

# The Buckeye Backcheck

Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

Volume 34 Issue 4 May 2009



## Welcome to Our New Members !

The *Buckeye Backcheck* would like to welcome **Christopher Burget** and **Michael O'Neill** to our chapter. We hope being part of the PTG will be an educational and a fun experience.

### MEETING MINUTES April 21, 2009

The meeting was held at First Congregational Church.

Attendance: Kim Hoessly, Chris Altenburg, Ron Kenreich, David Stang, Victor Wolfe, Bob Grubb, Chris Purdy, Michael O'Neill, and Chris Burget.

#### Treasurer's Report:

We presently hold \$2000 in CDs and \$902.45 in checking, totaling \$2902.45

#### Committee Reports:

Testing Committee

Examapalooza at Cedarville University jointly sponsored by the Dayton and Columbus Chapters.

So far there have been 3 inquiries about the tuning exam.

#### Old Business:

Our chapter picnic tentatively will be in June.

#### New Business:

We will hold chapter elections at the May meeting.

#### Announcements:

Ron mentioned that a good contact for repair of electric and electronic pianos and organs is Melvin Lewis Electrical Service at 876-9030.

#### Upcoming Meetings:

May 19: Hendersons Music, Sawmill & 161. Chapter Elections.

Technical program by Phil Walters on the Stanwood Touchweight system.

June: Picnic. Date and location TBD.

September 15: TBD

#### Butts and Flanges:

Chris B. brought up his experience with a 3/4-plate, and wondered if there were particular issues with pitch-raising this type of piano. The consensus was that any issues with pitch-raising would be the same as with any piano. If there is evidence of previous broken strings, it may not be a good idea to bring it all the way up to A440.

There was a discussion of pianos and piano trucks with inadequate brakes. Sometimes improvisation is necessary. You may need to jam a penny or a wedge into the wheel in order to secure it. Also be advised that uneven castor wheels can result in vibrations.

### EXAMAPALOOZA

May 15 and 16, 2009

Cedarville University

If you have been putting off taking either the RPT Technical or Tuning Exam, then come to Cedarville University and take an exam or two.

Registration: Send exam fee of \$180 to the Home Office with a note explaining that you will be taking the exam at Examapalooza. When we receive confirmation of payment you will be contacted to schedule an exam slot. Exam slots are on a first come first served basis, so hurry and register today!

Technical Exam contact is Kim Hoessly RPT, 614-326-3630 or [khoessly@columbus.rr.com](mailto:khoessly@columbus.rr.com)

Tuning Exam contact is Doug Atkins RPT, 937-766-7566 or [atkinsd@cedarville.edu](mailto:atkinsd@cedarville.edu)

CTE training will also be available at Examapalooza contact Doug Atkins, RPT for more info.

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## Technical Presentation:

### A Little About Harpsichords

Harpsichords, I admit, are not for everybody. Sir Thomas Beecham famously once said they sound like "skeletons ... on a tin roof during a thunderstorm". (I'll leave it to your imagination to fill in the word I omitted.) Others, though, find them to be unique and sparkingly beautiful.

They were largely ignored during the 19th Century because they were thought of as obsolete because of the "superior" piano. In the early 20th century there was a revival of interest in them and in playing music of the pre-piano era. Some of the first 20th century harpsichords were built by piano companies in France and Germany and were built similarly to pianos. They had piano-like keyboards, soundboards and structure. In the mid-20th century, William Dowd and others studied instruments from the peak of harpsichord building around 1750, and began to make historical reproductions. These reproductions were lighter and simpler than the so-called "revival" instruments, and more true to the sound of historical harpsichords.

There are many different kinds of harpsichords in use today, with various degrees of historical accuracy. Some builders insist upon pure reproduction of 18th century instruments, including real quill plectra. Others make use of available technology, such as plastic jacks and plectra. Plastic parts are more durable than wood and are much easier to regulate. "Revival" style instruments are still around, too.

The harpsichord built by Ben Bechtel is a beautiful example of a Dowd-influenced 20th century instrument designed to have the sound and feel of a historical instrument. It is a French double-manual and has 2 8' sets of strings and 1 4' set. (The "foot" nomenclature designating the octave is taken from pipe organs.) It has a palette of sounds that results from the ability to play the sets of strings in any combination. The two manuals play two respective sets of jacks, where the set that plucks the string closer to the string termination produces a more "nasal" tone with more harmonics. There is also a "buff stop" which places a set of felts against the strings, giving a lute-like sound.

Tuning a harpsichord is similar to tuning a piano, but there are differences. Since the string tension is so light, there are generally no problems with residual tension in non-speaking parts of the strings, and no problems with pins being too loose. The tuning can be quite unstable with climate, but a harpsichord that is a little bit out of tune is not as obvious to the listener as a piano equivalently out of tune. There is more attack as less sustain than pianos.



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If you are asked to tune a harpsichord don't forget to ask whether concert pitch should be A440, or A415. Many harpsichords have a movable keyboard which can be shifted by a half-step. Historical (non-equal) temperaments are rarely requested, and usually players who want a historical tuning know how to do it themselves.

## **Harpsichord References - Books**

*The Harpsichord Owner's Guide: A Manual for Buyers and Owners*  
by Edward R. Kottick. University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

*Three Centuries of Harpsichord Making*  
by Frank Hubbard, Harvard University Press, 1965.

*A Guide to the Harpsichord*  
by Ann Bond. Amadeus Press, 2001.

*Ruckers: A Harpsichord and Virginal Building Tradition*  
by Grant O'Brien, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

## **Web Sites**

Claviers Baroques: [www.claviersbaroques.com](http://www.claviersbaroques.com)

Dolmetsch Online: [www.dolmetsch.com/musictheory27.htm](http://www.dolmetsch.com/musictheory27.htm)

The Harpsichord Clearing House: [www.harpsichord.com](http://www.harpsichord.com)

The Harpsichordist to the Internet: [www.sankei.ws/harpsichord.html](http://www.sankei.ws/harpsichord.html)

Hubbard Harpsichords: [www.hubharp.com](http://www.hubharp.com)

## **FROM RON MAY (by way of Mark Ritchie)**

Here are some pictures of a simple folding table that I converted to something I could use to bring grand actions out of churches, tops of our many condos, etc., etc.,

The casters I just keep in the car, I pulled off the original feet and filed it with a dowel. I then just drilled out a hole for the casters. Much to my surprise and delight, the table, in the lower position, slides under most grand key beds.

The table can be bought most anywhere, Walmart, Home Depot, Lowes.

I am really surprised how handy this thing is.

Hope it is of help

Ron



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## FROM THE ARTS JOURNAL ...

### **The murky music prize: Our classical music competitions can be corrupt**

by Jessica Duchon, *The Independent*

It's competition season in classical music. I used to enjoy spotting the rising stars, but no longer. For if ever there was proof that self-regulation is useless, it is to be found in music competitions, where everything depends on the personal opinions of eight to 12 jurors. Perdition beckons.

Last week I received a message from a group called "10,000 Musicians against Corruption in Music Competitions". Ben, its founder, told me his story, a saga which reveals how some contests advance jury members' students, lovers and children, eliminating players who are "too good" to avoid showing up the failings of the favoured, and by-passing the rigidity of a marking system in favour of "discussion". Ben's group demands that all competition processes be made public and transparent.

I spoke to a pianist who entered a contest run by an adjudicator he felt was among the more suspicious, as there were wild rumours flying around of nepotism and sexual relations with competitors.

Competitions devalued themselves years ago by an excessive surge in their number and through betrayal of trust. If a musician protests, his or her future can suffer. I know a pianist who joined other disgruntled youngsters to write and sign a letter of protest to a leading Russian newspaper.

And, if you are star-spotting – at the forthcoming London International Piano Competition, which is most definitely among the better ones and runs until the 28 April – my advice is don't just listen to the winner. Hear the early rounds; look for the talents that just can't be kept down. There's still hope that they will win through in the end.

Read the full story at:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/classical/features/the-murky-music-prize-1671566.html>

### **Estonian pianos hit the right notes**

by AFP News Service

After the Soviet Union occupied Estonia in 1940, Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin received a piano made there for his birthday. It's said he liked it so much that Estonia's piano factory became a leading supplier of concert pianos for the entire Soviet Union. In an ironic twist of history, more than half a century later grand and baby grand pianos from the same factory in a Tallinn suburb have become a huge success on the US market and are catching on in Asia too. With no middlemen and low labour costs in Estonia, its pianos can sell for a fraction of the price of their Western-made competitors of comparable quality.

Regarded as the piano-buyer's bible, the Larry Fine piano book ranks the Estonia piano as 12th among the world's top 84 brands. But the piano maker's success was not always a given. When Estonia regained its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the factory's future appeared grim. It was bought and sold by a string of owners until Indrek Laul, who is also a pianist, became the sole proprietor in 2001.

Armed with a doctorate from New York's acclaimed Juilliard School, the musician put his love and knowledge of music and musical instruments to work to fine-tune the Estonia's design, while relying on the priceless skill of the factory's master craftsmen.

"We've sold over 2,500 grand and baby grand pianos -- 90 percent of our production -- to the US because Estonia pianos became so popular there that we lacked the capacity to produce more for other markets," Laul told AFP.

"The Estonia piano has very classical European sound that has vanished from most of other European pianos," Tomonori Shibata, owner of Hamamatsu Piano told AFP.

Read the full story at:

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hYUAOB8wfVoOncVKiwNDXII72bTA>





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[www.ptgcolumbus.org](http://www.ptgcolumbus.org)

## Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

**President** Kim Hoessly, RPT  
**Vice-President** Chris Altenburg, RPT  
**Treasurer** Ron Kenreich  
**Secretary** David Stang

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

*- David*



## Upcoming Events

### Chapter Meetings

Tuesday May 19, 2009, 7:30pm  
Henderson's Music  
Sawmill & 161  
Program: Touchweight Technology

Chapter Picnic in June, day TBD

### EXAMAPALOOZA

May 15 and 16, 2009  
Cedarville University  
Contacts: Doug Atkins, Kim Hoessly

### Annual Convention and Institute

July 15 - 19, 2009  
Grand Rapids, Michigan  
Visit [www.ptg.org/conv/2009](http://www.ptg.org/conv/2009)  
Bookmark it and check often for updates.

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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