

Harpsichord & fortepiano

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WOMEN IN EARLY MUSIC: INTERVIEW WITH PAMELA NASH



Pamela Nash at
her Milan Misina
harpsichord,
after Taskin 1769.
Photo by K. Malone.

1. When you started your career was it in general music or early music?

Actually it was early music from the start, which was unusual for the time. This was the late 70s/early to mid-80s. It wasn't a conventional route though; I was born and raised in Bahrain in the Middle East and then attended boarding school in the UK from age 11 and then went to Chetham's, again as a boarder. Until Chetham's I had no contact with the harpsichord. As a child, my catalysts for exploring early music repertoire were the Bach recordings of Rosalyn Tureck and jazz versions of Bach by the Jacques Loussier Trio - areas which were starting to become controversial. The first Scarlatti I heard was on two guitars, and on jazz piano.

I was introduced properly in my teens to the harpsichord by Heather Slade-Lipkin (See *Harpsichord and Fortepiano* 23/1, Aut 2018). After Chetham's, I went to music college in London in 1979, where I was a rare as a first study harpsichordist. I'm not sure, but possibly only Penny Cave preceded me in this. I studied piano with Josef Weingarten, and harpsichord with Valda Aveling. In Paris my studies with Huguette Dreyfus awoke me to the world of French repertoire. I'm pretty sure I couldn't have got such intensity from anyone else at that time.

Later there was Ed Parmentier in Michigan – studying with him was an eye-opener. His transformational knowledge and hothouse way of teaching at such a high level caused me to turn my two-year masters degree into three years. I

was also lucky to have Penelope Crawford there for fortepiano. I did stand out with my desire to explore 20th-century music, but it was exciting because the composition students were writing works for me to premiere. I was learning alongside a new wave of career harpsichordists like Bradley Brookshire, Barbara Weiss, and Jillon Dupree and all this further encouraged me when I returned to England.

2. What were your goals/expectations in terms of your career path?

I've always been a bit of a free spirit... willing to be led rather than setting personal goals. When I returned to the UK I'd formed an eclectic view of the harpsichord and was rebellious; interested in the whole spectrum of the instrument and its capacity for new music. And I had married a composer who wrote brilliantly for the harpsichord, so it was a symbiotic partnership.

Finding new combinations of harpsichord with other instruments then became a new goal: I found myself promoting the contemporary harpsichord through concerts, festivals, recordings and a composition competition. I knew I'd always teach; it was initially a form of stability, but I had been Teaching Assistant to Ed Parmentier at Michigan and relished it, and found instantly took to teaching again. One of the things I love is communicating a passion for music to young people. And I find I can organise other people better than I can organise myself! I have been happy in my role of curator for several events in my career, which goes hand in hand with the role of teaching. I've always been motivated to bring the right people together for the right job, for example in support of the work of living composers. I have also done some editing and producing of recordings and want to do more of that.

3. Do you have any children? What ages are they now?

I have a daughter whom I had in my 30's. She's now 25, and highly musically intuitive, so I'm glad it's passed on to her.

4. What were your expectations about having children, and have your goals changed since then?

I had no particular expectation. My own musical goals became extended in supporting my daughter in musical opportunities that her talents seemed to warrant, such as Suzuki violin. It's fascinating to see your little person developing into an expressive musician, like with your students. Motherhood has affected my teaching in a big way; it makes it easier to empathise with a pupil as someone else's son or daughter. Maternal instincts can make women better teachers...not just in having limitless patience!

5. How do you and your partner/spouse divide the work of childcare, parenting, arranging childcare, and household tasks?

When one musician is self-employed and the other has a salaried job, it's natural for the home-based person to take on the lion's share of domestic tasks, and that's what happened in my daughter's early years. I took on a lot of home piano teaching in addition to pursuing harpsichord goals. Life as a musician parent is a balancing act; I found myself juggling too many balls in the air at times, yet still managed to stay involved in contemporary music avenues and creating interesting partnerships.

You are two different people - one a musician, the other a mother. It shouldn't be anything other than egalitarian when it comes to who deserves the most time for their work, but by definition because of the financial/professional setup, my work had to be a bit more of a movable feast and undetermined. Musicians together is tricky. But there's a risk of relegation in any household and you have to strive to try to preserve that sense of personal importance within the relationship.

6. Does your partner/spouse make more, the same or less income than you each year?

My spouse makes more. Although interestingly, whilst he's now considering the end of his career, retirement is never on the cards for me. I've got far too much left undone. A lot of what I've done in music has been unrewarded financially, but artistically very enriching... so I'll continue to work on projects regardless, as long as they achieve their aims.

7. Besides the situations you have already mentioned were there other opportunities you have had to pass up because of family commitments?

More than I care to remember! Looking back, I've always put family and relationships above all else. As a woman, it's always felt like a strong imperative. I do think the urge to nurture others is in the blood for women, more than for men. Also as a daughter, I looked after my parents in their final years, a role which felt absolutely right.

8. Early Music has become more accepted and part of the mainstream. How have these changes affected you?

Progress in the mainstreaming of early music has been amazing. This has happened more quickly than anyone could have anticipated. And thank goodness. It's all so wonderfully permissive now. In the early days, I found attitudes suffocating. Today, there aren't many who want early music and instruments to remain a secret domain for chosen members.

As for the female situation, it's much less of an issue now, but I did experience some "gender-related indifference" from older male figures of the establishment. It's known that the management of the early music world was run by men, while a lot of the practitioners were women. Being female affected your position in the marketplace, yes, but maybe it was not that detrimental for harpsichordists; the harpsichord has until recently been a largely female domain anyway, and almost exclusively so with contemporary music.

After Landowska's influence we had pioneers like Sylvia Marlowe, Violet Gordon Woodhouse, Antoinette Vischer, Annelie de Man, Elizabeth Chojnacka, and then people like Jane Chapman, Vivienne Spiteri, Goska Ispphording and Elaine Funaro. And now a new younger generation is springing up. My theory — going back to nurturing — about why women have led the charge for new music in the twentieth century, is that historically they have been conditioned to assist the male cause, and that in turn spawned a drive to champion their music. There is a tradition of women harpsichordists who promoted their husband's compositions, and they did so with astonishing alacrity and loyalty.

HF: You mean like Jane Clark and Stephen Dodgson?

PN: Yes, and think of Zuzana Ružicková and Viktor Kalabis, and Annelie de Man and Roderick de Man. And female composers were largely subsumed course. Look at Fanny Mendelssohn – her own music was passed off as Felix's. It was thought of as unseemly that she would "come out" as a composer.

HF: What about female composers?

PN: Now, women are playing women's music. But I think there has always been a great propensity for them (players and composers) to embrace new sounds and take risks. Contemporary harpsichord women have never really suffered indignities though. What concerns me today is the funding situation for projects: even within women-centred grant initiatives, the harpsichord often struggles to find favour compared with "modern" instruments.

What might be a difficulty in presenting the harpsichord as a contemporary instrument is that there seems to be a misconception, perhaps through recent hype, of the contemporary harpsichord as only now coming out of the 18th-century closet. It's not the case, but maybe concert promoters don't know this? The path has already long been paved by all those people we mentioned.

HF: If you are a warrior for the cause, it is worthwhile to have some recognition of the efforts that have made these things possible and to realise that the harpsichord is not an endangered species. We do find that state-sponsored radio programming has changed to include more harpsichord rather than piano performances of early music.

PN: It's all good... those small ripples that were started a long time ago are becoming a big wave, and anything of quality that brings the harpsichord into the mainstream is to be embraced.

9. With the perspective you now have, are there things you would have done differently?

If I could go back to my early career, I think I would stand up to the voices of dissent which I encountered. At the time, things were very dramatic; the authenticity movement was very biting, dominating all areas. We could all have questioned more those who held court on matters of correctness, such as the fear campaign against players who "strayed" - from doing specific repertoire on the appropriate instruments for example. To those arbiters/gurus of style... we've all had that in workshops — those prescriptive absolutists about harpsichord interpretation who used to inspire such awe — I might have asked, "Who are you to issue decrees? Do you have an exclusive direct line to Couperin?"

HF: It's true, that some of us who were attracted to early music for the freedom it offered found ourselves in another strait-jacket, but I've always felt early music is about questioning.

10. What advice would you give young women starting out on a similar career?

Several points strike me:

1. I think because early music is now more mainstream, that means the climate is much healthier, but also more competitive. The key today is versatility. You can still be highly specialised on one instrument, but it's no longer frowned upon.

to diversify. There are now more baroque players who also compose, and there is more new music incorporated into programmes.

2. For young women, there will always be vestiges of chauvinism, though these days they benefit from more egalitarian treatment and thinking. But it's important to establish equality within working musical relationships from the outset. I recall I fell afoul of this in the past. In one ensemble there was a limit to the amount of points I was allowed to make in rehearsal situations... in the final analysis I was heard but my ideas were seldom adopted.

3. Sometimes older, experienced people are set in their ways and don't re-think their approaches. A sound musical decision is independent of age and experience. Musicians should value their own opinions.

4. Go to as many concerts as you can, visit collections, play original instruments, practise on them, and make yourself useful. And support other harpsichordists.

5. Before you launch yourself, have experience of different teachers, and be aware of different harpsichordists and their playing. You can be sucked into one person's point of view, so arm yourself with knowledge and perspective. It's expensive, but do go to as many workshops and courses as possible while you're young. It can be a lonely business, so you must talk to other people and go to their concerts, and this can lead to ensemble opportunities which are vital.

6. Don't imagine you can survive on doing solo recitals.

7. Finally, buy a harpsichord with maximum portability so you can drive it around yourself and save money!

Interview with Emer Buckley



Emer Buckley. Photo by Véronique Allio-Vitrac.

1. When you started your career was it in general music or early music?

It was early music. I discovered harpsichord at university and fell in love with the instrument. I had been playing piano, but not with the idea of having a career. Lots of people were doing it. Ireland was rather on the edge of Europe at that time.

2. What were your goals/expectations in terms of your career path?

I smile because for women of my generation in Ireland what you expected was husband and children. I went to a good school in central Dublin. The career advice was either an air hostess or nurse. I didn't know what it was to plan a career. I drifted into harpsichord, then went to Italy to study the language. In Sienna, I met Kenneth Gilbert studying early music and doing summer courses. I met people from France and realised Paris was the place to be. The Dowd workshop was there. I was to be there only six months but I stayed. It was a wonderful time, with a scholarly/analytical approach...a time of discovery.. notes inégales. We read what composers actually said, read original sources... How did your family feel? They were surprised....especially more that I was staying in France, but they were supportive. My parents are both music lovers, especially my father, who played records every evening.

3. Do you have any children? What ages are they now?

They are grown now. I was 30 when had my first child. There was a gap and I had my second child with my second husband which explains the gap. It was not simple.

4. Have your goals changed since having a child or children?

You don't know what it's like until you actually have them. I was travelling a lot with my son. His father was involved in the harpsichord world...as there were no nearby family, all childcare was hired. Several years later, after I'd had my second I was much more organised. I felt it was important for my child to have regular life, so I started teaching on a regular basis at Lille Conservatoire.

It must have been a golden age, from what I hear from my former teacher, Arthurs Haas, who taught in France.

It was. Nowadays students are going to listen on youtube, but then... going to the Bibliotheque Nationale ... it was treasure coming out of a fax machine.... Perhaps we are a bit nostalgic about it... Now so many things are happening in the mainstream.

5. How do you and your partner/spouse divide the work of childcare, parenting, arranging childcare, and household tasks?

I do many more household tasks. He loves cooking when he is available at the weekend. I shop and try to put something on the table.. Food is a big thing in France....part of the culture. Also, we bought a vineyard in Bordeaux three years ago, where we are concerned with the production and selling of wine.

6. Does your partner/spouse make more, the same or less income than you each year?

It is variable. At times he has been company director and has made more...but at other times our incomes are about the same.

7. Early Music has become more accepted and part of the mainstream. How have these changes affected you?

To begin, I was playing recitals; that's hardly ever an option now. There weren't that many good players of other baroque instruments in the '80s. It's progressively got easier to find good players. I

think audiences shouldn't have to listen in religious silence for an hour to the harpsichord- they want to hear ensembles....especially in France. Harpsichords are in most of the music schools; most have recorder classes and even other baroque or renaissance instruments. Modern string players have had courses....

8. Do you think being female affects your position in the early music marketplace?

I think it's more to do with my upbringing in Ireland. I don't have a leadership skill. If I had stayed in Ireland, I would not have founded a group or travelled as much. With my upbringing you waited to be asked. I have great respect for women like Emmanuel Haim and Laurence Equilbey. At the conservatory I teach most of the students I teach are female. It makes you wonder why there are not more successful females. ... Women do this to themselves.... this glass ceiling, this *plafond de verre* , is self-imposed. It's always the mother who thinks she has to collect the children from school.

9. Do they teach artist management in France?

Nowadays they teach them to plan projects, sell them to concert organisers and begin to teach. It's a question of temperament... men tend to have that temperament.

10. With the perspective you now have, are there things you would have done differently?

I would have taken singing lessons, chamber music earlier—you need to be involved in group work, and the training for that is singing, conducting and being in group activities. I would have worked harder at contacting and selling myself. Students at school need to ask questions, be curious... in the harpsichord world one has to be curious...

11. What advice would you give young women starting out on a similar career?

Plan your career like a battle campaign. Have

good photographs. One thing I admire... Americans are less shy about promoting themselves. They say, "Here I am. When are you going to invite me to give a concert?"

Young players have training in jazz and improvisation, and working on ground bass improvisation. They are able to bring this liberty to playing. I'd give the same advice to all (male or female). As a female, you have to fight harder, but that's true in aspects ... The earlier you start the easier it is.

HF: With recent allegations of sexual misconduct, young ladies need to be especially careful.

EB: Yes, there has been in the past exploitation of young women by older male tutors...it's more common with girls... and some women take advantage of it without realising... but this is due to this idea of respect for authority without question. Parents should educate their children against this.

Interview with Medea Bindewald



Medea Bindewald.
Photo by Stuart Hollis

1. When you started your career, was it in general music or Early Music?

My journey with the harpsichord began long before I knew there was such thing as "Early Music". I started learning the harpsichord as a child, because I was fascinated with the sound. I suppose, I have been an "early musician" for most of my life without consciously making that choice.

2. What were your goals/expectations in terms of your career path?

I think there has always been a mixture of having goals or dreams and being open to what turned up on the way. The job profile "harpsichordist" as such does not really exist. Instead there's a great variety of individual paths. Also, you do not have to decide to go either into teaching or performing, or into either solo or continuo playing.

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These things evolve on the way, and being a harpsichordist usually means combining a variety of tasks: a "portfolio career". I was attracted to the instrument and the repertoire associated with it at an early age, but I have not always wanted or planned to become a professional musician. I was born into a family of doctors, both grandparents and parents, so I am a bit of a black sheep.

3. Why did you move to the UK from Germany?

I moved, because my then partner got a university post here in the UK.

Do you have any children? What ages are they now?

I have two boys, now 11 and 8 years old. Both were born in Germany and are growing up bilingually now. I envy them! They get to know two languages and two cultures equally well.

What age were you when you started your family?

I waited to start a family until I was in my 30s. I was reluctant about the decision, because I knew the major part of the childcare and household duties would fall to me. This easily happens, when you are the financially weaker partner in a relationship.

4. What were your expectations about having children, and have your goals changed since then?

Children are a part of life, and I wouldn't want to miss the wonderful experience of having children. However, I admit that I struggled a lot. Children inevitably slow you down very much. I remember doing an orchestra project when I was still breastfeeding my first son. He refused to drink from the bottle... I went to the rehearsals with my Mum accompanying me. The (male) conductor was very understanding and, without me even asking, offered to let me leave the rehearsals any time to feed. Even so, it was quite a stressful experience. I found it hard to concentrate on the music under those circumstances.

HF: I think this must be quite rare to have such support. After this, did you have trouble accepting performances?

MB: Oh, I think there's a lot of understanding and support around, as many colleagues are confronted with similar challenges. Generally, I have become more selective over the years regarding what projects I do. Time seems to be so precious, that I only want to take on projects that are close to my heart. Also, having young children increased my wish to work more locally and within more regular hours.

5. How do you and your partner/spouse divide the work of childcare, parenting, arranging childcare, and household tasks?

The father of our children and I separated about three years ago. Childcare and family duties have been divided much more equally between us since then. In fact, I consider us to be good co-parents, much better than when we were a couple. We both have regular and irregular work commitments, including stays away from home. We try to arrange our trips so that one of us can stay with the children. We have never had the privilege of having grandparents living locally, but a number of good friends are happy to help out in case of any clashes. I think it is very important for children to learn that their mother is not always available, because she is working. As for my boys, I hope the acceptance of my work will positively impact on their own attitude towards women and partnership later in life. These days, I enjoy seeing them grow more and more independent, and also more understanding. My children are actually proud of me when they see a good review of one of my concerts in the paper.

Do you think women and men react differently to the challenges of their jobs? Can you give examples from your personal experience?

Perhaps women and men tend to react differently when put in similar situations. I have been raised according to the concept that "a mother has to

be with her children". Whenever I am away, I can't help having a bad conscience, even though I know the children are very well looked after and no harm is done by me being absent for a limited period of time. I don't think my ex-partner feels bad when he goes on a research trip for four weeks because of his job. If I were asked whether I could step in and play Brandenburg V next week, I might hesitate to take on the challenge. This moment of hesitation might be judged to indicate a lack of confidence and lead to the assumption that I am not capable of doing it, when that is far from true. I am not sure, however, whether to put this down to the fact that I am a woman or whether we are talking about a personality trait here.

6. Were there opportunities you have had to pass up because of family commitments?

When I moved to the UK because of my husband's job, I gave up three teaching posts in Germany, one of them at the Early Music Department of the Leipzig Musikhochschule, where I had worked for seven years. A little later, an ambitious German Early Music group was looking for a harpsichordist. I applied for the job and won the audition, but in the following negotiations I was confronted with their demands. A series of concerts with different programmes could have meant not being at home for several weeks. I thought through a number of solutions, but finally had to decline the job as this did not seem acceptable to me. This was sad for me at the time, but eventually it led me to create my own goals. I asked myself: "What do I really want to do?" This is how my first CD project was born.

7. Early Music has become more accepted and part of the mainstream. How have these changes affected you?

Every musician has to decide whether to produce a "real" CD or online streaming. Personally, I think my next recording will still be the old-fashioned physical CD, simply because it is nice to sell CDs in concerts. This is when people want to buy something to take home.

It is true that Early Music has become more accepted. Today there are a great number of concert series and festivals featuring Early Music. At the same time, there are more good players around today than there were at the beginning of the Early Music Movement, so competition has become tougher.

I don't experience the Early Music world as being hostile towards women. It is a field where particularly many women work, also in top positions. Whether being female affects my personal position in the Early Music marketplace is hard to tell. Of course, frequent moves and having children have interrupted things, but I have always worked to a high standard, and my CV still ticks a lot of boxes. Pursuing a career together with having family requires a great deal of dedication, a strong will, and most of all a passion for music. I believe that this is eventually what counts and what will help me to stand my ground.

8. Let's talk about image and appearance.

Is sex appeal more important for women musicians than for their male colleagues?

I see a difference regarding age. I am regularly addressed by promoters or members of the audience as "young lady". Being in my 40s, my initial reaction is feeling amused. But isn't it quite sad, when you think about it? It indicates that there is this stereotype of the young, talented female musician, but there is hardly an equivalent for the middle-aged, mature woman. Only celebrities like Martha Argerich seem to be allowed to display their real age. We all play this game (or most of us do); we Photoshop our pictures when we are beyond 30, attempting to look at least 10 years younger than we are. From that perspective, we experience getting older as a loss. I don't think men experience this to the same degree. I would like to see a shift here. Life experience adds to our personalities, making us more interesting. It would be great if this were reflected more in the media.

9. With the perspective you now have, are there things you would have done differently?

I would have become proactive earlier in my life. I see now that I lacked some of the skills of self-marketing. Artistically, I got the best possible education, I studied with wonderful professors, I learned how to delve deep into things, but after having done three degrees, I still had no clue what was required to be a self-employed musician. Something else I have only come to recognise over time, is that I need a stimulating environment to thrive. As important as spending time alone with one's instrument is, inspiration frequently comes from exchanging ideas with colleagues or listening to performances of fellow musicians. I have not always been aware of this, and I try to do it more justice now, by attending concerts and events such as conferences.

10. What advice would you give young women starting out on a similar career?

Being a musician is extremely rewarding, as it is so much more than a job. However, it is not an easy journey, and you should only take this up, if you feel you absolutely have to, because not doing it would mean denying your identity. Once you have made the decision, seek to surround yourself with people who support you, who believe in you. Avoid those who belittle your choice as something that cannot be taken seriously. As a career in Early Music will most likely mean working on the basis of self-employment, I strongly recommend familiarising yourself with the business side of the career at an early stage. Last but not least: DON'T WAIT! Don't wait to be asked, don't wait to be discovered by an agency, don't wait to be selected by a jury, but strive to realise your own projects. Take the necessary steps to make some of your dreams come true, be it the production of your own CD or founding your own magazine. This is a lot of hard work, but it couldn't be more satisfying.