

The Buckeye Backcheck

Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild
Volume 35 Issue 9 December 2010



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Hello everyone. I hope this newsletter finds you busy with a full tuning schedule!

Sorry to miss you at the November meeting. I had a great time in New York at the Steinway seminar. I'm working hard to get Kent Webb to visit us in the spring and give a Steinway technical at a meeting. Though I understand that I was elected in absentia to present that technical myself... I learned a lot of great techniques and have a long list of new tools I want, just in time for my Christmas list! This seminar was different from most classes I have attended over the years in many ways. For one, there were only two of us attending so I had a lot of one on one instruction. That was a luxury! What I really enjoyed was that we would discuss a technique and then immediately try it ourselves. So many times I've taken reams of notes in a class and learned new methods. But then I didn't get to try them out until I was back at work. Then I would have questions that my notes didn't answer. This seminar was great because we took a couple of Steinway B's right off the factory line and tried everything we were learning right there. Then when I had questions or a problem, the instructor was right there to answer and demonstrate. Kent is a great teacher and I highly recommend this series of seminars to everyone. Contact me if you would like information on how to apply. They are booked up a year or two in advance so you'll want to get your name in right away. I'll be attending the damper and voicing classes in 2012. Also, the big seminar at Oberlin still has openings for this coming summer. I was there a couple of years back and really enjoyed it.

I want to wish each of you the very best during this holiday season. Maybe we all will find a new tool or two under the tree this year!

Chris

PTG COLUMBUS NEW YEAR DINNER

SAT. JAN. 15 6 PM

**BEL LAGO BANQUET ROOM
170 N. SUNBURY RD.**

**PLEASE RSVP TO MARK
614-855-7704**

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Chapter Meeting Minutes November 16, 2010

by Chris Burget, Secretary

The meeting was held at The Piano Warehouse.

Attendance: Mark Ritchie, Ron Kenreich, Chris Burget, Evan Bingham, Bob Grubb, Kim Hoessly, Michael O'Neill, Ben Wiant and host Dave MacDonald, owner of The Piano Warehouse.

Old Business:

More details have been worked out for the proposed Fortepiano Event. Dr. Andrew Willis from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro will be the presenter and will bring with him two fortepianos; one a reproduction E style, and the other a Florentine style fortepiano. Target dates for the event are Friday and Saturday October 14-15, 2011 and plans are being made to have the event at The Church Of The Master by Otterbein University. It was also projected that expenses for the event may reach approximately \$2,500 and various methods of recouping the costs were discussed. No final decisions were made but suggestions included charging fees to those attending the masterclass (for music majors) and/or technicals (piano technicians) or seeing what the Chapter may be able to get from the Home Office in the way of Grant Moneys. Also discussed was the possibility of opening the masterclass portion to students outside of Otterbein University. Logistical and technical issues concerning an overhead viewing system for the technical portion of the event still need to be worked out as well.

Mike O'Neill will be taking over Chapter Librarian duties from Ben Wiant.

National PTG and Chapter dues for 2011 are due by December 31, 2010 and are now payable online in the Members Area of the PTG home page.

New Business:

In place of a January meeting the chapter will once again have a post holiday dinner. Mark Ritchie has placed a tentative reservation at Bel-Lago Waterfront Bistro in Westerville on Saturday January 15, 2011 at 6:00 pm. The address is 170 N Sunbury Rd.

Chris Purdy has once again shown his popularity in absentia. It was proposed, and voted for, that he should present the April technical, seeing that he now

has received instruction from the Steinway program in New York.

Kim Hoessly said there is a Howard upright or console that is free for the taking if any one wants it. The contact's name is Neal at (614) 975-8856. The piano is located at an assisted living facility where he works.

Mark Ritchie was also contacted about a Melville Clark upright owned by Jill Pierson in Powell. She can be reached at: <pierson.jill@gmail.com>

Butts & Flanges:

Mark Ritchie showed us a tool of his which many may find useful: the Variable Speed Oscillating Multifunction Power Tool made by Chicago Electric Power Tools. Here is a link:

<<http://www.harborfreight.com/variable-speed-multifunction-power-tool-67537.html>>

Tools similar to this are the Fein MultiMaster, and one made by Dremmel. There are also single speed versions available as well. Mark recommended buying a narrow offset wood cutting blade that is not included with this kit. He demonstrated how he uses the tool to trim grand hammer shanks after hanging the hammers. First, clamp the shanks and use the tool with the blade to trim them, then replace the blade with one of the triangular sanding pads to sand the shanks flush with the hammer molding. It seemed to do the job in pretty short order and, in Mark's hands at least, yielded fine results. It was rather quick and it looked like it didn't take much to sand the shanks flush. The sanding pads are also mountable at different angles and are useful for sanding in awkward or tight areas like corners and soundboards near bridges and aprons.



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Butts & Flanges cont'd

Kim Hoessly came across an old Weber upright player with the player mechanism removed that had a rather odd fallboard. It was hinged along its whole length and a thin front came down partially over the keys revealing a recessed area in the remaining upright portion of the fallboard.

It seems unlikely that it was a storage area for sheet music or anything else, so it was suggested that it may be the equivalent of a handle to hold onto while pumping a foot treadle for the player mechanism. Some players had handles for aiding in leverage while pumping, but this design seems to be a bit of a departure from the typical handle. If anyone knows of another purpose, let us know.

Technical Presentation: Hammer Shaping

Kim Hoessly and Evan Bingham both shared their approaches to hammer shaping and here is a brief synopsis of what they had to offer.

Why file? So that the proper geometry of the hammer and its shifting of tensions throughout is restored, providing an adequate strike point and proper rebound from the strings. Tonality is improved because when a hammer is flattened from years of playing it tends to excite the string erratically, creating harsher overtones and irregular string nodes when vibrating. This causes some partials to be overly dominant and this irregular vibration also leads to string breakage.

Many other questions come into play such as: What is the customer's budget? Do the work in the customer's home, or back at the shop? Just a touch up filing on a few hammers? Or the whole set followed by regulation? Etc....

Before filing one should inspect the action and hammers for any problems that show up in string groove patterns. Bad spacing, twisting shanks or loose/broken parts must be fixed or corrected. Gouged out hammers may likely mean loose center pinning. One should also check a suspect hammer by pushing it toward the string with a fingernail, using the barest amount of pressure possible, and see if the hammer correctly mates to it's strings or incorrectly slides/shifts as the grooves contact the strings.

Tools would include items such as: standard sanding paddles/sticks, small paddles (2" or so) for verticals, Mother Goose "Shoe Shine" paddles, backed sand paper of various grits (60 to 500), various brass bristle brushes, voicing blocks, an action support/cradle, level, hammer supports/gang clamps, vacuum, and latex gloves and eye protection and a surgical type mask may help as well. There are also various other items on the market like sanding jigs that allow partial sanding of hammers along one or two grooves.



In the treble one can start off by gang filing groups of hammers, while tenor and bass hammers need to be done individually on account of their bias. When filing a single hammer, one should clasp the shank between two fingers with the thumb on the hammer tail to prevent damage to center pins. The main thing to consider is removing layers of felt with consistency keeping in mind the original shape of the hammer. Work from the base of the hammer to just near the striking point. One can use short quick upward strokes or a long continuous one while maintaining a consistent motion and force. Do not put too much pressure on the hammer. Let the grit do the work. Care must also be taken to keep the paddle square to the sides of the hammer. Gradually increase the grit when doing multiple passes and finish off and clean the hammers with 300 to 600 grit paper.

Other tips included: removing the stack (grands) so filings wouldn't get in the keys and their bushings; using a brass brush to "quick file" bright hammers to bring the tone down a bit; and try to resist rubbing your eyes with your fingers!! Keep tissue paper or a handkerchief handy, you DO NOT want 60+ year old hammer felt filings getting in your eyes, or lungs for that matter.

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HAMMER SHAPING

by Evan Bingham, RPT

In an ideal world, every Mrs. Jones with a 1945 Steinway M will be happily willing to pay for a complete rebuild. They will insist on all new parts, including a new soundboard with a shiny decal, restringing, new hammers/wippens/keytops, and most importantly the satisfaction of knowing that their piano is as close to its original state as humanly possible.

In the real world people have bills. Having said that, there are more affordable ways for a customer to better their piano if a complete rebuild is not a viable option. One suggestive sale is the improvement of the look and tone of the hammers by filing.

For demonstration purposes, let's take a look at a recent customer's Steinway. It is a model example of a piano that has had little outside interference in its life cycle. Certainly there are plenty of things that can be done to it to bring it to its full potential. A prioritization of important needs comes into play in how many hours you can put into working on the piano against how many hours of work a customer is willing to pay for. Since this particular piano did not have any debilitating mechanical problems I decided to focus on improving the overall tone of the piano through hammer shaping. This is the process I go by.

1. Take the action back to your shop. Hammer filing can be a messy undertaking. Unless you're prepared to be in a customer's home for a few hours in an uncomfortable position with Scruffy barking in your ear, I suggest working in an environment where you can maintain a higher level of quality control.

2. Remove the action stack. I do this not only to keep wool fibers from getting in the keys and bushings, but also to examine any quick repairs that may be needed (loose action stack screws are common) and give myself more room to work.

3. File. With the chosen hammer(s) on a voicing block, I can stabilize the hammer as much as possible with my recessive hand as I file with my dominant. I use three filing paddles, made by 1'x1½" pieces of door skin. On either side of the surface, various grits of sandpaper have been placed on using contact cement. If three paddles are used for example, I would have grits of 60/100, 140/180, and 220/260.

Remove "layers" of felt with consistency working from the base of the hammer to near the crown. Careful



filing with a paddle with quick upward strokes following the curve of the hammer helps maintain shape. Another method is filing with one long rolling fashion a few times with each grit, drawing the paddle towards you with consistent motion and force. Do not put too much pressure on the hammer. Let the grit do the work. Be careful to keep the paddle square to the profiles of the hammer and use a ruler to ensure all of the hammer tops are level. From about C4 to C8 you can file three hammers at a time. Where the bore angle is offset in the tenor and bass section you'll want to file one hammer at a time to preserve the angle.

After using paddles I use a strip of duct tape with high grit sandpaper (300-500) stuck to it to smooth out the top and remove the string grooves. Here is a before and after of the same hammer.



The goal was to try and replicate its original shape. Sometimes I use the hammer's core as a guide.

4. Clean the action stack and reassemble.

5. Bring action back to your customer's home...some regulation required.

Tips to Consider.

- Try to keep action parts as clean as possible.
- Do not use a Dremel Moto-tool.
- Let the grit do the work instead of forcing the issue.
- Keep your motions consistent from one set of hammers to the next.
- Think of the original shape of the hammer. Use its core as a clue.
- Check for evenness of hammers with a straight edge and correct if necessary.
- Check regulation when placed back in piano.

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FROM THE MEDIA

A customer sent this to me. I don't have any other information about this piano. - Kim

Boardman man mixes music, Internet

By Guy D'astolfo, *The Youngstown Vindicator*

Michael J. Moritz Jr. has spent the last year working with engineers, designers and manufacturers in Europe to create his own line of player grand pianos. Now he is ready to unveil his work.

The Boardman resident and his pianos will be at Southern Park Mall beginning Monday, where he has set up a display in the main concourse. An accomplished musician, Moritz and guest artists will play the piano and demonstrate its features throughout the holiday season.

But what sets them apart is the player function.

The pianos' automation system is integrated with Apple computer products, including the iPod and iPad.

Each piano comes with an iPad preloaded with thousands of piano performances ranging from classical, jazz and seasonal to current hits. The iPad wirelessly controls the piano keys and hammers from anywhere in the house, using iTunes.

"To my knowledge, we are the first to integrate wireless Internet connectivity, as well as the iPad, with a piano," said Moritz.

The pianos are completely Internet-enabled, and users can add new music as desired.

Each piano also wirelessly connects to an Internet piano radio station. A user can simply turn the piano on, and it will literally play itself from the Internet, 24 hours a day.

The pianos also have the ability to record musical performances for playback.

Moritz has been playing the piano professionally since he was 8. He started his own recording studio, Kontinuous Jams, 13 years ago while still a student at Cardinal Mooney High. He also attended Youngstown State University. He has worked in theaters throughout the region as a music director and conductor. He is currently the executive director of Ohio Public Broadcasting.

TUNING INTO THE ZONE

by David Stang

Artists, athletes, and others, have described a feeling of being so immersed in their activity that everything else around seemed to disappear. This feeling has been called being in the "flow" or the "zone".

Experiencing flow has been associated to an increase in happiness. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihali (*Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*) has studied and written about this. He describes two conditions which must exist for "Flow" to be experienced:

1. Have a clear goal and remain focused on it.

2. Have skills that match the difficulty of the task.

I imagine many piano technicians have felt the feeling of being in the "flow" while tuning pianos, because it is easy for those two conditions to exist. The goal is to make the piano sound as in-tune as possible, and most of us have reached the point where our skills match the task. It is a task which requires concentration and skills, yet (usually) isn't maddeningly difficult. Admittedly, some repairs, and some tuning pins, can be real pains. But some instruments can be a joy to tune, especially if you're doing it aurally and immersed in listening.

Sometimes sitting at a piano is the best part of the day because all my problems of life fade away for that hour or two. Peripheral tasks, like driving, phone calls, scheduling, and accounting, can be like a big windstorm of stress. But our main bread-and-butter job, tuning, is the eye of the hurricane where we are alone and purely involved in our art and craft. All the other stuff fades away. Not everyone can say the central task of their profession is the most blissful.

Believe it or not, I was in the "zone" enjoying tuning a Betsy Ross spinet the other day, because it didn't need repairs, and I believe I tuned it just about as well as it could be.

I wish you the happiness of the season, whether it be tuning pianos or being with your family.

Happy Holidays

from

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www.ptgcolumbus.org

Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

President	Chris Purdy, RPT
Vice-President	Mark Ritchie, RPT
Treasurer	Ron Kenreich
Secretary	Christopher Burget
Imm. Past Pres.	Kim Hoessly, RPT

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

- David

Upcoming Events

Saturday, January 15, 2011, 6:00pm

New Year Dinner at Bel Lago
Please R.S.V.P. to Mark Ritchie
614/855-7704 as soon as you can

No Meeting in December.

Technicals planned for 2011:

Wapin Bridge Pins; Wes, Nickel & Gross
Carbon Fiber Actions; Reyburn Cybertuner;
Report from Steinway Seminar

*Many thanks to Chris Burget, Chris Purdy, Evan Bingham,
Mark Ritchie and Kim Hoessly for their contributions!*

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Disclaimer:

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