

The Buckeye Backcheck

Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild
Volume 39 Issue 8 November 2014



PRESIDENT'S CORNER



I recently picked up *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, a book put out by the British Museum and published as a companion to the BBC radio series of the same name. The book takes the reader on a globe trotting road trip through time using man-made creations that tell many more things about their makers than you might have imagined possible. A stone chopping tool found in Olduvai Gorge by Louis Leakey is one of the oldest; approximately 1.8-2 million years old. Now, I love tools; piano tools, kitchen tools, building tools, gardening tools, you name it. I'm fascinated by gadgets, especially old ones. Remember the tool chest featured on a PTG Journal cover made by a Mr. Studley who worked for the Poole Piano Co? A work of art! Even million year old tools are fascinating. But what Sir David Attenborough said about this stone tool says a lot about all tools and how we feel about what we make:

“This object sits at the base of a process which has become almost obsessive among human beings. It is something created from a natural substance for a particular purpose, and in a particular way with a notion in the maker's mind of what he needed it for. Is it more complex than was needed to actually serve the function which he used it for? I think you could almost say it is. Did he really need to do one, two, three, four, five chips on one side and three on the other? Could he have got away with two? I think he might have done so. I think the man or woman who held this, made it just for that particular job and perhaps got some satisfaction from knowing that it was going to do it very effectively, very economically and very neatly. In time, you would say he'd done it beautifully, but maybe not yet. It was the beginning of a journey.”

What a great mini essay on the beginning of human made devices in general and tools specifically. Isn't what makes a tool a favorite tool the fact that it does the job effectively,

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(President's Corner continued...)

economically and very neatly? And having an appealing ascetic just makes it all the more dear to us. Think about your favorite tools; whether that be a tuning lever or a kitchen knife, and aren't the above criteria what makes it favorite? And if it's a homemade tool, isn't part of what you love about it the fact that you had a "notion" in your mind and were able to execute it?

And let's not forget that complex musical "tool" that we work on every day, the piano. We did not create it, but we keep it working so others can use this tool to make music. And when it functions effectively and economically and neatly and, yes, now we can say beautifully, then we have done our job and become part of the journey.

Kim Hoessly. RPT

Chapter Meeting Minutes October 18, 2014

The meeting was held at Coup Restorations.

Attendance:

Kim Hoessly, John Schmall, Ron Kenreich, Chris Burget, David Stang, Victor Wolfe, and host Steve Coup.

Treasurer's Report:

\$3617.79

Committee Reports:

Testing - Kim proposed that the Chapter get a newer vertical action model. The present one has seen some use over the years and repairs and modifications have had to be made on it in order to comply with visually-impaired testing requirements. Motion passed: John S moved and Ron K seconded.

Old Business:

A proposed change in the Chapter's Standing Rules, Section 2C, regarding Council Delegate reimbursement. The rule was originally that the Delegate would be reimbursed for two extra hotel nights plus \$200 in other expenses. The new rules would be that the Delegate will be reimbursed for \$500 flat in any expenses and that receipts must be presented. Motion passed: Ron K moved, and John S seconded.

Refreshments at meetings will be left up to the hosts, if they want to offer them, when meetings are held at a Member's house or shop. A kitty will then be presented for attendees to contribute funds.

Relocating the Chapter Library was discussed, as well as cataloging it's contents. (Editor's Note: Some weeks after the meeting, David Stang said he may be able to catalogue the Library, and possibly house some of it.)

New Business:

Maria Pollock, MERVP, requested Chapter Officers from around the region take part in a conference call on either October 21 or October 25. Chris Burget offered to take part on October 21.

Announcements:

David Stang announced that one of Ben Bechtel's harpsichords was going to be used by the ProMusica Chamber Orchestra for performances on November 7-8, and again December 12-14 for Holiday performances. For more schedule information go to: <http://www.promusicacolumbus.org/schedule/>

Midwest Regional Conference Call With Maria Pollock, MERVP

On October 21, Chris Burget took part in a hour-long conference call between Maria Pollock and other Chapter leaders from the region. Most of the time was spent discussing the recent Midwest Regional Conference (MRCO) and the health and programming of Chapters in general. Most of the feedback on the MRCO centered on the length of class periods, which were typically one hour in length. Most responded that they liked it, while a few preferred the longer sessions. There were also some suggestions regarding last minute schedule changes and a few other minor logistical issues, but most responded favorably. Chris mentioned having the International Convention every other year and there were several who also agreed. Some instructors who were accustomed to longer sessions said they felt a bit rushed trying to fit everything into the smaller slots. The rest of the call focused mainly on Chapter attendance, with most saying that attendance was inconsistent, or around 20% of membership, while out-of-town experts tended to be the biggest draw.

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Tour Of Coup Restorations Inc.

The technical portion of the meeting was a tour of Coup Restorations on South Yale Ave on the near west side. Owner and proprietor, Steve Coup, has over forty years experience, opened his business in 1976, and his shop has been in its present location for over twenty years. He has several technicians working for him with over a hundred years of combined experience. They mostly do furniture repairs and restorations and occasionally have some pianos. On this day there were two in the shop but were not being worked on presently. Still, though, it was educational to see a shop like this and he did offer some useful tips.

As far as pianos are concerned, he only does case and refinishing work. He does not restore actions, keys or soundboards. He related a story from many years ago where he refinished a piano and stripped the soundboard, thinking he was doing the piano rebuilder, Mark Ritchie, a favor. Mark still had to shim the board and work on the bridges, etc.... So, he no longer touches soundboards. "It's furniture to me, and an instrument to you... and I don't cross paths."

All items are stripped, sanded, and treated with paste filler and resanded before staining and finishing. Some items are stripped by hand while others are placed in a dip tank with an alcohol solution. The dip tank can do wonders in that a piece can be dipped, and an hour later, after draining and being wiped clean with rags, the surface is smooth as glass and touch up sanding and full refinishing can begin. This is excellent for pieces that have ornately carved embellishments. "All good refinishing jobs start with a good stripping job."

He prefers spray laquer finishes to purely hand rubbed, because it is easier to apply, but will accommodate technicians who want a hand rubbed finish. So, if the piano tech nicks the finish they can just buff it out with 4/0 steel wool and a little water. Care must be taken, though, to work in straight lines and avoid the natural arcing motion of the arm. He also says that wood grain finishes are easier to work with than solid color finishes, especially black. Black is rarely "just pure black". Often it has a shade of blue or brown in it than can be hard to match for surface touch ups.

When asked what is the best thing to clean a piano with, he said that there is no short and easy answer to that. Products containing silicone are best avoided and may cloud finish. In the shop, they use paint thinner, but rarely mentions this to the public because the public may confuse lacquer thinner



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(Coup continued...)



with paint thinner and inadvertently remove the finish. He often recommends Murphy's Oil Soap but that can be problematic as well if the user doesn't know when to quit. Also, sometimes items that are handled a lot are dirty and oils from hands have broken down the finish and oil soap with in turn strip away those oils and leave bare wood exposed. "The cleanser wasn't the problem. It merely removed what was originally a problem." So, these things have to be explained to people so they understand. Later in the tour, the subject was revisited when discussing surface scratches and he does like Old English products, especially for the general public. "Just wipe on and wipe off. But make sure you wipe all the excess off or someone with a white shirt will rub against it and stain the shirt." He also briefly discussed burn-in laquer sticks. Basically, it just takes some practice with those, so trial and error on scrap wood is where to start. Another random note: You can never have too many clamps. There had to be several hundred of them in all varieties in the shop.

He also had a word of warning to the do-it-yourselfer. Work in a well ventilated area, and try to have an understanding of the chemicals you are working with. Do NOT make refinishing something a winter-time project in the basement. He told a story of an individual who did such a thing and the fumes reached a pilot light on a heater and set the whole basement on fire in an instant.

Towards the end of the tour, discussions turned to more business and customer service oriented topics. His line of work shares many traits with ours in this regard. It often costs more to restore an item than it would to replace, or at least cost more to restore than its market value when finished. And, often when such work is commissioned anyways, it is because of sentimental value. "Furniture refinishers are the original recyclers," he said. He also discussed the learning curve for giving accurate estimates and how to balance profitable business practices with good customer service. He places a high value on good customer service, which he feels is waning these days, and it is more than just marketing-speak. Sometimes that little extra touch on something, or that little extra time on a detail may pay off in the long run. Also, sometimes you have to eat the cost of a service call to fix something that wasn't done right. People, when made aware of these things, appreciate it when they feel they are truly getting an added value for their money. Often we are dealing with heirlooms and people are entrusting us with their care, so we have to be ever mindful of that and show empathy and consideration for them.

For more information go to: <http://www.couprestorations.com>



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www.ptgcolumbus.org

For Sale! Rebuilt 1920's Mason & Hamlin A \$25,000



From Ron Kenreich. This piano is in NYC but looks to be a nice instrument. Just posting in the off-chance that someone may be interested. It was rebuilt 7-8 years ago and is supposed to be in excellent condition and has been regularly maintained in a climate controlled room. For more info contact Ron, or the owner, Martha Bernard, at: marthabernardnyc@gmail.com

Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

President	Kim Hoessly, RPT
Vice-President	John Schmoll, RPT
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*

Upcoming Events Chapter Meeting

**Tuesday, November 18
7:30pm**

Classic Pianos

1313 Cameron Ave.
Lewis Center, OH 43035

Formerly Henderson Music Co.
One mile west of Polaris Mall
on Polaris Parkway

Topic: Yamaha C-X Pianos

RSVP Kim Hoessly by Nov 14 for dinner arrangements at 6:30pm

Map Link:

<http://goo.gl/maps/Nbt56>

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Disclaimer:

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