

Harpsichord & fortepiano

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Friends of the Fortepiano

The Accademia Bartolomeo Cristofori

ITALY, the land of origin of so much musical development in the past, is no longer so advanced. After a long fallow period things are at last slowly improving—and one area which has suffered in recent years, that of early keyboard instruments and especially the fortepiano, is one where the rejuvenation is particularly welcome. It has been suggested that Italy is no longer friendly towards new influences, and that the

discoveries of musicians from elsewhere in Europe and America about period instruments and style have not found a particularly willing audience in the peninsula. It is hard to name a contemporary Italian keyboard instrument builder of note, for instance, and the organization of the educational system is such that any significant improvement in this state of affairs in the immediate future is probably

unlikely. Yet there are small signs of life and to come upon an institution seriously devoted to early keyboard study is a cause for celebration: the Accademia Bartolomeo Cristofori in Florence, the city where Cristofori lived and worked and where he invented the piano in 1692, is a lighthouse in this rather dark sea. Stefano Fiuzzi, Director of the ABC, writes about the formation and the work of the Accademia.

THE Accademia Bartolomeo Cristofori was founded in Florence in 1989 upon the initiative of a group of friends all of whom are music-lovers with a shared passion for antique musical instruments. Their goal was to create a unique centre in Italy, entirely dedicated to the fortepiano, so as to have the possibility of making music on original instruments and studying in depth the interpretative and performing styles common to them.

The idea, which I had nurtured for many years, had come to me following my assiduous frequenting of the instrument collection of the famous Austrian pianist, Jörg Demus. As is well known, Jörg Demus, to whom I was assistant for many years during his masterclasses in Salzkammergut and with whom I later had the privilege of playing duo, is one of the forerunners of the re-evaluation of antique instruments and of their use in concert.

Naturally, there were many obstacles to the formation of what was to become the Accademia Bartolomeo Cristofori, not least the financial question. A meeting with the renowned banker Alberto Milla, a great music enthusiast himself, suddenly made the creation of the Accademia possible, with the acquisition of a spacious building situated in the heart of Florence in the popular quarter of San Frediano, presumably not far from where Bartolomeo Cristofori had his workshop nearly three centuries ago.

The building was then divided into a large exhibition space, offices, a library and an

auditorium with a capacity of 120 seats, which gives us the possibility of organizing chamber music concerts, lectures and masterclasses.

Adjacent to the Accademia we were able to acquire another space so as to create a restoration workshop highly specialized in the care and recovery of the fortepiano.

The first step was that of putting together a collection of instruments of particular historical interest that, having been saved from abandon and restored to their initial efficiency, could again be listened to with their original sound. The next move was to start an intense activity principally dedicated to the study and diffusion of the culture and the history of the fortepiano via the formation of a specialized library, an archive of documents on the history, construction and teaching methods of the instrument and interpretation seminars held by the top experts.

The principal activity of the Accademia is however represented by the concerts—about twenty-five to thirty per year—in a period which goes from September through to the whole of June: concerts which have hosted the best names in the profession, who have in turn performed programmes of great cultural interest, ranging from well-known repertoire 'revisited' on original instruments, to forgotten pages written for the fortepiano both as a solo instrument and as part of a chamber ensemble.

Therefore next to the famous and less famous Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, whose

works we are aiming to cover entirely, our concerts have included the music of Hummel, Reicha, Weber, Mendelssohn, Spontini and many, many others whose work has been so often forgotten—unjustly so if one considers their importance for the evolution and formation of the Classical and pre-Romantic styles.

We have also dedicated great attention to Lieder, with the performance of the Schumann and Schubert complete cycles.

Alan Curtis, Paul Badura-Skoda, Stanley Hoogland, Jörg Demus, Rosalyn Tureck, Temenuschka Vesselinova, R Könen, Melvyn Tan, Lucy van Dael, Christopher Hammer, Geoffrey Govier, Claudio Desderi, Tiziana Tramonti, Gerald Finley, Rufus Müller and Antonia Brown are only a few amongst the artists who have performed in our concerts, often extending their participation to teaching during the masterclasses organized by the Accademia.

THE instruments used in our concerts, all of which are restored and constantly checked in the adjacent workshop directed by Donatella De Giampiero, are principally a Schantz, dated back to the end of 1700, a Rosenberger from the same period, two Grafs (nos. 362 and 1041), a Lange dated 1835, a Simon and a Schrimpf from the same epoch, and 1849 Pleyel and other instruments by less famous makers but, however, equally appropriate for our needs.

Two recently acquired antique organs have given us the possibility of organizing concerts and seminars held by such artists as L F Tagliavini, Christopher Stembridge, P P Donati and Stefano Innocenti.

The Accademia Bartolomeo Cristofori, which by now is habitually recognized by the logo ABC,



collaborates on a continual basis with other prestigious musical and academic institutions, such as the Cherubini Conservatoire of Florence, the Centro Tempo Reale, directed by Luciano Berio, the Amici della Musica di Firenze (Friends of Music in Florence), the Centro di Studi Musicali Ferruccio Busoni in Empoli, the Florentine Centre for the History and Philosophy of Science, and many others.

The Accademia's hall and its instruments are also often used for recordings: just recently a CD dedicated to Hummel was produced on its premises [see review on page 37—Ed.]

In 1993 the Accademia was granted the prestigious Franco Abbiati Prize on behalf of the Società dei Critici Musicali Italiani (Italian Society of Music Critics), as the best Italian musical institution for its cultural initiatives.

The Accademia Bartolomeo Cristofori, *amici del fortepiano*, is at Via di Camaldoli 7/R, 50124 Firenze, Italy. Tel: (+39) 55 221646.