# "THE SOONER TUNER"

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

## NEXT MEETING

DATE: April 16th, Thursday
TIME: 8:30AM
LOCATION: Home of Gary & Jan Bruce
313 Cedar View , Edmond, 405-348-3213

DIRECTIONS: From I-35 & 33rd, go west to Bryant, then north to Cedar View
(about 1/2 mile, across from pet hospital),
turn left, go 1/2 block

*• • • TECHNICAL • • •*

***"On Becoming Incorporated"***
presented by Gary Bruce, RPT

Gary will present a discussion on the advantages and disadvantage of becoming incorporated.

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

Ben Davis, RPT, wishes to report what an excellent meeting it was Thursday, March 12th. Chapter dues increase, delegate expense (Keith McGavern, RPT, nominating committee (Ben Davis, RPT, Gary Bruce, RPT, David Wallace, Associate) were some of the business items. Treasurer's report - $1083.75 Gary Bruce, RPT, shared terrific new information about Oklahoma Christian University in Edmond since the arson incident. And Keith McGavern, RPT, did his Teflon applied skilled session. Everyone seemed to find great interest in this unique activity. Special thanks to Northwest Baptist Church for hosting and coffee, and to Ed Hamby for donuts!

## 1998 SCHEDULED MEETINGS

May 21st, Thursday
Norman Cantrell, RPT, presenting "From Bench Warmer to Player - How To Get Past First Base and Score a Home Run with In-Player Piano Service". This is the class he will be doing in Providence.

June 18th, Thursday
"Servicing the Spinet", Keith McGavern, RPT and Norman Cantrell, RPT, do a tuning pass, relevel the keys, adjust regulation & make repairs all in one technical session...well, almost all these things in one session. :-)

July (no meeting)
August 20th, Thursday
September 17th, Thursday
October 22nd, Thursday
November 19th, Thursday
December (undecided)

All meeting times 8:30AM except July & December

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I hope all of you are prepared to file your taxes this month. I am writing this month's column from Lawton, OK. I have been here all week preparing a Steinway D for the McMann International Music Competition. This year's contest features piano. Competition cycles annually with an emphasis on piano, voice, and instrumental respectively.

I came to Lawton on Sunday night so I could get an early start Monday morning. I spent all day Monday and Tuesday morning preparing the competition piano. I spent another two hours Wednesday morning before the contestants began performing. The total prep time came out to thirteen hours. Since then I have been checking and servicing the piano as needed, during the lunch break and before each morning session.

This is the second time I have been involved in this competition. I find it a very challenging experience to try to prepare a piano for six competitors. My goal has been to make the piano perform as consistently as possible, repeat as quickly as possible, and voice as evenly as possible. So far, with the exception of one contestant, the feedback from the performers has been positive.

Two things surfaced this week. First, it has been helpful to draw on a lot of experience in this endeavor. Some of the experience is mine to be sure, but a lot of the experience I'm drawing on has been from classes, articles, and discussions with fellow technicians. The second thing I noticed was, while servicing some other pianos in my "spare time", the concentration required to prepare the competition piano as heightened my senses to the unevenness that exists in "average pianos." This awareness, along with experience, has allowed me to make a few quick improvements in these "average pianos" that I might not otherwise, out of laziness, have been willing to let slide.

It really is amazing what you can do in just a few minutes to help your customers enjoy their instruments more. I hope to see all of you at Gary's on the 16th.

Norman Cantrell, RPT

## PIANOTECH (Internet) STUFF

*"Wise policy for servicing player pianos"*

by Les Smith

Date: Wed, 7 Jan 1998

For the newer techs out there, it cannot be overemphasized how important it is that if you ever walk in unexpectedly on a PLAYER piano for a new customer, DON'T TOUCH IT until after the customer has demonstrated to you how well it works. Otherwise you're just asking for a situation where you hear: "What did you do to my piano? It was working GREAT before you tuned it."

At that point, it's too late to verify the condition of the piano. You're up you-know-what creek, in a leaky boat, without a paddle, and sinking FAST. By having the customer demonstrate the condition of the piano FIRST, you are invoking NEWTON'S FIRST LAW: CYA!!!!! :-)*

Les Smith
lessmith@buffnet.net

* Editor's note: CYA loosely translated means protecting one's self.

# PIANOTECH (Internet) STUFF

*"Limerick"*

by Jan Blees

Date: Sat, 6 Dec 1997

I once had a piano in tune --
It might have been some year in June.
I thought it would last
A few summers past -
I was going to have it done soon.

My neighbors have started complaining:
The few friends I have remaining
Have plugged up their ears
Or passed by with tears,
While smiles of pity they're feigning.

Lest my reputation should end,
And the piano gets beyond mend
Before this nightfall
I really must call
My tuner, the piano's best friend.

Janet Blees, wife of Wim Blees, RPT
Wimblees@aol.com

The moral of the story:

Regular tuning is a SOUND idea.

## PIANOTECH (Internet) STUFF

*"A Refinishing and painted cases story"*

Date: Sat, 10,11 Jan 1998

I look after an old upright that someone has tried to make a "Steinway" out of at some time in that past. Most of the plate markings had been ground off and raised letters spelling "STEINWAY GERMANY" were added to the plate and a S&S decal to the fallboard. This instrument was "refinished" with a thick epoxy or perhaps a polyester without taking ANY of the parts off it except for the front board. The piano is actually a Canadian "Bell" instrument from about 1920, a fact that's obvious since they didn't remove the "Illimitable Repeating Action" insert from the plate triangle.

Not only did I have to tell the owner that I couldn't get at the action to regulate it (there was overspray on the action too) because of the thick finish, but I had to tell him it wasn't a "Steinway" either. I did it all as gently (diplomatically?) as possible, but I still have one very disappointed customer who paid a lot of money for the piano and to have it "refinished". He's still a customer, though.

This particular piano is pretty-much toast in my opinion, although it still tunes reasonably well. Breaking it apart will tear up the wood and the finish, and nothing short of total action replacement will get all the hardened guck off the parts. The owner says he'll just enjoy it as it is, and since all it's used for is playing hymn tunes it will do just fine for him. I feel sorry for the next owner though and I'm tempted to put a sign inside that says "THIS IS NOT A STEINWAY" just in case.

John Musselwhite, RPT
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musselj@cadvision.com
http://www.cadvision.com/musselj/

## ANNOUNCEMENTS:

**"Jazz on a Sunday"**

June 28th, 2-5PM, Sooner Theatre, Norman, OK.
Our own Nathan Sobel, Associate member will be playing
in one of three jazz groups.
He can cook!!

# PIANOTECH (Internet) STUFF

*"Temperament Musings"*

[ET = equal temperament, HT = historical temperament]

by Thomas A. Cole, RPT

Date: Thu, 29 Jan 1998

Today, I heard, for the first time in a long time, a CD of Benjamin Britten's "Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings" (recorded 1944). Dennis Brain plays some amazing French horn solos wherein some notes sound incredibly out of tune. There is one note that could easily be 50 cents flat. But the effect is tremendous: the intonation of every note seems to have been chosen for a particular purpose rather than simply being "out of tune". I would describe it, from my ET perspective, as knowing the rules of equal temperament and knowing when to break them.

My father was a viola player, and when I listened to him practice, I would notice that he would deviate significantly from equal temperament. This is one of the expressive devices available to musicians who make their own notes; other than the open strings, all tuning is done on the fly. Playing in C major, say, the E would be quite sharp as would the B to create the tension to move the piece to the following point of resolution. Intonation would depend on whether he was going up or down the scale. But if he modulated into a another key, other notes would be altered (e.g., the leading tone is now a different note).

Since a pianist does not have the capability to adjust intonation when a modulation occurs, I submit that a "neutral" tuning is a very desirable framework to work within for the same reason that a museum has white walls on which to hang its paintings. Colored walls might enhance some paintings but clash with others, and it would be impractical to change colors every time paintings were changed.

The piano has no bow to make the strings sing, no ability to change registration, vibrato was buried with the clavichord and only the organ can swell. Each instrument, however, has its own kit bag of goodies to evoke a range of emotions. I'll never forget listening to my teacher play, tears welling up in my eyes from the magic she created on her beautifully-tuned (in ET) Baldwin grand. Her technique was not flawless, she was not a powerful player, but she had a wealth of expressive devices which could be appreciated no matter what the tuning was. It never struck me that she lacked anything.

(continued on other side)

The instrument should be transparent to the music. An ill-chosen temperament would detract from a performance but a well-chosen and well-executed HT tuning might very well enhance a composition, considering, for example, that it was written with the temperament, used by that composer, in mind. You might even say that the piece and the temperament are integral. Of course, that same logic could be applied to works written since ET. Do we now need pianos with temperament-changing pedals, like a concert harp? How do you choose a temperament? I've got 57 programmed into my machine and I'm confused.

I would love to hear a Beethoven sonata played on a well-temperament, for academic purposes as well as enjoyment. Unfortunately, the last chance I had to witness an HT performance, the playing was so poor that I left in disgust and don't have any impression of the tuning at all. The quality of the playing is equally as important as the spacing of the intervals. In fact, the playing is "more equal" in my estimation.

I'm not against HTs per se but think that, for most situations, an instrument that is called upon for playing such a vast array of music needs to have the most versatile tuning possible. If resources are available to record one piece in a Young temperament, the next cut in a Montana, etc. then fine. I could appreciate that kind of attention to detail, that sense of historical setting. But as a practical matter, I think HTs can fare better on (gasp) an electronic keyboard. I am imagining a smart keyboard that senses the key changes and adjusts the tuning accordingly. At the least, there could be a temperament selector and a pitch bending pedal...

Thomas A. Cole, RPT
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Santa Cruz, CA

(this article begins on other side)

## PIANOTECH (Internet) STUFF

*"Another Refinishing and painted cases story"*

Date: Sat, 10,11 Jan 1998

I have come to dread hearing a customer boast about refinishing their own piano. I've seen many a _botched_ refinish job. Sometimes even by "professionals". However, twice I have seen jobs that I would love to call my own work.

The greatest looking piano that falls into the painted category is one that I did myself. Now, you have to understand I was only 11 years old at the time. We had an Acrosonic in the living room that I took lessons on, and in the basement we had a 1920's upright that my father had hauled from somewhere. Permission was granted that my friend and I could do as we pleased with the basement piano.

Well, it was the '60's and wild was "in". Each section of the case was painted in a different abstract theme from Piet Mondrian style to multi-colored flames. The sharps were painted 5-6 alternating colors. The lid was splatter painted. And, of course, it was outfitted with thumbtacks in the hammers. I still have a color photo of it on my shop bulletin board. It was this piano that started my interest in piano technology. I tried real hard to tune it with a wrench from my father's nearby workshop.

Thing about it is, I would love to have that piano today. Just as a novelty. When we moved from that house a neighbor two doors down bought the piano. He loved it! It was rolled on sheets of plywood out of our basement door, up around the hill on the side of the house and down the street to his house. As far as I know it is still there.

Debbie Legg, FL
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## Recommended Reading

*"How Do The Blind Fit into PTG?"*
by Don Mitchell, Corresponding Secretary
Visually Impaired Concerns Committee

This article contains some interesting items as well as a unique historical perspective on the beginnings of the blind entering into the trade of piano tuning and servicing.

## The "Kick" Zone

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

"Hunting will become a sport only when the animals are allowed to return fire."
(author unknown)

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"Whatever you do might initially appear to be insignificant,
but it's very important that you do it"
(paraphrased from Mahatma Ghandi)

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"It seems that this jazz pianist arrived at a club for a new gig and sat down to try the piano. After riffling though a few chords and runs, he said to the owner, "I can't play this thing, it's a terrible piano." To which the owner replied, "what do you mean it's a terrible piano, I just HAD it painted!" (author unknown)

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"All expressions of opinion and all statements of supposed facts are published on the authority of the author as listed and are not to be regarded as expressing the views of this Chapter or the Piano Technicians Guild unless such statements or opinions have been adopted by the Chapter or the Guild."