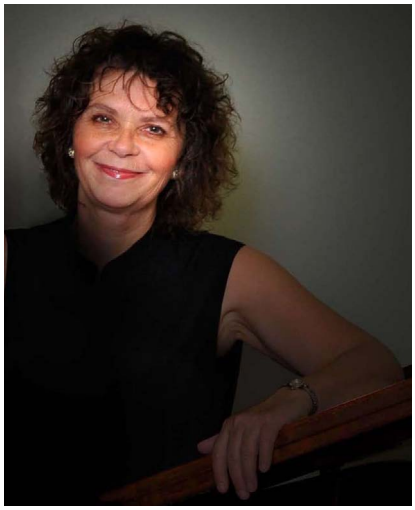
Oregon Musician

Sharing ideas about music and the teaching of music

Music and Inspiration

The Editor's Comments



About the Editor

Diane Baxter, pianist, educator and consultant, is the new editor of *Oregon Musician*. She is currently Professor of Music at Western Oregon University where she has received the *Faculty Honors Award for Outstanding Creativity* and the *Pastega Award for Excellence in Teaching*. Diane teaches studio piano and courses in Ethnomusicology, Performance Anxiety, and Research Methods. Off campus Diane consults and performs far and wide, often giving workshops on doing our best under pressure. "The Science of Artistry: The Fourth String" was published in *Clavier Companion* in Nov/Dec 2013. She lives, writes, plays and thinks in Brownsville, Oregon.

It seems to me that music and inspiration are inextricably linked. We may be inspired simply to listen. Or we may be inspired in the presence of music to think, to create, to dance, to laugh. We see flash mobs on the internet that unexpectedly bring tears to our eyes with their power and beauty; we experience films and plays enhanced by music whose meanings are zinged directly to our cores. We soar above the earth with beautiful opera. We know that our lives are made better with music in them.

Teaching, playing, composing, working on instruments, writing about music—all these are very important endeavors. These are not simply hobbies nor ways to earn a living. These are tremendously powerful ways to reach other human beings. They provide us with both enormous privilege and monumental responsibility. In this edition of *The Oregon Musician*, several authors speak to the role of inspiration in their musical lives. These statements are greatly varied in scope, from an international concertizing pianist to piano shop owners. The one characteristic that each essay exhibits is the desire to connect with people, to reach people, through music.

Alon Goldstein, concertizing pianist, begins "My main goal as an artist and an educator is to give everyone the chance to be transported by the beauty and power of classical music." Later he says "I gain infinite inspiration from direct interaction with composers and their music." He speaks of his relationship with pieces as if they are living friends. Kevin Walczyk, composer, writes "I view my creative process as collaboration. If I do not include the commissioning parties, performers, conductors, and audience members in that collaboration then I am not collaborating at all!" Kevin's description of his composi-

tional process in creating works *in memoriam* is profound. He later adds that "listening to outstanding musicians is always inspiring. Having the opportunity to compose a unique work for them is a tremendous challenge for which I am always grateful."

Jill Timmons tells us that she feels "we must do more to recognize, name, support, and celebrate those among us who provide extraordinary inspiration and move our culture forward." She believes that in teaching "it becomes incumbent upon us to instruct our students to recognize and appreciate what is truly inspiring. We must cultivate discernment and taste, and provide them with the highest level of musical literacy." Mitch Paola and Brenda Kell describe how they find inspiration in their hugely important piano shop. It is not just a shop. It is a musical community center, generously shared with the community. "We are continually inspired by teachers who are dedicated to educating others and by artists who make the world a better place by sharing their music. Families who encourage their children to study music, knowing it will be an important part of their lives for all of their lives, nourish our inspiration too."

Finally, Susan Kline inspires us all to learn something about self-sufficiency and lack of fear with her wonderful tutorial on how to care for pianos at home. She writes: "Inspiration—chase after it, and it will elude you. Getting oneself trapped by chewing over grudges and grievances and anxieties will bar the door against inspiration. But in some odd moment, maybe when bone tired, maybe just sitting waiting for something—there it is! That flash of unexpected beauty, that window into a whole new idea, the warmth of something one hadn't recognized, but which had been there all along. We may not be able to predict inspiration, but we can certainly remember it."

Enjoy this issue, and please send your comments to me. I'd love to hear from you.

Diane Baxter, Editor
The Oregon Musician

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Music and Inspiration

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Inspiration to Artistry

by Alon Goldstein

PHOTO: CHRISTIAN STEINER

"Goldstein seems to have gotten his impressive chops from his Russian teacher in Tel Aviv and his soul from the legendary Leon Fleisher."

—*Providence (RI) Journal*

My main goal as an artist and an educator is to give everyone the chance to be transported by the beauty and power of classical music. If I think about my background, I realize where I got the inspiration to become an artist. It was my late grandfather who first opened the door for me into the world of music. I was always drawn to interesting, multi-faceted people. My late grandfather was just such a person—a painter,

About the Author

Alon Goldstein is one of the most original and sensitive pianists of his generation, admired for his musical intelligence, dynamic personality, artistic vision and innovative programming. He has played with the Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Baltimore, St. Louis, Dallas, Houston, and Vancouver symphonies as well as the Israel, London, Radio France and Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestras, under the baton of such conductors as Zubin Mehta, Herbert Blomstedt, Vladimir Jurowski, Rafael Frübeck de Burgos, Peter Oundjian, Yoel Levi, Leon Fleisher and others. He makes his home in Rockville, Maryland.

an accomplished violinist as well as a pianist, and a great actor who could impersonate Charlie Chaplin brilliantly. In other words, he was an artist in the true sense of the word. Every minute with him was filled with music and stories, with many of the stories about survival during World War II. Throughout my life, the people that have inspired me were the ones that were multi-talented, larger-than-life, charismatic figures.

The creative journey that brought me to where I am right now involved both events and people that I met. When I was 17 years old I heard a concert in which Zubin Mehta conducted young soloists. I was so moved by the whole event that it energized me with tremendous ambition to be the next young soloist that the maestro would invite. That manifested itself in my commitment to practice harder every day. The following year I got my wish. Both the late composer Ben Zion Orgad and Leon Fleisher are important figures who shaped my musical thinking enormously. Ben Zion Orgad told me once that "if a piece is good, then at a certain point it spreads its wings and can fly away from the composer. It becomes *independent of its creator*." This is a profound statement! It can be liberating for the performer but it can also be dangerous. The composer is the creator. He knows what he wants! The performer, however, is the one that will make the work . . . work. What happens then when the performer has a different view of the piece than the composer? This is a VERY delicate issue. Years ago Ben Zion Orgad gave me his newest piano work with no dynamics or articulation markings. He asked me to add them. In the process of learning the piece I added my interpretative markings, including articulations and dynamics. He then showed me the same piece with all his desired markings and we compared. To a large extent we were identical, and at the places that we differed, it was very difficult for me to accept his requests. By making me part of the creative process, I also became the creator. Taking this a step further, however we look at this, we—performers are also creators! Fortunately, I played Orgad's new work numerous times, and gave it different interpretations—with his markings, and mine—both sounded convincing. This elevated my awareness of what I do and why to levels that I had not experienced before.

When my great teacher Leon Fleisher asked me to "direct his ear to what he should listen for" before I played for him, whether it was Schubert or Chopin, he taught me to teach myself. His teaching did not involve extensive demonstrations. Not being able to play with his right hand for many years, he spent a lot of time searching for the right word to express what his inner ear was seeking. Musicians tend to say that music cannot be described in words. I believed it until I heard Fleisher speak. It was so clear, so eloquent, so rich, so incredibly precise, even if it took me a while to figure out how to spell "surreptitious," "periodicity," "subtle" or "menacing." His goal was to teach us to teach ourselves: to know what to ask and when to ask, how to do, where to find, why this and why that.

Inspiration to Artistry

I gain infinite inspiration from direct interaction with composers and their music. One of the creative projects that I have worked on deals with creating a mega work out of two enigmatic monumental works. One of the most important yet difficult to understand solo works of the 19-century are the 24 preludes by Chopin. Even Schumann's review of this work was quite elusive in its praise. I inserted into these 24 jewels the 11 miniatures called 'Musica Ricercata' by the 20-century composer Gyorgy Ligeti. I strongly believe that music makes infinite number of connections, just like our brain. The juxtaposition of the raw passion of Chopin with the somewhat "scientific" passion of Ligeti fascinated me, and I hope this combination sheds new light on the essence of these wonderful works.

My relationship with the Mendelssohn first piano concerto has inspired me in numerous ways. I consider the piece a personal friend. Let me describe some of our adventures! For one reason or another this delightful piece accompanied me on many happy occasions, and in the process also exposed me to the possibilities where things can go awry and as I like to see it . . . quite funny.

The first time I performed the Mendelssohn concerto I was an eighteen year old non-protège pianist. The performance took place in Israel in the southern city of Beer Sheba. Not a cultural Mecca so to speak, but definitely an enthusiastic community where music is appreciated and taken seriously . . . very seriously, especially by one stage manager. My rehearsals with the orchestra went well, playing an old scratchy Steinway, which was o.k. When I came to warm up in the evening about 45 minutes before the concert I suddenly saw on the stage a different piano than the one I had used during rehearsals. It was a beautiful shiny Yamaha. Somewhat agitated, I went to the stage manager who, politely at first, less so thereafter, shoved me to the side. I kept being persistent and was finally told that in the morning I played on the "ugly looking" whatever piano and now in the concert I was lucky to get the shiny looking other instrument. Needless to say, no explanation on my behalf helped in any way. He was NOT going to change the instruments—after all, the audience would not tolerate such a lack of aesthetic priorities. The situation got even more serious and ultimately I had to call the conductor to mediate. I finally got my wish to the stage manager's enormous anger. That was not the end of that experience, though. As I went upstairs to put on my tux, I discovered that I had forgotten to bring my black trousers. Looking for a solution, I saw one of the musicians passing by my door. As if taken out of a devilish cartoon, the next minute that musician was naked and his black trousers, which were extremely tight, were on me. I walked onto the stage. I was very nervous, and very concentrated . . . NOT on the piece I was about the perform for the first time . . . but on the trousers which were so tight I felt they could explode at any minute.

Inspiration to Artistry

A few years later came the next performances of the Mendelssohn. The first gulf war was looming and I had just won an important competition in Israel with the Prokofiev third piano concerto. At the announcement ceremony of the winner I was asked whether I could play the Mendelssohn piano concerto the next day with the Israeli Philharmonic under Yoel Levi due to cancellation by the scheduled soloist. I had not touched the piece since that first performance two years earlier. Good friends always are at your side, and this piece did not let me down. The next morning I went to the only rehearsal I had playing from the score. After all, I had had less than 24 hours to prepare and I spent them on praying rather than practicing! That night, on the way to the concert I heard on the radio that "Zubin Mehta has just landed in Israel and he is on the way to the concert of the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra". Well, I was way too nervous to remember anything that followed, but the maestro did invite me a few months later to play with him . . . the Mendelssohn concerto.

Mendelssohn has visited me many times since, in Maryland, Louisiana, Eilat, and in my debut with the London Philharmonic Orchestra under the extremely intense and insightful Vladimir Jurowski. This time though I need to thank the stage manager. When I came back from warming up in an adjacent hall, I heard the orchestra tuning for me and I was locked outside! The stage manager ran to open the locked stage door. Well, all's well that ends well . . . especially with such good friends as the Mendelssohn first piano concerto by your side.

There are many things that I need as an artist: my family and my friends above all—my support team. I also need time—time to explore, to ask questions, to succeed as well as to fail. I need peace and quiet that allows me to concentrate. I need "Godot"—something that constantly challenges and stimulates me to wake up the next day and run to the piano. I need to see a good play, a good movie, take a beautiful scenic road . . . and oh, I almost forgot, I also need a glass of red wine with a few lamb chops!

Inspiration to Create

by Kevin Walczyk

The following is an interview with Oregon artist and composer Kevin Walczyk, who answered questions about inspiration and his compositional process.

Where do you find inspiration for your compositions?

I am often inspired as I compose by exploring how much 'mileage' I can create by simply exploiting a single compositional technique. This has been the ubiquitous convention of most composers through time, as well as the manner in which composers are academically trained. But I have found that placing all of my creative energy into an "abstract-only" piece

About the Author

A native Oregonian, Kevin Walczyk's compositions for orchestra have been performed and recorded by many prestigious orchestras around the world. A dedicated teacher and mentor, Dr. Walczyk regularly serves as guest composer at universities across the nation. He is currently Professor of Music at Western Oregon University in Monmouth, Oregon where he teaches composition, orchestration, jazz arranging, film scoring, and media production. He is the Graduate Music Coordinator. Kevin's lists of accolades, prizes, commissions and recordings are too numerous to list. You can find them at his website, along with samples and scores of his work: www.kevelimusic.com.

often leaves it devoid of meaning and artistic expression. I view my creative process as collaboration. If I do not include the commissioning parties, performers, conductors, and audience members in that collaboration then I am not collaborating at all! If, in the end, the most astutely crafted composition generates no interest from listeners then my composition dies of neglect—simply because I've failed to transform my craft into art. Many of my composing peers and colleagues do not agree with my position on this! I have learned to rely more on incorporating extra-musical resources; that is, anything beyond music that I can bring into the composition. This imbues it with meaning beyond pure abstraction. I draw inspiration from poetry, folk elements, historic events, people, places, and spiritual concepts. By musically incorporating and "commenting" on these sources I can better entice my collaborators to engage in the music. I still utilize all of the abstract compositional tools to craft the work itself, but the addition of extra-musical sources allows me to create a musical narrative of meaningful music.

How does history play into your creative work?

I'm a history buff. More specifically, I'm an American history buff. History provides me with a wealth of inspiration for musical expression. I enjoy learning about historical events, people, and places. It is another passion for me, particularly when I can look at events through first-person accounts. My historically-inspired works allow me the opportunity to research a specific topic and recreate it in musical form. I've been pleasantly surprised that these works have provided a different perspective for listeners that allows them to gain a new or renewed interest in these historical topics. I have learned the important lesson that audiences like to be engaged with the music that they experience in the concert hall. Giving musical accounts of historical events provides a programmatic backdrop for the audience to participate in the collaborative experience that is music.

My works inspired by history have described my great-great-grandfather's exploits with the famed "Iron" Brigade of the American Civil War (*Groveton Concerto*); the tragic effects of Agent Orange during the Vietnam War (*Elegy for the Wall's Unnamed*); the Lewis and Clark expedition (*Symphony No. 1—Corps of Discovery and Voices From The Water*); the March 2011 Japanese Tsunami (*Eloi, Eloi*); the writings of Pulitzer Prize winning correspondent, Ernie Pyle (*Cantata: Drifting Gently Through Endless Beauty*); the D-Day landings at Normandy, France (*Capriccio*); the Battle of the Bulge (*Symphony No. 2—Epitaphs Unwritten and Bois de la Paix*); the Navajo Code Talkers of WWII (*Talking Winds*); the American Hymns of Charles Tindley (*Songs of Paradise*); the tragedy of September 11, 2001 (*Visionplace of Souls*); and ancient Greek music and myths (*Delphic Suite*).

Inspiration to Create

You are often asked to write pieces in memoriam. How do you approach the score in terms of the human being and the situation you are faced with? In other words, how do you explore the musical notions that represent a human life?

These commissions provide a great challenge for me since each work must represent or encapsulate a person's life in a relatively short amount of time. I have been commissioned to compose works *in memoriam* to those who have lost their lives at age 12, age 42, age 51, age 67, and for those whose age is unknown to me. My approach is always similar: I research, study, and learn all that I can about each individual so that I am able to personalize each composition. One technique that I often use is to transform the subject's name into pitch information using a ciphering technique. This allows me to musically represent the subject in melody and harmony. Utilizing the seemingly non-musical materials of, texts and numbers, ,then rendering that information into music statements greatly imbues the piece with a musical representation of the person. It adds much greater emotional power and audience connectivity beyond music that I might overlook without these personal references.

Another technique is to incorporate folksong to achieve similar associative connections. For example, *From Glory To Glory*, is about a mother who was tragically killed while riding her bicycle. I utilized two folksongs—one from Vietnam and another from China. The lyrics to both of these folksongs speak to separation between parent and child. I incorporated these particular folksongs to represent the mother's four young children who were adopted from Vietnam and China. As this piece unfolds, the musical material representing the mother on her bicycle is achieved by ciphering her complete name. It recurs throughout the work. The two folksongs are introduced in separate sections without the mother's material being referenced. Near the end of the work both folksongs and the mother's musical representation are presented simultaneously—a musical moment in which the children are reunited—albeit musically—with their mother. This work is purely an instrumental work in which the lyrics of the folksongs are not literally stated. Nor is it necessary. The melodies of these folksongs, joined with the mother's melody, provide the music's powerful narrative.

Sometimes I use instrumentation as a way to represent the subject of an *in memoriam* work. *Sojourn of Dreams* memorializes a percussionist who was also tragically killed. It is a percussion-intensive work but the final statement of the entire piece is of a solo snare drum that gradually fades in the distance. Although, this may not present an extremely interesting ending to a work, the personal narrative itself—the fading life of a percussionist—through its musical representation can be very compelling.

In summary, these *in memoriam* works are all singularly inspired by the lives of the individuals honored by my music. It is incumbent upon me to personalize the work to such a degree that every time the work is experienced, the subject of the work is unmistakably encountered in the music.

Inspiration to Create

What is your modus operandi when composing?
What happens if you get stuck as you're working?

The workflow of my composition process tends to unfold in the following manner: first comes the inspiration, which can be determined by a commissioning party or from my own interests. Once I have convinced myself that any given concept should be pursued as an artistic endeavor, I research the subject. It's at this early point that I consider the global aspects and other characteristics that will best convey the story of the inspiration. This research process determines the need for pre-compositional materials—is there a name or a poem that needs to be ciphered/transformed to music notation? Do I use numerology as a source? What folk elements (song, dance, rhythm) do I want to feature? I begin an unconventional sketching process. My initial sketches reflect the research and pre-composition concepts as opposed to logically notated musical phrases. This is necessary since the goal for most of my compositions is to create a unique sound world based solely on the extra-musical sources that are being implemented. This is achieved by 'auditioning' the pitch materials that the inspirational sources yield. I then determine potential linear arrangements (melody) and vertical arrangements (harmonies), including chords, progressions, cadence patterns, and the relative nature of consonance versus dissonance. This process is done at the piano. My goal is to find multiple musical solutions from the pre-composition materials so that I don't get "stuck." In fact, I don't get stuck (writer's block) if I've carefully and diligently examined my research and pitch materials because the process tends to yield too many ideas. As this process evolves, the music begins to take shape and I'm able to expand, develop, and refine each section of sketches into larger, cogent, and coherent musical ideas. It is only at this point that the piece begins to slowly reveal itself to me. Up to this point in the process I have absolutely no idea how the piece will take shape. Only after the pre-compositional materials are laid out and I begin the basic musical sketching process does the piece begin to reveal its sound world.

After I have completed the sketches I begin orchestrating—the assigning of notes to the instruments. This is a challenging, yet fun part of any composition. I orchestrate the entire piece by hand on manuscript paper. Most of my composing peers prefer to orchestrate on the computer since it allows them instantaneous playback and shortens the time required to prepare score and parts. But I'm a very tactile artist. I need to use pencil, ruler and manuscript paper and be able to view the entire score page while orchestrating. I also prefer the challenge of choosing and hearing the orchestration decisions in my head rather than relying on the less-sophisticated sound capabilities of a computer. My works tend to favor rather sophisticated colors that complement the unique sonic world of each piece. Having performed in many different ensembles as a horn player—orchestra, band, pit orchestras, choirs, chamber ensembles, jazz ensembles, etc., and having transcribed so much music in my formative years, I have a finely-tuned aural understanding of what I'm

imagining. This greatly aids in the process of orchestration. My works for orchestra tend to require 32–35 individual parts, which provide ample opportunities for unique combinations of orchestral colors. My larger works for band and wind ensemble require up to 52 individual parts. With this many instruments on my palette, it's easier for me to track the orchestration process by hand notation using manuscript paper rather than fighting with the limitations of the computer. Once the orchestration process is complete I enter everything into music notation software so that I can professionally present the score and parts. As I notate in the computer I might refine a few orchestrations, usually confined to the percussion section. I still choose not to listen to the work via a computer performance playback since an electronic realization, even after hours of programming sound-sample libraries, cannot accurately simulate the live ensemble. This means that I do not hear the fully-orchestrated work until it is placed in front of a live ensemble.

How often does an individual musician inspire you to write something for them?

Listening to outstanding musicians is always inspiring. Having the opportunity to compose a unique work for them is a tremendous challenge for which I am always grateful. Although the bulk of my commissions come from ensembles, I get the opportunity to compose a concerto or featured-soloist work approximately once every two years. As a native Oregonian, I enjoy featuring other Oregon professional musicians. I will mention three of these collaborations here.

I recently wrote a trombone concerto (*Talking Winds*) for Oregon native Peter Ellefson who has performed with the Seattle Symphony, Chicago Symphony, New York Philharmonic, and Boston Symphony. Peter is currently Professor of Trombone at Indiana University and Northwestern University, training up the next generation of trombone performers. Peter and I have a little history as we performed together in the Portland Youth Philharmonic and the Oregon Symphony sponsored Student Orchestral Brass Section over 30 years ago. Reuniting with him on this project has been very exciting.

I have collaborated with another Oregonian, Tim Morrison, an outstanding trumpet player that has been a member of the Boston Symphony, Boston Pops, and the incomparable Empire Brass. You have probably already heard Tim perform without knowing it. Tim performs with the Los Angeles Recording Arts Orchestra, the orchestra responsible for recording many Hollywood films. Since the late 1980s, Tim has been the go-to trumpet soloist for most of John Williams' movie scores. Tim's solos can be heard on the soundtracks of *JFK, Born on the Fourth of July, Saving Private Ryan, Nixon, Apollo 13, Amistad,* and *Patriot*. Tim was the inspiration for John Williams' work *Summon The Heroes*, written for the Atlanta Summer Olympics in 1996. I contacted Tim about writing a trumpet concerto for him, which resulted in *Concerto Gaucho*—a work featuring South American folk elements and Tim's trademark lyrical playing in the trumpet's upper register. Tim has been one of the few soloists who felt comfortable offering ideas dur-

ing the early stages of our collaboration. Concerto Gaucho allowed me to collaborate with other notable professional trumpet players (who perform the work), including Christopher Martin who has performed in the Philadelphia Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and soon will start his tenure as the new principal trumpet with the New York Philharmonic. Christopher can also be heard as trumpet soloist on the recent John Williams film score, *Lincoln*. I was able to spend ten days with Christopher on a tour in Japan and Okinawa where he performed *Concerto Gaucho* and an arrangement that I was commissioned to compose specifically for him on the jazz standard, *Stardust*. Interacting with such a talented and humble musician definitely ranks as one of the most rewarding musical experiences I have had as a composer.

I would also like to mention the inspiration behind the work, *A Goodbye Too Soon*, which was composed specifically for Diane Baxter (editor of this journal) for solo piano and strings. This was a tremendous experience since the inspiration of the work came from a poem (*A Goodbye Too Soon*) that her husband, Paul Baxter wrote about the untimely death of a friend. The work's entire pitch content is derived from ciphering the words of the poem and transforming the artistic statement from literature to music. This work was commissioned and premiered by the Chamber Orchestra Kremlin with Diane as soloist. The collaboration includes a beautiful recording on Parma Records featuring Diane with an outstanding professional string ensemble from Boston and New York. This was a particularly rewarding collaboration for me since it involved composing a work specifically for a longtime colleague and friend.

I would be remiss in my remarks if I did not mention opportunities to collaborate with some pretty amazing chamber ensembles (in a *concerto grosso* setting), including the Atlantic Brass Quintet and the Boston Brass. They are absolutely amazing musicians—both as soloists and as collaborating musicians in a chamber ensemble format. I hope that my career will continue to allow me the opportunity to collaborate with such amazing musicians!

How does your own experience play into your compositions?

I don't really spend a great deal of time composing throughout the year. As so many of us do, I wear a great number of 'hats' that defines my life—husband, father, brother, son, teacher, composer, publisher, homeowner, and irrigation engineer of my dead or dying lawn. I also have a couple of dachshunds that require my attention, too! It requires a great deal of balancing between these roles and if something has to give, it's usually the composition time.

That being said, composing is a very necessary expressive outlet for me. It allows me to emote as a reaction (or perhaps, more accurately, an interaction) to my world. My family, job, peers, commissioning opportunities, students, dachshunds, and perception of more global events constantly inspire me. For example, my wife and I adopted our two

children—Gabriel and Sophia, and I utilized their names in my *Concerto Scion*. The third movement is entitled *Xtoles*, which is a children's folksong of Mayan descent that speaks to the anticipation of the sun returning to mark the beginning of spring and, hence, outdoor playtime. This particular folksong was selected since Gabriel is of Mayan descent and the energy and momentum of the melody can almost keep up with the energy and momentum of Gabriel and Sophia!

I read in a recent journal by the National Association for Music Education that, ". . . *evidence confirms the notion that music is a common way for people to have very powerful, emotional experiences that are transcendent, help shape each person in unique ways, are long lasting, and that lead to an enhancement of quality of life*." This is not only true for performers and listeners but in a very intense way, for composers as well.

I tend to be very introverted and not great at verbally expressing deep emotions. But I do express all of my feelings through my music. A gentleman who recently has become aware of my works over the past few years stated, "I can tell the quality of man you are by the manner in which your music is expressed." This comment serves to remind me that (for better or worse) people listen intently and gain valuable insight from experiencing my music that I cannot and should not control. I may be able to suppress my emotions personally, but my music is the gateway to my soul. I believe it was composer Edgar Varèse who once stated that music is not a mere representation of a composer's inner feelings, it is the composer's feelings. Placing all vulnerability aside, I will continue to compose with as large an expressive palette as possible, inspired by what I know best - my personal experiences.

Inspired Pianos

by Mitch Paola and Brenda Kell

Mitch Paola is the owner of Portland Piano Company. He has been working in the piano world for 30 years. Mitch loves the challenge of finding the right piano for a particular client. He's personally matched thousands of pianos to satisfied clients that include Steinway artists, baseball greats, NFL quarterbacks and NBA stars.

Brenda Kell is the manager of Portland Piano Company. She loves the challenge of finding the perfect piano to meet each customer's needs and budget. She also considers it a privilege to work closely with local music teachers, artists and musical organizations. In this age of technology and hi-tech gadgets, Brenda believes that "The piano is able to communicate the subtlest universal truths by means of wood, metal and vibrating air." (—Kenneth Miller)

I recently asked Mitch Paola, the owner of Portland Piano Company, and his manager, Brenda Kell, some questions about what they find inspiring in the piano business. They are generous and supportive to local pianists and musicians, and to guests who are traveling through. Here are a few thoughts from them.

Both of us had a deep connection to music in our childhoods. As a young boy, Mitch spent a lot of time with his grandparents who exposed him to classical music and encouraged him to spend time in his piano workshop. He was a piano technician who patiently shared his love of working on the instruments with Mitch. Brenda's uncle was a traveling piano technician. He would come back from each trip with fascinating stories of his piano tuning adventures and loved to share them with the family. Her father was a huge influence in her life in all things, but especially in music. He loved to sing and to play the banjo, guitar and harmonica. He took on extra work to pay for Brenda's piano lessons.

Music in our society is of utmost importance. For our young people, being involved in music literally dictates who they hang out with and how they spend their time. It's very good for the brain! Music is an international language. It touches the soul, it unites

and uplifts, and it sparks creativity. Music is an incredible way to express one's deepest thoughts and emotions.

We are continually inspired by teachers who are dedicated to educating others and by artists who make the world a better place by sharing their music. Families who encourage their children to study music, knowing it will be an important part of their lives for all of their lives, nourish our inspiration too.

We feel it is very important to network within and outside our music community. While this can be quite costly, we feel that it is a worthy investment, not just as a business decision, but as our way of investing in our society and our community. By offering these services we're able to contribute to the enrichment of the musical community in Oregon and Washington.

Quite often we are inspired by pianists we meet. It is refreshing to talk with musicians to get their viewpoints and to understand their interpretations of a particular piece of music. This creativity gives us the desire to find new ways to try new things in life. Pianists' drive to perform and share their music keeps us engaged and involved in our work. They are committed to their craft and their work ethic is incredibly inspirational. They are always striving to improve.

We love the challenge of finding the perfect piano match for each customer. Each day we're meeting new people, happy people who love music. We enjoy getting to know our clients! We enjoy working with families whose children are starting lessons and they are choosing their first piano. We believe there always will be the need and the desire for acoustic pianos. Digital pianos will continue to grow in popularity as new hybrid pianos are developed and shared spaces become more common, but acoustic pianos will maintain their place in our musical culture. We're deeply touched every time we see someone moved to tears because the instrument they are playing is so beautiful. Each piano has its own personality, just as people do. It is fascinating to work with the individual characteristics of each instrument.

Music is powerful. We are honored to be contributing to it through our work.

Inspiration: Who Has It and How Do I Get Some?

by Dr. Jill Timmons

About the Author

Jill Timmons performs internationally as a solo and ensemble artist and has recorded on the Laurel, Centaur, and Capstone labels. With some thirty years in higher education, she continues to prepare pianists for competitive auditions and successful performances. Her best-selling career guidebook, *The Musician's Journey: Crafting Your Career Vision and Plan*, is published by Oxford University Press. Timmons is the artist/teacher affiliate with Classic Pianos at their flagship Portland store and in their satellite locations in Seattle, Denver, Cleveland, Anchorage, Las Vegas, and Albuquerque.

I have a problem with inspiration. It's so darn subjective! What's uplifting and compelling to me may not be so to someone else, and vice versa. On the other hand, most of us in the music profession have a pretty good idea of what we would designate as inspirational. Some examples might be Mozart's *Requiem*, Bach's *B Minor Mass*, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story,* Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, anything by Pete Seeger, Ravi Shankar, Alan Walker's three-volume biography on Franz Liszt, B.B. King, my favorite pianist bar none Oscar Peterson, please, somebody stop me . . . you get the picture.

From my vantage point here in Oregon, I feel we must do more to recognize, name, support, and celebrate those among us who provide extraordinary inspiration and move our culture forward. In our state we have the opportunity to work with many exceptional and iconoclastic professionals who often go unnoticed by the rank and file. They may not be serving on committees, volunteering for hospitality, or creating a piano studio that has scores of students. More often than not they are charting new waters within a large and expansion artistic vision. These exceptional professionals have few peers and they can easily be overlooked amidst the everyday hubbub of auditions, exams, festivals, and running organizations.

What are the qualities that best define musicians who authentically inspire, those visionaries that who create truly dazzling and innovative ideas and works of art? Here's my list of essential characteristics that are intrinsic to these movers and shakers.

Inspiration: Who Has It and How Do I Get Some?

1. **Brilliance.** They have exceptional talent and intelligence and they consciously cultivate their skills and talent. They become good stewards of their musical and intellectual gifts. There is no sense of "resting on your laurels" or "good enough."
2. **Extensive training and skill.** This can mean long years of training far beyond the ubiquitous music degree. These musical professionals follow a path of life-long learning, ever expanding their knowledge and experience.
3. **Experiential knowledge.** They are actively engaged in their work and continue to seek challenging opportunities, ones that test their mettle and provide new information.
4. **Emotional intelligence.** They are not driven by the need for recognition because they know they are on to something extraordinary. As Carl Jung observed, they don't believe, they know.
5. **Humility.** They have it because in the face of inspiration, they are humbled. What they do is not for the purpose of self-aggrandizement, although paradoxically their work can attract enormous attention.
6. **Civility.** They play nice with their colleagues and are not distracted by negativity. Why? Because they are too busy doing extraordinary work (and #5).
7. **Self Awareness.** They have an a *priori* understanding of commitment, talent, rigor, innovation, and hard work. They know who they are.
8. **Wisdom.** They have an abundance of it and are happy to share it with others.

It's tough finding these folks. We mostly know them by their work, and often, long after it has been produced. What they create is new; it requires enormous skill and talent, and ultimately, it moves us. Sadly, these outliers are often misunderstood or worse yet, intimidate others in the profession who are less confident and capable. The biographies of such giants as Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Robert Frost, and Charles Ives, among others, describe luminaries that for the most part led private lives without the benefit of mass appeal or instant fame. And then there are those artists who burn hot and fast like Schubert or Chopin.

One Oregon musician who qualifies as an exceptional visionary is the late Robert Trotter. I had the pleasure of meeting him when I returned to Oregon following my graduate studies. Over the course of many years, I encountered Bob in a myriad of situations. He was a superb pianist, scholar, master teacher, iconoclastic innovator, and a dean who is credited with doubling the size of the University of Oregon School of Music. His international credits would require another article alone! Those who knew him held him in the highest regard. His thoughtful and brilliant approach to music along with his

unfailing integrity made him an ideal mentor. He lived Martin Buber's "I – Thou" relationship with everyone that he encountered, regardless of differing views or perspectives. And while he was firmly rooted in the Beaver State, his inspiration, innovation, and legacy throughout the world continue to live on today. The College Music Society celebrates his lifelong contribution through the annual Robert Trotter Memorial Lecture. The University of Oregon has endowed a professorship in his name. His remarkable influence is an enduring inspiration to all in our profession.

Few of us fit this iconic mold and yet, the music profession requires that we serve this ideal. I can never really grasp Mozart's full genius, but as a musician, I can serve it. I can also assign myself the task of acquiring greater knowledge and skill over the course of my lifetime, preparing myself to better recognize and celebrate that which is inspirational. I acknowledge and appreciate the efforts and enthusiasm of many in our profession. While everyone has value, however, we must not confuse that *joie de vivre* with the creation of something awe-inspiring—a vision for the future. Not everyone is a visionary nor will they move the collective into uncharted territories. Rather, they hold fertile ground where an extraordinary talent can emerge. This is an important and necessary service to the profession and requires wisdom and a steadfast commitment.

In our teaching it becomes incumbent upon us to instruct our students to recognize and appreciate what is truly inspiring. We must cultivate discernment and taste, and provide them with the highest level of musical literacy. In this age of reality TV, trendy sound bites, and all manner of cheap spectacle, what is truly inspiring can elude us. It's rarely part of the mainstream. For those of us in the teaching trenches it means finding the very best repertoire for our individual students, avoiding the easy fix of those method books that present the very worst in music, dumbing down to our students in the name of economy.

One of my former clients who now works for a major indie record label recently sent me a video of an artist the company was considering. She wanted my reading on what this artist was offering. As I clicked on the video, I was breathless with anticipation, figuring something good would be coming my way (never mind inspiring). I am not making this up. The music consisted of two different chords over the course of two minutes (I couldn't take any more beyond that point). The production was lavish, with several keyboards, flashing lights, and a drum machine. The artist had an expression of rapturous engagement and intense heartfelt emotion. "It's the Emperor's New Clothes," I exclaimed to my former student. "It's like watching paint dry! And no, it is not inspiring—far from it!" As a disclaimer, I would hasten to add that there may be a place for this sort of sound landscape but it is far from inspiring. Someone with one piano lesson could learn to play those two white-key triads (root position, I might add). The white hot emotions would be optional.

Inspiration: Who Has It and How Do I Get Some?

One of my colleagues offered this: What is popular may not be right, and what is right may not be popular. In regards to the subject at hand, I would expand this euphemism. What is popular may not be *inspiring* or even of good quality, and what is *inspiring* may not be popular or even easily understood.

As I climb down from my soapbox, I would like to challenge the leaders of OMTA to look deeply into the membership for those professionals who offer a fresh vision to the collective, who think outside the box and thereby move the organization forward, who have a fine body of work backed by extraordinary training and commitment, and who offer their gifts with humility and joy. Let's tell their stories, celebrate their iconoclastic visions, and recognize their invaluable and *inspiring* contribution to our state. They will have something important to teach all of us.

Music as Inspiration

by Susan Kline, Registered Piano Technician

About the Author

Susan Kline, a piano technician living near Corvallis, studied at Oberlin and at UT/Austin. She has a Masters degree in applied cello. She played in the Hamilton Philharmonic (Ontario), then did two sabbatical replacement jobs on the Canadian prairies. In 1978, she attended George Brown College's Piano Technology course in Toronto. After 12 years of sweaty piano work in Stockton, California, she happily moved to Philomath, Oregon. She tunes for most concerts and festivals in the area. She has written a series of articles for *Piano Technicians Journal.*

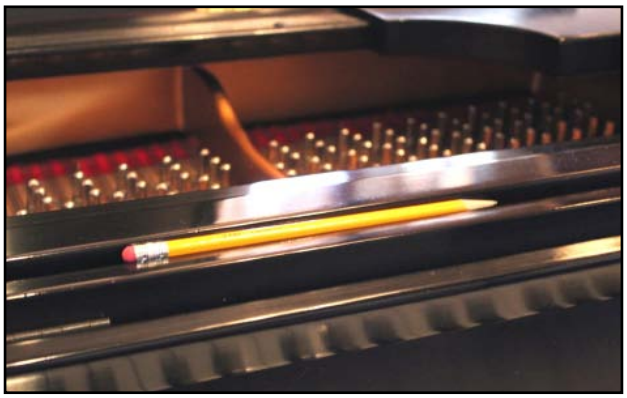
Inspiration cannot be planned or leaned upon, to our chagrin. Inspiration is part of the wildness of life, not under our control, and always a surprise.

We can have the steady glow of work well done. One of the consolations of old age is that after decades of doing our best work we gain the confidence that we can do what needs to be done, despite adverse circumstances. We no longer need to run scared. Everything is polished and made strong and agile by practice. You'd think that musicians (and piano technicians) would get to a kind of steady state after awhile, when everything was as good as it was going to get, but luckily both music and pianos always find us more to explore and new aspects to discover. If we just keep paying attention to the subtleties of our craft, there's always more to find. But this isn't inspiration.

Inspiration—chase after it, and it will elude you. Getting oneself trapped by chewing over grudges and grievances and anxieties will bar the door against inspiration. But in some odd moment, maybe when bone tired, maybe just sitting waiting for something—there it is! That flash of unexpected beauty, that window into a whole new idea, the warmth of something one hadn't recognized, but which had been there all along. We may not be able to predict inspiration, but we can certainly remember it. If music can keep our minds open in a particular way, then, yes, one can talk about music and inspiration at the same time.

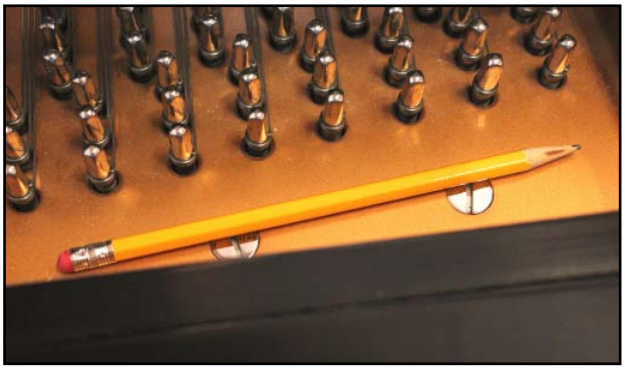
Music as Inspiration

Today I'm going to talk about how to get into a grand piano without breaking anything. The main reason this need arises is the tendency for a pencil to slip through the crack just behind the fallboard. It will slide down the ski slope of the fallboard back, and then land on the keys, inside. It usually will make about six notes clatter, more if the pencil is long, and fewer if it's short. A pencil can also wander deeper into the action and jam notes.



Precarious Pencil

There are better places to leave a pencil, for instance:



Safe Pencil

Also Safe Pencil

Music as Inspiration

The fallboard (which covers the keys when closed) is also sometimes called the nameboard, because the name of the piano brand is on it. If you just need to remove a pencil or something else which has fallen onto the keys, removing the fallboard will give you the needed access.

Pianos come in several sub-groups, but let's start with the Steinway grand, since the process to get into a Steinway is the same for all of them, and they are often concert instruments.

Steinways

First, remove the keyslip. This is the long thin piece at the very front of the piano, directly below the keys. (The keys slip past it—hence, "keyslip.") On Steinways, the keyslip is not screwed in. It has some thin metal pins which slide into holes in the keybed, and it has a triangular mortise on each end, which slide over large flat head screws in the front of the key blocks. ("Key blocks"—one on each end of the keyboard. They are held in by great big screws which come up into them from underneath.)

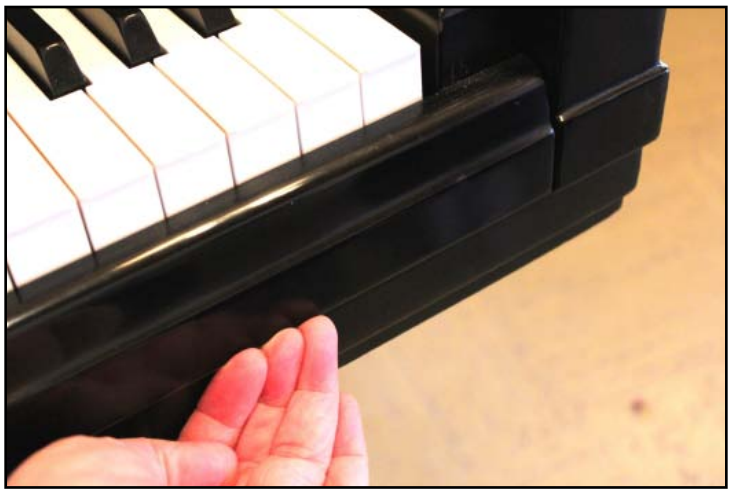
Keyslip Mortise

Keyslip Detail

Steinway Key Blocks

Music as Inspiration

There's a little edge down at the bottom of a Steinway keyslip. You can pull up the keyslip by putting your nails under this edge and lifting. Probably it's just as well to avoid the areas right where the key block screws are, since if the keyslip comes loose in a hurry you can jab your hand going past the screw. (Don't ask me how I know . . .)



Lifting the Keyslip

When the keyslip is in your hand, you can lay it on the music desk, or across the plate above the tuning pins if the music desk is off.

Next, get a good-sized screwdriver, and loosen the screws going into the bottoms of the key blocks. When I was young and limber, I'd get down on the floor and look up at the screw heads, which is easier, though the bits of sawdust in my eyes weren't very nice. As I got older, I started feeling for the screw heads while still sitting on the bench. Your automatic tendency will be to turn the screwdriver in the wrong direction, because the screws are heading up, not down. Imagine yourself looking up at the screw head, see which direction will loosen it, and you will get it right.

When you have the screws out, put them on the plate near the tuning pins, in front of the music desk, one in the bass region, the other in the treble. This will also help you keep from mixing them up. As a general rule, make sure all screws from a piano go back the same places they came out of, even if they seem identical. Some are sometimes more identical than others.

Steinway Key Block Screw

Music as Inspiration

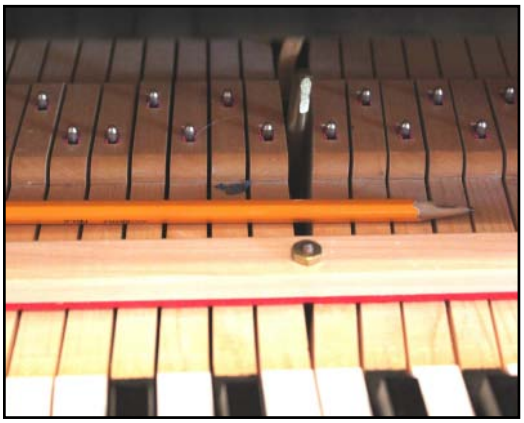
Next, you will have to get the fallboard and key blocks out, and they come out together, because the key blocks hang on little brass pins on the ends of the fallboard. Look at the photo of the key blocks and you'll see the brass piece with a hole in it, which hangs on the pin.

Pin for Key Block

Here is your little danger moment, but it's easily avoided—the key blocks are not screwed on, they just hang there. If you remove the assembly the whole way, one or the other (or maybe both) will fall off and go *bonk*—maybe on your foot, maybe on the bench. The procedure goes like this: fold the fallboard about halfway down (45 degrees) and grab it by the ends. Then give a little tug upward and the key blocks should come free. If they are stubborn, you can free them up by gingerly prying between the bottom of one and the keybed with a screwdriver. The place is hidden behind the keyslip, so you don't need to worry about a possible small dent on the bottom edge of the key block. Once the assembly is free, don't take it all the way out. Raise it a little bit, and then set it back down with the key blocks still on, just over half way forward.

Fallboard Halfway Out

Now, take one end of the fallboard, and raise it enough that you can remove the right key block. Place the key block on the music desk or on the tuning pin area. Repeat with the other end. Now you can lift the fallboard and put it in the room out of the way. On the floor is all right, or on a table or sofa. If no one has been inside the piano for a long time, a little bit of dusting and vacuuming may be in order, but you'll be better off if you don't move the action and keys unless you have to.



There's the Rascal

Key Block Kept on by Case

Once the case parts are out of the way, a grand action, consisting of the key frame, the keys, and the action stack, slides out as one unit. I'll discuss removing the action, with caveats, later in the article. If your mission, such as pencil retrieval, is accomplished without having to move the keys and action, so much the better. Leave it all where it is. Now, how do you put the case back together?

In reverse order. First you take the fallboard, and place it, standing vertically, on the keys halfway out. Hang the key blocks on the pins, one at a time. The cheeks of the piano case will hold them in for you.

When both key blocks are hanging, held in by the case cheeks, you pick up the whole assembly, not lifting it high enough for the key blocks to fall back off. You tilt the fallboard forward to the same angle you used to remove it, and you settle it down in its place, so the wooden dowels in the bottoms of the key blocks go into their holes. With the fallboard upright (as if you were going to play), you screw back in the key block screws. Then you just slide the keyslip back over the screws in the fronts of the key blocks, with the keyslip locator pins going into their holes, and push it gently down. All done. It is much longer and more complicated to describe than to do.

Baldwins

Baldwins are like Steinways, except that the keyslip is held in by screws coming up from underneath. Many other pianos have four keyslip screws (almost all uprights do), but Baldwins have an odd number, 3 or 5. Baldwin keyslip screws also often have followers,

little metal pieces which keep them from digging into the wood too deeply, so don't mislay them if they are there.

Baldwin key blocks hang on the fallboard in the same way as Steinway key blocks do, and can fall off just as easily. The only difference is that that Baldwin fallboard has a small hole in each end instead of a small pin, and the brass piece on each Baldwin key block has a little brass cylinder which goes into it, instead of a hole.

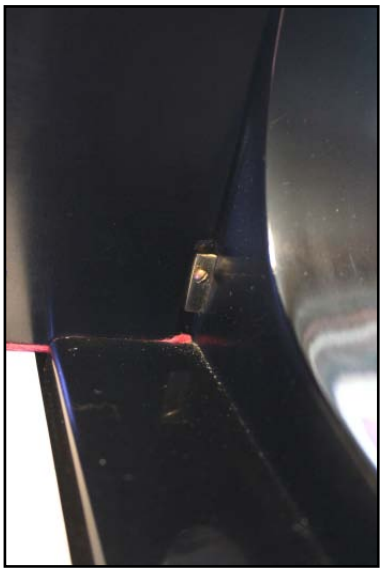
Other Asian and American Grands

Grand pianos can be divided into two sub-groups: those which will allow you to take off the fallboard without removing other parts, and those which won't (Steinways and Baldwins, mostly). If you see a small screw going through a little piece of brass at either end of the fallboard, down near the keys, the fallboard can be taken out without removing the key blocks.

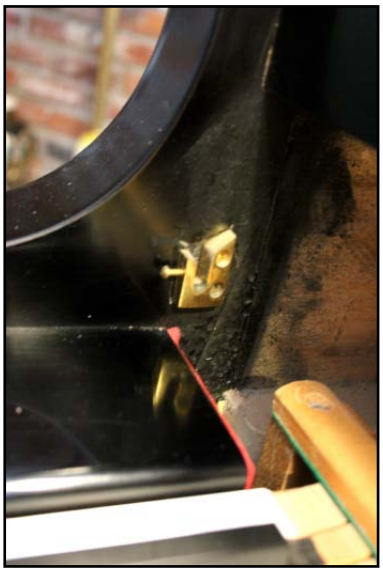
The little screws holding the fallboard in aren't all that easy to deal with. If you turn them all the way out, they are hard to thread back in. But if you turn them only partway out, the fallboard usually isn't free yet. So you have to carefully turn them a little more and a little more, till the fallboard is free, but before they fall out of their holes, only a turn or so later (as you can see from the Kawai fallboard support photo.) Also, you'll need a small screwdriver, or sometimes a small Phillips screwdriver, and the cheek of the piano case is in the way so there's little room for your hand. [rant mode on] tiny little Phillips screws cobble so easily! and then they are nearly impossible to remove! These I have had to replace. [rant mode off]

Once the fallboard is free, partly close it, grab both ends, and then lift it straight up and out. Set it aside in a safe place.

Object removal and basic cleaning is now possible.



Kawai Fallboard Screw



Kawai Fallboard Support

Music as Inspiration

To put the fallboard back on, set it vertically on the keys a few inches out, and then sit down on the bench. Holding it angled like it was when you removed it, moving slowly and carefully, poise it above the little supports which it hangs on. Deal with one end first, and then the other. It is possible to chip the finish by getting the fallboard behind instead of on top of the support, and it is also possible to wedge the fallboard by putting it in crookedly. Attempt to get the pin in one end of the fallboard into the support on that end, while holding the fallboard slightly above the other end, then deal with the other end. It is easier to do one at a time. Once you have both ends where you think they should be, try closing and opening the fallboard to be sure it's right, and then tighten the little screws again. If one of the screws has come all the way out, it can be a ticklish matter to get it threaded right again. If it seems stiff to turn the screw, you may have double-threaded it. If so, reverse back to the beginning, try again at a slightly different angle, and carefully tighten it again. If the screws are already all cobbled up (usually Phillips screws) it may be better to replace them instead of putting them back in. You can take one to a hardware store as a sample to find a match. The replacements may not look exactly the same.

Some other pianos, mostly Asian (Yamahas, for instance) do not have the small screws, but the fallboard can be taken off without removing the other parts or undoing any fasteners. One problem with Yamaha fallboards is that many of them have a spring going up into a slot on the left side. One sometimes has to press against this spring before the fallboard will lift out, and also when it is going back on.

Old American brands sometimes have a long hinge so the fallboard folds in half. This is called a "Boston Fall." Once the little screws are turned out far enough that it is free, unfold the Boston fall so it is flat, and lift it out like the other types.

There is a new style of fallboard, with a small hydraulic fitting in place of the usual simple brass pin setup. The Kawai company had a little question to deal with at about the time these were being developed, because they wanted to use them on Boston grands (designed by Steinway, built by Kawai.) They couldn't call it a Boston Fall, because that's the hinged type, but they didn't want to keep calling it a fallboard, because it no longer falls. (If you close the fallboard on a piano with this new fitting, it will slowly drift down instead of falling on your hands when you are playing.) They asked piano technicians for suggestions. I don't know who came up with the term, but it's usually called a "soft fall" now.

The soft fall system isn't too hard to deal with when removing the now-misnamed fallboard. After loosening the fasteners (if any), fold the fallboard forward like the other types, but slowly, then grab the ends and lift straight up and out. When putting it back in, you have to be careful that the little rectangular piece (usually on the left side) which takes the place of the old brass pin is at the same angle as the fallboard, then you can slip it back over it, stand it upright, and tighten the little screws if it has any.

The next installment will talk about when and how to take out and put back the action and keys.

Baxter's Bookshelf

Many of you know of the three volumes (a monumental 1,600 pages) that Alan Walker has written on the life of Franz Liszt. We could argue that no one knows the life of Franz Liszt any better than Alan Walker. To my knowledge, no one else has dedicated their life's work to him in the way that Mr. Walker has.

The trilogy is
Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847;
Franz Liszt, The Weimar Years, 1848–1861;
and *Franz Liszt, The Final Years, 1861–1886*.

There is a fourth book Mr. Walker has written on the subject, and if you don't have time to navigate the entire 1,600 pages, you might like to start with *Reflections on Liszt*. Even though he wrote it after the other three were finished, this one adds interesting essays to the massive volumes. It is interesting to read, fascinating in its contents, and each essay can be absorbed independent of the others. There is one entire chapter on the *B minor Sonata*!

I hope you enjoy it.