

The Buckeye Backcheck

Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild
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PRESIDENT'S CORNER



7.9 inches. That is how wide I can stretch my hand. If you look at the picture of the Steinbuhler Hand Gauge, you'll see that the shaded outline, that marks the sample hand, is 9.2". Several of my fellow technicians who came to our last meeting were close to that. I, apparently, have tiny, tiny

hands. Well, as my struggles in High School and College with Brahms and Chopin and even Scott Joplin attested, that was really no surprise to me. I have a little trouble with bassoon, too. How I have longed to reach a tenth so I could do that octave test with one hand! Although, even with the 7/8 keyboard, I still could not do that. Dang. Looking at the "zone" chart on the other side of the page with the gauge, I see that I fall a bit above the middle of average ranges for women.

Still, I didn't give up on Brahms and Chopin and I have found ways to work around those interval tests that I cannot do with one hand. I use both hands. When looking for an answer, sometimes the obvious answer is... wait for it...the actual answer! You learn to make do with what you have, no pun intended, at hand. If you really want to do something that may at first seem out of reach (again, np), you have to work at it. Piano work is not for everybody, but if you really want to do it, you will be willing to make the stretch (that pun was intended).

Kim Hoessly. RPT

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Chapter Meeting Minutes September 16, 2014

The business portion of the meeting was held at Columbus Piano Leasing, and the technical portion was held at the home of Mark Ritchie's client Melissa Robol.

Attendance:

Kim Hoessly, Ron Kenreich, Chris Burget, Mark Ritchie, and Alle Schwartz

Treasurer's Report:

\$3534.60

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.

Old Business:

There was no Old Business.

New Business:

Kim proposed a 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. It was also proposed that the Delegate be a member in good standing or was an alternate the previous two years. And the Delegate must attend the meetings prior to the Convention and afterward with a report of Council activities.

A discussion of refreshments at meetings, and who is responsible for providing them, was tabled.

A proposal to change meeting times from 7:30pm to 7:00pm was tabled.

A discussion of who should take over the Chapter Library was tabled.

Possible Technicals for the upcoming program year were discussed and they included:

Oct: Saturday technical on piano finishes by Steve Coup.

Nov: Tips from Dan Levitan's book by John Schmoll.

Feb: Associate's Day/Exam prep day on a Saturday?

March/April: Solutions for loose pins/Smoke damage/Pianoforte?

May: Damper troubleshooting?

Other proposal for this year, or next: Franklin Titebond tour; General troubleshooting; Working on the unworkable piano; Ron Berry of PTG.ORG; Wally Brooks; Bill Spurlock; Bob Marinelli/Pianotek; Joe Goss/Mother Goose Tools; TouchRail by Scott Jones/PitchLock.

For Sale



From Kim H: Just looked at this Wurlitzer, c. 1930, for an older couple in Whitehall who are downsizing to a condo. I tuned it for them, it's in pretty good condition. Looks like when they had the piano antiqued white, the bass strings were replaced (with new pins) and the key tops were done. Everything else is original. Owner is Dawna Ealy, (614) 861-4242.

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Steinbuhler 7/8 Sized Keyboard

The technical portion of the meeting was held at the home of Melissa Robol, who is a client of Mark Ritchie. We thank her very much for inviting us into her home, and we congratulate her on being named the OMTA Teacher Of The Year! She is a piano teacher, and very accomplished pianist, who has had to contend with the fact that the size of most piano keyboards make certain chord voicings and passages hard to realize with the small size of her hands. There are many people out there who have similar problems, including children, who must contort their hands, alter chords or fingering, or used complicated pedaling techniques to overcome these issues. Somewhere along the line, she had heard learned of David Steinbuhler who made reduced-sized keyboards that addressed these needs.

David Steinbuhler first got the idea when he visited a bed and breakfast and the owner had a piano with a customized smaller keyboard. The owner, Christopher Donison, who had studied music at the University of Victoria said, "I could finally use the correct fingerings. Broken-chord formations could be played on one hand position, instead of two. The sensation of what it feels like to play with the proper fingering is easier to remember, more reliable in terms of accuracy, less painful, and ultimately better sounding. That is because the fingers that must bring out specific pitches in concerted sounds are aligned more directly over the keys. The whole hand-shape is less stretched out, and so power can be directed down into the keys."

Steinbuhler was not a piano technician, nor did he have any practical working mechanical knowledge of the instrument. "I had been developing products in our family owned textile business in Titusville, PA and believed that this was an opportunity placed before me. I had computer programming experience, and the idea of building keyboards out of a computer data base intrigued me. Never mind that I knew nothing about the piano industry. I told Christopher I would try to build small keyboards, and he conceived the idea of calling the new proposed keyboard size the Donison-Steinbuhler Standard. The DS Standard™ was born! To designate this standard on the keyboard itself, Christopher designed a logo which we would attach to the front of the first bass key."

There are several main key sizes they produce that are somewhat standardized, yet they can produce just about any custom sized sets. The terminology for these sizes has



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(Steinbuhler continued...)



recently been changed as of 2014. They were named according to fractions like 7/8, 15/16, and so on, but now are named as decimal numbers that correspond to the number of inches that span an octave. They are: DS-6.5 Conventional Keyboard, 6.5" octave, 48.25" overall width; DS-6.0 Universal Keyboard, 6.0" octave, 44.53" overall width; DS-5.5 7/8th Keyboard, 5.5" octave, 41.10" overall width; DS-5.1 Child's Keyboard, 5.1" octave, 37.94" overall width. Kits that have tools and jigs are available for technicians to use when measuring a piano. There are also options for using the original stack or having a brand new separate stack fitted onto the new keys. They use Renner parts and hammers based on the technician's recommendations. The website says that about four hours will be needed to regulate, voice and tweak the action when first installed. This seems to be in line with what Mark said his experience was installing it. "It was actually less work than I was anticipating." He did mention that he had to slightly reposition the new action by 1/8" to get the proper strike point, so he marked the keybed with two lines that corresponded to the two action's individual alignments.



Upon looking at the action, the first thing one may notice is the extreme zig-zag shape of many of the keysticks, that somewhat resemble dog leg keys without the downward bend. Steinbuhler, after much feedback from technicians, started to rotate the keys before cutting so as to align the grains of the wood to maximize strength and eliminate springiness on hard blows. The keys are also aligned so that capstans, balance rail pins and the contact points on the keys form straight lines in order to reduce lateral movement of the key and wear on the balance rail bushings. The lowest fifteen keys are also braced to help reduce key flex, so if they need to be removed for whatever reason they must all be removed together. Another noticeable feature are the enlarged cheek blocks to accommodate the smaller overall width.

We then took turns playing the piano. And, of course, playing "octaves" was the running joke. Many, due to sheer muscle memory, played something more like a ninth. It does take a little getting used to. However, with just a little practice one should be able to adjust and the potential benefits for smaller hand spans are clear. The website offers many testimonials, as well as some empirical data and research studies, that show that readjustment periods are shorter than what most people would expect. They also offer examples of the benefits to those who have performance and practice related injuries, or those with arthritis. There are also examples of people learning certain pieces on the smaller keyboards before transitioning to more conventional sized ones.

For more information, go to: www.steinbuhler.com





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www.ptgcolumbus.org

Rachmaninoff Had Big Hands!



<http://youtu.be/iffKKlhYF53w>

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

**Saturday, October 18
10:00am**

(different day and time than normal)

Coup Restorations Inc
136 South Yale Avenue
Columbus, OH 43222
(614) 274-5900
couprestorations.com

Topic: Piano Finishes
by Steve Coup

Map Link:
<https://goo.gl/maps/6Au0Q>

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