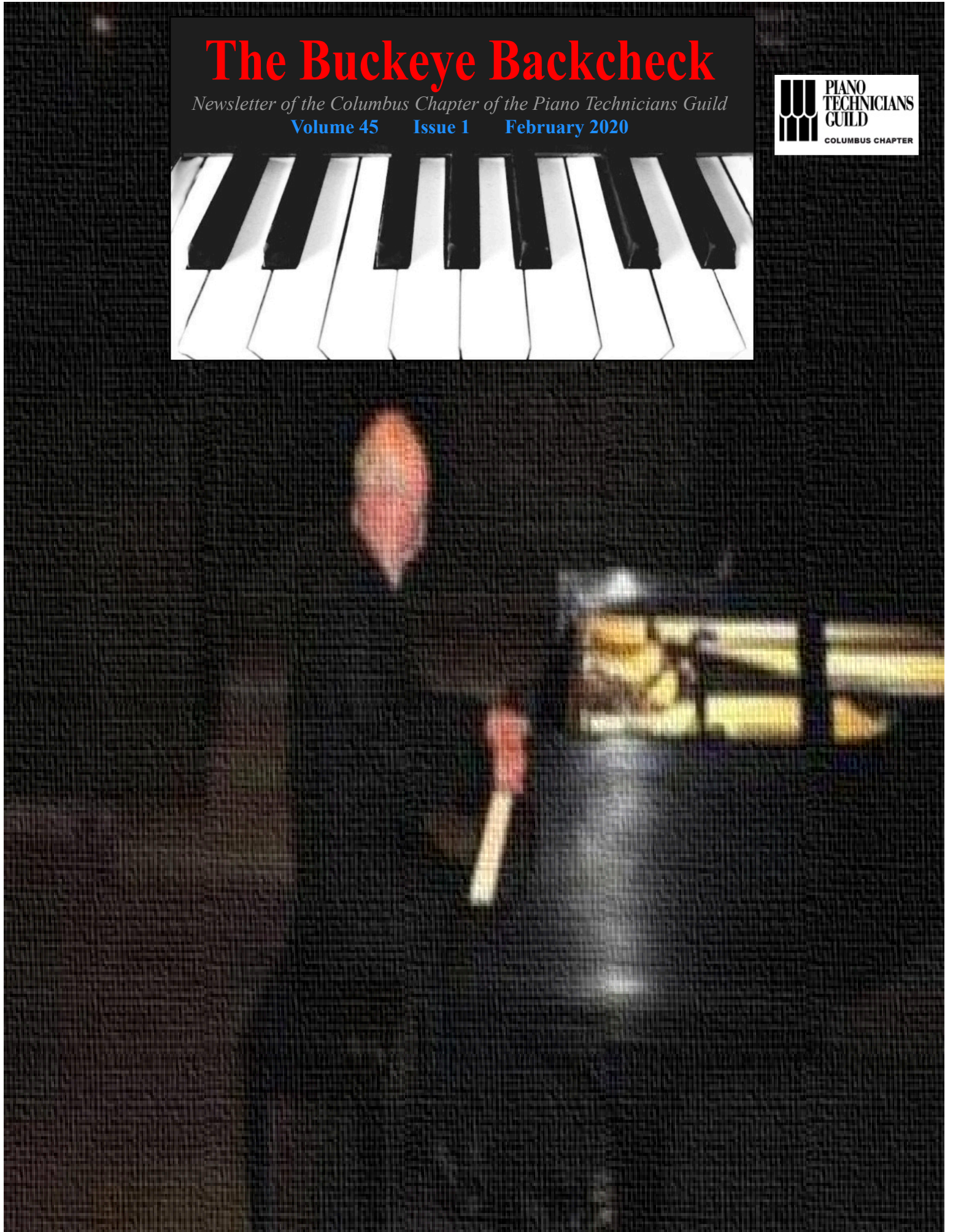


The Buckeye Backcheck

Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

Volume 45 Issue 1 February 2020



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Chapter Meeting Minutes November 12, 2019

The meeting was held at Solich Piano.

Attendance:

David Chadwick, Chris Burget, Ron Kenreich, Kim Hoessly, David Stang, Walter Bagnall, Chris Altenburg, Mitch Staples, Gale Staples, Dwight Hansen, Mark Ritchie, Chris Purdy, and guest Heather Fullenkamp.

Treasurer's Report:

\$2,065.32

Old Business:

PTG membership renewal notices will be sent out in November, and are due by December 31.

Mitch Staples went to the national Convention in Tuscon, and may give a synopsis of his time there.

New Business:

No new Business

Benjamin F. Wiant (85)

1/17/1935 - 1/22/2020

It is with great sadness we announce the passing of our beloved Ben! Much Love to his family, friends, and loved ones!

Ben passed away peacefully in his home, the historic Wesley Chapel (Hilliard), from complications of Parkinson's Disease. Ben is survived by his husband, Jon Chandler; 3 children, Phillip Wiant, Portland, Brendan Wiant (Diane), Pittsburgh, Stephanie Wiant (Colin Fogarty), Portland; and 8 grandchildren. Also surviving, are his siblings, Allen Wiant (Rita), Westerville, and, Cecilia May (Michael), Santa Ana, CA. He was preceded in death by his parents Bliss and Mildred Wiant, Delaware, and brother Leighton (Dorothy, surviving), Baltimore, MD. Born in China, Ben grew up in a household surrounded by music and beautiful Chinese artifacts, collected by his educator-missionary parents, during their tenure at Yenching University. Those years in China were paramount to his career choice, and lifetime interest in Chinese antiquities. Ben was recognized as one of the finest piano technicians in America. His understanding of the instrument's artistic requirements brought him special praise from performers worldwide, many of whom were proud to know him as their friend and counselor. A highly trained pianist and musician, Ben held the BMus degree from Ohio Wesleyan University, and the MMus degree from the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati, where he studied with Olga Conus. While pursuing his doctoral degree in piano performance, Ben studied with György Sándor, University of Michigan. With considerable study in Germany, Ben developed a truly international perspective on piano building and design, which guided him throughout his professional and technical career. Prior to his retirement in 2016, Ben was the Chief Technician for The Lancaster Festival; served 30 years as Chief Technician for the Grand Teton Music Festival; and was the resident technician for the Columbus Symphony Orchestra. To read more about Ben, please go to: <https://tinyurl.com/rtbzowy>

A Celebration of Life is forthcoming.

Published in The Columbus Dispatch on Jan. 26, 2020
<https://tinyurl.com/tv8wexs>

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The following is a reprinted portion of an article from January 2013, "Life & Times Of A Piano Technician".

Ben Wiant's background in piano tuning began with his father, who, as a youngster, worked at the O.S. Kelly piano plate foundry in Springfield, Ohio. It was there his father picked up some tuning knowledge and it was he who maintained the family piano. His father later went to China for missionary work and he was one of only two people in all of Beijing who could tune a piano. So, early on the interest was sparked in Ben.



His first practical experiences in tuning came as a student at Ohio Wesleyan. They had an interesting assortment of American pianos as well as a harpsichord that no one wanted to play, or tune. Since he wanted to play it, he started to tune it. He then went to grad school in Cincinnati to further his piano performance education. There he bought a Baldwin Hamilton. Upon watching the tuner perform the warranty tuning, and after discovering the expense of regular tuning, Ben's interest in the process was furthered. Ben also learned that he would eventually have to get a good quality grand piano if he was going to continue in his performance studies. He eventually ended up in the doctoral program at the University of Michigan.

While searching for this grand piano, Ben came to know Ben McKlveen, oboist and well-known piano technician in the Cincinnati area. He took an interest in young Ben's endeavors and even paid him to help with tunings around the area. The friendship lasted many years and he says he is still learning from him to this day.

Like many techs, his path in the industry was a circuitous one which took him many places. One being the Wisconsin State College where he was the only piano faculty member who had any knowledge of piano technology, so, needless to say, he was the piano tech during his tenure there. He eventually ended up teaching in Sedona, Arizona for six years where he was the only person with any piano service understanding for a radius of eighty, or so, miles. After that, he ended up here in Columbus at OSU in the Ph.D. program for Music Education. While there he also did some work for some of the local piano stores including the Kimball, Bosendorfer and Wurlitzer dealers. It was beneficial in that he was able to use shop space for repair work. He put in a lot of hours during this time, honing his craft and learning things like the twenty-minute pitch raise, and generally building his reputation in the area as a skilled tuner and performer. He, later on, worked as the piano tech at OSU for two years. It was his time there that eventually led OSU to include the position of piano technician as a line item in the school's budget. Until that time the school didn't heavily invest in good instruments or give much thought to properly maintaining them. Ben's tenure there changed some of that.

He eventually started working with the Columbus Symphony Orchestra and many famous concert artists, some of whom would use Ben's personal pianos to practice on. He also worked on the Grand Teton Music Festival for twenty-six years. Concert service has been a passion and the learning experience invaluable because concert performers can be very specific about what they want and you learn how to give it to them. On the other hand, he cautions, just because someone isn't a professional doesn't mean they may not have a sensitivity about tone. One must learn to put aside their own personal preferences and give the clients what they want.

Ben then related how he was a founding member of the reorganized Columbus Chapter of the PTG, holding meetings on Bryden Rd. He also told of organizing the first Ohio Piano Technicians Seminar with Mark Ritchie. Ben was also employed by Graves Piano as their European purchasing agent.

He also talked about some of his early business practices including offering two tunings, the second one being six weeks or more later and offering the second for half price, as long as two tunings were agreed to. He again advised that because someone isn't a concert pianist that doesn't mean they don't have good perception about instruments and tone. Some people do test by playing in pianissimo which says something of their sensibility. He also stressed the importance of maintaining a good reputation because, "You are lucky if people are calling you based on reputation!"

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Yamaha Grand Damper Regulation

The November meeting was once again held at Solich Piano with Yamaha's Senior Piano Technician, Kevin Suzuki, giving the technical presentation on damper regulation in Yamaha grand pianos. Thanks to Solich and David Chadwick for the venue and for the food and refreshments. The following is but a brief summary of a fairly detailed presentation.

Kevin started with the question, "When approaching a piano, what do many of you check first?" He said that he checks the damper pedal first, often before even playing the keys. He looks for proper damper lift and listens for any extraneous noises. He may then check that the lyre is firmly attached. He then followed with detailed discussions of the various steps in regulating the whole damper system. Much of this was in regard to newer pianos that may need some touch-up regulation, but also described some scenarios encountered in the field on older pianos.

Suzuki first addressed lost motion in the damper pedal. Lost motion is set in the factory to a spec of 2mm between the damper lift tray and the bottom of the damper underlevers. This will change over time as various felts in the damper system compress. Ultimately, the pianist should decide what is appropriate for them, if they are so inclined. This can be changed by either adjusting the cap nut on top of the damper lyre rod, or by bolstering the felt under the pedal. There are also some punchings that can be added to or removed from the pitman. Kevin had a yellow rubber mute with markings on the side for 1.5mm, 2mm, and 2.5mm, which can be wedged between the tray and underlevers.

He then described damper pedal stop, or travel. He tested by depressing the damper pedal, then played some sharp keys at mezzo forte and looked for them to "wink" slightly. Naturals should not wink at all, because their overall leverage at the back end of the key is less. Then play sharps with no pedal, then lift their dampers by hand to feel the slightest upward motion. The spec is 0.5mm, which is difficult to measure, so the slightest motion is taken into account. If there is no lift, then the rail is too low. This gap will narrow over time as key dip increases, so it should be periodically checked. If changes need to be made, then adjust the damper stop rail inside. There is also a capstan under the keybed, above the trap lever that can be adjusted as well. The upstop rail adjustment in relation



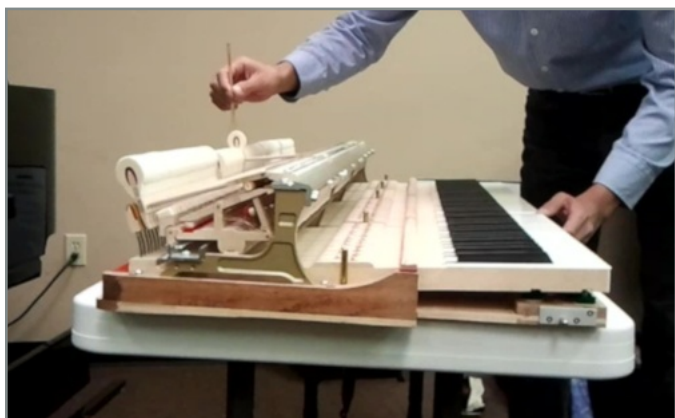
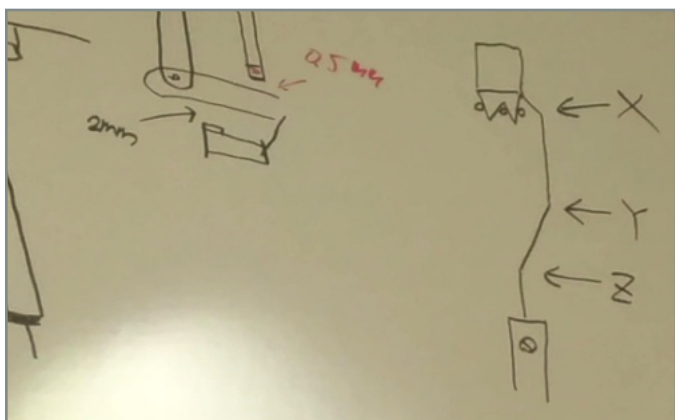
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to the sostenuto lift early in the sequence was brought up by Mark Ritchie, and was ultimately addressed later in the technical. However, Kevin said he was not aware of any Yamaha test for stop rail adjustment with the sostenuto in mind, but did think Mark made a good point. This can be taken into consideration when regulating that system.

Next was a rather lengthy section on the damper wires, how they mount into their blocks and their various bends. Damper wires need to be centered in the holes in their blocks. If the set screw were loosened, the block should be able to move freely up and down without the damper head moving above. If the block is held up, or the damper head lifts up with the wire then the wire is out of alignment somewhere. He labeled the bends X1, X2, Y, and Z. Z is the first bend above the block that is followed by the Y bend which lines up the wire with its guide rail hole. Then there is X1 and X2 together which position the damper head over its unison. He described the various situations where any one, or combination of those bends may need to be tweaked. The section above the Y bend should be parallel to the section below the Z bend. The X bends may need to be adjusted if the head, though centered on the strings at rest, moves or tilts slightly immediately upon lifting up. If the head rotates slightly upon lift, then the wire can be counter-rotated in the block by slightly loosening the set screw just enough to allow the wire to rotate yet maintain its present height. He went on to describe how these angles are set in the factory using various straight edges, squares, and jigs. The damper workers are highly skilled at their jobs. Kevin suggested using the stretcher as a straight edge when observing the wire vertically and horizontally as needed. If you place the damper on top of the stretcher as it would sit atop a unison, then the wire should hang straight down and perpendicular to the head. Bends should only be visible when looking "head on" towards the end of the head. He also went on to say that damper block screws should not be overly tightened to the point of marring the wire. He will often hand tighten them first before using a screwdriver.



Damper timing with key was then discussed. As in verticals, damper lift should start when the hammer has travelled half of its blow distance. Yamaha spec for blow distance is 46mm, so at 23mm the damper should lift. One method he explained for setting this across the keyboard was a bit lengthy in description and practice, but should

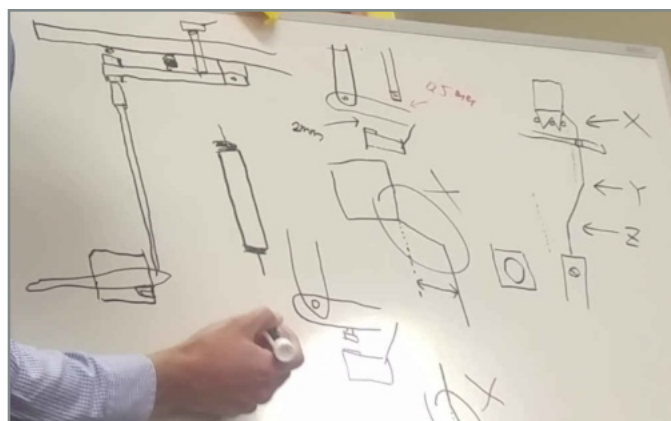
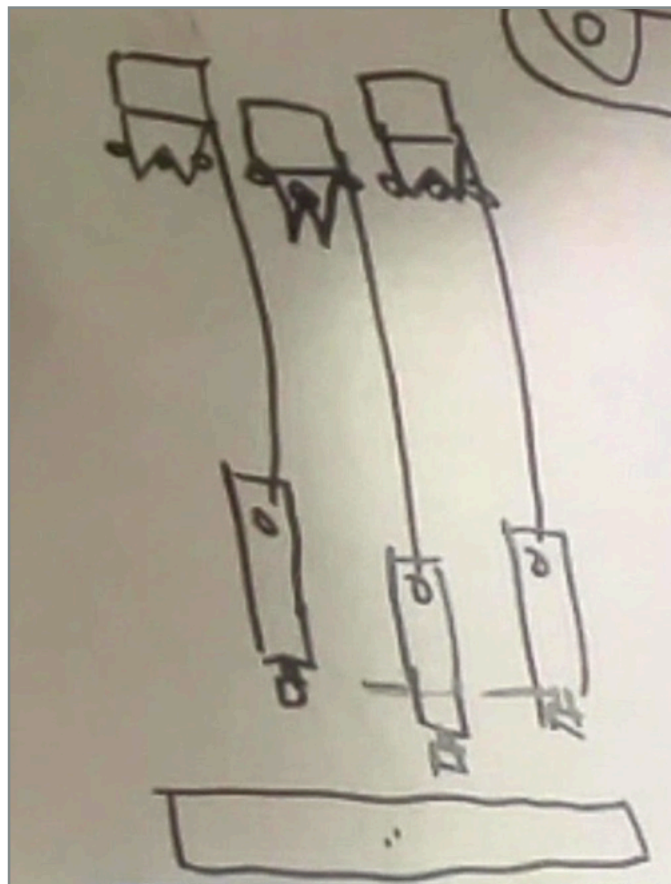
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yield consistent results across the keyboard. Basically, you use the damper tray to hold all the underlevers at the same height. This is one of those "easier to show than explain" procedures and it takes some time because it involves loosening ALL of the set screws in the damper blocks, then tightening and rechecking and rechecking. The cap nut on the lyre rod is lowered all the way down, a sample damper wire is tightened in its block, then a jig with 23mm marked on it is used to measure hammer travel while slowly depressing the key. The cap nut is gradually raised up until the hammer travel stops at the 23mm mark. The action is then removed, the sample screw loosened so its lever drops to height of the rest, which is now the proper height. Then all the set screws are tightened by hand, then by screwdriver. Any twisting of damper heads are then addressed individually. He could only describe this process as there was not enough time to literally demonstrate that whole process. He says factory workers can do it in a half hour, but even an hour for a technician would be pretty fast.

Sostenuto regulation was discussed next. First, test the system by depressing the damper pedal, then the sostenuto pedal, then release the damper pedal. All dampers should stay raised up until the sostenuto is disengaged. The sostenuto rod is in the piano and can be adjusted up, down, in, and out via mounting brackets. The distance between the blade and the tabs on the damper blocks should be 2mm. The angle of the blade can be adjusted with the cap nut on top of its lyre rod. As for how much the damper should lift after sostenuto is engaged, Kevin said he was not aware of any spec for that, though agreed that the same criteria for the "slightest lift" if done by hand could apply. This would prevent the felt on the bottom of the upstop rail from compressing from using the sostenuto.

Kevin then went on to describe some differences in the lyres of smaller vs concert grands, how guide rails are bushed, and offered some assorted tips. He said the capstans found on concert grand underlevers are actually for factory workers using a special straightedge for making micro adjustments to damper lift to key, not for damper timing with the tray. Also, when a damper head sits a little lower than its neighbors because its felt is a little more compressed, it may also lift sooner because its underlever is also sitting lower. The proper adjustment for its timing would be to adjust the wire in its block so its underlever is even with its neighbors. It will still sit lower at the string, but its timing will be consistent. As for lubrication, he did say that he does not immediately go to lubricating guide rail bushings and damper wires when they are sluggish, but did say that Protek CLP was acceptable. He also showed us a pair of wire bending pliers that had plastic tubing on one of the handles so that he always knows which way the pliers will bend.





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Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

- Officers -

President	David Chadwick, RPT
Vice-President	Chris Purdy, RPT
Treasurer	Ron Kenreich
Secretary	Chris Burget
Imm. Past Pres.	Mitch Staples, RPT

Chapter Meeting
Tuesday, February 18
7:00pm

Refreshments:
6:30pm

Solich Piano Columbus
6370 Proprietors Rd,
Worthington, OH 43085
(614) 8883441
www.solichmusic.com

Topic: TBA

Map Link:

<https://goo.gl/maps/oSyuD7HKTaU2>

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