Harpsichord & fortepiano

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Report From the 35th Annual Meeting of The American Musical Instrument Society / Galpin Society / CIMCIM, 19- 23 May 2006 Reported by Anne Beetem Acker

May is perhaps the best time of year to visit the National Music Museum in Vermillion, South Dakota, and even more so when there is a meeting of this sort. The weather, company, and programmes were outstanding. The schedule was rich with scientifically and historically oriented lectures, recitals, concerts, and two instrument replica debuts, as well as many social gatherings, capped by a wonderful final banquet with award presentations.

The National Music Museum, formerly The Shrine to Music, has risen to international prominence as one of the great instrument collections with over 10,000 instruments from around the world. Included is an excellent representative collection of keyboard instruments. Of particular note are the 1767 Manuel Antunes and 1781 Louis Bas pianos.

Over 150 attendees from around the world shared research results and heard concerts and demonstrations on a great variety of instruments. These organisations and meetings are a wonderful opportunity for people from diverse walks of instrument life to cross paths. Academics, museum staff, private collectors, instrument builders, dealers and performers come together to create fertile ground for future collaborations. Other organological topics were covered, but there were more than enough lectures and recitals dedicated to keyboards to please the most focused historic keyboard specialists. I will discuss here topics of the greatest interest to harpsichord and fortepiano aficionados.

Recitals and Instruments

Several keyboards in the NMM's collection were used for lecture recitals and concerts, including the Manuel Antunes grand piano (Lisbon 1767), the José Calisto harpsichord (Portugal 1780), the Kirckman (London 1798), the Guarracino octave virginal (Naples 1694), a clavichord by J. P. Kraemer & Sons (Göttingen 1804) and the Späth & Schmahl tangentenflugel (Regensburg 1784). In addition, Jayson Dobney of the NMM demonstrated organs made by Josef Loober (Switzerland 1786), the 1808 Pennsylvania organ by Dieffenbach, and the 1850 New Hampshire David Dutton organ.

Suzanne Skyrm (University of South Dakota) did a fine job playing 18th- century Spanish and Portuguese works on the Antunes grand piano. In the interest of maintaining its nearly original condition, this instrument is rarely played. This piano has its original soft leather on many of the hammers and has a very intimate sound. Its action is virtually identical to the early Cristoforis.

Gerhard Doderer and Cremilde Rosado Fernades of Lisbon presented "How Portuguese Harpsichord and Pianoforte Building Recovered after the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755", with examples played on the Antunes piano and Calisto harpsichord.

The Lanzelotte-Galhono Duo made superb use of the 1780 Calisto harpsichord and Clea Galhano's personal collection of recorders, performing Italian, Portuguese, and Brazilian music from the baroque period, looking at the influences in music from Italy to Portugal to Brazil and back. Rosana Lanzelotte (Rio de Janiero, Brazil) has made recordings on the Calisto available from the National Music Museum. Galhano is currently based in St. Paul, Minnesota, yet these two perform as if they play together all the time.

Luise Morales (Spain) played Soler and Scarlatti on the 1798 Kirckman, showing command of the music and the instrument. The last three Scarlatti sonatas were performed with Cristobal Salvador dancing and playing castanets. This concert stood in marked contrast to a previous year's concert/dance performance also at the NMM. This time the tempos played and the combination of Scarlatti with the dance were quite convincing. A fine performer, Salvador danced at a brisk yet never out-of-control pace, and with expert use of various types of castanets.

The Guarracino octave virginal was highlighted in a recital by David Schulenberg (Wagner College, NY) and Mary Oleskiewicz (University of Massachusetts, Boston). The duo played beautifully and this little instrument has a surprisingly loud and clear voice.

The final concert highlighted Susan Alexander-Max (London, England), playing works by C.P.E. Bach, Haydn and Mozart on the Kraemer clavichord, and the Spath & Schmal tangentenflugel. Max has long shown herself to be in superb command of clavichords and fortepianos and she did not disappoint this time.

New Replicas

Darryl Martin (Edinburgh) presented his reconstruction of an early Flemish style clavichord. Using images such as the painting *"Portrait by Jan van Hemessen,* Antwerp ca. 1530", he had constructed an instrument of which there is no surviving example. A distinct school of Flemish clavichord making was demonstrated in paintings, which proved to have sufficient detail to deduce, design, and build a hypothetical instrument. The resulting clavichord was played by David Schulenberg, both solo and with Mary Oleskiewicz on her copy of a Renaissance flute by Barbara Stanley (after Lissieu, Lyons, c.1572). As expected from such a new instrument, it had a rather thin but sweet tone.

Malcolm Rose (Lewes, England) presented his new Karest virginal commissioned by AMIS member Lloyd Farrar. Two surviving virginals by Joes Karest dated 1548 and 1550 were used as models for the design of the new instrument. Charlotte Mattax and Sonia Lee (University of Illinois) aptly demonstrated the instrument with duets and solos of the period; the instrument has great projection and a full, wonderful sound.

Conservation and Restoration Issues

An excellent presentation of the real world of restoration was Michael Latcham's "Conservation and Compromise in Practice: Two instruments of 1777, a piano-harpsichord by J.A. Stein and a harpsichord-piano-organ by Taddeus Tornel." The Tornel is in such a state of decay, it was decided to do nothing, as any attempt to restore it to playing condition could only do harm. In contrast, the Stein has experienced considerable renovation and "improvements" over the last century, destroying original information, and making it virtually impossible to restore the instrument to its original state. Since so much was not original, they did decide to get it into playing condition, but did not undo the work of previous restorations. This instrument then, is a record of the types of restorations done by organ builders in the late nineteenth and mid twentieth centuries.

Science, Engineering and Mathematics as a Means to Discovery

Study of materials and their production, sound analysis and theories of design techniques are of great importance to scholars and makers of keyboard instruments and were well represented. Those most directly related to keyboards included Dr. Stephen Birkett's work at the University of Waterloo (Ontario, Canada), Grant O'Brien's ongoing research and Pedro Manuel Branco dos Santos Bento's work at the University of Edinburgh. Of indirect interest was the work of Benjamin Hebbert (St. Cross College, Oxford) on the use of geometry in the design of viols. This work was reminiscent of Birkett's work with William Jurgensen on the geometrically directed design of stringed keyboards. Also of interest was the discussion by Micha Beuting (Hamburg) on dendrochronology, a dating method that uses the growth of tree rings to date wooden objects.

Of great interest to those of us in the early keyboard world is the work presented by Dr. Birkett on "Authentic Soft Iron Music Wire, 1500-1830". Birkett has been researching not only the metallurgical composition, but also the original processes

for creating iron music wire. Thanks to substantial submissions of historic music wire from a very wide spectrum of time and instruments, it was possible to analyze destructively pieces from the samples and obtain their definitive chemical compositions. This approach avoided the problems associated with previous surface analysis of wire samples, which can easily show anomalies not present in the bulk material and vice versa.

The new results show that all historical iron music wire had the same composition, from the earliest plucked instruments right up to the availability of the first steel piano wire c.1825. It appears that builders varied in their inclination to adopt steel wire for their piano designs, and some may have continued to use the old iron wire up to 1840 and later. Birkett believes we can quite safely use the old iron "P-wire" (a term coined by Birkett which signifies high phosphorus content) for anything up to at least 1830.

Birkett's study of ancient wire production methods has led to the creation of a modern reproduction material. This was recently evaluated on the first test-case, an anonymous five octave fortepiano after Stein c.1780, which was presented at *Harmoniques 2006* in Lausanne, Switzerland, last May. According to the restorers, the instrument came right up to pitch, settled with no further stretching, and sounded good from the beginning. The plan is to have the new wire available for purchase before the end of 2006.

Grant O'Brien presented "The Statistical Analysis of Lateral String Spacing in Neapolitan and Flemish Seventeenth Century Harpsichords". This was another chapter in O'Brien's quest to determine the size of individual workshop units of measurement as a means of identifying anonymous harpsichords.

Pedro Manuel Branco dos Santos Bento discussed natural chords and stiffness-dependent inharmonicity. This theoretical and experimental work made it clear that harpsichord pitch is in part delightful because of the life induced by a small amount of inharmonicity. His work considers both regular and irregular inharmonicity. Regular inharmonicity is a result of the clearly understood effect of stiffness upon the partials produced, whereas irregular inharmonicity results from movement of the bridge and nut.

The Written Historical Record

A number of presentations shared findings gleaned from various records from the past. Jenny Nex (Royal College of Music, London) spoke on the easily overlooked, yet important role of women in the trade and craft of keyboard making during the period 1750-1810. Women were active participants: working, managing apprentices, making jacks, and when widowed, running their late husbands' shops. Of great interest was a discussion by Gabriele Rossi-Rognoni (The Conservatorio Cherubini, Florence) on "The New Early Instrument Market in the Time of Leopoldo Franciolini". What we see as butchery of antiques was a reaction to a huge and poorly educated demand for antique goods from a rising upper middle class. Benjamin Hebbert (St Cross College, Oxford and the Metropolitan Museum, NY) spoke on writings by Samuel Hartlib, Sir Francis Kynaston and their London circle, 1630-1660. This research provided a glimpse into the seventeenth century and a reminder that in their times, they were the modern age; they faked antiques and discussed change and new instruments just as we do today.

In the up and coming area of 20th century instrument studies, Arian Sheets (NMM) spoke on "Lloyd Loar in Context: Early Electro-Acoustic Instruments of the Vivi-Tone Company." Loar was trying to bring stringed keyboard instruments into the twentieth century. His electronic "clavier" is worthy of note as part of the ongoing development of the modern harpsichord and clavichord.

Substantial new historical research is coming out of Italy. Francesco Nocerino (Centro Iniziative Didattiche Musicali

NaturalMenteMusica, Naples, Italy) spoke on "Harpsichord Makers in Naples During the Period of the Spanish Viceroy (1503-1707)". This valuable archival work will continue to advance the growing appreciation of Neapolitan harpsichords. Additionally, Giovanni Di Stefano (University of Rome) spoke on tangentenflugels and other pianos with unpivoted hammers in Italy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is surprising how late *Stossmechanik* actions persisted, with and without dampers. There are pianos with a scarcely leather covered "tangent" as late as 1850 in Italy. An instrument made by Baldassare Pastore, dated 1799 looks like an almost exact copy of a Späth. More research will show the Italians did not forget the piano after Cristofori.

Haruka Tsutsui (Kyoto, Japan) discussed combination instruments described in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* around 1800. The names of these, such as the *Tastenharmonika* and *Panmelodicon* seemed to be early exercises in marketing.

John Koster (NMM) gave an overview on "Clavichord and Clavecimbel Making in 16th -century Antwerp". Notable is the observation that "grand" harpsichords were few in comparison with virginals and clavichords before the end of the 1500's. Evidence shows instruments were exported from Antwerp to Germany, England, Holland, the Iberian peninsula, and South America. Methods of mass production, later adopted by the Ruckers workshop, were evidently developed during the 1500's.

Looking at a particular instrument in the context of its art, Susan E. Thompson (Yale University Collection of Musical Instruments) spoke on "The Significance of Contest, Dance, Improvisational and Extemporaneous Activity in the Decoration of a Double Virginal by Johannes Ruckers, Antwerp 1591(?)". Thompson discussed the mythological tale inside the lid and made conjectures about the multitude of paintings of dancing peasants on the "mother" and playing boys on the "child".

In sum, the 2006 AMIS/Galpin Society/CIMCIM Annual Meeting was an extraordinary event, a reinvigorating force in the field of instrument study. As always, it was a meeting of minds of people who truly care about historic instruments and their music and pursue their study, use, and preservation.