

# Treasured Artist *Don Winslow*

by Mary Ann Ebner

## **i Tune**Pianos keep Winslow tuned in to local music scene

Music trails Don Winslow nearly everywhere. And the pitch sounds perfect once he applies his piano tuning talents. With his morning routine ahead, this Cornwall-on-Hudson family man double checks his tool bag and jumps into his Toyota Tundra to drive over Storm King Mountain for an engagement with a West Point piano.

He knows his way around West Point. After graduating from the Boston Conservatory in 1972, he auditioned for the U.S. Military Academy Band, received a basic training welcome from the Army, and reported for duty as a trumpet player. After decades of performing for the Army and retired since 2000, Winslow is still making music. He has created a niche as trumpet player transitioned to piano tuner. This former performance perfectionist immerses himself in making stringed percussion instruments sound their best.

Winslow steers his Tundra into West Point parking and makes his way to his appointment. He meets up with a striking stage beauty: a Steinway D concert grand piano. With Clay Aiken, the American pop singer, about to make a stop at West Point's Eisenhower Hall for an evening concert, the piano that the house provides needs a tune. Working from his black bag of tuner's gear stocked with one of his favorites, his tuning hammer, Winslow carefully gives the 9-foot piano a professional tune.

"Every time there's a performance or the band is performing a concert, it's a requirement that it's (the piano's adjustment) a fresh tune," Winslow said. "I'm kind of in a unique position. Although I've retired from the band, I still feel as if I'm an integral part of it."

Planning for semi-retirement, he began to lay the foundation of piano tuning while still a performer. He had an uncle who tuned pianos and the legacy was passed on in the family. The retired U.S. Army Master Sergeant dedicated 28-plus years of service to the USMA Band, but passion

for music hinders him from fully retiring.

"When I would go home (Ayer, Mass.)," Winslow said, "my uncle, Allen Winslow, would invite me over (to his home in Bedford, Mass.). He planted the seed; I did some apprenticing and joined the Piano Tuners Guild. I used to tune four a week when I was in the band. Now I can tune four a day."

Beyond the finely crafted Steinways, Winslow services pianos that take a pounding from students to those treated gingerly by his professional clientele.

Dr. Ruthanne Schempf of Cornwall, a serious concert performer and faculty member at SUNY-New Paltz and Marist College, teaches music history, theory and piano. At home, she primarily plays her handmade Yamaha, one of three residential pianos.

"Don's the only one I have look at my pianos," she said. "He's very serious

about it, very professional." Self-described as persnickety, Schempf generally schedules tuning once a year, depending on humidity, climate control and other environmental conditions. But she calls on Winslow frequently to tune for the Hudson Valley Society for Music, which orchestrates the Potluck Concert Series, live chamber music at the Cornwall Presbyterian Church.

As a Registered Piano Technician (RPT) and past president of the New Jersey Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild, Winslow knows how to find a solution to tuning challenges, as well as how to rebuild pianos. The Piano Technicians Guild awards the distinction of RPT only to members who have "passed a series of rigorous examinations on the maintenance, repair and tuning of pianos."

Whether it's a stately performance hall piano or a hand-me-down model used for family lessons, Winslow excels at restoring the region's pianos to a fine tune.

Sidebar note: To hear one of Winslow's fine tunes, check out the Potluck Concert Series schedule at [www.hudsonvalleysocietyformusic.org](http://www.hudsonvalleysocietyformusic.org).

