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Tuning, not tunes, for this musician

by LESLIE BRIDSON

For a period of time, Dave Tabachnick considered a career in business administration. This aspiration, however, was short-lived. He has found his true love — tuning, repairing and rebuilding pianos.

Born and raised in the Bronx, he began taking private piano lessons when he was eight years old. "It's funny," he says. "At first I wasn't interested in playing it. It was, 'You will play an instrument.' But I found out that it was something that worked for me, and so it turned into something nice."

At the end of Tabachnick's high school career, he moved with his family to Stony Brook. After graduating from high school, he attended Sullivan County College in the Catskills, with the intent of studying business administration. He laughs and says, "The only thing I learned was that business administration was not for me."

After college, Tabachnick "was a working piano player in New York City," performing at hotels, restaurants and clubs, including the Plaza Hotel and the Tavern on the Green. "I had to take care of my piano so it could sound nice."

He explains why he chose music as a profession. "I was into music. I knew it was for me." But he was also quickly learning he seriously enjoyed working on his piano. "As a professional musician, you practice a lot and the instrument is at your disposal." Tinkering with his piano "really began to take my attention away from playing."

He describes his move from piano player to piano tuner, repairman and rebuilder as a "slow process. It occurred over a period of time. At first, I did it as my second love, from the time I was a late teenager till the time I was in my early twenties. Then it was no longer my second love, it was my first love. But I didn't give music up right away." Eventually, Tabachnick decided that he found the tuning work more enjoyable than performing.

He says that most of the knowledge he possesses concerning the tuning and repairing of pianos is self-taught. After becoming versed in the field, he took the entrance examination for the Piano Technicians Guild. In this three-part test, Tabachnick had to successfully tune a piano, repair and regulate a piano so that it worked as well as possible and pass a written test.

"Anyone who services pianos knows about this organization," says Tabachnick. "You don't just pay dues. The principle of the organization is to have a pool of knowledge for the people who service pianos professionally."

"I've always been very disciplined. I like to be my own boss. It means a lot to me to wake up and see a busy schedule for my day. If I have a lot of pressure that day, I take a long lunch hour. I make my own guidelines. I don't have to dance to [any one else's] music."

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TABACHNICK TUNES while listening to piano's tone.

Photo by Maxine Hicks

Tabachnick is proud of his accomplishments, proud of the two seminars he attended recently that were by "invitation only." The most recent of the two was held in California at the beginning of this year.

"Six people were invited." Invitations, he says, are sent out based on the recipients' reputation. "I was invited because of my reputation. Sometimes I trouble shoot problems for Yamaha dealers." Knowledge of successful problem-solving "filters back" to Yamaha.

Describing the program, he says that an unfinished piano is taken out of production and the seminar participants have to "finish it up" under the eye of a senior technical manager. "We have to be as well versed as any inside factory worker. They want to make you the best person you can be in all areas." The first such seminar he

attended was held by Steinway, and only three were invited.

Tabachnick is divorced. His two sons are 18 and 14. He now is engaged to be married.

For Tabachnick, one of the reasons he enjoys doing what he does is because, "In the field of piano technology... with each new skill, new worlds are opening up." But the main reason Tabachnick is so content with his job is because he is a "people-lover." He says, "It's nice to get to know things about the instruments people have. You see these people about every six months [the average span between piano tunings] so you get to know an awful lot about their needs as a person and as a piano owner. You watch their kids get older and their houses go through changes. You get to know quite a lot. It's most interesting."

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