

Harpsichord & fortepiano

Vol. 24, No. 1 Autumn, 2019

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Musical Instrument Research Catalog
(MIRCat)

Reports

Friends of Square Pianos study day

The third of the annual meetings of the Friends of Square Pianos (<http://www.friendsofsquarepianos.co.uk>) took place on 13 April 2019 at Chelveston near Wellingborough, and was organized by David Hackett in the usual format: a lively and informal gathering of about 45 players, makers, collectors scholars and enthusiasts, with a mixture of talks and instrument demonstrations, plus an instrument exhibition and a 'shop'. The previous two events had focused on the spinet and on the clavichord, and this year the theme was 'restoration': what are the appropriate goals, materials and issues, and when it might be justified and when not.

The 16 instruments displayed were all brought along by the participants, and included a mix of originals, copies in historic style and 'revival' keyboards. They included clavichords by Karin Richter and Robert Goble, virginals by Morley (rebuilt by Olaf Van Hees in an ornate outer case), spinets by Edward Blunt (1704), Archibald Pringle (1775), Dolmetsch, David Hackett, Mark Stevenson and John Storrs, and square pianos by Christopher Ganer (1777), Adam Beyer (1782), Longman & Broderip and Southwell. The generosity of owners in bringing antiques to this event is, as ever, to be warmly commended.

Supported by many contributions from the instrument owners and expert comments from the floor, the main talks were given by David Hunt, Olaf Van Hees and Lucy Coad, raising such issues such as the use of ivory within the new CITES regulations, appropriate action cloth and string material, quilling choices, pitch standards, and the difference between conservation and restoration. Square pianos were the main subject, as there are still many available in unrestored form which could be put back into playing condition, and how and whether this should be done depends on many factors; Lucy Coad made a strong case that some instruments at least should be left untouched.

Francis Knights

of musicians to express enthusiasm. The opening of a new soundworld results, and with it, benefits for musical appreciation, as shown by a seminar there on 6 May 2019, 'The Importance of Tuning for Better Performance'.

The instruments at the house include some formerly from Finchcocks and the Colt Collections. Study of these has led to identifying a change in the nature of piano tuning around the 1870s. The assumption that the nearly ubiquitous equal temperament was the tuning for which most of the classical repertoire of the piano was composed can be challenged. With the assistance of Michael Gamble, a former Glyndebourne technician with experience of harpsichords and organ building, it has been possible to develop a tuning methodology for all pianos, ensuring good results. Seminar participants included interested musicians, students and piano tuners and were presented with a viable alternative to the traditional concepts of the 20th century.

Panellists and performers at the event were organbuilder and musicologist Martin Renshaw, pianists Gary Branch, Jong Gyung Park and Adolfo Barabino, and harpsichordist, organist and pianist, Alexandra Kremakova. Modartt, who make Pianoteq, very kindly sponsored the event with their software to allow electronic simulation of different pianos in both historic and modern and different tunings.

A simulation of pipe organ stops to demonstrate pure and impure intervals, and to demonstrate the way in which the Tierce organ stop, the fifth harmonic, beats and grates against the equal temperament seventeenth note, two octaves and a third. This gives a shimmer and a glistening sound to the piano but causes the instrument never to be able to express a sound that is actually still. Using other temperaments can do so.

The performers demonstrated repertoire from Dowland and Sweelinck right through to Debussy and John Cage. Mozart, Chopin and Berg with Kellner and Kirnberger III temperaments, as well as Prof Jonathan Bellman's 'Chopin temperament'. The Haydn F minor Variations were demonstrated in meantone, otherwise blandly experienced in modern times.

Participants experienced the different ways of tuning to give clearer, more resonant instruments, for performers

The importance of tuning for better performance

Over the past decade Hammerwood Park in Sussex has become focus for exploration of the importance of tuning both to repertoire and performance, leading a number

to play, offering greater creative opportunities and hopefully leading to a new golden age of musical performance and recording. Recordings of musical examples are on the website www.hammerwood.mistral.co.uk/tuning-performance-examples.htm, and more details of the event can be found on www.hammerwood.mistral.co.uk/piano-tuners-association-article.pdf.

David Pinnegar

VIII Nordic Historical Keyboard Festival

The eighth Nordic Historical Keyboard Festival (<http://www.nordicclavichord.org>) on 21–29 May 2019 offered 20 events, with concerts in as many as 13 exciting venues around the city, most of them focusing on the clavichord. The Festival takes place in Kuopio, Finland, a town – it is said – with more clavichords and clavichordists per capita than anywhere else in the world. Definitely there are more clavichord recitals in Kuopio yearly than anywhere else, with a nice audience of people who have been awed by the instrument. It may be that the quiet intimacy of the clavichord suits the Finnish temperament especially well.

The Festival opened with two clavichord recitals in the chapel of Kuopio Cathedral, a tiny space with wonderful acoustics for the clavichord, but unfortunately never enough seats for all who want to attend. The first recital was played by Eija Virtanen, with a programme including Buxtehude, J. S. and C. P. E. Bach, Haydn, Anna Bon and James Hewitt. The winner of last year's International Clavichord Composition Competition, Gabriele Toia, then performed in his recital the winning piece, *Tamutmutef*, which was inspired by the story of an Egyptian princess. Toia began with Sweelinck, Froberger and Clementi, improvising toccatas and preludes in between, and concluded with Bartók, Chick Corea and Antonio Zambrini, an Italian composer working with jazz genres.

Interdisciplinary performances included the combination of clavichord with black-light theatre, which had amazed me on a visit to Prague years earlier. Performing together with Manda Konttinen, we did three performances with music of Mozart played by me wearing white gloves; with ultraviolet lights one could only see my hands and my scores. Manda's performance was filled with all kinds of objects which glowed in the darkness: baby boots, high-heeled shoes, a veil, skirt, blouse, white feathers... all which had an adventure with the music. That evening Mads Damlund, Albert Mühlböck, Gabriele Toia, Eija Virtanen and I performed at the Old Kuopio Museum

with two clavichords, performing pieces including a Bach concerto and works by Christian Heinrich Müller, Handel, and J. C. Bach (four hands). The following days included solo recitals by Albert Mühlböck, Mads Damlund, Jan Weinhold and myself (music by female composers, including Martinez, d'Agnesi, Bon, Jacquet de la Guerre and Westenholz, with the second prize winner of last year's clavichord composition competition, Alissa Duryee's *Forager's Journal*). There was also a rare concert of music for clavichord and Romantic guitar (Panormo 1828), played by Päivi Vesalainen and Janne Malinen (illus. 1), and lectures on Bach and medicine (Claus Köppel) and the Clavichord Revival (Esther Yae Ji Kim, who also gave a recital of Bach and Beethoven).



Illus. 1 Päivi Vesalainen and Janne Malinen

The Nordic Historical Keyboard Festival is an excellent opportunity to meet other clavichord-lovers, to hear music from the 1500s to World Premieres in exciting performances, or to fall in love with the clavichord, if one has not already done so. We are already looking towards 2020, with an emphasis on the Beethoven 250th Anniversary.

Anna Maria McElwain