

Harpsichord & fortepiano

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Musical Instrument Research Catalog
(MIRCat)

LETTERS, NEWS & VIEWS

Dear Editor,

Thank you very much for featuring Paul Irvin's thought-provoking, two-part article on recapturing the historical sounds of harpsichords.

I was fortunate enough to come into possession of a German single (2 x 8') of Paul's recently, an instrument that espouses his ideas. These include:

1. Rounded dampers, allowing the disengaged register to ring sympathetically with the engaged register.
2. A buff stop that is set to work on the front 8', but which can also provide limited damping on the back 8', thus allowing one to mute disengaged registers, should one not wish to have sympathetically vibrating strings. The buff, when applied to the front 8', and with the back 8' ringing sympathetically, is a singing, still quite vocal sound —not the "plinky sound" one hears from most buff stops. It is, in fact, one of the most convincing lute sounds I have ever heard from a harpsichord. Furthermore, because the buff stop sustains so well, it combines very well with the back 8' to produce an almost fortepiano-like sound.
3. A front 8' that is voiced equal (perhaps even slightly stronger) to the back 8', allowing for a better blend of the two registers when combined.
4. Voicing that minimizes the initial pluck, but maximizes the "vowel".

The instrument is changing much of how I think about harpsichord playing. The greater resonance encourages one not to be too hasty, and makes passages such as the arpeggiated chords in the Chromatic Fantasy much more powerful and atmospheric. (One is reminded of the effect of undamped pianos of Gottfried Silbermann, for example.) The sympathetically vibrating strings remove the need for so much fussy overholding (for which there is scant evidence in Germany anyway) to create an illusion of greater resonance. This allows one to use the same basic touch that one would use when playing the organ or a (fretted) clavichord. The variety of stop combinations is also remarkable; an instrument that would normally have had five possibilities

(front 8', back 8', front and back 8' together, buff stop, both 8's together with buff stop on), now has seven.

Gregory Crowell

Obituaries

Bill Dowd, the esteemed harpsichord researcher and maker, died 25 November 2008.

Richard Hickox, the esteemed conductor and champion of British music, died 23 November 2008.

News

16-19 September: Festival Musica Antica a Maganon, IX International Clavichord Symposium,

<http://www.musicaanticamagnano.com>
Please note that dates have been changed.

Special Birthday Honours

150th anniversary of Handel's Death
200th anniversary of Haydn's death
200th anniversary of Mendelssohn's birth
350th anniversary of Purcell's birth

30 April – 3 May 2009 TRIOthlon at Esterhazy palace

There will be a chamber music marathon including the premiere of 18 new piano trios dedicated to Haydn Burgenland.
Visit <http://www.austria.info> for more information.

20-23 August 2009 Fortepiano workshop, Schloss Kremsegg, Austria.

Applications due 15 June, cost €180. With Wolfgang Brunner, Bart van Oort, and Alexei Lubimov. For advanced pianists, conservatory or professional level fortepianists, and other keyboardists who want to get to know the early fortepiano & performance practices. Organized by Hochschule der Musik Trossingen www.mh-trossingen.de
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altemusik@mh-trossingen.de Information on the historic instrument collection is available at www.schloss-kremsegg.at