

The Buckeye Backcheck

Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

Volume 39 Issue 3 April 2014



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



In April we take a look at evaluating poor action performance such as heavy touch and difficulty with regulation. I have an action in the workshop as well as a completed action rebuild wherein the capstans were moved and parts chosen with this in mind. Radical improvements can be achieved by moving capstans to the proper location, and pianists can be made ever so happy. It's pretty neat, come and check it out!

teeter totter, teeter totter, a balancing act
key goes down, hammer zooms up, it's out of whack!
measure, think, what to do?
see those fulcrums- move them, dude

It's a miracle! Pianist says Wheeeeeeee!

Bryan Hartzler, RPT

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Chapter Meeting Minutes

March 18, 2014

The meeting was held at North Unitarian Universalist Church in Lewis Center, Ohio

Attendance:

Bryan Hartzler, Ron Kenreich, Chris Burget, Kim Hoessly, Doug Meszaros, Mark Ritchie, guest Ben Peters, and Maria Pollock, CERVP.

Treasurer's Report:

The Chapter has \$2941.05 in checking.

Old Business:

A budget for future post-holiday dinners was discussed. This would cover, or contribute to, the cost of any musical entertainment and tip for the dinner. The amount agreed to was \$450.

New Business:

Ken Foresee is a new member of the Chapter. Welcome! There was brief discussion of the new government regulatory proposals concerning the trade of ivory. Mark Ritchie had sent all Chapter Members a letter from the American Institute Of Organ Builders (AIO) regarding the subject and its potential impact on our industry. No action was voted upon to offer an official response from the Chapter, but it was mentioned to Maria Pollock, CERVP, that perhaps the matter may be addressed by National PTG Leadership. Members were also encouraged to educate any customers that may also be affected by any changes in the regulations.



www.ptgneecso.org

Absolute Miracle



(Reprinted from The New York Post)

As 1646 Park Ave. exploded in fiery pieces, Colin Patterson found himself safe in a cloud of flying pianos.

“I was watching TV and there was a massive explosion, like a sonic boom from a jet, and then the whole building was on me,” remembered Patterson, a piano technician who lives behind the Absolute Piano store on the building’s ground floor.

“The pianos flew in the air — pianos were all around me,” he said.

“They were literally on their side. I was stuck in some miraculous cocoon” of pianos, he said of the massive wood and steel instruments that fell benignly around his body — shielding him from the weight of five stories worth of debris.

Patterson would crawl relatively unharmed from the wreckage, his face black with dust. But other witnesses to the chaos and carnage at 116th and Park Avenue had more chilling tales to tell.

For more go to: <http://goo.gl/cv3qSc>

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Maria Pollock, Regional Vice-President

The presentation for the March meeting was given by newly elected Central East Regional Vice-President, Maria Pollock, RPT, and the topic was "45 Ways To Make Your Business More Successful".

She started off by giving us some background and personal history, followed by an explanation of some of her duties and the hierarchical structure of the PTG as an organization. She grew up in Heroldstatt, Germany, where her father was a dairy farmer. Her interest in the piano started early when, taking lessons as a child, she would eagerly wait her turn to practice on the family's birdcage piano after other siblings were done. At the age of thirteen she became the village church organist and later went on to get a degree in music education. Eventually, she moved to Chicago, married and started a family. She had also apprenticed as a tuner with Steven Wilson who got her started in in-home piano service. She later joined the Chicago PTG and was mentored by the likes of Virgil Smith, James Fullmer, and Ben Gac, among others. She said that many people helped her to pass the RPT exams and they freely gave their time. So, to give back, so to speak, she immediately sought out how to take part in leadership and get on the PTG Committee. She seems genuinely passionate, exuberant even, in her desire to educate others, preserve this craft, and pass on the collective knowledge that has been discovered thus far. She then went on and offered 45 suggestions that helped to improve her piano service business and welcomed anyone to add their own at any point. She would rather have a dialogue than just give a lecture.

First, she asked us, "What does it mean to have a successful business?" Some answers were: money; busy schedule; large clientele; personal satisfaction; and increased skill and knowledge. Success may be defined differently for different people at various stages of their careers. Each of us may want slightly different things. Some people only want part-time work, while others may want a large-scale rebuilding shop with multiple employees. Others want to specialize in certain services.

She then went on to offer four areas for growth and improvement that all her tips could be grouped under. They included: advertising and marketing; interpersonal skills; professional development; and general business practices. Following are just a few suggestions from each category.

For marketing, there were the basics like business cards, brochures, magnets, pens, etc.... And websites, too. Web presence can also be boosted by all the various social media, Link'd In, and Pianoworld, as well as using keywords for search engines in subject header codes for websites. Whatever avenues are pursued it is important to set goals for marketing and contact-building. "A goal without a plan is just a dream."

Interpersonal skills often boil down to just being personable. For some, this is easy, and for others, not so much. Someone had told her to smile when talking on the phone to clients, as if face-to-face. It may do wonders to lift one's own spirits and it may come through over the phone. When a customer opens their door it is important to smile. That is the first thing they see. Try to find something in the home to compliment, or mention a similar interest if one is perceived. Relating to someone on another level beyond the business at hand creates another connection. Don't force or feign interest, though. "Try to give a great experience with your product or service." Also, do what you can to remember how to correctly say a client's name. Write it out phonetically if needed. She also suggests being a part of the local music community. Go to performances and shows, get to know musicians and, if possible, support them by seeing them perform. Performing musicians are a community unto themselves, in that they often buy, sell and trade instruments, gear and services amongst each other and word of mouth travels fast. Ron Kenreich also suggested that, on leaving voicemails, one should clearly state a return phone number near the beginning, and end, of the message, so one doesn't have to replay and listen to an entire voicemail over and over again to get contact information.

Developing professional skills should be an area of constant improvement. "There is always something new to learn!" This is a life-long learning endeavor. Study for, and try to pass, the RPT exams. She even suggested that some who have passed them in the past may consider retaking them. She also encourages people to volunteer to teach a class or give a technical presentation because through teaching



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(Maria Pollock continued...)

one also learns. Ron also added having daily goals, or intentions, no matter how small. Choose a task or problem and complete or solve it. Daily goals may be things like spending a little time each day tuning with your other hand, or practicing regulation techniques "blind" or by feel only. Trying out different interval tests or temperaments. String splicing or rebushing flanges. Try that clever tool modification you saw in the Journal. Or just get caught up on reading the Journal! What is that one thing, task, or repair that is just outside of your comfort zone? What can be done today to help change that? It is important to challenge ourselves from time to time, at least. Keep things fresh!

When it came to business practices this is where she probably offered the largest number of individual items, many being more direct and to the point like, be on time, hire an accountant/tax agent, stay on top of business paperwork, etc. "Start planning retirement yesterday!" She related a story where Virgil Smith told her this very thing, even before he showed her how to tune a single note.

She also covered topics like advance scheduling, using calendar apps and organizing software, like PianoCal, that not only organize clientele information but can also group appointments together based on geography and proximity to one another. We also need to be clear and confident when answering questions and have a clear idea of the services we are going to offer and those we are going to outsource. Do you offer full-service appointments in day, or half-day, blocks? This may include cleaning, tuning, voicing, regulating and Damp-Chaser servicing. Also discussed were increasing fees and fuel surcharges for longer-distance appointments. Her fees increase annually and her customers know it, and she hasn't really lost any. Economic realities vary greatly from region to region and you have to be in tune with that, but you also have to be fair to yourself. Most customers in many areas may even expect modest increases. Guaranteeing work was also discussed. There are limits, of course. One probably shouldn't guarantee total stability after a large pitch-raise on a rarely serviced ninety year old upright. But, she posited, that if a key is sticking a day or so after a tuning for a regular client then she'll go and look at it. If it's easily fixed she's not going to charge them. And, if it came to it in some instances, she may even pay another technician to fix a problem that she could not. Mark Ritchie interjected with "I can guarantee my work and tunings... but I can't guarantee your piano!"

A few other things she suggested were opening up clients' minds to other services. This may mean referring or giving work to someone else when a client was too far away, or you're too busy, or don't know a certain procedure. Maybe a client needs some specialized work and you don't have the equipment and know someone who can better serve them. It doesn't have to mean that "you're no good" at your job. It means that you know what is good for the client and their piano and you have the information and know who to call to get the job done right. You are their connection to the piano technician community at large, and they can feel comfortable going through you to have it arranged to be done. Also, documenting shop work and repairs with before and after photos, videos and sample action models is useful for demonstrating expertise and opening up clients' minds to other services.

Many thanks to Maria for sharing her insights, and listening to some of ours as well.

The Wrong Way To Protect Elephants

by
Godfrey Harris and Daniel Stiles

(Excerpts reprinted from the NY Times Opinion Page)

The year was 1862. Abraham Lincoln was in the White House. "Taps" was first sounded as a lights-out bugle call. And Steinway & Sons was building its first upright pianos in New York....

...The keys on those pianos were all fashioned from the ivory of African elephants. And that is why one of these uprights, the oldest one known to survive, in fact, is stuck in Japan.



Matt Chase

...The director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service recently issued an order prohibiting the commercial importation of all African elephant ivory into the United States... The Obama administration is also planning to implement additional rules that will prohibit, with narrow exceptions, both the export of African elephant ivory and its unfettered trade within the United States... In short, these new rules proposed by the Fish and Wildlife Service may well end up doing more harm than good to the African elephant...

...The story of the Steinway underscores the complexity, rigidity and absurdity of these rules. The piano was salvaged years ago by Ben Treuhaft, a professional piano technician. When his wife took an academic job in Japan, he shipped the piano along with their other household possessions to Tokyo. They moved to Scotland after the Fukushima nuclear accident three years ago, leaving the piano in storage in Japan to be shipped later. Now Mr. Treuhaft is ready to return the piano to the United States and place it in the hands of a friend who planned to display it at her piano shop.

But the piano remains in Japan. It lacks the paperwork necessary to clear customs in the United States because Mr. Treuhaft failed, when he shipped the piano abroad, to obtain the required export permit identifying the ivory keys and the piano's provenance. In the past, the government might have exercised some discretion over Mr. Treuhaft's oversight. But no more. Moreover, to meet the personal-use exception for an import, the piano would have to be shipped back as part of a household move, and he wants to send it to a friend.... So the piano that Steinway says is its oldest known upright is stuck in Japan.

Of course, Mr. Treuhaft is not the only one who is or will be hurt or inconvenienced by this draconian order... Musicians already complain of a burdensome process and monthslong delays in securing permits to take their instruments containing ivory abroad....

Leaving Mr. Treuhaft's piano in Japan will not save African elephants. But it will further endanger them and diminish the lives of those who recognize and value the role of ivory in history and culture.

For the full opinion piece go to: <http://goo.gl/yQFAAa>



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www.ptgcolumbus.org

Practice your scales lately?



<http://www.thefuntheory.com/piano-staircase>

Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

President Bryan Hartzler, RPT
Vice-President John Schmoll, RPT
Treasurer Ron Kenreich
Secretary Christopher Burget

*Contributions and pictures for
the Buckeye Backcheck and the
web page are always welcome,
(even if they are only
peripherally related to pianos)!
- Chris Burget*

Upcoming Events Chapter Meeting

Tuesday, April 15, 2014,
7:30 pm

Bryan Hartzler's Shop

1179 S. Galena Rd.

Galena, OH 43021

740-972-9466

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www.hartzlerpianos.com

Topic: Changing action
leverage by moving
capstans and other means.

Map Link:

<http://goo.gl/maps/n0WvZ>

This newsletter was created using the open-source program Scribus running on the Linux Mint operating system.

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Comments, articles, and advertising requests may be sent to the editor:

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