter, much clunkier-looking version (middle picture). Both of these have blades set at 90 and 45 degree angles for convenience. Over this are two with blades only at right angles. The ratchet screwdrivers are not as convenient to use for the purpose as one might hope.

In making adjustments with these keep in mind that the wood is old and likely to be brittle. Overzealous tightening can easily break their backs. I have seen pianos with a number of rockers cracked across which renders them hors de combat until repaired, which certainly slows up regulating.

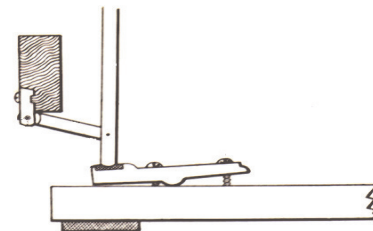
Since you will ordinarily be taking up excess lost-motion, first loosen the back screw sufficiently to allow the high screw to be turned down enough to raise the wippen and jack to the proper point. Then tighten the first just enough to maintain the setting without trying to bury the fulcrum in the key. Doing this on square piano actions is an especially fiddling exercise in patience due to the usual difficulty of access.

### From Kim Hoessly: Mystery Miniature

I received an inquiry regarding a piano belonging to a non-music department staff person. Anybody recognize this type of piano? Please let me know if you do.



The key rocker and tools to deal with them.



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### FROM THE ARTS JOURNAL:

#### Is It Live ... or Yamaha? Channeling Glenn Gould

By Edward Rothstein

*The New York Times* March 12, 2007

Last September in Toronto, Zenph Studios gave a public “reperformance” of Glenn Gould’s *Goldberg Variations* on a specially prepared Yamaha Disklavier. Zenph’s *Goldbergs* inspired a standing ovation from the audience members, many of whom knew Gould and some of whom had heard him play live. The press reports glowed.

Then one day last week Zenph brought a press demonstration of its *Goldbergs* to Yamaha’s New York piano studios, playing portions of the work both on the Disklavier and from its recording, due to be released at the end of May on Sony BMG Masterworks.

Before the demonstration I returned to the 1955 recording. The recording is skittish, illuminating, thrilling and extraordinarily physical: the playing seeps into muscles as well as ears; every phrase exerts the pressure and play of dance.

John Q. Walker, Zenph’s president, knows this as well. He is a brilliant software engineer and a musician who speaks of his enterprise with impassioned fervor. Last week, when he started the Yamaha instrument playing his encodings of Gould, something thrilling really did take place. The piano produced sounds that were indisputably human and unmistakably Gouldian. The playing could not have come from any other pianist.

Bizarre. But am I experiencing something in reverse, treating sonic antiquity with reverence and not recognizing musical similarities? We all learn languages of listening, ways of interpreting reproductions, imagining full-size orchestras emerging from clock radios, ignoring hisses or distortions, compensating for flaws.

Does the new instrumentation seem less convincing because it disrupts the old familiar language of listening? I don’t think so. In Zenph’s recording, the music’s

tensile line really is loosened. I admire what I hear and might not even realize what was missing without comparing, but I am not intoxicated with Gould’s exuberance or infected with his ecstatic amazement. The music is the same, yet not the same.

The process is mind-bogglingly complex. And at every moment there are also human decisions — adjustments of the piano, musical alterations. Perhaps over time both human practice and technological possibilities will evolve further, leaving fewer distinctions. A recording by Art Tatum is due next from Zenph, along with other recordings from Sony BMG Masterworks’ rich archives.

But why all this effort? (Five man-months for a “reperformance,” as Mr. Walker explained.) Partly perhaps because contemporary sound is considered preferable and marketable. Partly because the great recordings of the past are passing into the public domain.

But is the result really musically superior? It could only be that if there were absolutely nothing lost and every difference were an improvement; neither is the case. This is a disappointment then, though one that is exhilarating in its enterprise and promise.

The disappointment is also a relief. For had Zenph succeeded, there would have been a severe price. Had that really been Gould’s sound coming from the piano, it would have dealt a severe blow indeed to an ancient prejudice: that music, in all its complexity, is beyond the reach of the merely technical, and that it belongs, in creation and interpretation, to humanity’s ever-shrinking domain.

*Read the complete article at:*

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/12/arts/music/12conn.html?pagewanted=1&ei=507>

*Visit Zenph Studios at [www.zenph.com](http://www.zenph.com)*



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[www.ptgcolumbus.org](http://www.ptgcolumbus.org)

## Upcoming Events

### Chapter Meeting

Tuesday April 17, 2007

Location TBA. - Check the web site!

### Mid-Atlantic Regional Conference

April 19-22, 2007 King-of-Prussia, PA

[www.ptgmarc.org](http://www.ptgmarc.org)

### PTG 50th Anniversary Convention

June 20-24 2007, Kansas City



### American Guild of Organists Regional Convention

June 25-29 2007

There will be concerts on some of the great organs in the Columbus area, including one at First Congregational Church featuring their Beckerath and Kimball organs. [www.conferencesite.org/AGOsched.htm](http://www.conferencesite.org/AGOsched.htm)

**For Sale Steinway "M" # 306267** c. 1941 Mahogany with new duet bench. Rebuilt 1999 with new block and action. Well taken care of, very good condition.

Contact Mark Ritchie for details if interested.

**Starr player piano** free to a good home. It needs to be refurbished. Please e-mail me if you or anyone you know might want this piano. Thanks.

Bonnie Harris

[BonnieHarris@wowway.com](mailto:BonnieHarris@wowway.com)

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