

# The Buckeye Backcheck

*Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild*

Volume 41 Issue 5 May 2016



## PRESIDENT'S CORNER



Have you ever been just minding your own business when seemingly out of nowhere, someone throws a ball, or some other object, at you and shouts “Think Fast!”? My older brother has done that to me. I didn’t particularly like it then and I don’t like it now. However, as John Lennon said, “Life is what happens when you’re making plans”, so it is part of the life to have to deal with surprises and changes and to sometimes have to deal with them quickly. How many times have we shown up to do a tuning, just a routine tuning, and found out that a. something is broken, b. keys are sticking, c. the piano is actually 1/2 step flat (oh, it’s just been a couple of years since it was last tuned...), d. all of the above. Oh, and it’s 4 in the afternoon. There have been times when the thought going through my head is “how much can I pay them so I can just leave now?” Think fast. These circumstances may not be daily, but they happen and it’s part of the job. Make it work, make it sound good, make the customer happy and of course, get paid. It’s what we do. The more you know about how the piano works, how pianos work in real life, the more ways you know how to make them work, the better these scenarios turn out. PTG offers many opportunities to learn all those good things that make us better technicians and help us to make a living. Monthly meetings, regional seminars, the national convention, a phone call to a colleague. Opportunities that make us better at what we are getting paid to do. And not just nuts and bolts learning. People learning. How to run your business, grow your business. Leadership opportunities in PTG, especially at the chapter level, help us grow in our business as well. Running a meeting, helping organize the chapter, working with members and colleagues are all skills that can translate to better business with customers. It helps you learn to be organized and focused. It also helps you learn to think on your feet and hit the ground running (as I had to do when I found out Larry Messerly wasn’t coming for the May meeting). PTG has helped me learn to think fast and think smart.

Kim Hoessly, RPT

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## Chapter Meeting Minutes

**April 19, 2016**

The meeting was held at Graves Piano & Organ Co.

### Attendance:

Kim Hoessly, Chris Burget, Ben Wiant, Mark Ritchie, David Stang, David Chadwick, John Schmoll, and guest Phil Walpole.

### Treasurer's Report:

\$2469.52

### President's Report:

Midwest Regional Conference in Indianapolis will be held September 8-10, and will offer 72 one hour classes. If Associates are just attending in order to take the tuning and technical exams, then the conference fee is waived, though they must have a voucher from the Home Office, as well as their reclassification forms. However, fees for the tests are still due. Early registration is \$279, and there is also a \$400 package that includes all meals. More info at: [midwestptg.com](http://midwestptg.com)

### Committee Reports:

Testing: Kim Hoessly may be offering the written exam in June.

### Old Business:

David Chadwick will be the Chapter Delegate at Council.

The Chapter Auction will take place Saturday, June 18, 2016 at Church Of The Master in Westerville. Browsing inventory at 9:30 am, Auction at 10:30am. More info at: [ptgcolumbus.org/auction](http://ptgcolumbus.org/auction)

### New Business:

Kim put forward the idea of actually having a slate of officers announced ahead of May election. No one was formally nominated in this meeting.

Kim suggested people start thinking about what kind of technicals they would like to have for next year.

It was also suggested to ask Larry Messerly, CERVP, about joint memberships for partners and spouses (As of publication date, Larry Messerly will not be able to attend our May meeting).

## Butts & Flanges

Chris Burget and David Stang recently attended the Second Annual Ben Mcklveen Seminar, which is hosted by the Cincinnati Chapter. The event is held in honor of the late Ben Mcklveen, whose contributions to the field of piano service and technology are enormous. The event was divided into two discussions, with Kent Swafford giving a presentation on the benefits of Pure 12th Equal Temperament, followed by Matt Shoemaker and Jon Ralinovsky discussing pitch raising techniques.

Overall, it was enlightening. Matt and Jon offered various methods for overall pitch correction, and which protocols worked better in various situations; and Kent did offer some compelling examples and reasons for adopting a tuning protocol that prioritizes clarity of the 12th, as opposed to the octave. In this method, the octave will be about half to one cent wider than typical ET, but the 5th will only be narrow by slightly over one cent, as opposed to two. Also, once the sequence has started and you get to the third note, you tune by playing a series of three-chord intervals with the help of a spanner device that plays a 12th (octave+5th) while your finger plays various notes in between. The idea is to tune that third note of the chord so that it is in the cleanest possible placement. He stressed the difference between tuning clean and pure intervals. The octave is as wide as the 5th is narrow, so the two beat rates cancel each other out when played together. This also has a subtle effect on overall stretch, particularly in the sixth octave, which is pushed slightly higher. There was, however, no handout given with the sequence, and this is due to some intellectual property discussions involving other technicians in the community. Kent is, though, presently writing an in-depth article on the topic that will be published in the Journal sometime in the future, and the scope of everything he had to say is beyond the limited space here.

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## Announcement

The newsletter page on the Chapter website has been temporarily deactivated. The Chapter recently received a letter notifying of a potential infringement of use of a copyrighted and licensed image in the October 2012 issue. Even though great care is taken to not use licensed images that require usage fees, this one was unknowingly licensed, and a copyright license compliance service notified the Chapter of improper usage. This is why many images and cartoons that people submit for the newsletter ultimately do not make it in. The image in question was a link to a BBC story and the image went with the link on the site, and sharing the link was encouraged. Evidently, BBC does not own the image. It was shared assuming Fair Use was applicable. So, to be on the safe side, that page is deactivated because there is over a decade's worth of newsletters still there. Other possible alternatives for maintaining an archive are being explored.

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## The Takeaway

by Kim Hoessly

Here's what folks took away from the May Meeting:

Kim Hoessly: I found Ben's comments about concert work being a psychological game, between the artist and the technician, interesting. Not that the technician is trying to fool the artist, but that you have to get into their head to understand what they want. Also his admonition that if the venue will not pay for the service you feel is necessary for optimal results, you should decline the work because if the instrument is not prepared properly, your reputation may suffer (and the pianist may blame you). I also liked Mark's comment that if a note needs to come up a little, you can brighten the tone a bit by putting your hand on the string (perhaps with a cloth between your hand and the string) and hitting the hammer hard 6-8 times, checking as you go, to compact the felt. That sounded like a great tip! Also the crumpled newspaper in a summer home piano which is left unattended over the winter. The bit of moisture in the paper helps keep the instrument from drying out too much.

David Stang: Hmm. Actually my takeaways were the ones you mentioned here! Especially the tips about brightening the tone -- I never thought about the idea that one cannot expect to brighten the tone significantly for a performance because juicing is not only impractical, it's also making a semi-permanent change in the piano that the venue may not want.

Chris Burget: Ben stressed the importance of bedding the keyframe, as this affects the whole regulation of the action. He also stressed checking, and that he prefers hammers with little, to no, tapering of the tails so the backchecks can better maintain optimum friction over the course of time. Ben also prefers, when possible, mating hammers to strings so that the mating favors the treble side of the hammer before the Una Corda is engaged. This gives more hammer surface to the pianist for coloration of tone with the pedal. I also found his remarks on the psychological interplay between artist and technician to be very interesting, as well as pianos, themselves, behaving very much like organisms with personalities that respond differently to various pianists and technicians. David Chadwick's tip about stuffing newspaper into pianos stored for the winter was interesting, too, in that it may help maintain the internal humidity over long periods.



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## Insights Into Concert Preparation

Thanks to Graves Pianos for hosting the May meeting and providing food and refreshments; and thanks to Ben Wiant for offering his insights into the preparation of concert pianos.

Ben started off by saying that a good deal of concert work is actually a psychological exercise between the technician and the artist. No so much a game where one is outwitting the other, but more understanding how the other thinks and how certain ideas are expressed. Though, perhaps with some artists, it may feel like a battle of the wits, and wills. Ultimately, one must learn how to listen to, and interpret, the requests of the artist and accommodate those wishes that are reasonable and achievable. One could say that part of the technician's job is to instill confidence in the artist that the piano will perform reliably and to their satisfaction. Throughout the discussion, Ben related stories of various concerts and how some went one way or another. He stressed the importance of really trying to reasonably accommodate an artist, and not just nodding in agreement and later pretending that certain tasks were completed. If a pianist wants a little more dip or closer let off, then by all means and with time permitting, it should be done. Ben has had many experiences with artists who sometimes later express their gratitude in a variety of ways, and that it is always worth the extra effort. One such artist even sent him rare unreleased recordings of their work that he had greatly wanted to hear for some time.

He went on to say that the technician deals not only with the artist, but also with the venue. If the venue, or whoever is footing the bill for the piano prep, is not willing to pay for the amount of work necessary to insure the instrument is properly prepared, then the technician may want to consider whether he/she should take the job. Especially if it is a high profile event. If there are to be rigorous rehearsals following a tuning, and no further service is requested before the performance, and/or the piano was just moved into the hall from a drastically different environment, or some other similar complicating circumstance, then the piano tuning may very well have shifted some by performance time. And if someone, like the artist, later has negative things to say about it, that can make the technician look bad. "The only way to know how the piano sounds in the hall, is to be there when the performer is playing the piano in the hall!" Whether it be for rehearsal only or staying through intermission, "If the people paying the bill don't want to pay for extra time, and you feel that it is warranted, then you don't have to do the work; it's as simple as that. With some performances there is too much at stake." He also described how some venues prioritized maintaining a consistent climate in regard to temperature and humidity, and the difference that it makes is profound. Other venues did not do this and those effects were profound as well. "Ideally, the piano should be in the performance space, if it doesn't already live there, for at least two or three days prior to the performance, in order for the climate to work its 'magic' on the piano." It was also suggested that one develop good relationships with stage managers and try to understand the complexities of their jobs. This also extends to other positions in institutional settings like secretaries and custodians. These are often the people that you deal with the most, and secretaries, in particular, often practically run the departments they are in and have great influence on budgets. Do what you can to make their jobs easier and often the favors are returned.

Ben also had some things to say about regulation, and some of that will be presented below in the copy of a handout he distributed to us. Before the start of any given concert season, he will prep the pianos as described in the list and he will do so to the limit that the hall will allow, meaning that the present climate conditions are a prime factor. Once this "baseline regulation" is performed, then it is a matter of checking on it throughout the remainder of the season, with emphasis on certain items that tend to change with humidity. Those items are highlighted in red. Bedding and position of the keyframe is paramount, as it affects all points in the complete regulation; and some keyframes and keybeds in some pianos fluctuate more than others. He related his thoughts on old Chickering's that held their regulation well for years on end while some Steinways were on the opposite end of that spectrum. Hammer checking is also very important. He went on to say that he prefers untapered hammers in some pianos because they maintain their positive contact with the backchecks for longer periods of time. If hammers are bobbling some, and not checking properly, and all surfaces are shiny and smooth, then filing horizontally across the tails may help gain a little needed friction in a pinch.

He also discussed some voicing and related how subjective that topic can be and how it's a matter of taste. Any major voicing would be done during the primary regulation. Anything else prior to a performance would be minor changes that could be reversible. Maybe a little chopstick tool voicing here and there. Ben also discussed trying to be somewhat familiar with the repertoire being performed. Ben has a distinct advantage here because he has a Master's Degree in Performance, and understands many of the challenges an artist faces with certain works. He also discussed trapwork, and placement of the Una Corda. To maximize the variety of tonal color from pedal shift, he tries to give the pianist the maximum amount of hammer surface to work with, so when he spaces the hammers to the strings he favors the treble side of the hammers. New York Steinway recommends favoring the bass, while most European makers favor the treble. Eliminating annoying pedal and trapwork squeeks was also briefly discussed.

This has been just an overview of the discussion, Q & A session that followed, and the many valuable war stories that were shared. Thank you, Ben!



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## General Description Of Procedure For Grand Piano Regulation

1. Clean the action cavity (keybed, etc.)
2. **Bed and position keyframe**
3. Clean and lubricate keyframe
4. Ease or tighten keys and check for chucking
5. Establish proper keyheight, level, and set touch depth
6. Space strings under the capo d'astro
7. Space and travel hammers and fit to strings
8. **Fit wippens to knuckles**
9. **Make hammers let-off**
10. Tune\*
11. Reset let-off\*\*
12. **Align backchecks**
13. **Set hammer drop, backchecks, and repetition strength**
14. **Align jacks with knuckle core and "wink"**
15. **Set hammerline**
16. Tune\*
17. Repeat procedures 11-14\*\*
18. Voice
19. Adjust damper lift, alignment, and travel
20. **Adjust sostenuto, una corda, and damper pedals**

Each adjustment is either checked or completed 88 times

**Red = Affected most by changes in relative humidity**

\*Optional, if necessary

\*\*Optional. and done if piano is tuned at these intervals

# **AUCTION**

**Saturday, June 18, 2016**

Church of the Master UM  
24 N. Grove St.  
Westerville OH 43081

## **TOOLS ~ PARTS ~ SUPPLIES**

The Columbus Chapter PTG is sponsoring an auction of piano technician tools, plus piano parts and supplies. In addition to items which belonged to our chapter member, Don Carle, who passed away last year, we will be selling off additional tools, equipment, and supplies of a couple other members looking to downsize. Included in the sale will be: tilters, tuning and regulating tools, spare action parts, rebuilding equipment, and more. Additional information can be found at: [www.ptgcolumbus.org/auction.html](http://www.ptgcolumbus.org/auction.html)

View inventory from **9:30-10:30am** Auction will start at **10:30am**

We would like to have an idea of how many people to expect, so please contact: Kim Hoessly [khoessly@columbus.rr.com](mailto:khoessly@columbus.rr.com) or 614-537-8596 or Mark Ritchie [ritchiepiano@gmail.com](mailto:ritchiepiano@gmail.com) or 614-855-7704





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

## Wine Bar



Coup Restorations latest upright conversion - Mark Ritchie

### Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

President	Kim Hoessly, RPT
Vice-President	Vacant
Treasurer	Ron Kenreich
Secretary	Christopher Burget
Imm. Past Pres.	Bryan Hartzler, RPT

*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

### Chapter Meeting Tuesday, May 17

Columbus Piano Leasing  
6493 Proprietors Rd  
Worthington, OH 43085  
[columbuspianoleasing.com](http://columbuspianoleasing.com)

Pizza & Drinks at **6:30pm**  
Meeting at **7:00pm**

**Topic:** Grand Damper  
Troubleshooting by  
David Chadwick, RPT

**Map Link:**  
[goo.gl/maps/aQFWAulwbhT2](http://goo.gl/maps/aQFWAulwbhT2)

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