

# The Buckeye Backcheck

*Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild*  
Volume 35 Issue 4 May 2010



## SQUARE TALK

At our chapter meeting on April 20, Ben Wiant led a discussion about square grand pianos. The talk was held at Towers Hall at Otterbein College, where they have an instrument that Ben recently worked on. Square Grands were considered the first "modern" pianos because those with metal frames were able to carry large tensions loads which gave the pianos the ability to play loudly in a large hall setting.

Square grands have a number of differences compared to today's pianos. They have a more fragile and simple escapement mechanism without a repetition lever, and the damping is inefficient. Therefore there is less ability to repeat notes and play quick staccatos, and the sound does not disappear immediately upon damping. Note also that the keys are each of a different length, and the hammers in the bass section are very angled.

There are certain pieces of music that can sound quite nice on square grands despite their shortcomings. Victor Wolfe demonstrated the instrument by playing Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag".

Thank you, Ben, for the talk, and thanks to Otterbein and Dr. Craig Johnson for hosting us.



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## Chapter Meeting Minutes April 20, 2010

The meeting was held at The Philamathean Room, Towers Hall, Otterbein College

**Attendance:** Kim Hoessly, Chris Altenburg, Ron Kenreich, David Stang, Ben Wiant, Michael O'Neill, Bob Grubb and Victor Wolfe. Otterbein faculty Tim Huffman, Amy Chivington, Dept. chair Craig Johnson and several students were our guests.

### Treasurer's Report

We presently have \$1064.06 in checking and \$2200.00 in CDs. We received \$780.00 from the home office for member dues.

### Old Business

PianoForte event

Volunteers are needed for the PianoForte Event Committee. There will be needs for publicity, mailings, refreshments, etc. The event is tentatively planned for spring 2011. We would like to get as many nearby colleges involved as possible, i.e., Otterbein, OSU, Capital, Ohio Wesleyan, Dennison. A few names from outside of Columbus were mentioned as people who also may be interested.

Ben Wiant would like to pass on his duties as chapter librarian. The librarian's duties are simply to provide a place to store books, publications, and other items owned by the chapter so that they are reasonably available to chapter members. Note that we have a number of educational materials including exam study books, tapes, CDs, and action models. Ben volunteered to do an inventory of items and pass it on to the newsletter editor for publication.

We are looking for a volunteer to be our chapter delegate to the national meeting this June.

We are looking for a volunteer to host our annual picnic this summer.

### New Business

For the May meeting Kim will try to arrange to have a drawing for a \$50 gift certificate to a piano supply house.

### Announcements

We will have elections at the **chapter meeting May 18.**

## FROM TOM HARR

### Defeating the Pac-Man Problem

Tom Harr read our "Butts and Flanges" in the April Newsletter about separated hammers, and contributed the following pictures illustrating a method of inserting a new "staple" into a hammer head.

Even hammers with staples can burst. The bottom one in the picture was stapled but it has pulled out, being only about 1/8" in the wood.



With the hammer clamped and secure use a Dremmel tool with drill no. 69 to drill two holes through the hammer felt and wood.



If your Dremel Moto-tool is not at hand a pin vise works just fine. This is a good one with a big swivel head so you don't drill a hole in your hand using it.



Insert a piece of 22 ga. wire (which is about 0.028") with a 180-deg. bend into the holes.



Draw up and twist the wire, then clip off and finish.



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## FROM OTHER NEWSLETTERS

### Julius Feurich, Piano Maker

By Frank French, *IN TUNE!*, The San Francisco PTG Chapter Newsletter, May 2010

This is the story of my encounter with Julius Feurich, a piano maker currently working in Gunzenhausen, Bavaria Germany.

After going through the facility I can relate what I saw there. At present it is a small operation with just two or three handworkers, who must be able to do every job. Therefore careful attention to detail and comprehensive knowledge is necessary.

#### Construction Methods

In specific terms of construction there is no rib-crowning in the building of the soundboards, but there is some crowning on the underside of the bridges where the tone is transmitted into the soundboard. Vertical bridges may be prepared and notched on the workbench. Not so with grand bridges, which must be notched and prepared after the bridge is glued to the board inside the case. Vertical models, still in greater demand than grands for the domestic market, have their backs fitted and glued up in a special press with hardwood posts and spruce frames. Rib notching is done from a template prior to installation of ribs and soundboard. The pin block is mounted to the frame, later to be shaped to fit the plate.

Feurich observes that technical knowledge for building grand pianos exceeds that necessary for building uprights, therefore it is harder to build a grand piano that sounds good. In new grand pianos, crown is obtained not by rib-crowning but rather by jig-crowning of the board itself. Special jigs and templates are constructed for this purpose. The board is then placed in a press with the bottom, rib side lacquered first to impart additional crown. Concave bridge crowning is then used to match the bottom of the bridge to the top of the soundboard. The case rim-press jigs are also contoured to match the existing soundboard crown.

#### On Restoration and Re-Building

With regard to restoration and re-building there seem to be some methods employed in the USA not considered necessary in Germany, though climate differences may be an important consideration. In reconstructing an old concert grand that had been recently rescued from a school in Eastern Germany, Feurich states that old soundboards are always re-used because one can only guess at the manner of construction employed in an earlier time, so a new sounding board could mean a significant change in the character of a piano and strategic blunders are possible when replacing soundboards. It seems as though the formation of the soundboard is directly related to the formation of the rim of the piano when it is built. An old soundboard is repaired with the idea that most of what was there before is still good enough to use again if properly treated and no design changes need to be taken into account. Bridges are not re-pinned unless the existing bridge pins are loose, the idea being that crown restoration as described above will make for sufficient down-bearing with proper plate adjustment. In restoration, all plate pins and agraffes are replaced.

Philosophy as regards current state of piano making in the world - There has been some discussion recently concerning the contraction of the industry and the fact that so many low-cost pianos are now being built in China. I was curious as to the effect of this on Feurich's operation so I asked him about it. He commented that the skill level among workers in Germany is very high. He observed that in China, knowledge is likely to be restricted in piece work, so that a worker may not know so much that he could hire his services away to a competitor. It is widely assumed that the comprehensive knowledge and skill level necessary to produce high-quality pianos does not yet exist in China.

The above is an excerpt from the article. Read *IN TUNE!* at <http://ptg.org/chapters/sanfrancisco/Current%20Newsletter.pdf>



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

## UPCOMING CONCERTS

THE MAGPIE CONSORT (Vocal Ensemble including Ben Wiant)

Fri. May 14 8pm

King Ave. United Methodist Church, 299 King Ave.

Sat. May 15 8pm

Trinity Episcopal Church, 125 E. Broad

Sun. May 16 4pm

Redeemer Lutheran Church, 1555 S. James Rd.

Sat. June 5 7pm

First Congregational Church, 444 E. Broad - Benefit for Haiti

## 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 peripherally related to pianos)!*

*- David*

## Upcoming Meetings

May 18, 2010, 7:30pm

### Chapter Meeting

Mark Ritchie's Home / Workshop  
6262 St. Rt. 605, Westerville

Check [ptgcolumbus.org](http://ptgcolumbus.org) for directions

Technical Program: Mark on uprights

June 26 - 30, 2010

### PTG National Convention

Las Vegas

[www.ptg.org/conv/2010](http://www.ptg.org/conv/2010)

No chapter meeting in June, July, or August

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### Disclaimer:

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

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