

# Harpsichord & *fortepiano*

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Musical Instrument Research Catalog  
(MIRCAt)

# H&F

## *A Note from the Editors*

**M**elvyn Tan has recently said that he felt “alienated” and “dismissed” as part of the early music world, and is returning whence he came, i.e. to the modern piano (*Time Out* 5.1.2000). Now he feels “part of a group...we can exchange ideas”. We at *H&F* could be forgiven for thinking he’s lost the plot, as we hope our current edition shows. In this issue we have gathered together our own group — musicologist, instrument maker, director of an early-music ensemble and performer — to explore and overturn ideas about what the 16th-century harpsichord might have sounded like. Philip Pickett’s commission of a 1531 Trasuntino copy, strung at a low pitch, has proved to be a winner with all those who have heard it, both in solo recital and in performance with the New London Consort. While the softer, more lute-like tones of the instrument are a revelation to us today, they fit in very well with contemporary ideas about articulation, and this experiment cannot be lightly dismissed.

For a few days of English summer sunshine we were fortunate enough to spend time with maker **Joel Katzman** and the director of the New London Consort, **Philip Pickett**, viewing a variety of historical instruments in collections in and around London. Along the way we took the opportunity to quiz Katzman on his construction of the Trasuntino copy, and to press Pickett on his views about articulation in the Renaissance and how, therefore, the instrument should be played. Of key importance to both of them is **Nicholas Mitchell**’s theory of a unified pitch, and we therefore open the debate with his outline of pitch practice during the Renaissance. Although the article might seem a little tough-going for those of us with only a dim grasp of pitch standards, it is well worth persevering with: in it the author tackles the all-too-frequently overlooked question of how instruments from different countries were played together, and why musicians were able to buy instruments from centres all over Europe. This leads on to **Andrew Stewart**’s interview with Joel Katzman, in which we see how Mitchell’s ideas about scaling and pitch are in tune with Katzman’s own philosophy of instrument-making. Following are two articles related to our general topic: Paula Woods’ fascinating account of the misunderstandings which the pitch system caused English buyers on the Continent, and Asako Hirabayashi’s astute questioning of the relevance of the Bevin table for our realisation of Elizabethan keyboard ornaments. We finish with a shortened review section.

In our next issue we will be going back to our usual format of articles on various subjects, accompanied by a full review section, covering the whole world of early keyboard instruments. You may note that our regular news column, Soundboard, seems to have disappeared; this is only a virtual disappearance, however, as it now features on our new web page, where we will be able to bring you news on a more regular and up-to-date basis, as well as previews of upcoming issues. Also in the e-world we will be bringing you articles on more specialist topics than can normally be included in our magazine. To enter this world, visit: [www.beedata.com/harp](http://www.beedata.com/harp).

Finally, as always, our thanks go to our contributors, and especially to Philip Pickett for his help and guidance in putting together what we hope will be a valuable contribution to the type of debate which ought to become common in the 21st century. Whatever else, it proves that the phenomenon of ‘exchanging ideas’ is not entirely unknown in the early music world. If you’re listening, Melvyn — there’s life in the old keyboard yet.