

Harpsichord & *fortepiano*

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A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE HISTORIC KEYBOARD SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA'S MEETING IN GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA, 25-29 APRIL 2017

by Judith Conrad

The Society meets each spring for a three to four conclave. Usually it meets in universities, during break weeks; but this time it met in downtown Greenville, South Carolina. Most meetings were held in Zen, a remodelled downtown chemical warehouse that has been transformed into a beautiful event space, with easy parking, convenient refreshment, and pleasant staff. There was a large space where most of the 20 or so exhibited instruments could sit comfortably, to be sampled by the assembled early-instrument aficionados during breaks, and larger-scale performances could be given on them without a lot of rearranging. There was also a smaller room for recitals and lectures, and an acoustically isolated lounge area where CDs and editions by members of the association were displayed and where my pairwise fretted clavichord sat. It's rare that people get a real chance to play clavichords at these gatherings and hear what they are doing; that was a very nice touch.

The subtitle of the conclave was "From the Old World to the New", which was largely taken to mean the connections between England and the colonies, and the new independent country. There were close to 40 recitals and lectures given, covering music from the early renaissance to the mid-19th century. I will just mention a few of the ones I attended that I remember most

vividly. An excellent, well-laid-out and organized programme book was compiled by Erik Ryding and the entire schedule is online at <http://historicalkeyboardsociety.org/conference-schedule-2017-greenville/>.

There was an unusual emphasis on the early piano at this conclave, partly because of the spectacular original instruments available for performance. Stephanie Schmidt, for instance, performed charmingly a programme of music from the collections of several southern ladies before the Civil War on an 1834 single-strung square piano by Nunns and Clark, which had been designed for tuning stability when sent to "the more remote areas of the country". It would not have been suitable for formal concerts, but was perfect for the parlour music she played, a mix of American reels and country dances with European imports such as Bürgmüller and Lange. Robin Morace played a stunning programme of music Chopin played on his tour of England on a Broadwood piano that was actually played by Chopin in a private concert in London in May 1848.

The lectures also meshed with the exhibited instruments. Karen Hite Jacob told the story of a piano purchased by a North Carolina man for his daughter when his wife died; the daughter had to give up her education to raise her younger siblings.

The piano was cherished and kept in the family for generations. Karen ended the presentation by playing a parlour piece found in that piano bench: the "Wide Awake" Rondo by H. Aug. Pond. Larry Palmer gave a presentation on "Chopin as Early Music" including reminiscences on Chopin's performance practice from such people as his piano tuner's daughter and Amy Fay - an American who went to Europe to study with Liszt, as well Chopin's own letters. "Play only with the very best partners!" he enjoined his students: good advice, for the rarified atmosphere of 19th-century Paris.

John Watson of Colonial Williamsburg told the tale of two remarkable instruments that were imported from Britain to Virginia in the 1790's, neither of which was a simple piano. One was a two-manual harpsichord that George Washington ordered from Longman and Broderip in 1793 for his stepdaughter, and the other was an "organized piano", a combination of a six-stop pipe organ with an upright grand piano; this was probably the largest domestic musical instrument in America in the end of the eighteenth century. It was purchased for Williamsburg in 1799 and has recently been restored there. George Washington's harpsichord has had virtual restoration through reproduction at Williamsburg.

There were many performances at various levels of formality; one of the most enjoyable was entitled "Haydn at Home" and consisted of Haydn's D Major Concerto, Hob. XVIII/11, performed by Beverly Biggs and Elaine Funaro from a manuscript arrangement of the work for two harpsichords from c.1778 found in Dresden. Haydn was immensely popular in England: but there were other

presentations unabashedly from other parts of the world. One was by Martin Aschauer, who has re-edited Mozart's Sonata in A Major K. 331 (with the Turkish March finale) for Bärenreiter in the light of a newly discovered autograph uncovered in 2015. His edition will present both versions separately: the autograph text prepared by Mozart himself for his family and friends; and the publication edition, not prepared or proofread by Mozart at all and intended for amateurs in need of written-out embellishments and other aids. Another exotic presentation was by Marcos Krieger, who described the transmission of keyboard culture from Portugal to Colonial Brazil. In 1759 the Jesuits were suppressed throughout Portuguese territories and inventory lists were taken of many of their properties; of the ones in Brazil, 11 record musical instruments, which include four harpsichords, 9 organs and two clavichords. I also gave a performance thoroughly rooted in the old world, playing a Seixas on a pairwise-fretted clavichord after an original instrument in Lisbon. There was actually a subtheme of music from Iberia: Frances Conover Fitch gave an exciting programme of organ music in Spain's American Colonies, and Vicent Bru y Soler of Valencia gave us background on some lesser-known composers from the time of Sebastian Aguilera de Heredia, with special attention to F. Correa de Araujo. Both programmes used a recently-made tracker organ in St. James Episcopal Church.

The conference ended at co-chair Thomas Strange's house outside Greenville. We knew many of the instruments that had been exhibited were from his collection, but it turned out that these were but the tip of the iceberg. His house was absolutely crammed full of keyboard instruments;

I heard the number "40" mentioned. Plans are apparently afoot for a Carolina Music Museum in Greenville, based around his collection. He himself has done the restoration on most of them, and he and his wife were gracious hosts. The final concert was by the always stunning Andrew Willis on two more of the grand pianos owned by Tom: a 1791 Broadwood and an 1825 Schanz. With music by Clementi, Moscheles, Dussek and friends, the conference was over.

...Well, almost over. The many instruments had to be moved back to their usual homes. Luckily there were several members of HKSNA who do this sort of work in their regular lives, and it was all accomplished in only a couple of hours of calm and controlled heavy labour. Without their expertise and willingness, conferences such as this could not be held. Many thanks to the keyboard movers!



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