



Glen Kirchoff

There is no person with a longer commitment to and deeper relationship with Hoff-Barthelson than Glen Kirchoff.

During his five decades at Hoff-Barthelson he has served as a piano faculty member, piano technician, building manager, and unofficial keeper of institutional memory, in roughly equal measure. He has provided expert music education to legions of students while simultaneously providing physical care for the school's nearly four dozen pianos and serving as the superintendent of HB's two buildings. Indeed, his knowledge of and investment in the school is both expansive and profoundly intimate. We are humbled to be honoring him today.

Glen grew up in southernmost New Jersey, about five miles from Philadelphia. Neither his parents nor sister had any experience in the world of music; his affection for music was organic and self-directed. Glen's first instrument was the trumpet, picked up as an optional part of the curriculum in elementary school. "My parents thought it was a waste of time," Glen said. "But to me, music was a world that made sense. All the structure resonated with me as an anchor."

When he was twelve years old, Glen's aunt, aware of his interest in music, found a distant relative with a piano they could no longer keep. His aunt said Glen could have the piano if his mother paid the \$25 cost of moving it to their home. His mother was reluctant but paid the \$25 because she learned the piano bench might be worth about that same sum.

When the piano arrived, he could play it nearly immediately, with an instinctual knowledge of how to put chords together, despite the impediment that the instrument had not been maintained for a decade and had to be tuned a half step low to avoid breaking the strings. Glen was delighted to have anything to play at all, even if it was the wrong pitch. His first formal lessons were with a local teacher, who was not a technically proficient performer, but did have an expansive knowledge of music theory, which he taught to Glen.

During high school, Glen added the violin to his repertoire, which gave him the invaluable experience of playing in an orchestra, learning both orchestral works and fostering a collaborative spirit of music making.

Glen entered Baldwin Wallace College in their piano performance program, but a complicated fracture resulted in having his arm paralyzed for a year, resulting in a switching of his major from piano to music theory. This was an easy transition because he had been so well prepared in theory by his childhood teacher.

To keep himself entertained one summer during college, Glen purchased a build-your-own harpsichord kit. The kit consisted of a keyboard, some strings, and a blueprint. He independently studied instrument design and how to source the right hardwoods for the task, eventually constructing a workshop in his bedroom. This first instrument he crafted played nicely. He borrowed harpsichord scores from the Philadelphia Library, often taking out twelve at a time, to teach himself mastery of the instrument. Glen eventually built several more harpsichords, including one of Hoff-Barthelson's, but he sold this first one in order to buy himself a properly tuned piano.

Glen went to graduate school at Bowling Green State University where he took courses in piano technology and left with a master's degree in composition. Following grad school, a friend recommended him for a job with a private piano teacher in Ohio who wanted to focus on rebuilding pianos. Glen took over his studio and spent mornings refurbishing pianos with him and teaching students in the afternoons.

A year later, a college classmate, who happened to be working at Hoff-Barthelson, needed to leave HB for family reasons. Not wanting to leave former director Mary Helton in the lurch, he suggested that she interview Glen. They hit it off and Glen came to New York, taking over his friend's teaching schedule.

When Glen arrived at Hoff-Barthelson, there were six Steinway grand pianos, some in less-than-ideal condition. In addition to teaching piano lessons, Glen took it upon himself to get the motley assortment of school pianos into excellent condition. Then when HB moved into 25 School Lane in the early 1970s people donated pianos to get the school the full complement of necessary instruments. It was Glen who got them in playable shape and later brokered arrangements with a dealer to trade several lesser pianos for a better Steinway.

From this improvised start as HB's piano manager, Glen became Hoff-Barthelson's primary piano caretaker, overseeing the tuning and maintenance of the school's entire inventory of pianos. Glen has also played a pivotal role in the acquisition of many of the School's pianos, some of which have histories as thrilling as any epic novel. Please ask him to tell you the tale of how HB came to possess a piano that was once owned by the publisher of the Washington Post; played by luminaries as diverse as George Gershwin, Oscar Levant, Chico Marx, and Rudolph Serkin; and, by way of an African princess, might have been owned by Donald Trump had he not spoken up for it.

Glen examines and tunes most of HB's pianos three to four times per year, but the concert grands in the Joan Behrens Bergman auditorium receive special attention. Glen likens their maintenance to that of a race car, with sometimes daily tweaking of the tuning based on usage and humidity levels. Micro increments of tuning can be the difference between just OK and concert ready. He is our in-house pit crew for the school's most foundational tools.

In-house is a literal description. Glen has lived in the basement apartment at 25 School Lane since the late 1970s. Our home is his home. And much like his oversight of the pianos, Glen is the person who oversees the fine tuning and maintenance of the Hoff-Barthelson buildings. The 120-year-old School Lane structure and her slightly younger sister Helton House have an unending need for care and attention. In conjunction with the board, Glen will arrange for everything from structural assessments to boiler maintenance. He is the first line of defense against any and all building problems and makes sure that the facility serves the needs of faculty, staff, and students as well as possible.

And again, Glen has done all this while serving as a piano instructor for hundreds of students, over a 50-year time span. He enjoys working with people of every age and ability, but he has a particular affinity for students with their own agendas and quirks, who want to experiment with music and see how they can create their own work or adapt an existing theme to make it their own. Glen has both the pedagogical expertise and the flexibility that allow him to meet students where they are and empower them to thrive.

In addition to a lifetime of devotion to Hoff-Barthelson, Glen is an avid runner, making daily laps to the far corners of Scarsdale. He won his age category in the 2024 Scarsdale 15K road race. He is also a longtime student of the Italian language and has combined these passions by spending several weeks each summer at a running program for adults in the Alps near Livigno, Italy.

While Glen has toyed with decamping to Italy in a long-off retirement, Hoff-Barthelson Music School is his home and his family. He has never been more eloquent and accurate than when he said, "My life is here."