

# Harpsichord & *fortepiano*

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# *pian'e fortino* : the Neumeyer Collection and its curator

Alison Holloway

*Bad Krozingen is a small town in the south-west corner of Germany, pinned onto the map between the Black Forest and the Alsace; Freiburg-im-Breisgau is about 15km to the north, Basel in Switzerland 47km to the south.*

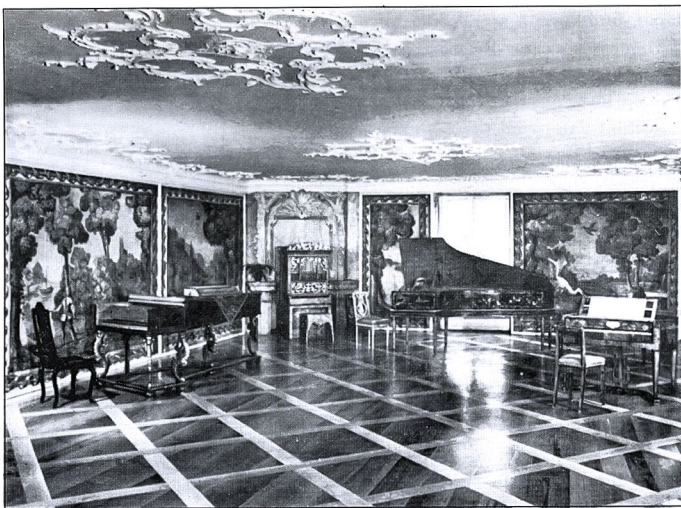
*In August we went in search of Schloß Bad Krozingen, its collection of early keyboard instruments and their curator, Sally Fortino.*

The Schloß is, strictly speaking, neither a castle nor a stately home, but what we in England, being particular about these things, would call a small country house or large manor house. It is situated on the southern edge of Bad Krozingen, just before the point at which the core of the town - shops, church, market place - dissolves back into the wide fields from which it has been conjured. Set behind tall iron railings on a quiet leafy lane called, appropriately enough, Schloßpark (which is just as well, as there is no other clue to its location), the Schloß is surrounded by mature trees, the protective rustle of which gives you your first hint of its claustral past. This is a former provosts' residence of the monastery of St Blasien, and was first built in the 16th century; in the mid-18th century it was altered to create a series of substantial apartments. In the late 20th century the second storey became the home of a private collection of historic keyboard instruments and of the three men who created it. Obviously, every 200 years or so, something important happens at Bad Krozingen.

At the front of the building is an external stair turret which links the separate apartments, and it was here that we were met by Sally Fortino, the collection's curator. We shook hands briefly at the foot of the stair - a little conspiratorially, like Jacks-in-the-beanstalk being secretly admitted into the giant's castle by an elf - and then Sally flitted up the spiral staircase ahead of us, disappearing

behind the newel as fast as we could follow her. Once inside the apartment, the heavy wooden door closed, we had the hush of a few hours in which to explore the contents before those who were conspicuous by their absence - an audience - were due to return for the evening concert, a Chopin recital by the Dutch fortepianist Jean Goverts.

First things first, Sally made a pot of tea, brought out a plate of homemade lemon cookies and ushered us into a large rectangular room furnished entirely with keyboard instruments, except for a polished wooden table at the centre, at which we sat. Here Sally began to tell us how she, an American living in Switzerland, had come to be looking after this collection - and, indeed, how the collection had come into being in the first place.



The harpsichord hall, Schloß Bad Krozingen

## *The Neumeyer Collection*

Fritz Neumeyer (1900-83) was one of the pioneers of early music in Germany. Musician, conductor, composer and teacher, it was during his studies at the Berlin Musical Instruments Collection in the inter-war years that he developed an interest in historic keyboards: because, in the words of his pupil Rolf Junghanns, he "had come to the conclusion that the music of past centuries is



considerably changed when played on customary instruments of the present day, because the historical instruments differ essentially from those of today as regards tone and mode of performance" (*Historische Tasteninstrumente*:

*Katalog der Sammlung Fritz Neumeyer*). The guiding principle in his collecting, which he began in about 1930, was the bringing together of a series of instruments which would enable him to play the music of the late 16th to mid-19th centuries "in its original tone picture." Over the next fifty years he achieved this (with, it must be admitted, the inclusion of a few modern reproductions to fill the gaps), building up a collection of over fifty keyboards covering the period 1590-1860.

The earliest 'original' instruments in the collection date from the 17th century and include a harpsichord by Nobili (Rome 1695), an Italian spinettino and a Swiss virginal. There are three German clavichords: Hubert (Ansbach 1772), Späth & Schmahl (Regensburg 1787), and a 6-octave fretted instrument of about 1800. The harpsichord collection is completed by two reproductions by Dowd, one after Blanchet 1730 (1973), the other after Ruckers 1620 (1975). There is also a copy of an Italian spinet of 1600 (Skowronek 1964) and a double virginal after Ruckers 1591 (Koster 1974).

It is in the pianos, however, that the collection truly comes into its own. The Stein dynasty is represented by an instrument of about 1790 by Johann André Stein, one of 1816 by Nannette Streicher ("it was found in a nunnery - they were very happy to exchange it for a TV set") and another by Johann Baptist Streicher (1868). There are two hammer-action grands from Broadwood (1798 and 1817), and two square pianos, one with wooden hammers of about 1785 and the other by

Clementi. Two 'Mozart' grands are thought to be by Heilmann (1780) and Fichtl (1795). First prize for curiosity value, however, goes to the instrument that stood behind us while we drank our tea - a Swiss *Schrankflügel* (c 1820) in which one half of the upright cabinet houses the strings and the other a bar. The same drinks stand inside it that were there in 1983, when Fritz Neumeyer died.

#### *The search for a curator*

So how did Sally become involved? During the war Neumeyer had taught at the Berlin Academy of Music, and afterwards moved to the Academy of Music in Freiburg where he taught the young keyboard player Rolf Junghanns; Junghanns, in turn, went on to teach at the Schola Cantorum at Basel. In 1974 they installed the collection at Schloß Bad Krozingen where they continued to build on it and, together with Canadian keyboard player Bradford Tracey, brought the instruments to audiences through concerts, recordings and radio broadcasts. Junghanns and Tracey continued this work after Neumeyer's death, but in 1987 Tracey also died, and, during his own illness in 1993, Junghanns alone of the three was left to prepare for the future. He thought of Sally.



Sally Fortino at the Fortepiano by Johann André Stein, Augsburg - ca. 1790

Sally Fortino was born in Pennsylvania and studied at Moravian College before going to Basel to study harpsichord with Junghanns. She graduated from the Schola Cantorum in 1977 and, after five years back in the States teaching and performing, she returned to Basel to do the same - as well as to research, edit, publish and record a variety of little-known early keyboard works. It was Sally whom Junghanns asked to take on the care of the collection after his death. He hastily

invested the collection in a foundation and, in 1993, Sally suddenly found herself both curator and artistic director at Schloß Bad Krozingen.

#### *A perfect match*

Sally Fortino is as perfectly matched with the Neumeyer Collection as are the instruments themselves with the charm of the rooms in which they stand. Here is an accomplished keyboard player, teacher and researcher, strongly committed to historic keyboards and their repertoire - full of both enthusiasm and knowledge and the ability to communicate them. After showing us around the instruments in the room in which we sat, she took us into the former banqueting hall. This is a magnificent chamber by any standards: richly decorated plaster ceiling, highly polished inlaid wooden floor, and walls painted from top to bottom and left to right with a series of pastoral scenes framed by elaborate plant-scroll borders. You have the impression, as you glide surreally across the floor in huge felt slippers, of being conducted into the tapestry-draped hall of a palace. This decoration, attributed to a refurbishment by Johann Caspar Bagnato in the mid-18th century, is an ideal setting, historically and aesthetically, for the extensive series of concerts - the *Schloßkonzerte* - which is held in it each year. On the evening of our visit the chamber was both visually and aurally evocative of an age of elegance when Goverts played to a full audience on a Conrad Graf fortepiano of 1826.

#### *Giving the historic repertoire a hearing*

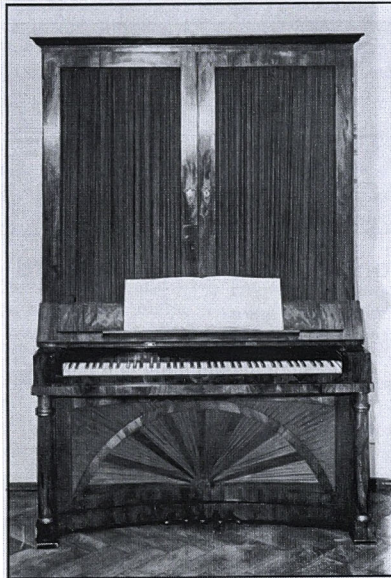
There are about 25-30 concerts each year at Schloß Bad Krozingen - roughly two a month, with special themed weekends and some private performances, for example for the Friends group, which helps to support the collection. A regular feature of the concert programme are the *Sonderkonzerte*, in which Sally gives a lecture-recital featuring different instruments of the collection; there are about seven or eight of these each year between April and October. Others feature

artists, both solo and in ensemble, from around the world.

The foundation which supports the collection is secured by a limited amount of state and private funding; as we all know, in the current economic climate, sponsorship for the arts is difficult to find. Ticket sales and the Friends group play an important part in keeping the collection going. As well as caring for the collection and running the *Schloßkonzerte*, Sally manages to continue teaching, performing, and — not least — carrying out her research, now largely directed by the need to devise a variety of concert programmes, both at Bad Krozingen and elsewhere. One theme in particular, however, is in constant demand: that of women composers for the harpsichord.

#### *A recurring theme*

Sally's interest in the works of women composers evolved from a general interest in exploring unknown repertoire. Her research into the subject began almost by accident: she happened to rent a room from the music librarian at Basel, who one day came across a keyboard work by Elizabeth Billington, a famous singer who had also composed since childhood ("she wrote sonatas like J.C. Bach"); he passed a copy on to Sally, and other works followed. Sally then began to search out the repertoire for herself, concentrating at first on solo keyboard works but soon becoming interested in other pieces, for example ensemble works.



*Swiss Schrankflügel ca.1820*

Although a popular theme appealing to adherents of 'political correctness' in both Europe and the USA, Sally's research into the works of women composers has been historically directed and is not part of an attempt to impose modern ideas about gender and society onto the past ("anti-historical"). As she says herself, "gender issues are not an issue". She has found that, if anything, composition came more naturally to certain groups of women in the past than we might at first assume. In 17th-century Italy, for example, nuns composed motets and masses

(much of which has now been researched, and some published), and daughters of the 'intellectual' nobility, such as Barbara Strozzi, were well-educated in music as they were in other spheres. In France and England, daughters of musicians and members of the aristocracy were similarly educated and also had easy access to instruments. At a time when published music was difficult to obtain, the composing of it was, perhaps, considered more normal than it is now. By the 18th century ("a time of discovering artistic activity in women generally") many women published their music, especially in England.

Sally's first programme on the theme was entitled 'Women Composers and their Teachers' and focussed on pupils of Mozart, Haydn and Salieri. Since then she has produced her own editions of works by women composers, performed them in public and made her own recording. She is a regular speaker on the subject both in Europe and the USA, and in 1999 she comes to England to give a recital of works by women composers at Finchcocks in Kent.

### *The rest of the story*

As for our afternoon at the castle, however, the tremor of the approaching hour could no longer be ignored and we left Sally to prepare for the evening. By the end of the day it was clear to us that Sally's work at Schloß Bad Krozingen is, in fact, only part of her story – as, indeed, the Neumeyer Collection is only part of the story of the building in which it has a home. Crucially, however, Neumeyer's story was only the beginning of that of the collection he founded, and it is to be hoped that, through the preservation of this important group of instruments in their unique setting, and the experience of this pleasurable combination through public concerts, it will be very far from the last.

*For information about the concert series at the Schloß write to Schloßkonzerte, Am Schloßpark 7, 79189 Bad Krozingen, Germany. Sally Fortino's solo CD Women Composers for the Harpsichord is available from the same address, or in the USA through Continuo Marketplace, Hammondsport, NY*

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