

The Buckeye Backcheck

Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Another year of pianos is upon us. We begin the season with the pleasure of a meeting with Paul Graves, owner of Graves Piano and Organ Company. His lifetime of experience in the piano business is fantastic, with sales of nearly every major maker of piano, with

experience of boom and bust cycles in the industry, with helping musicians from Horowitz to the new beginner, and with a true dedication to the local classical piano music community here in Columbus. Paul has seen it all - please join us as he tells us how it used to be, how it is now, and maybe even how it will be, in the business of pianos.

If you are a regular, I'll look forward to seeing you there. If you have never been to a meeting, this is a great opportunity to hear fabulous stories from Paul and meet some new friends who are fellow travelers.

Bryan Hartzler, RPT

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Horowitz Steinway CD 503

by Chris Burget

The famed Steinway "CD 503" that Vladimir Horowitz performed on exclusively for many years was recently on display at Graves Piano. It is a Steinway D #314503 and was maintained, as many of you would know, by Franz Mohr. In recent years this piano has been on a tour of its own, and its most recent stop was here in Columbus.

My first recollection of Horowitz was that of seeing him perform on a CBS Sunday Morning telecast of his performance in Moscow in April of 1986. I may have heard, and been aware of, Horowitz before this but this event is what made a lifelong impression on me. Seeing and hearing someone perform with such dynamic range had me transfixed for the entire telecast, which ran way over time and CBS thankfully didn't interrupt. The concert was considered important for artistic reasons, and political ones as well due to Cold War politics of the time. For me, the experience was visceral. And, on Sunday August 25, 2013, I got to play that piano!

I am, by no means, an accomplished classical pianist by any measure, and upon Paul Graves telling me that I could play it I told him that I would love to even though I am probably not "worthy" of the priveledge. I will say that, to my ears and hands, I thought it sounded and played wonderful. There may be others who might disagree judging by some comments made on various online piano forums, though some of those are now some years in the past. The tuning Sam Stahl, Graves Technician, put on it was impeccably clean and I found the tone to be quite round and balanced from ppp to fff. The touch was light yet firm. It was easy to play yet offered just enough wieght to allow for various shades of pianissimo while not bottoming out on forte. Again, I only have limited classical training, but I thought it played like a dream. According to Paul, a couple of visiting concert artists who performed on the piano felt the same way I did, apparently, and they fell in love with it. "The action just does whatever you need, or want, it to do," said Paul. I think part of the appeal stems from its history, I'm sure, but in its present state it really seems to be a wonderful playing instrument.

Supposedly, there may have been a time, a while back, when that wasn't the case, and it's touch and tone may have been starting to slip. And it may have had another action in it, but I cannot verify that. Upon looking at the bridges, strings and soundboard, we surmized that it may have at least been restrung at some point. Everything else looked pretty good on it. A few scratches here and there on the case and fallboard, how many of which were from Horowitz's own fingers playing deep into the keys, is anyone's guess. All in all, it looked to be in pretty good condition considering its early 1940's vintage and time spent on the road from city to city.

To the right are a few pictures of the piano, and a few more can be found on the Chapter website at: <http://www.ptgcolumbus.org/technical-photos.html>

A couple more links for a short clip from the CBS telecast highlighting Franz Mohr: <http://youtu.be/zA2KzMOXPBU>

And the full-length documentary "Vladimir Horowitz: The Last Romantic": <http://youtu.be/2hwLYZd6iyA>



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Music Education Or Botox... Make A Choice!

(Editorial from The Music Trades)

What provides a greater social good, music education or unlimited Botox treatments and liposuction? Given the debate currently underway at the Buffalo, New York school system, this question isn't as silly as it might seem, and it also has some serious implications for how best to advocate for school music programs nationwide.

Here's the back-story. By any measure, Buffalo is a metropolis that has seen better times. Citizens have fled the Empire State's second largest city, causing a 22% population decline over the past two decades, and the median income level is only a tad higher than Detroit's. With a current population of 261,000, Buffalo actually has fewer residents than it did in 1900. The exodus has resulted in a declining economy, high unemployment, and sagging school enrollments. Against this doleful backdrop, the city recently announced that it would eliminate all music programs in the coming year to trim about \$2.2 million from its budget. Yet, while music programs are coming under the budgetary scalpel, the Buffalo News reported that a plastic surgery benefit in the teachers' employment contract has been left untouched. Giving Buffalo's 3,200 teachers unlimited access to dermabrasions, breast augmentations, and any other cosmetic procedure, with no co-payment, costs the district about \$5.4 million a year.

The benefit has been a bonanza for plastic surgeons. Local physicians interviewed by the Buffalo News said that teachers represented four out of ten of their patients. Not surprisingly, they also asserted that unlimited plastic surgery was a well-deserved perk. Dr. Kulwant Bhangoo, a plastic surgeon in Buffalo for almost four decades, told a local CBS affiliate, "I feel the teachers have paid their dues and it would be wrong to take it away from them." Dr. Bhangoo and several of his colleagues regularly advertise their services in publications aimed at Buffalo educators. Left unsaid is that these funds could be spent on other, perhaps more worthwhile activities, including offering Buffalo's 42,000 students exposure to music making.

The template for most music advocacy efforts has been a straightforward call for more money, as if additional funding will solve all problems. However, as the situation in Buffalo forcefully illustrates, how money is spent is every bit as important as how much is spent. Which brings us to the issue of how best to craft a persuasive argument for school music programs.

Buffalo residents are among the highest taxed in the nation, paying lofty income, sales, and property tax levies. The school district's \$14,800 per-student expenditures are also about 28% higher than the national average. Unfortunately, it doesn't appear that residents are getting much bang for their buck. Local civic and news websites are filled with anecdotes of feather-bedding municipal labor practices, funds squandered on poorly thought out capital projects, and rampant cronyism. This well-documented mismanagement makes it doubtful that a simple plea to increase school funding would gain much traction with voters. Yet these same voters are highly receptive to arguments for the better allocation of existing funds. The plastic surgery/music program trade-off has sparked a torrent of commentary from the citizenry. And with the exception of a few plastic surgeons and school teachers, opinion seems unanimous in favor of keeping music and ditching plastic surgery. Union officials, obviously embarrassed by the situation, are back-pedaling in the face of public ridicule, and administrators have seized the high ground. As of this writing, Buffalo's Mayor, Byron Brown has managed to come up with \$400,000 to partially restore music programs. Whether music programs will regain full funding is still under debate.

Union officials are now saying that they will scale back the plastic surgery benefit if the administrators come back to the bargaining table and renegotiate a contract. School administrators counter that the union isn't prepared to bargain in good faith because a failure to reach a new agreement leaves the current contract, with its guaranteed annual wage increases, in place. Hopefully, mounting public pressure will break the stalemate.

Regardless of the outcome, the Buffalo case suggests illustrating how existing funds might better be directed towards music programs is a more effective way to motivate the citizenry than a simplistic call for "more money." Not every school district offers such a clear-cut choice between music and plastic surgery, but some careful budget analysis could uncover some misplaced fiscal priorities. The New York City schools, for example, spend close to \$100 million a year on "rubber rooms," holding pens where demonstrably incompetent teachers sit idly all day and collect their salaries because union contracts make it too costly to fire them. In our fair state of New Jersey, stories about graft in school procurement policies regularly make the headlines.

Management in a world of finite resources involves making choices, some of which are difficult. Music advocates would better advance the cause by highlighting the misplaced priorities that limit access to music education rather than issuing a blanket plea for more money.

Brian T. Majeski
Editor, The Music Trades

Submitted by Mark Ritchie, and reprinted from The Music Trades Online



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www.ptgcolumbus.org



by Carolita Johnson

Tax Reminder Funtime

A reminder that the sales tax in Ohio went up .25% on September 1. So all Sales Tax collected should be adjusted accordingly depending on which county you are tuning in (for example, Franklin county total sales tax was 6.75%, September 1 it will be 7%).

Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

President Bryan Hartzler, RPT
Vice-President John Schmoll, RPT
Treasurer Ron Kenreich
Secretary Christopher Burget

*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, September 17, 2013,
7:30 pm**

Graves Piano & Organ Co.
5798 Karl Road
Columbus, OH 43229
(614) 847-4322
www.gravespianos.com

Topic: The life and times of Paul Graves

Map Link:
<http://goo.gl/maps/FGn9S>

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

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