

The Buckeye Backcheck

Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

Volume 39 Issue 6 September 2014



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

That awkward moment when you're not sure if you actually have free time or if you're just forgetting everything.

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Whenever I am tuning a piano, especially one that I see on a regular basis, I sometimes go into autopilot mode. I'm sure you've experienced that yourselves. As Jim Harvey once explained in a class at a PTG convention, "one minute you are setting a temperament and the next thing you know, you're tuning the high treble and thinking HOW THE HECK DID I GET UP HERE?". I find I am operating on several levels while I tune. Level 1: the actual

tuning, Level 2: what else is going on with the piano, and Level 3: what do I need to get at the grocery store on the way home?

The first level is pretty obvious. Almost every trip to a customer's house begins as a tuning appointment. It is, I don't believe, an exaggeration to say 90% of our initial contact with piano owners is, "my piano needs to be tuned". And to be honest, for at least half, if not more, of those pianos, that is all they ever do (even if you suggest/recommend other work, and I do mean suggest/recommend because it is their piano). So, I am obviously listening and making the necessary adjustments. The more out of tune it is (1/2 for example), the larger part of my attention will be dedicated to that task.

But level 2 is also important. While I'm tuning, I'm watching hammers and dampers move. Is there a slight sluggishness? Is the regulation noticeably bad? Are the keys needing rebushed or are they badly chipped? Are the screws coming out of the lid hinges on that grand or is there a missing hinge pin (that has happened on more than one occasion)? How are the bridges? When I hear the need for voicing, what am I looking at that would help (worn hammers, something spilled, general neglect)? It's important to operate on that second level so you can make the most of your visit. Often, a few minutes spent fixing or

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(...President continued)

adjusting something other than tuning, can be a great customer relations tool and that is a very important tool to have in your bag.

And of course, level 3. When you're tuning that piano you've tuned many times and is generally in good shape, the mind can go on to what you need to do after the appointment or some other problem you've been mulling over. I have made many a grocery or house chore list or realized how to fix something or remembered someone I need to call and lots of other things while I'm tuning. I've even thought about what I need to do for the next chapter meeting. And sometimes I see things in the room, like a kid's drawing or an interesting book or a funny poster. I'm including one of latter which is an example of what happens if you spend too much time in level 3. Don't get too lost in that level, try to stick to 1 and 2.

Kim Hoessly. RPT

Upcoming Chapter Meeting

September 16, 2014

7:00 pm

Arrangements for the next Chapter Meeting are a little different than normal. First of all, the meeting will start at **7:00 pm**, a half hour earlier than normal, and will take place at more than one location.

We will meet at Columbus Piano Leasing for the business portion of the meeting. Then, for Mark Ritchie's technical presentation, we will go to one of his client's homes to look at a piano that he installed a 7/8 size action that is slightly smaller than the original action. Afterwards, for those that want refreshments and socializing, we will go to Villa Nova Ristorante. Mark's client is gracious enough to let us in her home, however, with space and time being a potential issue, we didn't want to prolong our presence with our business meeting and refreshments. So, this is the reason for this not-so-normal arrangement.

We do hope you attend, though, as 7/8 actions are not something many technicians see on a regular basis.

Columbus Piano Leasing

6493 Proprietor's Rd.

Worthington, OH 43085

(614) 436-2246

columbuspianoleasing.com

Topic: 7/8 size actions

by Mark Ritchie

Villa Nova Ristorante

5545 N. High Street

Columbus, Ohio 43214

(614) 846-5777

villanovacolumbus.com



September 25-28, 2014

www.midwestptg.com

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Boston's Phantom Opera House

(Reprinted from messynessychnic.com)

Boston has its own phantom of the opera; a vast and forgotten 120 year-old concert theatre buried 40 feet below street level. One of the city's best-kept secrets, the sleeping concert hall reminiscent of Italian Renaissance style, has been closed for more than 70 years, hidden away from the public below the unassuming old storefront of piano seller M. S Steinert & Sons on Boylston Street.

Steinert Hall was once a treasured performance space, hailed at the dawn of the 20th century as the "headquarters for the musical and artistic world of cultured Boston".

Today it doesn't serve as much more than a subterranean crypt for old pianos and their spare parts...

The "acoustically perfect" theatre was built by Alexander Steinert, son of Morris Steinert, a German immigrant who arrived in Boston in the mid 1800s along with his dream of opening an American piano store. Alexander commissioned the 650 seater concert hall for musicians to benefit from a unique acoustic environment, buried deep enough to entirely silence the noise of the busy Boston streets.

World-renowned pianists and opera singers alike performed on this stage but Steinert Hall hasn't hosted an audience or heard the echoes of musicians' instruments since 1942, the same year an unforgettable tragedy struck Boston's entertainment scene and shocked the nation.

It was the year 492 people would die in the deadliest nightclub fire in history at the Cocoanut Grove. Following the horrifying incident, building codes would never be the same again. Subterranean spaces in particular, became subject to strict fire regulations. With a capacity for 650 people and a serious lack of fire exits 40 feet below ground, Steinert had no chance of surviving the new wave of laws that saw many establishments heavily fined and ultimately shut down. The costly upgrades were simply out of budget and the sounds of Steinert Hall were silenced under lock and key.

While the piano shop at ground-level continued to specialise in Steinways and become a well-known and trusted name in the Boston music community, the once treasured theatre was quickly forgotten by the cultural elite that had frequented its underground auditorium. As decades passed, it became a mysterious urban legend, unseen even by the majority of the staff themselves at M. S Steinert & Sons. Some in-the-know Bostonians heard the whispers of a secret subterranean theatre, but few believed it was really there.

Then in 2011, one curious urban explorer, Greig Lamont published an article on his blog, A Project in Ruins, featuring photographs that



Joe Kowalski



Greig Lamont, Project of Ruins



Greig Lamont, Project of Ruins



Jessica Rinaldi, Boston Globe

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(Opera Hall continued...)



confirmed the existence of the mysterious theatre for those that cared to know. After all these years, it had indeed been sitting right under the city's favourite old piano store at 162-168 Boylston St.

With special permission (presumably thanks to a talented way with words), Greig was given access to the bygone music hall accompanied by the building's maintenance man.

In his article, he describes the theatre in its current state:

“With all but a few of the original chairs and benches removed, the Hall was used as glorified dumping-ground and store-room. Broken pianos, large wooden transportation crates, old toilets, boxes, cabinets, amongst other items of bric-a-brac lay strewn around its magnificent floor.”

All but a few of the original 650 seats were donated to the Boston College High School and since its closure, the theatre has been a serious victim of water damage. In the 1960s, the construction of a nearby garage caused major flooding from a pipe break and over the years, water has continued to trickle down from the water table above.

“Despite being in a bad state of disrepair much of the original plaster, stonework and paint survives, which the top balcony provided a perfect vantage point to inspect from,” says Greig.

At one point the theatre had been designated as a public bomb shelter but fortunately it was never employed under such circumstances and remained a mystery to all but a few. Occasionally in-the-know musicians requested a visit, including Elton John who allegedly took a tour in the 90s. In 2013, the local Emerson College radio website ran a feature on the theatre, followed by the Boston Globe, sparking a wider-spread awareness of the hidden treasure. Still, Steinert Hall is officially closed to the public and Paul Murphy, today's president of M. Steinert & Sons, discourages requests for visitation due to the high safety risks.

Murphy has had interest from various parties such as nightclub owners and theatre troupes to buy the old concert hall, but believes it would not be salvageable for anything less than \$6 million— and that's just the repairs.

The list of obstacles for Steinert's revival is no doubt a very long one and for the foreseeable future, the music from this phantom of the opera will truly have to play inside our minds...

Sources: Messy Nussy Chic, A Project in Ruins, Emerson College radio website, The Boston Globe, Andrew Vella on Vimeo, Flickr

For an award winning short documentary video by Andrew Vella go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W254Z7cD1pM>



Jessica Rinaldi, Boston Globe



Greig Lamont, Project of Ruins



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www.ptgcolumbus.org



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*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 16, 2014,
7:00 pm**

(half hour earlier than normal)

Columbus Piano Leasing

6493 Proprietor's Rd.
Worthington, OH 43085

(614)436-2246

columbuspianoleasing.com

Topic: 7/8 Size Actions
by Mark Ritchie

Other important details
listed on page 2

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

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