

Oregon Musician

Sharing ideas about music and the teaching of music

Invisible Work

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.

Several years ago I heard a poem entitled "Invisible Work" by Alison Luterman. This entire issue of *Oregon Musician* is devoted to invisible work, largely inspired by Alison's poem and by my thoughts about invisibility in the face of beauty. She has graciously allowed me to include it here. As musicians our lives are formed and defined by the work we do alone. It's an interesting concept because others might assume that our musical selves are created only through public performances. Of course, the vast majority of our time does not go into concertizing, not even if we are concert artists. The vast majority of our time goes into learning, refining, choosing, rejecting, experimenting, struggling. I've never kept track, but it would be fascinating to know how many hours I've spent on a single 5 minute work for performance. The ratio would be staggering, I am sure. Any performer does the same. Those hours and hours that we work in our studios feed us, nourish us, and support us. Slowly, slowly, we create an artistic sensibility. The Cathédrale St. Cecile (the patron saint of music) is in Albi, France, a stunningly beautiful place (When you go visit, don't miss St. Cecile's tomb. It's on the right in the back). It was there that I first found myself thinking about invisibility in the face of beauty. I had been listening to an organ recital on the spectacular pipe organ, and it was only after the concert that the organist appeared as a little Lego sized figure in the organ loft. So transforming was the music that it was almost as if she had materialized from a cloud. During the performance she was invisible to us, we to her. This dissolving of the self into music is a gift that we receive unexpectedly. It can happen when we listen or when we perform. Recently I played the piano at an 80th birthday party for a friend. At one point she leaned over and said "In my next life, I want to be able to do what you

do." And I thought to myself, "Yes, it DOES take a life"—and aren't we the lucky ones? As Alison says in her poem, "The work of my heart is the work of the world's heart. There is no other art."

For this issue of *Oregon Musician*, Jill Timmons opens the discussion with a brilliant and thought-provoking view of the theme. The nature and necessity of invisible work are at the core of her thoughts. She says "Without the invisible work, there is no true encounter with music let alone a career." Thomas Enman, vocal coach and pianist from Boston, speaks eloquently of his work with singers. He points out that "singing, like all great art, is complexity made simple." Larry Hsu's commitment to the piano and its role in his life is profound and deep. He says, "the piano transports me to a place where I can forget the rest of the world and be more immersed in myself, in who I am." Claire Blesing, an oncologist in Oxford, England, has been devoted to music all her life. She has come back to the piano with a newfound love for it, nourishing herself in her "full-on" life. Steve Emerson's beautiful essay reminds us that becoming a musician is an extensive and complex journey. He says, "How paradoxical that the public expression of music in any given performance is the result of such a complex and invisible process of intentional and unintentional work." Don Steinman reflects on the critical role of music in his life. Who among you might expect that the captain of your Boeing 737 might be a Brahms-loving pianist? And yet, here he reminds us that "the most public of musicians has an artistic *inner life*—the amalgam of innate talent plus musical experience—that's invisible to the stage."

Susan Kline enlightens us by revealing what goes on in some unseen realms of piano action. I once read that a typical Renner action has about 6,000 moving parts. Given that a 2-cycle engine has somewhere around 450, this might indicate the level of complexity in maintaining concert grand pianos! Susan is articulate and dedicated to her art. On Baxter's Bookshelf you will find an entire discussion by Chris Kaltwasser about the remarkable writings of Dr. Daniel J. Levitin, author of *The World in Six Songs* and *This Is Your Brain on Music*. For *The Poet Speaks*, I have included Paul Baxter's poem, "The New Piece." While our work may be "invisible," it is certainly not "inaudible." Enjoy!

I welcome your comments, questions, and observations.

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Invisible Work

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Invisible Work

by Alison Luterman

Because no one could ever praise me enough,
because I don't mean these poems only
but the unseen
unbelievable effort it takes to live
the life that goes on between them,
I think all the time about invisible work.
About the young mother on Welfare
I interviewed years ago,
who said, "It's hard.
You bring him to the park,
run rings around yourself keeping him safe,
cut hot dogs into bite-sized pieces for dinner,
and there's no one
to say what a good job you're doing,
how you were patient and loving
for the thousandth time even though you had a headache."
And I, who am used to feeling sorry for myself
because I am lonely,
when all the while,
as the Chippewa poem says, I am being carried
by great winds across the sky,
thought of the invisible work that stitches up the world day and night,
the slow, unglamorous work of healing,
the way worms in the garden
tunnel ceaselessly so the earth can breathe
and bees ransack this world into being,
while owls and poets stalk shadows,
our loneliest labors under the moon.

There are mothers
for everything, and the sea
is a mother too,
whispering and whispering to us
long after we have stopped listening.
I stopped and let myself lean
a moment, against the blue
shoulder of the air. The work
of my heart
is the work of the world's heart.
There is no other art.

This poem was originally published in *The Sun Magazine*.
For more information about the author, please visit her website at www.alisonluterman.net.

Artsmentor: The Musician's Journey

by Dr. Jill Timmons



About the Author

Jill Timmons, professor emerita at Linfield College, performs internationally as a solo and ensemble artist and has recorded on the Laurel, Centaur, and Capstone labels. She is the author of: *The Musician's Journey: Crafting Your Vision and Plan* (Oxford University Press, March 2013). You can find her in her Lake Oswego studio teaching, practicing, or writing her next book!

When Diane Baxter asked me to write on the topic of invisible work, I found myself pondering for days about this crucial component to the creative process. It's difficult to give a precise definition to what is central to the lives of artists and teachers. Here in the distant outpost of the music industry, artists and educators devote vast amounts of time to their craft, a large portion of which often goes unrecognized. It's a little like an iceberg. The visible part might be our public performances, reviews, recordings, publications, workshops, residencies, and the list goes on. As teachers, our professional persona can include our students in recitals, auditions, competitions, master classes, our service to the profession, and so forth. These are the public events, the actions we take that others see, and those *tangible* results that are evident. But this all hints at something deeper. Like all icebergs, the bulk of the structure lies hidden beneath the surface. For musicians, this is at the heart of our invisible but essential work. It contains our long-term commitment to study, to practice, and to the formal education that often begins in childhood. It requires a sustained and passionate devotion to the art. There are countless hours of practice, lessons, master classes, years of higher education, mentors, finding the right teacher, and a search for that cadre of like-minded folks pursuing their own pilgrimage into music. It's all invisible work.

As artists and educators we know experientially about this unseen and often solitary work. I am not writing about anything that is a mystery or an unknown. On the other hand, what is mysterious is how we convey this understanding of invisible work to our students and

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our audiences. Without the invisible work, there is no true encounter with music let alone a career. In an age when a student might win a contest with the same four pieces they have played for years, or when loud and fast is modeled by performances that feature theatrics and histrionics as new realms of performance practice, it is little wonder that our young people today may be short on time in the “invisible world.”

Invisible work has its own demands: blocks of uninterrupted time, a quiet space, self-reflection, study (not just drilling the notes!), scholarship, and countless hours alone with your instrument. You become the measure of your work and your mastery of the music, and it is you that knows in that private way the struggles, the triumphs, and the arduous trek to fluency. This is why great teachers are the ones who offer a language and wisdom about the nature and necessity of invisible work. Without it, there is no artistry.

As teachers, we can validate and encourage the invisible work of our students. From our experience, we can offer a road map for this difficult terrain and can confirm its presence. In our culture of instant gratification and unrelenting distraction, we can serve as a guide to our students into that private world of study and exploration. If they are lucky, our students will encounter not only great musical works but also themselves. As teachers this is *our* invisible work.

From my vantage point, the biggest impediment facing artists, regardless of age, is the quantitative approach to life. It's that insatiable appetite for more. For our young students it can take the form of more after school activities, more extracurricular pursuits, more awards, ribbons, contests, trophies, you name it. Pile it up for that résumé. And I am not speaking of just young people. For professionals in the field it can be an unquenchable thirst for more concerts, residencies, workshops, students, publications, degrees, accolades, piled higher and deeper. But *more* is not an indication of quality—it's just an amount. Quality, conversely, is the result of invisible work, and invisible work requires time. Think of Einstein's theory of relativity. As an unknown patent clerk, he labored over that construct for years. There was nothing remarkable on the surface. But underneath was a reservoir of imagination, original thought, brilliance, courage, and invisible work. Einstein forever changed our notion of the universe.

Not all students, however, subscribe to Einstein's model of how essential invisible work is to mastery and original thought. For those students who believe that volume is equated with excellence, a word of caution. The music profession has its own rules. The world of artistry and the gateway into the profession requires, first and foremost, quality. There is no currency in ribbons, contests, awards, or endless activities—only the depth of your artistry, and your integrity and wisdom in service to the music. It takes years to have entrance into this world and the price of admission is invisible work.

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Years ago I encountered a wildly talented student who could sight-read just about anything in the advanced piano repertoire. And with a little practice, she could cobble together something approaching performance level. She had an extraordinary gift. For her, however, music was all about the tip of the iceberg—being on stage, tearing through “big pieces,” getting the accolades for being dazzling. It was a challenge to convey to her that without that invisible work of practice hours, lessons, going to a deeper level with her music, and cleaning up the technical fluffs, she would not reap that true reward—a deep and informed connection to composers and their music. It was many years into her professional training before she grasped in an experiential way the power of her invisible work.

Over the course of my life I have been drawn to invisible work. It's my joy and my passion. And while I relish the tip of the iceberg from time to time, it is the private labor that gives me the greatest reward and exhilaration. I continue to search for ways to convey this rich experience to my students. In addition to “iceberg,” there are a lot of “i” words connected with invisible work: intrinsic, illusive, interesting, illustrative, intuitive, integral, intriguing, illuminating, independent, to mention a few. These might be useful words to weave into our teaching as we enlighten our students and audiences about the power and impact of invisible work.



Touching Beauty

by Thomas Enman



About the Author

Thomas Enman is a pianist, coach, and music director who has performed and given master classes internationally. At the Longy School of Music of Bard College, he has prepared a great many operas, including world and American premieres of works composed by Nancy Van de Vate (*Cocaine Lil*) and the New England premiere of Amy Beach's *Cabildo*. As a solo pianist he has toured Central America three times for the U.S. State Department. In 2015 Mr. Enman will be returning for his twelfth season as a vocal coach for the University of Miami Frost School of Music Salzburg Program in Austria, where he is highly regarded for his success in working with young singers. Of Salzburg, he said: "If there is a place which is a musician's heaven, it is Salzburg. One of my students told me: 'Our cook knows more about opera than my teacher back home.' The town and its citizens are music." The following recent comments about teaching, coaching, and invisible work, highlight Tom's love and dedication for his chosen profession.

My work as a pianist comprises my professional and professorial life. Very little of my teaching occurs without a piano, if only for demonstration. As pianists, we are fortunate to encounter perhaps the widest repertoire of any instrumentalist. The nature and breadth of the instrument's possibilities make even opera something one can experience with one's own hands and imagination. I have spent many hours in this kind of exploration and it has opened music to me that I will never hear performed live. Several years ago I found an old piano/vocal score of *Boabdil*, by Moritz Moszkowski, who is known

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primarily for his charming salon music. When I was reading through it, I happened to encounter a stamp mark declaring it to be the property of Oscar Hammerstein! That made the acquaintance even more of an adventure.

My personal work at the piano definitely takes a back seat as performances near for an opera scenes program or public production. I would hope that 99 percent of the work that I do in preparation for the concert stage remains unseen. While no one enjoys seeing a performer struggling to achieve, the audience should still respect the fact that desire and the need to communicate the love of art *demand*s struggle. What I love experiencing and seeing in performance is joy and pleasure in sharing music, while making the event about anything other than ego. The true artist is someone who shares emotional impressions and interpretations, has a good time doing it, and makes it seem personal and meaningful to listeners.

Any artist, aspiring or accomplished, who works with texts in music needs to have balance between the two. In my work as a vocal coach and operatic coach, Emerson has been as much a guide to me as Schumann. We know that “in the beginning was the word” and should heed such wisdom. Nonetheless, there are times when music speaks to the soul when words cannot. The power of music in times of tragedy makes this evident. Most of the healing that took place after 9/11 was because of the power of music.

In my work with singers, I am aware of some integral truths. When one works with singers, one must arrive at a common vocabulary in a way that isn't as crucial with an instrumentalist. The piano is an external instrument. The voice is internal. With a piano student I can make observations about the physical manner in which she is executing a passage and can point to obvious tensions, but with the voice, each body is unique. It is necessary that you and the singer are addressing the same issue with the same understanding, while using what might be loaded terms. For example there are “closed” and “open” vowels. The sound of them is fairly obvious and internationally agreed upon, but to tell a singer that they are restricting their resonance because their production is too closed, or that their sound is unfocused because it is too open, only invites problems. One must become articulate to be effective. Part of the joy of teaching is to establish this vocabulary, which of necessity is different with every person who enters the studio. I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to play for masterclasses of the great singer and teacher Olga Averino in her last years. From her I learned to really hear a voice as something apart from a pleasing sound. When I reflect on just how this happened, I realize that it was because she established words which were simple and yet covered a vast field of meaning. “Release,” “imagination” and “impulse” became triggers which could produce tangible results when a singer understood what Olga wanted. I never knew how to hear when a singer was “on the breath” or if the sound was “spread,” so this was a new way of listening to me. When I understood how this can work, I realized that every singer at the other end of the piano from me needs to be understood in *our common language*. Often the less one under-

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stands the complexity of English the simpler it is to communicate. The way we speak about singing often leads to confusion, so it can be an advantage to have things reduced to only a few words, in much the same way that a few notes in a motif can become a great work of music. I am fortunate to have a personality and sense of humor which singers trust, which enables them to feel free to explore their vocal possibilities. Singing, like all great art, is complexity made simple. Getting to that point demands understanding the same roadmap and the same language as your guide so that you're both on the same path and going in the same direction. When those you are working with can demonstrate change through the encouragement of your words and make a beautiful sound as a result, then you know you have communicated and are sharing something universal and beautiful.

Performances must come from deep invisible work, and while it may seem to be drudgery if we view it as such, there is no other way to discover and achieve artistry. In performance we *want* that work to be invisible. If it looks or sounds as if we are working, it only means that we haven't properly prepared. To that we must add the "necessary angel" which is imagination. I had a singer in a master class, who failed to realize that the text she sang was to a beloved who had died. When she told me that no one close to her had ever died, I got flustered and reportedly said: "Well, that's too bad, I guess you'll have to use your imagination then." The imagination is certainly invisible, but required.

I was fortunate to have spent years concertizing with a wonderful singer, Donna Roll, but to recall our adventures together would fill a book. I felt that when we performed I got enticed into a deep love for singing and was fulfilled in a way that I never felt as a soloist. As a coach I have been rewarded by playing for my students and witnessing their progress as young talents with me at their side. As a pianist, I have always been aware of the percussive nature of the instrument. I find playing for a singer or an instrumentalist where tones can be sustained and developed a vivid spur for my creativity and musical imagination.

While my pianistic technique has grown the most through Chopin Etudes, my spiritual response to music has been deepened profoundly by Schubert lieder. In my youthful ignorance I felt that Schubert was sight-readable, so how hard could these songs be? After decades of exploration I know how wrong I was and how few works of art are as perfect as this body of songs. I sweat bullets any time I have to play Schubert, because I have become aware of his perfection and my human failings. A few years ago, I was judging a song competition, and when I realized I was about to hear a young tenor begin his program with *Nacht und Träume* I groaned inwardly. His first "ah" vowel in the word heil'ge was so pure and beautiful that my eyes immediately filled with tears, and I imagined that I was hearing the young Schubert sing his own song. Every musician knows what Schubert meant when he wrote *An die Musik*.

As a soloist, the most profound performance which lives in my memory was a concert I did in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, for the State Department. I was playing several of Gershwin's song transcriptions and in the front row of the hall was a young boy whose joy

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at hearing this music was so great that he couldn't keep from dancing in his seat. It was a magical moment where I felt I was connected to spirits and music and everything seemed perfect. I knew then I had chosen the right pursuit.

I don't need an audience in the way that I did in my youth, but I can't imagine not having young singers in my life. It takes a long time to really know anything about this art form, and only now am I beginning to be aware of what and how to share the world I have immersed myself in. I feel a great need and responsibility to share what I know. I grew up on a cattle ranch in Montana, so my experience of the world and its many aspects was quite limited. Because of music, I have been able to perform and visit places in the world far removed from what was familiar and have come to know and love a diversity of people. I come from a family of teachers so being an educator seemed very natural to me, and teaching music a real bonus. We are teachers because of what we have been taught and the thinking we have been exposed to. Often when I am in the midst of a masterclass and filled with my own thoughts and ideas for the young singer in front of me, it comes to me that I am really only passing on something I learned at some earlier point in my life. Amazingly wonderful people shared it with me because we spoke the same language, and I am fortunate to be able to pass it along. The act of touching beauty every day as a pianist gives meaning to my life.



Why Play the Piano?

by Larry Hsu



About the Author

Larry Hsu studied Chemistry and Chemical Engineering at the University of Washington in Seattle. He worked as a professional engineer until 2014, but has since switched careers. He is currently a broker for the real estate company Coldwell Banker. Larry began piano studies at age 10 but switched to violin two years later when his parents sold the piano and bought a violin for him. He missed the piano so at age 15 he bought a piano and resumed playing. Larry enjoys gardening, is a licensed acupuncturist, and sings in two choirs in Seattle.

Sometimes I ask myself why I play the piano. It is a very solitary experience and it takes me away from other things that call to be done. It's a question that's even more relevant now that I am wanting to spend more time playing the piano and less time doing those other things. I recently retired as an engineer and am now selling real estate. One of the main reasons why I chose to do this is because I wanted more time to play the piano. Working as a fulltime engineer paired with a busy and active life outside work prevented me from spending the time at the piano that I desired.

If playing the piano is such a solitary and invisible thing to do, why then do I want to do it? Anyone who can play the piano has spent time practicing but who can say how much time? Only a piano savant perhaps could play the piano without ever having touched one, and I am not one of them! There were periods of time in my past when I didn't play the piano, not by an active choice, but working 60 or 70 hours a week at my job, family demands and other things simply kept me from it. I missed it, yearning to get back to it, but needing to attend to the tasks at hand.

It is this yearning that keeps me playing the piano. As long as I am *able* to play, I don't think I could choose *not* to play. I think the desire, the yearning, comes from the way the piano transforms me and transforms how I feel. The piano transports me to a place where I can forget the rest of the world and be more immersed in myself, in who I am. The music feeds my soul and I can enter a state of being where I feel safe, happy, and nurtured. I can think of few things in life that do that for me. Sometimes being in nature can, sometimes just working in the garden. Sometimes singing, or even listening to music works. I imagine that athletes experience this during performances, or scientists when their brains are exploring new territories of research.

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Writers can go there when they are writing and readers can get absorbed in stories. For me above all else, the piano provides this entry into the world of creativity.

Practicing the piano is not always transformational, but it is a means to an end. It can simply be hard work. That's not to say that practicing is necessarily a chore. Playing just a little phrase can give me great pleasure when it is exactly as I want it to be. Even in practicing I can be "transformed" for a moment. But it's true, a lot of practice time is invisible and must be done in order to play a piece as the composer and I want it to be played. When the piece is played or performed (depending on how well I play it), the result depends on how much "invisible" time I've spent. I like to perform. It gives me the opportunity to share my experience with friends, families and others. Music is meant to be heard and performing for others helps me to communicate that music, while providing me with a culmination of the work that I have done. It certainly gives me a goal to work toward, something to motivate me. Hopefully my playing can transport others as it does me. The work that I've done in the preparation becomes less "invisible," even though it is still ephemeral.

Performing is a very different experience than playing for myself. There have been times in performance when it's almost as if I'm just the observer. The piano nearly plays itself and the music soars. It's as if I'm floating in the music or the music is carrying me. This has happened only a few times in my life but it is something I want to experience again. I think it has occurred when I was prepared enough that the mechanics of playing the piano were not an issue and I allowed myself to just let the music be communicated from me to my audience. That is the ultimate goal and for me the most satisfying. I like to think that my communication of the music has given my audience a moment of enjoyable or even healing transformation.

Writing this essay has reminded me to enjoy my piano playing, practicing, and performing. I cannot allow those tasks of everyday living to take over my life and deprive me of this miraculous thing called music that feeds my soul.



Piano Magic

by Claire Blesing



About the Author

Dr. Claire Blesing is a Clinical Oncologist in Oxford, England. She qualified as a doctor 30 years ago after studying at Cambridge University and St. Thomas' Hospital Medical School London. When she can find a few moments, she likes to play the piano and particularly enjoys accompanying her younger daughter playing the cello.

Last summer I took the plunge and booked a week's piano course in France led by British pianist, author and scholar Paul Roberts, with assistance from Swedish pianist Martin Sturfalt. It took a bit of courage, because, though I have always considered myself passable when accompanying my daughters on flute and cello, I was not really up to performing solo in front of others. I had first considered doing the course fourteen years ago when a colleague at work told me he had been to a French chateau to spend a week working on his Chopin Prelude! What a dream! As a hospital surgeon with a growing family, he lived a busy life but found time to do the course, as well as play guitar and perform in a band. Although it took me a long time to go, I'm so glad I went. A new musical door has opened in my full-on life and I don't want it to close.

As a child I played piano, violin, and guitar, following the lead from my mother who plays piano. Her five children all learnt instruments and played in the school orchestra. Music and science are, to my mind, closely linked and have been interweaving threads throughout my life. The positive influence of others is always key; my mother encouraged me to work hard and excel in both science and music. As I progressed with piano exams to grade 6, I realized that I wasn't really connecting to music at a deeper emotional level. At the age of 16 I stopped and focused on getting into medical school and boys (or the other way round!).

Music took a back seat in my life until 20 years later, by which time I had lost a leg to cancer, gotten married, had two delightful daughters, been appointed a part time consultant oncologist in Oxford (England) and bought a house in a country village. As the girls were growing, I sang and played the guitar with them and took them to musical play groups. I taught them to play recorder and guitar, bought them toy instruments

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and finally an upright piano. Piano lessons for my oldest daughter soon followed, then I returned to study myself! I discovered *Pianoforte*, an amazing and fascinating piano shop in the neighboring market town. (I often go in to just look at the pianos, occasionally having a play if no one is there).

Our teacher had a Steinway grand! I discovered that I could play Chopin and Schubert, beautiful and meaningful Romantic piano music. I learnt how to practice and to improve, and how to encourage the girls in their music making. After four years, I discovered too late that our teacher was moving and selling her Steinway, but *Pianoforte* staff members found another equally beautiful one made in Hamburg in 1907. It is resplendent in our lounge and comes a close second after the girls in my heart!

I have also shared my love of music within my community. When I was chair of governors of the local primary school, I gave the school our old upright piano and arranged for piano and recorder teachers to visit the school, enabling many children to experience the joy of music making. I ran a monthly Sunday school for 10 years and took my guitar along to sing with the children who participated by selecting a toy percussion instrument to play. I organized two musical shows in the village church with twenty children performing solo or in groups and reading poems. These events brought pleasure to the performing children, pride to their parents and teachers, and joy to the older residents of the village.

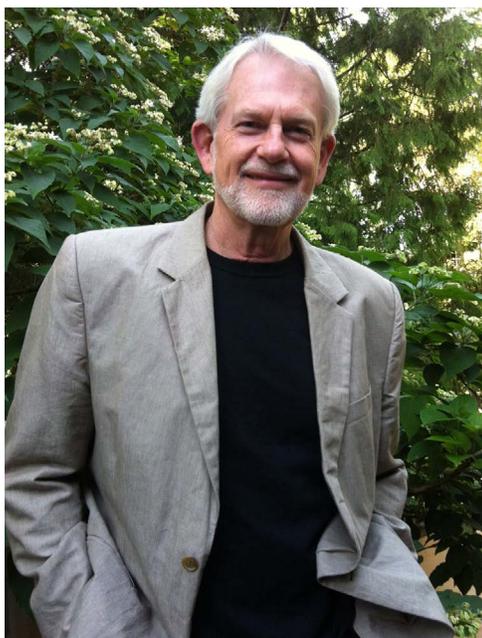
As my daughters grew and my job developed and expanded to become Clinical Director, it proved difficult to devote time to piano practice. Aside from accompanying the girls, I didn't really develop my musical skills for some years. However, following the course this summer, my love of piano playing has been rekindled, and I find that when I play, I must switch off from all else and concentrate on the musicality of the piece. This minimizes rumination about work issues whilst I am at home, and helps make a healthy and clear divide between my home and work life.

Piano practice is the invisible work, which is essential for a confident and emotive performance. I no longer feel guilty if I sit for half an hour at the piano, and a deeper contentment for having done so always follows. The sense of achievement when a new piece has been mastered provides internally generated positive reinforcement. On the course in France, I learnt how to look afresh at pieces that I had known for years and how to reinterpret the meaning of the notes. I learnt that understanding the life and ethos of the composer is often key to understanding performance. I have joined an adult piano group that meets every 4–6 weeks on a Saturday morning with teacher Sally Chappell in the wonderful Jacqueline de Pre music building in Oxford. We are currently working on duets, which means that rhythm and timing need to be negotiated and agreed—as well as meeting the challenge of overlapping hands on the keyboard fighting for the same note! Now that I have re-discovered piano playing I will not let it falter again and I mean to keep this very much part of my better-balanced life.



What We Play is Life

by Steve Emerson



About the Author

Stephen Emerson, cellist and psychotherapist, holds a B.A. degree in music, a Master of Music degree in cello performance, and a Master of Social Work degree. He was Associate Principal cellist with the Utah Symphony for 27 years and appeared as soloist with the Utah Symphony and the Long Beach Bach Festival. Mr. Emerson is Adjunct Professor Emeritus of the University of Utah's School of Music and was a member of the adjunct faculty from 1988 to 2013. In his role as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) he maintains a private psychotherapy practice in southwest Portland helping people deal with a variety of challenging life issues including performance anxiety.

So much of the work we do as performing musicians is invisible work. The “finished product” that the audience experiences is the result of an extensive, complex, and mostly invisible process that can easily be taken for granted. The performance is like the tip of an iceberg where 90 percent of the underlying process is below the water level, out of view and thus out of awareness. But supporting every performance by student, amateur, or professional musician, there is an extensive process (often years long) that culminated in that performance.

There are many different aspects to this underlying process. Much of the work is intentional. That is, it's made up of studying, practicing, rehearsing, and dealing with issues of self evaluation and confidence in a goal-directed way. Some of the work, however, is unintentional and works upon musicians invisibly (they may be invisible even to us unless we are mindful of them). These psychologically developmental aspects are comprised of such things as early inspirations experienced when we first heard music and saw it performed, and early social, environmental, family, instructional, and performance experiences. These contribute to our sense of reverence for music and for beauty, our motivation to continue, and the formation of our sense of competence. They also contribute to the formation of an internalized critic which can either serve us well or create obstacles for us. Therefore, a complex combination of goal-driven intentional work and developmental processes is behind every performance.

What We Play is Life

Most everyone who chooses to become a musician was inspired early in life by having heard something that caught their attention and touched them. They may have been introduced to music by their parents or others, heard recorded music, attended concerts, or heard musicians practicing and performing. These early impressions shaped musical preferences and aesthetic sensibilities, forming preferences for interesting and beautiful experiences. They brought up emotions and created associations that stay with us throughout our lives. I remember several recordings I heard as a child that had such impacts on me: Schubert's *Valse Nobles*, Mozart's *C Major Piano Sonata*, a *Gigue* by Bach, pieces by Chopin including the two concerti, Puccini and Verdi arias, and the Tchaikovsky violin concerto. They were recorded by artists such as Jorge Demus, Paul Badura-Skoda, Jascha Heifetz, and Mario Lanza. Music by these great composers performed by these great artists touched me deeply and have stayed with me and inspired me in many ways. Although I'm a cellist, I realize that I was influenced a great deal by pianists, violinists, and tenors!

As we begin to study an instrument (or voice), we begin intentionally to learn the mechanics of playing the instrument and all the elements of musical notation and expression. Many hours are devoted to taking lessons and practicing what our teachers are advocating. The musical values we are taught rest on the centuries old, outwardly invisible history of western music. I began studying the cello in 4th grade after the school strings teacher came to our class to recruit students by demonstrating various instruments. I was attracted to the sound of the cello and joined the beginning class. That first teacher and the many others I've had throughout my life had a significant impact on my development as a musician and the amount of confidence I was able to bring to playing.

Playing for and with others may both excite and scare us. On the one hand, we experience the joys of music in connection with others. On the other, the ideas of comparing ourselves to others and trying to achieve perfection begin to strengthen in our minds and the internalized critic begins to seize more of our attention. Invisible psychological goings-on play a big part in our musical careers. I remember being a junior high student and being placed in the high school orchestra. We were learning Beethoven's *5th Symphony*. The notorious trio section of the scherzo, often included in cello and bass auditions, wasn't sounding very good. The director decided, in frustration I'm sure, to make each of the cellists and bassists play our part individually with the rest of the orchestra looking on. I felt so petrified I could hardly play at all! Not a confidence booster! It gave my internal critic a lot of ammunition! As we notice the effects of various experiences on our psyches regarding performing, we may engage in internal psychological work on our own or with help of others, such as teachers or counselors.

Probably the clearest example of invisible work one engages in as a musician is in practicing and rehearsing. For string players especially, there are many opportunities to do ensemble work as well as solo. A lot of time and effort is involved in learning the individual part, then rehearsing with the other members of the ensemble. If we're involved in a chamber ensemble, it may be a small number of fellow musicians we need to work

What We Play is Life

and play with. This can involve not only the many hours of practicing and rehearsing, but learning to get along with other individuals' personal and musical idiosyncrasies. In an orchestra, we deal with the personality of the conductor as well as practicing and rehearsing. Most of an orchestra's work with its conductor is invisible to audiences. Audience members are sometimes confused about the role of the conductor, not realizing that most of the work has already been done, unseen by them, before the concert. Fortunately, many orchestras and chamber groups now hold open rehearsals, allowing audiences to get a glimpse of the usually invisible process. As a chamber music and orchestral cellist, I've spent untold hours rehearsing. Depending on the repertoire, fellow musicians, and/or the conductor, those rehearsals seem either endless or extremely exciting and inspirational. As a member of the Utah Symphony, I had the privilege of working with many excellent conductors such as Maurice Abravanel and Joseph Silverstein, as well as many guest conductors. Those that radiated a deep sense of reverence and spiritual involvement were the most inspiring to me.

As I matured as a musician and as a person, it became more apparent to me that the beauty in music is an expression of the spiritual: that most invisible, ineffable something that makes all the difference. When we as musicians are touched by the presence that I believe music expresses and of which it is a manifestation, surely it enables us to play more beautifully and touch our listeners more deeply. How paradoxical that the public expression of music in any given performance is the result of such a complex and invisible process of intentional and unintentional work. That process, made up of the unfolding of the psychological, physical, emotional, aesthetic, musical, and spiritual dimensions of the whole person creates deep inspiration in ourselves and our audiences and forms the substance of our on-going "finished products."



Solo and in Solitude

by Don Steinman



About the Author

Originally a flutist, Don Steinman has recently suffered a serious case of adult-onset piano. Steinman is a professional aviator by trade and has been an airline pilot for over thirty years. He lives with his wife and avian friends in Phoenix.

My current musical endeavor—unlike that of most musicians, and certainly unlike that of the working musician I once aspired to be—is almost totally invisible, for my endeavor is a solo one conducted, mostly, in solitude. Off-stage solo piano practice is nearly the entirety of my music making, excepting the occasional lesson and the even more occasional solo recital. I'm not doing any accompanying, nor being accompanied, nor playing in ensemble settings. Playing with and for others isn't particularly important to me these days. My recitals, of course, have forced me to set goals and to focus my practice, and overcoming stage fright has been a worthwhile exercise. But the recitals have been infrequent, averaging one a year, each including about five minutes on stage. Mainly I play for and by myself.

We all have public and private personae, of course, outer and inner lives lived in parallel. The most public of musicians has an artistic *inner life*—the amalgam of innate talent plus musical experience—that's invisible to the stage. While much of the invisible work of practice is done off-stage, the true domain of music making's invisible

Solo and in Solitude

'sweatshop' lies within oneself, out of sight even—paradoxically—when playing with (or in front of) others. It would seem that part of the invisible work of performing is making “the work of performing” itself invisible. And although my music making is nearly always out of public view, I still feel part of a larger ‘whole’ as I privately work through the repertoire. For me, the private work of learning a piece is its own reward, even if it never sees the lights of the stage. I experience the thrill of *playing* music that I’ve long loved *hearing* at the hands of others. It is this thrill the spurs my present impulse to play, informs my tastes and choices, and forges connections to my early musical past, my childhood and family traditions, and to my “inner artist.”

My first instrument was flute. As a child I played in ensemble settings—school orchestras and bands, and at Interlochen for three summers. I forayed into bass guitar as a teen and actually made a few dollars during and after college playing in bar bands around Washington, DC. As an older adult I went back to woodwinds, playing clarinet in chamber music circles. This all reflected a lot of invisible work, to be sure, but my playing was much more public then than now. Less visible, perhaps, was the source of the wellspring. Music was in the air my brother and I breathed growing up. Our mother was a talented pianist with perfect pitch who’d earned a Masters in Music Education from Columbia University’s Teachers College. We each inherited some small part of her gift. Though her life ended suddenly when we were still kids, her music reverberated through our young lives as performers, and it echoes still, some fifty years later. I’ve continued to feel the calling even as non-musical professional pursuits have taken center stage.

I do wonder whether and how my approach to piano might have been different had it been my first instrument, and studied in childhood, rather than my fourth and picked up in middle age. As a kid I was a facile reader, but now reading piano music—with multiple voices and clefs—is an on-going challenge. Now I must devote considerable invisible work to endless repetition in the attempt to develop finger dexterity. As a kid I took ensemble playing completely for granted. Now I savor making music as a solo—and solitary—experience.

Although my playing is very much in the private, invisible sphere, my professional life as an aviator, on the other hand, is a very public and highly visible one, albeit one that keeps me from the piano for days at a time. Flying airplanes is anything but musical, although there is a balletic quality to aviating that’s complementary to playing music. In a way, flying is a sort of dance, though one that requires a large, somewhat cumbersome, prosthetic. Still, there’s little room for real creativity moving large jet transports from place to place. Perhaps that is why I’m continually drawn back to music. Though I’ve set it aside at times in favor of other pursuits, I’ve always returned to it. In the end, music doesn’t so much transform my life as complete it.



Behind the Scenes

by Julie Weiss



About the Author

Julie Weiss is an Oregon State University Fine Arts graduate, a freelance graphic designer, and owner of Tobias Weiss Design, a firm she founded in Corvallis in 1999. When she's not working creatively to meet her clients' needs, Julie and her husband spend time caring for their goats, chickens and bees, and tending their gardens and orchard. As time allows Julie escapes the Willamette Valley to backpack, hike and canoe in the Cascades, sip wine in Walla Walla, and watch the sunset in Yachats.

You may or may not have seen my name at the bottom of this issue's page three. If you did I'm pleased, but if you didn't, I'm neither surprised nor disappointed. Why? Because it's the job of the publication designer to work quietly behind the scenes, without drawing attention, so that what is published and the messages it conveys are the only things a reader notices. In other words, the job of a publication designer is to do good and creative work—invisibly.

As a freelance graphic designer for the last 20 years, my approach to projects has typically been focused on creating pieces that are tasteful and pleasing, and to achieve that I most often strive for understatement. Of course, I consider the words I'm laying out on a page to help set the tone of my design work, and in general the louder they speak, the more boldly I'll present them. But my best projects and the pieces in my portfolio that I am most pleased with are those that are beautiful but subtle; intensely designed, but quietly rendered.

Ideally my work is created without constraints (except, of course, for budget), and it's those projects that achieve the outcomes I describe above. Often though, I work with clients who feel strongly about a look, a feel, a color, a photograph, or a font. And sometimes, they feel strongly about all of these things and have a specific final product in mind before I begin my work. Over my career I've learned that the best approach to such situations is to listen to my client's ideas and desires, incorporate as many of them as is possible without sacrificing design quality, but in the end, to reject, tactfully and with thoughtful reasoning, ideas that will make a good design mediocre, or a mediocre design unappealing and ineffective. Quietly

but firmly walking this line is one of the greatest challenges I face, especially when I first begin working with a client.

Designing *Oregon Musician*, thankfully, represents the type of work I most enjoy. Over the years I've worked on *Oregon Musician* I have collaborated with two excellent editors, and for each issue I've been given full license to create a design and layout that achieves what I believe the finished product should be: a subtle, pleasing, understated piece that suits the content well, and stays quietly, unassumingly in the wings? while nudging the articles' content to the central focus of the reader's attention.

Now you know my secret desire—how I hope to (not) be noticed. How I hope to stand behind the curtain while the authors receive the applause. How I do my best work creating visuals by remaining invisible.



Baxter's Bookshelf

Dr. Daniel J. Levitin
Neuroscientist, Musician, Author

By Christian Kaltwasser



About the Author

Christian Kaltwasser has been recognized for his music talents and scholarship, including the *WOU Outstanding Composer* and *Excellence in Ethnomusicology Awards*. His compositions have been featured in master classes with Chamber Orchestra Kremlin and Andrew York, and he has participated in clinics with Ascendo3, Hollywood composer Dave Metzger (*Frozen*, *The Avengers*), and Halcyon Trio Oregon. He currently studies music composition with Dr. Kevin Walczyk.

This Is Your Brain on Music:

The Science of a Human Obsession (2007)

The World in Six Songs: How The Musical Brain Created Human Nature (2009)

Foundations of Cognitive Psychology (2010)

The Organized Mind: Thinking Straight in the Age of Information Overload (2014)

Amazon's webpage devoted to Dr. Daniel J. Levitin's work states that he is "Professor of Psychology and Music at McGill University, Montreal, where he also holds appointments in the Program in Behavioural Neuroscience, The School of Computer Science, and the Faculty of Education. An award-winning teacher, he now adds best-selling author to his list of accomplishments as "This Is Your Brain on Music" and "The World in Six Songs" were both Top 10 best-sellers, and have been translated into 16 languages. Before becoming a neuroscientist, he worked as a session musician, sound engineer, and record producer working with artists such as Stevie Wonder and Blue Oyster Cult. He has published extensively in scientific journals as well as music magazines such as *Grammy* and *Billboard*. Recent musical performances include playing guitar and saxophone with Sting, Bobby McFerrin, Rosanne Cash, David Byrne, and Rodney Crowell." This brief synopsis of his career is extracted from

Dr. Daniel J. Levitin

a full curriculum vitae of over fifty pages! He has fifteen gold and platinum records as a producer. He has produced for Steely Dan, Stevie Wonder, and The Carpenters. In addition to those performers mentioned on Amazon's site, he has performed with Mel Tormé, The Steve Miller Band, and Ben Sidran. His creative work is extensive. He has even worked as a stand-up comic! He wrote jokes for Jay Leno and Arsenio Hall, and coauthored the *Bizarro* comic strip for some time. He has worked on film and television programs, including *The Music Instinct* for PBS, and *The Musical Brain* for National Geographic.

Dr. Levitin received his B.A. in Cognitive Psychology and Cognitive Science from Stanford University in 1992, and his Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Oregon in 1996. He received post-doctoral training in neuroimaging at Stanford's medical school.

Levitin has stated that he became a neuroscientist because he wanted to understand more about music and the emotional basis for artistic experience. He is recognized as a leading expert in neuroaesthetics, a field devoted to the brain's foundation for art and aesthetic experiences

Levitin has authored hundreds of articles and talks, ranging in subject from auditory perception and perfect pitch, to his latest scholarly paper on the inability of world-class violinists to tell the difference between a newly made violin and an old one. He has published six books so far as author or editor, two of them New York Times best sellers on the science of music. His first book, published in 1992, was on working in the music industry. His latest book, *The Organized Mind*, deals with evolution of the human brain and coping strategies for dealing with the overwhelming modern media environment.

In his research, Levitin connects music to the ability of the human brain to represent and recall sensations and information. Music is complex, but more easily recalled than words by themselves. For example, Levitin has shown that when people are asked to sing a song they know, they are typically able to reproduce specific aspects such as the pitch, tempo, and inflections of the original performance. He relates the amount of information contained in music to its ability to communicate emotions, seeing music as a very early means of communicating emotions that preceded language in human evolution. He also notes that music, because of how deeply it works into the brain, stays with people longer, as they may lose cognitive function to diseases of the brain and to old age.

Levitin cites evidence that music is able to activate deep regions of the brain, and brain chemicals such as oxytocin, which affect emotions of trust and social bonding. He notes that humans have shown an ability since ancient times to live together in very large cities, whereas other primates cannot sustain groups larger than those with about 18 male individuals. He suggests social music-making may help sooth certain group tensions. In *The World in Six Songs: How the Musical Brain Created Human* Levitin argues that the evolution of the human prefrontal cortex and the formation of human cultures and society were aided by the emergence of art, in particular, music. He identifies six distinct ways in which music functions to support this evolution. The six functions of song that he identifies and discusses are:

Dr. Daniel J. Levitin

- Bonding, trust, and friendship
- Celebrating good feelings, moving the body in dance
- Bringing comfort, empathy, reassurance
- Preserving and transmitting vital knowledge
- Religious ritual and spirituality, belief in something larger than oneself
- Love for others, and selflessness

Dan Levitin is a music educator, researcher, teacher, consultant, audio engineer, and performer, and can write with authority on all of these topics. I highly recommend his thought-provoking books!



The Unseen Artist

The Unseen Revealed, Part 1

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*.

We're looking inside a grand piano today, a 1926 Steinway M (medium-sized). It was built with considerable elegance and one great failing, which is what brought the action and keys to my workbench. The failing is called verdigris, a kind of rust which is specific to brass, copper or bronze. It doesn't affect the keys, which we are inspecting today. With minor variations, what we see here is present in all grands (except historical or old Viennese pianos).

See Photo #1, "side view of keys." On the underside, just under where the fingers play, see the mortises and the red linings of woolen cloth. These are called key bushings. They cushion and stabilize the key as it goes up and down past the front rail pins. You can see two front rail pins in the photo, where two keys have been taken out. They are oval.



Photo 1: Side view of keys

Moving back, the gray circles on the sides of the keys are lead weights. They are far forward to counterbalance the weight of the hammers, so the keys are easier to push down.

The Unseen Revealed, Part 1

Halfway back on the underside of the key, there is a reinforcing piece of wood, the shoe, with a hole in it. The shoe stiffens the key, which improves power. A substantial shoe is a sign of quality. The hole is the balance rail hole. A key pin goes through it, round not oval, the balance rail pin. The two key pins stabilize the key. They must be very smooth.

On the top of the key is a shorter reinforcement, called the key button (see photo 2). It also has a mortise and a key bushing. This photo shows how the balance rail pin comes through the mortise. On top of the key, further back, is a round piece of brass, the capstan. It can be turned up and down, which gets the hammers in a straight line at the right height. These are slanted, very classy. In newer pianos they are always vertical.

At the back of the key, on a slanted wire, is the back check, a wooden block with felt glued to it, covered with leather. It catches the hammer tail after a note is played, so the hammer can't bounce up and down. At the very back, sadly not very well revealed, is a notch with a piece of red felt on it. This raises the damper so the note will sustain till the key drops back to rest position.

Now let's take away the keys and reveal the key frame (see photo 3). There are front rail pins, with dark green woolen front rail punchings on them. They are called punchings because they are cut from heavy action cloth, cardboard, or paper, with punches. There are the balance rail pins, with thinner white woolen punchings. And there is the back rail, heavily cushioned so that the keys won't make too much noise when they go back down after the keys are released.

The fourth photo shows in detail the oval pins, the thick cardboard punchings, and the heavy green cloth front rail punchings on top. Moths love all the cloth punchings and the back rail cloth, especially in older pianos. Mice also chew the keys (which are sometimes made of sugar pine). They corrode the key pins and strings and can put a nest under the keys. Carpet beetles love wool as much as moths do. Cleanliness and avoidance of damp conditions are the best defenses against these vermin.



Photo 2



Photo 3

The Unseen Revealed, Part 1

Other parts shown in the key frame photo must be mentioned: coming out of the end of the front rail you can just see a piece of metal. This is the guide pin, held down by the left key block. It keeps the action moving sideways in a straight line when you push the left pedal. There's one on the right end, too. You can see two little rods sticking up from their square platforms. (You can get a closer look at one in the key buttons photo, with a brass nut on it.) This holds a long half-round piece of wood with felt underneath, just above the keys. When the rail is installed, it is secured by brass nuts on top, which tighten against those underneath it. The left end of it is held down by a screw. You can see the hole for it in that pretty walnut block on the left. It's called the key stop rail. Back east they call this the shipping rail, because it keeps the keys from getting dislodged when the piano is on its side to be shipped.

That block, with two screws and a flat spring going through wood guides, is unique to Steinways. It holds the sostenuto "monkey," which lets the middle pedal work. All other brands (and Hamburg Steinway) mount this in the action cavity, not on the action itself.

Finally, if you look closely you can see some rods bigger than the key pins in the balance rail area. These are the tops of the "glides," polished metal domes on the underside of the key frame, which can be adjusted to support the balance rail. When they are not adjusted right, you can get ticking noises. Adjusting them is called "keybedding."

So, how do the keys work?

The balance rail punchings, under the white cloth, are thin cardboard or paper, some tissue-thin. They determine the key height. Any keys which slant are squared up by bending the balance rail pins.

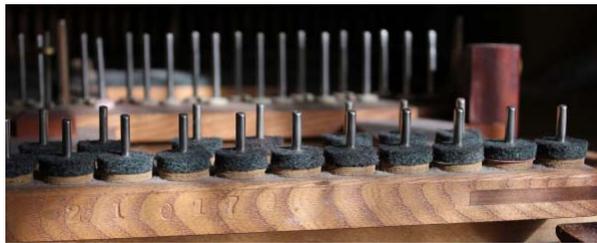


Photo 4

The larger front rail punchings (see photo 4), determine how far down the key is allowed to go. This is called key dip, and it must be uniform. Different pianos want a slightly different key dip measurement. The key must move freely up and down with very little friction, but it must have only minimal side play. The balance rail hole is critical—it must be free but not loose. The back check must be at just the right height and angle. Rough key tails will wear through the back check leather.

Repairs? The key bushings wear through, or if they get wet, they harden and can fall out. Move keys side to side and see if you hear clicking or if they don't feel cushioned. If a bushing falls out the key will wobble all over the place and can even hit the neighboring key. Replacing worn key bushings can have a miraculous effect on the touch of a piano and can lessen noise.

The key buttons can split but are easily reglued. The keys can split also, but can be glued back together with very careful alignment. If the key pins are rusty or roughened

The Unseen Revealed, Part 1

(pliers . . . ugh) they must be smoothed with 600 sandpaper or replaced. Try pushing a key to the side, and see if it gets very hard to push down. This is called side friction. The key pins can be sprayed with a dry lubricant to fix this.

If you grab a key and try to pull it forward, and it moves, this means that the balance rail hole is worn and oval. It is called “pully key,” and uprights get it too. On grands, aside from the clatter of a loose key, it is impossible to regulate the back checks accurately because they may move forward or backward. Pully key can be fixed with a veneer saw, little slips of hardwood veneer, and a trace of glue. The trouble is, if there is one pully key, there are probably 50.

The lead key weights can loosen, making a characteristic little click. The lead, being soft, can be spread by hammering with a punch so the weights will grab the wood better. A drop of superglue can help stop rattling by gluing them in place. If moth damage is present, it’s best to strip the punchings, scrape off the back rail cloth, and replace everything. This seems like a lot of work, but with any luck what I do in a day will still be in the piano, invisibly working, when both I and my customer are long gone. Life and good work can be wonderful.

So, what became of the Steinway M which was seized up with verdigris? Well, I can’t tell you all the details, because we have not yet explored the action stack where all the verdigris lives. Tune in next time, for the mysteries of hammers, wippens, and double escapement.

By the way, concert piano technicians are often called “the unseen artist.” But since I check the tuning at intermission, I am not unseen.





About the Author

Paul Baxter, Ph.D., is a Research Archaeologist at the Museum of Natural and Cultural History at the University of Oregon. He works and writes about archaeological projects throughout the state of Oregon. He has written poems for the past twenty-five years, including this one, the result of living with a pianist for years. To his credit, he has never once asked her to stop!

The Poet Speaks

by Paul Baxter

The New Piece

Sounds pouring out,
rising, ringing, repeating,
caressing, careening,
a deluge, splashing, washing
room after room,
a multicolored stream,
cascading out and away and away . . .

The stream slows
forming languid pools,
where small, smooth rings,
exquisitely centered,
opening, spreading, and spreading
out and away, and away . . .
and then exploding upward,
a tsunami blasting forth,
overcoming, inundating,
drowning the house and all in it
in beauty, and radiance, and life,
rushing out and away, and away,
expanding magically, majestically,
carrying the best of humanity
to Saturn and Jupiter and beyond.

The poem is printed here with the permission of the author.