



PIANO
TECHNICIANS
GUILD
COLUMBUS CHAPTER

The Buckeye Backcheck

Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

Volume 33 Issue 4 May 2008

PRESIDENT'S NOTES

Our meeting this month is scheduled for **Tuesday, May 20th, at Henderson Music, Dublin. 7:30 P.M.** is the start time, as usual. I hope that everyone is able to make it as it is time for officer elections and to decide about whether to hold a chapter meeting in June, or to go on vacation for the summer.

Also, if you have them, bring your latest "butts and flanges" story to share.

Unfortunately, we will not have any delegates at this year's PTG convention. I imagine the expense of flying to and from California and staying nearly a week in the Los Angeles area played a large role in this decision being taken. Perhaps next year, when the convention is held much nearer to us here in the Buckeye state, the story will be a different one. I know that I thoroughly enjoy this annual event, but its cost was too much for me this year.

In closing, let me suggest that we each endeavor to mention the Piano Technicians Guild to our customers at every opportunity. I find that in my daily rounds many opportunities present themselves in which I can mention the guild, my membership in it, its value in keeping us informed regarding piano technology, the training available through it, etc.

I am proud of it and of my membership in it. Remember, the guild is what we make it.

Chris

PROPOSALS FOR NATIONAL BY-LAWS MODIFICATIONS

Have a look at the PTG Journal Supplement which was mailed with the May issue. It spells out the proposals that will be voted upon at the national convention. Here is a brief summary of them.

Proposal 1: A provision that officers may identify themselves as such on materials related to their performing their officerial duty.

Proposal 2: Reduction in dues to spouses who are both members.

Proposal 3: A revision in the entire section regarding exams. Note the provision that fees be doubled, and sent to the home office prior to the exam, and half remitted back to the examining chapter after completion.

Proposal 4: Change in Regional Vice-President elections. Provides for voting over the internet since there are sometimes very few members representing certain regions at the national convention.

Proposal 5: A new category of membership for those in the allied trades.

Proposal 6: Changes in the disciplinary code. The board does not recommend this proposal because of potential restraint-of-trade issues because of overly broad language regarding rejection from membership.

THE COLUMBUS CHAPTER OF THE PIANO TECHNICIAN'S GUILD

President: **Chris Altenburg, RPT**

Vice President: **Bob Grubb, RPT**

Treasurer: **Ron Kenreich**

Secretary: **Mike Varrone**

Immediate Past President: **Mark Ritchie, RPT**

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FROM THE ARTS JOURNAL

Free the Piano Player

by Terry Teachout, *Commentary Magazine*

Critics, commentators, and managers have noted with alarm that concert audiences are aging steadily and that people under fifty seem disinclined either to attend classical-music events or to support the organizations that present them. Some presenters and performers have responded by seeking to change the time-honored institution of the solo recital in ways meant to make it less formal and more contemporary. Classical artists are now being advised to speak to their audiences from the stage, to play a fresher and wider-ranging mix of repertoire, even to employ up-to-date staging techniques.

Yet as anyone who keeps up with the programs in America's major concert halls is well aware, very few artists are taking this advice. Far more often than not, classical performers continue to come before the public dressed in more or less formal attire and to play two-hour-long programs consisting of three or four groups of pieces drawn from the standard repertoire and arranged in chronological order, never speaking a word out loud save to announce their encores.

There was once a time when classical recitals were very different - less straitlaced, more improvisational, and, above all, more populist in tone.

After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance by Kenneth Hamilton is based on extensive research into the performance practices of the pianists of the 19th and early 20th centuries, a period known to record collectors as the "golden age" of classical pianism. Hamilton, a concert pianist and teacher at the University of Birmingham in the UK, offers the fruits of his labors in the hope that they will inspire performers to break with "the fusty rituals of modern concert-giving, in which the music is served up with the superciliousness of a sneering sommelier offering overpriced wine at a too-long-established restaurant." His style is dryly witty, his scholarship immaculate, and his conclusions challenging.

"Golden-age" pianists generally treated the written score as a guide to interpretation rather than a definitive set of instructions. Many of them added unwritten embellishments of various kinds to the pieces they played. Vladimir Horowitz, the last major classical pianist to play

with such textual freedom, recorded versions of works like Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 15 that deviated so dramatically from the score as to amount to substantially original compositions.

"Golden-age" pianists put a higher premium on bravura and spontaneity than on precise execution, and as a result many of them played far more wrong notes than would now be considered acceptable by critics and audiences.

In the 19th century, virtually all concert pianists doubled as composers and regularly programmed their own works, be they good, bad, or indifferent in quality. It was customary for them to offer "reminiscences" and "paraphrases" based on themes from the popular operas of the day, and customary as well to improvise in public, sometimes on themes submitted by members of the audience.

To listen to recordings made by pianists born in the 19th century is to be struck by their extreme individuality, bordering at times on outright eccentricity.

Such excesses are rarely encountered in 21st-century concert halls, where audiences sit in (relative) silence and listen to programs consisting mainly of performances of the classics that, in comparison, are straightforward to the point of sober-sidedness. But to what end? Hamilton, for one, claims to have written the book out of "a deep unease with the sheer routine and funereal boredom of some piano recitals I have attended. . . . Whatever disadvantages early-romantic concerts had, they were often more informal and sound simply like a lot more fun, for both performers and audiences."

Might we also profit by casting a colder eye on the social formality that continues to shape the experience of concertgoing? Again, Hamilton thinks so. "A little less reverence and a bit more entertainment would do us no harm today," he writes.

I agree, but up to a point. I would not want to live in a musical world denuded of the high seriousness that allowed a pianist like Artur Schnabel to devote the last part of his life to playing nothing but Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert; at the same time, though, I would not want to live in a musical world that consisted only of Schnabels.

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FROM OTHER CHAPTERS

Here is a presentation I would love to see! Sorry I wasn't in Colorado at the time ...ed.

The Tuner's Art: Music and commentary by Frank French

Presented by Boulder Chapter Piano Technician's Guild
Friday, April 18, 2008 7:30 PM

Frank French, pianist, music historian and piano technician, who will give a spirited presentation using three grand pianos, each tuned to a different authentic historical tuning system. He will perform selections from Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" and other historically relevant works demonstrating the effect of tuning systems on modulation and shifting harmonies. Listeners will get an idea how this music sounded to the composers themselves, and how very different it sounds when played in Equal Temperament, the modern method of tuning.

According to French, "Temperament affects how keyboard instruments have been tuned from about 1400 to the present day. The manner of tuning has changed over the centuries to accommodate various styles of music. During the 18th and 19th centuries something called 'irregular' or 'circulating' temperaments were favored by musicians and composers and allowed for complex harmonic expression in keyboard music written in three, four or five parts."

Nearly all the great composers of the baroque, classic and romantic periods were keyboard players and the tuning systems they used were not necessarily like today's standard equal temperament. Literature of those periods employs specific tonalities for expressive purposes.

French's recent recording of the 48 preludes and fugues of Bach is in a temperament devised by Thomas Young at the end of the 18th century. One can hear how the music sounds on an instrument tuned in this way in every major and minor key. To do this go to

<http://cdbaby.com/cd/frankfrench8>

TECHNOLOGY NEWS

Under the Hood: The Autotuning Guitar

By David Carey, *EE Times*

Gibson Guitar has released the "Robot Guitar", which automatically tunes to a range of standard and alternative tunings at the touch of a button.

At the core is a standard Gibson Les Paul electric guitar. The departures from a stock guitar begin with a special bridge and tailpiece. The bridge provides one of the two endpoints that set the string length; the other string endpoint is the nut at the end of the fret board. Unlike a standard bridge, however, the saddle pieces (normally metal) are replaced with isolated piezoelectric pickups to detect the string frequency. Audio output comes from a separate pair of wound pickups no different from any other Les Paul guitar, thus maintaining traditional sound.

The pickups, which detect string frequency, feed signals for each of the six strings to an electronics module, mounted in the position normally occupied by the volume control knob. The knob still serves as a volume control, but the action begins when the knob is popped out to go into "Robot mode."

Pulled out, the knob becomes a multiposition rotary switch that allows players to select the desired tuning. LEDs in the special control knob blink to indicate that retuning is complete.

The Robot guitar uses the guitar strings to provide six points of connection between body and headstock electronics.

Each line is isolated behind the special tailpiece. The traditionally all-metal part instead has ceramic insulating ferrules in each string to allow each string to connect from the body to the head.

Signal communication lets the headstock electronics know which way to tune each peg. The motorized tuning pegs contain a motor, reduction mechanism, and peg worm gear. The tuning pegs can be pulled out for manual tuning or pushed in to allow the mechanized system to take over. To exert large forces from a small dc motor, the rpm are reduced by what I'd estimate to be a 500:1 ratio to go from the low-torque, high-rpm motor to the low-rpm, high-torque environment needed for string tensioning.

As an EE and hack player, I have to give Gibson credit for creating an instrument that advances the state of the guitar.



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www.ptgcolumbus.org

Upcoming Events

Chapter Meeting

Tuesday, May 20, 7:30pm
Henderson Music, 2829 Festival Ln.
Chapter Elections

Organ Concert by Matthew W. Scavo

Sunday, June 8, 2008 4:30pm
Broad St. Presbyterian Church, 760 E. Broad St.

National Convention and Technical Institute

June 18 - 22
Anaheim, California
www.ptg.org/conv/2008

Pianos in need of a rebuilder

For sale, Steinway square grand piano, in desperate need of rebuilding.
Also, Baldwin model F grand (6'11" ?) also in need of a rebuilding,
although it appears everything is there.

Contact Chris Altenburg, at 614.264.0399, if you are interested. I will then
get you in touch with the owner.

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

Disclaimer:

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

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