

KANSAS CITY – JUNE 2007

Review of: “Bridge Capping”, Andre Bolduc
By Nevin Essex

I sat in the back of the room while Mr. Bolduc presented his very practical video and discussion of his shop’s bridge capping procedure. In spite of the large number of attendees and Andre’s casual, unpretentious presentation, I could see and hear very well. The work depicted in the video was a repair of an old upright piano which was clearly not worth a great deal of money. The underlying message was that a bridge cap replacement job can be done in just a few hours, using only a few dollars worth of materials and that an otherwise unserviceable old piano can be returned to work for a modest fee. The procedure, of course, can also be put to use in a fine grand piano. The repairman in the video was Andre’s son, Christian, who was there to help present the material and guide the skills session and with whom Andre was justifiably well-pleased.

The two Bolducs provided us with plenty of detail, from a step by step account of the job, to insights into practical woodworking--like making the gluing surface of the bridge slightly concave where it will be clamped to the cap with screws down the center line--to the tools (tapered drill bits) and the materials used (“acoustic glue”), to Christian’s homemade right-angle pencil used to scribe the outline of the bridge on the underside of the cap.

The lecture-presentation was promising enough that I returned for the skills session to see the hands-on workshop lead by both Bolducs, the younger confidently carrying his own weight, the elder sharing the stage easily. They marked, drilled and notched a number of bridge caps, guiding unsteady students with patience and good humor. I left feeling good about the PTG as an organization whose purpose is passing traditional musical instrument building skills from one generation to the next, and hoping that in the shrinking economic condition of the piano business, this kind of father-son, teacher-student, master-apprentice system can continue to provide meaningful careers and a decent living to those of us who commit ourselves to it.