

THE SOONER TUNER

NEWSLETTER OF THE OKLAHOMA CHAPTER
OF THE PIANO TECHNICIANS GUILD, INC.



DECEMBER 4,
1989

COMING EVENTS:

Dec. 9 Saturday 6:30 Christmas Banquet!

Come sing, eat and be merry at the Bonham's house, 8104 N. Brookside Dr. in OKC. Brookside is the first street west of MacArthur. Exit north off Northwest Highway and the house will be the second one after the stores on the corner. Turkey and dressing will be prepared by our hostess, Rhaelynn Bonham, and you are asked to bring a vegetable, salad, or dessert to share. Please call by 7:00 Thursday evening to say whether you can come and to coordinate food items with Rhaelynn.

Jan. 18 Thursday 7:00 Chapter Meeting at Ross Trawick's shop. Ross will present a technical on polyester repairs.

Feb. 17 Saturday 2:00 Chapter Meeting at Tim Hast's shop. "Show and Tell" group presentation of each person's special tool or technique or ?

Mar. 2,3,4 South Central Regional Seminar in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Mar. 15 Thursday 7:00 Chapter Meeting at OU Piano Shop. Technical by nationally recognized woodworking authority, Bob Flexnor.

Apr. 14 Saturday TBA Chapter Meeting at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee. Ron Lewis, piano faculty, will speak to us. Keith McGovern will host.

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS include Ross Trawick, David Bonham, Tim Hast, and Amos Hedrick. We're getting older, but we're also getting better!

THANKS to Gary Bruce for hosting our last Chapter Meeting at his new shop and to Tim Hast for the good presentation and discussion on damper repairs and regulation.

TECH TALK:

I had an experience last evening that might be unique, though I suspect it is not. I share it here in hope that it could be instructive to one or more of you. First some updating is necessary.

The experience involves the Steinway concert grand on OU's Holmberg Hall stage which I wrote about in the October newsletter. After that writing I made several discoveries. For one thing, my gram weight measures were off almost 8 grams (I had not weighed the set I bought from Schaff before doing the article) and this made the downweight and upweight readings on that sample key closer to 68 and 44 grams. Many readings were even higher. No wonder we were getting complaints, eh? Remember the ideal is closer to 50 and 25. Anyway, to summarize the process, I was unable to get enough results by removing felt from the hammers. This decreased the weight factors approximately 6-12 grams, but they were still too high by about that much more. So did I resort to re-weighting the keys?

No, I continued the same basic process outlined in the October article in order to not destroy the intended mass designed into that action by people at the Steinway factory in whom I am choosing to trust. Instead I kept grinding -- right into the bone. Where I couldn't take off more felt on the perimeter of the hammers (particularly as the size decreases in the treble) I sanded the sides, taking wood and felt together, maintaining the shape I had established. A stationary belt sander proved invaluable for this. This helped me create a tapered shape to the hammer. (I sanded until I achieved my compromise downweight goal of 84 grams, reaming teflon bushings as I went along to pass the swing test for tightness.) On one key near the middle, for example, I reduced the thickness of the hammer by 6% at the striking point and 20% at the tail. On top treble hammers the tail was reduced by nearly 50%.

I have seen hammers this shape before, but no one ever indicated that I might have to do

this as a regulating step. Part of my thinking at this point was (to quote my ten-year-old) "It's not fair!" But as the dust settled (and I do mean a lot of dust) and after I had readjusted the 88 repetition springs, the average touchweight had been reduced by over 30% and the resistance through escapement greatly reduced as well. The piano is infinitely more playable and friendly. You don't have the sense of having to fight it. It wants to play and sing!

I had a lot of voicing to do on the piano, as you might imagine. Between the radical reshaping of the hammer, its reduced mass and higher speed of travel, it sounded quite different. Some further regulating is still needed, but I had to shift time to catch up on other projects, let it settle in, and allow those who play it to get reacquainted. The feedback has been very positive.

Now about last night. Ed Gates, one of our piano faculty, performed on this piano in a wonderful recital. I made a special Sunday trip down to tune for the recital, bringing my wife Rhaelynn to share the experience. We arrived at 5:30 and I checked the tuning and voicing. The piano had been played heavily the two preceding days for a statewide competition, but it was still in tune, with only minor tuning touch-up needed! I was relieved and very pleased. I sure did a good tuning on it this week, I thought. I walked back to the shop and resumed a rather heavy conversation with Rhaelynn, begun on our drive down to Norman (knowing I had plenty of time afterwards to prepare the piano for the 8:15 recital). Rhaelynn and I really needed the time together. At 7:15 I went back out on stage and set about to decide how I could improve the piano.

To my horror, the piano was now out of tune! I couldn't reasonably touch it up -- it needed a new temperament. Was it the stage lights I had left on during our conversation? or the poltergeist, D. Tooner? I believe it was

my own changed temperament that was allowing me the news that the piano was in worse shape than I had thought. I kicked myself and got to work. I usually spend about one and a half hours tuning this piano, but I knew I could make it very good in just under an hour this time. And it would have been very good had not the C64 string broken at 7:50. With people filling the auditorium I replaced the string and stretched it repeatedly, then did my unisons in the middle. The top two octaves got cheated for time, though I checked for anything significant. I was stressed out and upset with myself. The recital went well, with Ed playing beautifully and the piano sounding great. In the last piece (Liszt's Mephisto Waltz No. 1) I detected a little out-of-tuneness on the new string and some less-than-perfect octaves in the very top. I considered myself lucky and committed myself to be more responsible and careful next time.

Why couldn't I hear the need for tuning at 5:30? Would I have heard it if I had proceeded to do the touch-up? How do we hear differently on different days? How does our emotional and mental state affect our judgement? How good is "good enough"? Should an experience like this be interpreted as good reason to use a more consistent technique such as the Accutuner method? What do you think?

David Bonham

EDITOR

David Bonham
6104 N. Brookside Dr.
Okla. City, Okla. 73132
405-721-0566

P.S. Please save this issue. If there is nothing to "edit" there won't be a January newsletter. David

**MAY YOU EACH BE OPEN TO
RECOGNIZING AND RECEIVING THE
DIVINE GIFTS THAT SURROUND US
THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON**

