

# "THE SOONER TUNER"



Official Newsletter, Oklahoma Chapter 731  
The Piano Technicians Guild, Inc.  
**February '98**



## NEXT MEETING

DATE: February 19th  
TIME: 8:30AM  
LOCATION: Ross Trawick's place

DIRECTIONS: From I-35 & 36th street, go east to Bartel,  
then south to 3200 North Bartel,  
#427-6663

### \*\*\* TECHNICAL \*\*\*

"Replacing Hammers in Upright Pianos"  
by Ross Trawick, RPT

Ross will demonstrate the in's and the out's of determining  
bore distance, angle, and weight for hammer replacement.

\*\*\*\*\*

Norman Cantrell, President.....	405-525-7762
Ross Trawick, Vice President.....	405-427-6663
David Wallace, Secretary.....	405-755-4221
Gary Bruce, Treasurer.....	405-348-3213
(E-mail address: garybrucegang@juno.com)	
Keith McGavern, Newsletter.....	405-275-8600
(PO Box 1585, Shawnee, OK 74802-1585)	
(E-mail address: kam544@ionet.net)	

### LAST MEETING

I regret not being at the last meeting. It was due to my own negligence that I missed it. How you might ask? I didn't put the meeting date into my calendar book. Well, it won't happen again. I now have logged in all the meeting dates for the year. So, if you maybe have the same problem, now would be an excellent time to mark the dates in your calendar schedule.

### UPCOMING SEMINAR

CENTRAL WEST REGIONAL SEMINAR  
 March 19-22, 1998  
 Clarion Hotel Airport, Wichita, KS  
 Contact: Marty Hess 316-744-0564  
 3900 North Parkwood  
 Wichita KS 67220

### 1998 SCHEDULED MEETINGS

March 12th  
 April 16th  
 May 21st  
 June 18th  
 July (no meeting)  
 August 20th  
 September 17th  
 October 22nd  
 November 19th  
 December (undecided)

All meeting times 8:30AM  
 except July & December

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Well, I hope everyone saw their shadow on Groundhog Day. I am fairly certain that whether you saw your shadow or not, we will be in for six more weeks of winter, or a month and a half, which ever comes first.

Since we met last we have enjoyed a Super Bowl in football, and currently we have begun the Winter Olympics. Both of these events represent people who are the very best at what they do. Both Super Bowl teams endured a long season as well as ups and downs in their quest for a championship. Each Olympic athlete sacrificed hours in training to excel in their respective events.

Pianist, too, enter competitions requiring hours of investment to display their prowess at the keyboard. There are no such competitions for piano technicians, however, but perhaps we can learn from the competitors example.

What can you do this year to excel in the profession of piano technology? Opportunities are available from the nearby Central West Regional Seminar at Wichita, Kansas in March to the National Convention at Providence in July. I have yet to invest in a seminar or convention that didn't result in growth, either personally or in my business.

I may never receive a gold medal tuning, but the discipline to invest in myself and my business is very satisfying, all the way to the bank. See you at Ross Trawick's shop on the 19th.

Norman Cantrell, RPT

## PIANOTECH (Internet) STUFF

### *"Piano Detectives"*

(by Frank Weston, waco@ari.net, Arnold, MD)

Date: Tue, 11 Nov 1997

...I thought you might like to hear the story of a Knabe "B" that I restored last year.

Prior to this particular piano, I had restored a number of Knabe "B" grands from the 1920's, and had come to respect Knabe as a good quality instrument with potential for a wonderful tone with a little work. However, the "B's" from the '20s all seemed a little too light in construction, with a few too many shortcuts taken. Nice instruments, but not world class. I liked Knabe, and sought them out because they are plentiful here (Annapolis-Baltimore area), and because the old Knabe grands seem to be undervalued.

I was called by a Virginia farmer one day. He had read my sales ad in the paper for a Knabe, and he had a Knabe he wanted to restore himself. He paid me to drive the two hours to his farm and consult with him about the piano. I met him at his home and we drove together to the farm blacksmith shop where the piano sat atop the brick forge, legs piled inside the case, no lyre, no music desk, and both mice and birds nesting in the action. The farmer explained to me that he had bought the piano at auction from the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind, where apparently the piano had resided for about 50 years. The piano had been built in 1912 by Knabe in Baltimore.

I went over the piano and found that the rim was quite sound, the plate was ornate, and appeared in good shape under the years of crud. The action was a total loss. Amazingly the soundboard was almost perfect, free from any cracks and with good crown. Maybe the keys, and frame could be salvaged. Hard to tell about the pinblock. The piano had been in an unheated, semi open forge/shop for more than a year, and who knows what before that. I explained to the farmer the risks involved and gave him an estimate to make the piano once again playable. He was a very qualified cabinet maker and wanted to do the case work himself. I valued the piano in its present condition as worth less than \$500.

(1 of 4)

page 3

page 4

It was almost six months before I heard from the farmer again. He had decided that the piano was just too expensive and time consuming, and wanted to know if I would give him \$500 for it. I had just sold a few pianos so I had some cash to spare, I liked Krabe, and I thought I had detected some pretty nicely figured mahogany under the nearly opaque, alligatored shellac on the case. I bought the piano and hauled it to my shop/home, where it sat over the winter, covered in an unheated but dry garage.

This spring I started restoration. I envisioned that this piano was a gamble but that it might come out to be an OK instrument which I would sell for less than \$10,000. As I stripped the case, the quality of the mahogany veneer became apparent, beautiful, subtle, a match for anything else I have ever seen. The case structure was no compromise. Solid, with a four post frame, and a rim a full two inches taller than on a modern Steinway B. Nice carving on the legs and molding on the case. Not too ornate, but classy. Because the wood was so nice, I spent more time than I should, refinishing with uncounted coats of hand rubbed shellac. The plate was also a work of art. Cast in intricate detail, with ornate holes, no waviness, and fortunately very solid. A little scrubbing, sanding, priming, and painting, and it came out like new.

The soundboard was amazing. Under the years of dirt, it was perfect. I stripped the original shellac finish with alcohol, and hand rubbed on a new shellac finish. It is beautiful. The bridges got cleaned up, renitched, epoxy sealed, regraphited and repinned.

The pinblock was a big debate. It looked very good, but why not replace and be safe? I battled the issue around, and finally decided to keep the original. All the rest of the wood was good, why not the block? Besides, would a replacement ever be as structurally sound as the original? It was repinned with 4/0 pins, and it has ended up very stable and easy to tune.

The action was shot, but I was able to use Renner universal wippers, shanks and flanges and duplicate the original geometry. The new Renner light hammers matched the weight of the originals very closely. I had to determine the hammer line by ear and experiment. The backchecks were re-leathered, and all felts replaced. The backaction was a mess, but with some rebushing, lots of patience and a little CA glue, it was restored to like new condition. The keys all got cleaned up and rebushed, but I was unable to save the ivories. The new German plastics are a nice compromise.

Because the music desk and lyre were missing, I had to modify/manufacture them from what the catalogs offer. I'm not happy with the result, they are functional, but don't match the overall quality of the rest of the piano.

Slowly the piano came back together. I was surprised when I measured the touchweight and found that it was very close to a uniform 42 grams from top to bottom. Too light, I thought. I finally got the piano restrung (I stuck to the original scale, figuring the guys that built these things know a lot more than me in this department). After a few chip tunings, I installed the action and did the first complete tuning with dampers installed and regulated. THEN CAME THE BIG SURPRISE. I played a few measures of a simple Hayden sonata I have been struggling with. I could not believe my ears! I'm not much of a pianist, but I do know beauty when I hear it, and this piano had/has the most beautiful, clear, sweet, and even powerful tone I have heard in anything its size. Yes, it was still rough, unvoiced, drifting, but unmistakably wonderful. I called to my wife, who is a pretty accomplished musician. She tried the piano and went away in disbelief. She owns and teaches on a 1929 M&H "BB" which she has always defended as the best piano she has ever played. Over the years, her "BB" has sat adjacent to very good Steinways, Bs, A2s, A3s, Cs, and beaten them all.

(3 of 4)



Over the past months, the Knabe has just gotten better and better with careful voicing, and as the new strings stabilize finer tunings are possible. My wife has decided that the Knabe is now "her" piano, and the M&H is up for sale. I can't argue with her, although I suffer from tinnitus and must play the Knabe with the lid closed because of it's power and clarity, especially in the mid-treble - I never had that trouble with the M&H. The touch at 42 grams turns out not to be a problem. The action is fast and responsive, and the dynamic range is incredible. I've got it tuned to a Vallotti-Young temperament and you never heard anything sweeter (well maybe you've heard something just as sweet).

Well, anyway, that's just about the end of my story. The conclusion is, that in my practical experience what you have written about the quality of pianos of this vintage, Knabe in particular, is 100% correct. I am actively seeking more Knabe restoration projects, but unfortunately, a pre-1915 Knabe grand is not something that can be bought from a catalog or the Yellow pages. Maybe that's good. You correctly note that nothing in life lasts, but it does give me great satisfaction to find one of these beautiful creations and restore it to a condition so that it will last at least another 80 years or so.

Regards,

Frank Weston  
waco@ari.net  
Arnold, MD

## Recommended Reading

Presidents' Message  
*"Taking Care Of Business"*  
by Marshall Hawkins, RPT  
(PT Journal, February 1996, page 6)

"To build a flourishing piano technicians business you must have something more than good fortune. You must also have knowledge in the field, aggressive, honest business methods, and settle for nothing less than becoming a craftsman member of the Piano Technicians Guild."

## The "Kick" Zone

(closely related to after touch)  
from  
Keith McGavern, RPT

"Extraordinary expense must be limited by the worth of the occasion."  
(Francis Bacon)

.....  
Q. What do you get when you drop a piano down a mine shaft?  
A. A flat minor  
(author unknown)

.....  
"Anyone without a sense of humor is at the mercy of the rest of us."  
(author unknown)

.....  
"The difference between mailing lists and newsgroups (on the Internet) is the difference between inviting a group of friends over for wine on Sunday evening and putting a billboard that says 'Free Booze Here' in your front yard."  
(Lazio Nibble)

.....  
"Hard heads don't necessarily win, but they usually end up with a pretty clear picture of what beat them."  
(Ron Nossaman, RPT, Wichita, Kansas)