

The Buckeye Backcheck

Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER



We've all had folks tell us that for some reason or other, they were not happy with the previous technician. Sometimes they even tell us why. I always joke that I especially have to be on my toes because, while they may not remember that "other guy's" name, if they say "that woman who was here", at least in Columbus, they'll know it was me. Although, that may be changing (for some reason our chapter has rarely had more than one

woman at a time), thanks, Alle! The complaint du jour seemed to be "the last guy scolded me about not tuning my piano enough". I heard that that twice recently from new customers. Now, it is our job to educate our clients, as well as service their pianos, but you have to apply some good bedside manner, to borrow from the medical profession, when telling someone they may not have been caring for their piano properly. No one, especially an adult, likes to be scolded. Few of us like to be told what to do or how to do it, particularly if it involves how their money should be spent. Let's face it, many of our customers now spend more every month on their cable or phone bills than they do on their piano, so it's hard to believe it's because of the money. They just don't think it needs to be done and they don't want you telling them what to do. So it's good to let them know if 5 years is too big an interval, but not a good idea to scold them about it, to harass them. They are adults after all and they, like us, do not like to be embarrassed (that may be another reason they don't call back). Try to leave them with a positive feeling about what they have done by finally calling you. It makes for better customer relations. Of course, the irony of me writing this is that I seem to be scolding you all. Not in the least, I assure you. Just gently reminding you that an important feature of good customer relations is to treat others as you would like to be treated. After all, not only do you want them to call you back (at least most of the time you want them to call you back), you want them to actually listen to you and not just tune you out (no pun intended).

Kim Hoessly. RPT

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Announcements

Kim Hoessly is asking if any members have any plastic name badge holders left over from past conventions or what have you, could they bring them to the next meeting. It may be nice to have them as we often have guests and newer members who may not know everyone.

The Cincinnati Chapter is hosting a One Day Tuning Seminar on Saturday, April 18, 2015. The doors will open at 9:00 with coffee and donuts. Class will begin at 9:30 with Dan Levitan giving a class on tuning theory. The class will break for lunch at 12:30. The second session will begin at 1:30 with Lawrence Becker giving a class on the practice of tuning. There will be online registration as well as mail in. The registration fee for the seminar is \$60.00. That will include lunch. The information now, with more coming at a later date, is:

BEN MCKLVEEN MEMORIAL TUNING SEMINAR

Sponsored by the Cincinnati, OH PTG Chapter
Piano Pros Piano Store, West Chester, OH
Contact: Matt Shoemaker, RPT
mshoemaker1@woh.rr.com 937-452-7325

Former Chapter member, Don Carle, has moved back to Ohio and is once again a member of the Chapter. Welcome back Don!

For Sale

1991 Baldwin M



I have a customer who wants to put her 1991 Baldwin M on the market. She didn't have a price in mind yet, but if anyone knows of someone looking for a small grand, they can contact me and I can tell them its condition and pass on their interest to my customer.

- Kim Hoessly

Oberlin Piano Technology Program

I wanted to reach out to all of my friends in the Piano Technicians Guild to share information about the Artist Diploma in Piano Technology being offered at the Oberlin Conservatory.

This two-year, graduate-level program, designed in association with Steinway & Sons, digs deep into a comprehensive range of issues integral to the care and maintenance of modern and

historical pianos, with an overall goal of developing a holistic sense of how pianos work as well as a more complete understanding of the needs of concert pianists - to bridge the gap that so often exists between our two worlds.

Limited to three students per year, the Artist Diploma in Piano Technology is not an introductory look at the art and science of piano technology - it is an intensive, hands-on program intended specifically for experienced technicians.

Many of you know me through your involvement with PTG. In addition to my role as Executive Director of Keyboard Technology here at Oberlin, I am co-director of the C.F. Theodore Steinway Technical Academy and a concert tech at the Aspen Music Festival and School.

Along with my colleagues Robert Murphy and Ken Sloane, I have taught piano tech classes at Oberlin for a number of years, and I serve as director of this Artist Diploma program. In addition to our staff, instruction and mentorship for the program is provided by visiting teachers from the New York Steinway factory and a host of master technicians.

A number of you surely know that Oberlin is unrivaled in its collection of exceptional pianos, boasting an incredible 234 Steinways, both Hamburg and New York models - more than any other locale except for the Steinway factory itself. Oberlin has been an all-Steinway school since 1877 - longer than any other institution in the world - and its relationship with Steinway dates back to the company's founding in 1853.

This is a truly amazing place to study piano technology, and I would encourage you to consider the Artist Diploma program or to pass this information on to colleagues or advanced students you think might make a good fit. The deadline for application is April 15, 2015.

If you'd like to know more, please send me an email or call anytime. Hope to hear from you!

John Cavanaugh
440-935-6699
john.cavanaugh@oberlin.edu



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Piano Tuner Is Known as a Pro, and a Scold

By Corey Kilgannon

(Reprinted from the New York Times)

“Between you and me, a job like this is a pain in the neck,” the piano tuner said, surveying the aging Baldwin spinet before him.

“It’s for little children and grandma,” he said of the piano, before softening and adding, “but it’s an O.K. instrument.”

The tuner, Zinovy Pritsker, arrived at a family’s spacious Upper East Side apartment on Tuesday to get this hand-me-down, used only occasionally by the children, back into playing shape.

For a piano tuned so infrequently, today’s work would go only so far, said Mr. Pritsker, 68, who, in his green wool overcoat and with his thick Russian accent and mustache, looks and sounds like the Soviet Army clarinetist that he once was.

He carried a bulging leather suitcase full of piano tools. He flipped open the top of the piano and began the laborious loosening and tightening of string after string. He consulted an electronic tuning oscilloscope and tightened wavering, discordant pitches into true tones.

The tuning would take two hours, he said, “but if I don’t do a perfect job, I no longer have a job.”

In his 40 years working on pianos, Mr. Pritsker has tuned for some of the greatest jazz and classical pianists. He is affordable, at \$100 for a typical tuning, but he advised that if your piano is crummy or neglected, the tuning might just come with a serious scolding. In these cases, Mr. Pritsker’s temperament can turn much less pleasant than that of the pianos he works on.

For examples, let us turn to Yelp, the business evaluation site. Two of the three reviews for Mr. Pritsker describe his haranguing the customer about their horrendous pianos.

One reviewer wrote that Mr. Pritsker — “my cranky Russian” — had tuned his old piano well.

“But, oh, the abuse!” the reviewer wrote. “The way you’d lambaste me in your broken English.”

Another reviewer described an “hourlong lambasting and barraging of verbal abuse” by Mr. Pritsker and his directive after the job: “Don’t ever call me again to tune a trashy piano!”

Asked about the reviews, Mr. Pritsker stood firm. He recalled one of the pianos — “First of all, it was a piece of garbage” — and explained that playing on a bad piano is an insult to one’s God-given talent.

A customer will neglect a piano and then expect a tuner to show up and, with a magical wave of the tuning lever, transform the thing into a great instrument, he said.

“I’m not a magic man — I’m a technician,” he said. “I always tell it like it is, because I don’t want a bad name.”

Mr. Pritsker, who works for many affluent piano owners on the Upper East Side, said even the wealthy and powerful are not spared his dressing down.

For example, Mr. Pritsker tuned Lauren Bacall’s upright piano for many years and admonished her constantly to



replace it.

“But she liked him, because he wouldn’t take any mess from her,” recalled his son, Gene Pritsker, an accomplished composer who lives in Manhattan.

Discussing his father’s intolerance for inferior pianos, the son laughingly referred to the “Soup Nazi” character from “Seinfeld.”

“Being a perfectionist gets him into trouble sometimes,” he said.

Zinovy Pritsker said he grew up in St. Petersburg, went into the Soviet Army at age 14, as a clarinetist in the military band, and went on to play with a respected opera company.

But he fell in love with the few jazz recordings he could find behind the Iron Curtain, and a scratchy, reel-to-reel bootleg of Charlie Parker made him want to be a New York jazzman.

As a precaution, he learned piano tuning at a large piano refurbishing factory, “so I would not have to drive a cab in New York,” he said.

After moving here in 1978, he played in a big band and tuned pianos. He and his wife, Alexandra, raised their son and daughter in the housing projects of Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn.

Mr. Pritsker now lives in Coney Island, and still helps run a big band of mostly Russian musicians from Brooklyn. He enjoys his Russian vodka and smokes a pack of Marlboros a day.

The couple drive from job to job. Since legal street parking is rare, Ms. Pritsker tends the car while he works.

“But he won’t let me drive,” she said. “What can I do? He’s a perfectionist.”

Ms. Pritsker sat in their car, double parked, on Tuesday, as Mr. Pritsker tuned the Baldwin.

His blunt style comes from his devotion to music, and the art of tuning, he said. There is no room for fudging.

“Ninety percent of piano tuners just do it for the money,” he said. “I’m a musician. I can’t do that.”



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*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, February 17
7:30pm

Solich Piano Columbus
6370 Proprietors Rd. Suite A
Worthington, OH 43085
(614) 888-3441
solichpianocolumbus.com

Map Link:

<https://goo.gl/maps/7ccJY>

Topic: Review of Daniel
Levitan's book **The Craft Of
Piano Tuning**

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

Disclaimer:

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

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