A Grand Opportunity

Mark Holt & Jeremy Eusebio

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On August 3rd, Jeremy Eusebio and Mark Holt took advantage of Dean Petrich's Piano Day offer to have a mini-convention Dean so alluringly offered.
The day was beautiful as expected and yes, pianos were moved around on the concrete slab in front of Dean's piano shop.
This was Mark and Jeremy's Grand Opportunity:
They were put right to work buffing the strings of a very tarnished Grand Piano. The most unfortunate part was- there is no before picture taken. As they scrubbed the strings with copious amounts of elbow grease (not to mention the number of steel wool pads we went through) those strings began to show their luster.
"Have you done this before?", asked Dean.
"No!", was the harmonious replay from Jeremy and Mark.
This piano was pretty bad. However, as they worked on cleaning the strings, tuning pins, sound board and action Mark's was impressed to say it might be worth salvaging.
Mark compared what Dean was teaching to his own 'day-job' at the Boeing Company. Mark has had over 25 years of experience teaching engineers how to fly an airplane that will never leave the ground. Here is Dean, most likely many more years of experience, teaching them how to coax pianos in every possible condition imaginable back to life. Mark feels very comfortable dealing with complex aerodynamic issues engineers throw at him.

Jeremy is currently a student of Randy Potter's correspondence course and started tuning pianos less than eight months ago, so Dean's Piano Day was indeed a grand opportunity he couldn't pass up! He studies piano technology in the evenings and weekends when when time permits, as he works full-time at Puget Sound Energy in the Accounts Payable department. He also loves to play the piano and record music (both acoustic and electronic based) in his home studio, and jams with his musician friends regularly, so more of his time is taken up with those endeavors as well. But ever since joining the PTG and attending a few Seattle Chapter meetings and the national convention in Bellevue, what began as a mild interest in the craft is now growing into a full-blown passion. He hopes to make the transition from the mundane desk job he has tenured for the past eleven years to working full-time as a piano technician someday, and earning the RPT badge of honor somewhere along the way.

Here at Dean's Piano Day they both felt like the newly hired apprentices! That's not all that bad- considering all that Dean pack into a single day!
Just a few of areas Dean touched upon:

- Repair a broken bass skirt bridge
- Twisting strings after replacing them on the repaired bridge
- How to correctly use some rebuilder's tools (and how not to use them…more on this later)
- Rough tuning
- Hammer shaping (right way and wrong way…more on this later too)
- ALL-AT-A-GLANCE grand action assessment
- The difference between sucking and blowing with a cleaning vacuum (wearing dust masks)
- Moving & tipping pianos
- Speed cleaning the Ivories
- Speed regulation before fine adjustment
- Action removal- (right way and wrong way…more about this mess up)
- Re inspecting your own work – personal assessment

Now, some of the details:
Remember, any of these things can happen to any of us.

Hammer reshaping:

While reshaping a group of hammers with the flexible sanding sheet a little too much pressure was applied and the hammer heads snapped off- right at the hammer head shanks entry point. Cedar shanks that are very old are like that press-board furniture when it's soaked. 3-hammers are in need of repair.

Action Removal:
How many of you have removed a vertical action that on the way out accidently bumped off two or more dampers being caught on the action bracket stud? Huh? Never? We'll never believe that.

Action Replacement:
Now, upon replacing the action, carefully not to catch anything on the action bracket stud, find that a jack has been caught under a hammer butt because the bridle tape was broken and was not pulling the hammer back? Dean had to show Mark how to correctly un-stick the jack to keep from breaking off the head of the jack. Way to go Mark! He sure was red faced. He better have replacement jacks in his parts box!!!

Bridge Repair:
The most disappointing part of this was the fact that after properly repairing a long-wise split on the apron bass bridge and allowing ample drying time, the bridge succumbed to further splitting as Mark and Jeremy began their task of bring up the tension on the bass strings. See the photo of Dean's new 'chipper'. It actually made better sound chipping than an old guitar pick that was found in the Grand Piano they were cleaning previously. (See photo)

Dead Strings:
Dean had to dash off for an errand and left Mark and Jeremy to finish bring the bass strings up to somewhat of a pitch. They soon discovered a new found confidence in analyzing further issues this one piano had.
Jeremy was not getting any sound out of the strings he was trying to raise. He could see the dampers were not pulling back as he struck the keys to tune the strings in the bass section. Mark's worst nightmare: They bent all the damper spoons somehow installing the action incorrectly. Not quite, to Mark's relief.
They both pondered the situation. About the same time they both discovered that the hammer return spring rail was seriously warped and the damper wires were being held against the strings.

As a result, something new discovered:
Don't take out just one end of that hammer spring return rail unless you want to reposition about 30 springs. The rail's position had been modified earlier so the decision was made to leave it as is because this was their "practice piano". About the last 10 springs are not in their proper location – but hey, who plays the bottom 10 notes of a piano anyway - huh?

Dean returned from his errand. Time to button up. All the loose (broken) pieces were gently placed behind the left cheek block (for the next lucky technician) and the rest of the cabinet pieces gently replaced. A couple of whacks here and there seemed to make them all fit. Finishing nails make good top board hinge pins! Be sure they are not too lose. Oh, Mark's excellent observation: Never let a metal fall board support rod rub against the wood finish where it is attached. Put a bushing behind it. I think his cop out was he didn't see how it was taken out – so he had NO clue how it was supposed to go back together. C'mon Mark- it just makes sense, right?

Mark and Jeremy finished the day by observing Dean replace a set of grand action back-checks. Both were surprised there was a tool to perform this task. Who wants to spend all that time turning on back-checks by hand. Chuck it in a variable speed drill. Oh, just be sure the drill motor starts out slow and actually has a variable speed trigger.

Jeremy and Mark were very grateful for a full 10 hour day, breaking only for lunch. They learned things neither of them have done before. An opportunity to apprentice in a piano workshop is not an everyday occurrence. Both weary from way too much outside air and jostling pianos around left with a sense accomplishment and new methods not to break things.

Next time you see Mark or Jeremy ask them, "Have you done this before?"