

Harpsichord & fortepiano

Vol. 25, No. 1 Autumn, 2020

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Musical Instrument Research Catalog
(MIRCat)

Reviews

BOOKS

Frank Mento, *Harpsichord Method*, 10 vols. (2019)

The publication of a 21st-century harpsichord instruction method is a magnus opus, worth marking with a serious review. Frank Mento's self-published work (although via Amazon, in paperback, and also in a digital version for those who prefer to use their tablets), has many precedents in the late 18th century. Pedagogical keyboard composers, such as Bemetzrieder, Malme, Barthélemon, Calcott, Kollmann and Dale, all initially published instruction books at their own expense. Mento has not yet produced any accompanying audio material, but has stated that he is prepared to consider it. It is clear that he has some practical pedagogical experience with children, as well as being Professor Emeritus of Harpsichord at the Paris Conservatoire and Organist Emeritus at Saint-Jean de Montmartre Church. He also has an international career in performance.

A book a year

This ten-part initiative is to be hugely admired, and although I have some reservations about the method, derived from my own considerable experience of harpsichord and piano teaching, it goes a long way towards fulfilling a need. Mento's intention is that his ten volumes will each cover a year of lessons. The lengths of each vary considerably between the super-slim 27 pages of the second year and the huge volumes 8 & 10 which are two hundred pages longer; whether with a teacher or not, this is study-material for a whole decade. It is not, perhaps, wise to buy the 'complete set', if you are just beginning to learn a new instrument; such a long-term effort might seem overwhelming, and discourage slow and methodical study. However, it is cheaper to buy three-year's worth at a time, and you will also need a good supply of whiting-pens. If Mento's *Harpsichord Method* is the course you intend to take, I would urge you to tackle just one volume at a time, and forget the author's artificial time-limits. Speed of progress varies considerably from one individual to another with any course of instruction.

Beginning with beginners

The decision to start at the beginning, mainly with children in mind, which Mento rightly felt was a lacuna in the teaching of harpsichord (as opposed to piano), is a worthy one. I like the space he leaves for drawing round the pupil's hand, to explain fingering numbers (something

I also do in a first lesson), but, alongside the eight points he gives on posture, an image of the hand-position at the keyboard would be helpful. Even the cover is stark black and white; text only. Images and quizzes appeal to children, along with explanations (from their teacher), that are coloured imaginatively and metaphorically, to suit the pupil. Adults might not need titles such as 'Belvedere' or 'Undergrowth' explained to them, or so I thought until I read Mento's interesting 18th-century definition of 'The Mall' and, in Volume 5, a list of the individual Canary Islands. Whilst the layout of exercises, pieces and random nuggets of information is spacious enough for additional personal notes, the lack of any aesthetic appeal is off-putting in Volume 1, for beginners.

Subtitled, 'First Year', the first book covers the theoretical basics; initially, the child's needs are uppermost, but with one rather glaring omission; there is no indication or reference anywhere of how the pupils, in their first lesson, are to find middle C on the keyboard, although instructed to do so. He presumably expects the teacher will give assistance, but the book is so prescriptive in other aspects, that this lack is illogical. Harpsichord keyboards are not standardised, so middle C can be confusing, even for those who can normally easily locate it, but this is not discussed. It is probably also necessary to discuss the letter-names in conjunction with sol-fa, which is many children's first musical language. British historical instruction books show the keyboard with letter names attached, and occasionally linked to the staves, for a correlation between the named note on the music score and that upon the instrument. Indeed, some such tutors even include a double page or flap, to view the layout. It would have been interesting to see it with the black natural keys, and white sharps or accidentals and, even though this was not standardised in the 18th-century, it would reinforce its specificity for the harpsichord.

It is no small task to accumulate the theoretical information, pieces and exercises to cover all technical challenges, but it does not always teach the student step by step, as an holistic process. Volume 2, continues the introduction of pieces and exercises by named composers, started in the first volume, but I would question the wisdom of teaching scales (starting with Eb major), somewhat randomly and pointlessly, without also coupling them with pieces in the keys that are appropriate to this elementary level. Root-position triads appear on the last page, without differentiating major, minor, or diminished, and yet the explanations, along with their inversions, should have already prefaced the Purcell prelude, twelve pages earlier.

Fingering matters

If I use this method, for children or adults, the first thing will be to apply a whiting pen to almost all the fingering numbers and any printed letter-names in the text, leaving only the key ones. I have, in fact, started on my copies, but this is irksome, because Mento has applied them to every note at the start. Whilst choice of fingering will be essential in producing chosen articulations later on—for beginners with a fixed hand position, few fingerings are needed. Throughout the method, there are far too many numbers; despite the suggestion, in Volume 2, that you should avoid relying on fingerings, such a forest of numbers can also lead to ignoring them altogether. This frequency is completely unnecessary if hand-positions are explained and adhered to, and will discourage reading the notes on the two staves. The ‘Localizing Notes’ pages would, initially, be better achieved with a smaller range of random notes, but they are helpful for shape recognition. The sight-reading exercises do not begin until Volume 7, and they do not equate to the higher standards of the pieces of this standard or, indeed, the ABRSM exam system.

Exercises

Despite my insistence on the removal of unnecessary fingering numbers, the inclusion of five-finger exercises is helpful for digital skills, many of which are derived from historic publications, including Couperin, Hartung, Marpurg etc. I would have liked the exercises to complement specific pieces, to be created out of, and for, the following piece to encourage productive future practice.

Perhaps Mento’s greatest contribution to harpsichord pedagogy is the inclusion of figured bass exercises, sensibly starting from basics, with the understanding of intervals, in Volume 2. This important strand continues throughout the further volumes and offers many and diverse progressive exercises. These are to be welcomed, although as he intersperses them between his chosen repertoire, it might have been revealing to make harmonic or stylistic connections between them. Ornamentation tables are given throughout the method, but a note to explain why symbols are used (instead of notation of embellishments), might encourage flexibility in performance. The inclusion of exercises on diminutions and improvisation is to be warmly applauded for encouraging an early improvisatory approach, supported by some solid historical foundation.

Page 41 of Volume 1 offers the first piece (by Türk), with prescriptive markings, but lacks an explanation of how to execute either a legato or a tenuto; nor does he define this first occurrence of the slur. Naming the mark ‘slurred’ notes, does not enlighten the student as to its

meaning. Volume 3, a page of ‘Early Articulation’ offers some excellent examples but, whilst Mento suggests that the student should find suitable fingerings as he plays them, he gives no idea why these composers might have chosen to join or separate the notes. Those of us lucky enough to have heard Gustav Leonhardt work through Frescobaldi toccata explaining why he was choosing each individual length of note (whether separated, or joined, or overheld, and by exactly how much), will know that articulation is so much more than mere slurs and staccato markings, and that it is a personal matter, at the heart of interpretation on the harpsichord. However, guidance is certainly needed in the early stages, such as that given by Clementi (a fine harpsichordist before he applied his techniques to the early Piano Forte), on the eighth page of his own beginners’ method. In the 1801 Introduction, Clementi indicated three different grades of detachment plus legato, and this remains a helpful starting-point.

Assessing the level and choice of repertoire

To progress to the pieces at the end of Mento’s ‘First Year’, is a tall order for most complete beginners, and I doubt the method assists sight-reading to this standard, but the choice of pieces, throughout the Method, is a good introduction to harpsichord repertoire, including that for virginals in the following volumes. It remains less common to meet students with no previous keyboard skills, and more often it is a process of adaptation. An accomplished pianist might feel it beneath them to start at Volume 2 (unless they want to improve sight-reading skills, and start figured bass), but choosing a less ambitious level would enable concentration on the instrument, the touch and the style (but where the fingerings are not marked as original, then editing will still be required). I like the early introduction of an unmeasured prelude, in Volume 3, a form which can liberate some early-learners, but wish he would put his comments ahead of the piece, rather than at the end, and make it clear for whom they are intended. More assistance will be needed by the pupil, in preparation for much of the included repertoire, which does suggest a teacher is essential to this method; the two introductory Scarlatti sonatas in Volume 7 are rich in editorial, articulatory marks that lack satisfactory explanation of their purpose (an essential for students to learn autonomy). Throughout the Method, the layout could be much improved, and save unnecessary waste of paper, as exemplified on the mostly blank page with scant and inexact information on Scarlatti. Volume 10 includes much longer major works, such as Couperin’s B minor ordre, and Rameau’s A minor suite, both of which have discontinuous bar-lines, departing from the house-style that is used to join the staves and ease reading, as in the preceding Bach prelude and fugue and Couperin piece.

In conclusion

Like J. B. Cramer and other writers of early piano preceptors, Mento may well make alterations to content and layout in future editions, and attempt to make them look more appealing. Indeed, I would be encouraging my adult students to buy what forms an excellent Basso Continuo collection, especially were Mento to issue this separately. As the exercise collection is not wedded to the repertoire within the Method, it would also be a useful freestanding publication, offering an overview of early technical practice. The elementary five-finger pieces constrict the thumbs to C, but will be useful for children in the first stages.

A few pieces for harpsichord from the last 120 years would be welcome, if only in an overview of historical repertoire (which is badly needed). I would also have liked some facsimiles, and I consider a bibliography of scores and books relevant to the harpsichord an essential addition. A mention of international harpsichord magazines (such as this one) and societies (such as the free, online British Harpsichord Society), might bring those who are new to the subject into contact with others. For a publication which I imagine is almost printed on demand, and available online, it would not be difficult to update information.

In the hands of a wise teacher, prepared to eradicate both extraneous fingering and unhelpful articulation, and to extract and supplement, according to a student's needs and preferences, the ten volumes contain much of value. They will, indeed, 'favorize' the learner with a huge number of pieces, in a method that nearly 'englobes' the repertoire, from which they will, in time, be ready to 'concertize'!

Penelope Cave

Mark Kroll (ed), *The Boston School of Harpsichord Building: William Dowd, Eric Herz and Frank Hubbard* (Hillsdale, NY, 2019)

This is the seventh volume in Pendragon Press's 'The Historical Harpsichord' series, which has been going for some forty years. Previous volumes have been historical studies, including examination of such things as harpsichord wire and decoration, but this new book fulfils a very different purpose. The last decade or so has seen the loss of many of the leading post-war historical performer and instrument-maker pioneers, and it is vitally important to have a first hand record of their work, from those who knew and studied with them. The main focus here is the work of William Dowd (1922-2008), Eric Herz (1919-2002) and Frank

Hubbard (1920-1976), all born within three years of each other (William Hyman (1931-1974), another important figure, is also mentioned). There are three to five essays on each, and the dozen authors include leading makers trained in those workshops, including Hendrick Broekman, Reinhard von Nagel, Rod Regier, Allan Winkler and Thomas and Barbara Wolf.

The Boston harpsichord story goes back as far as 1949, when William Dowd and Frank Hubbard set up a manufacturing business, which moved inexorably towards harpsichords, virginals, spinets, clavichords and fortepianos based on historical originals, it having become clear (as it was to makers like Martin Skowroneck in Germany) that it was not possible to improve on the elegant and functional designs of a Ruckers, Taskin or Walther, either by changes to the design or the use of modern materials. The influence of the Boston makers, and their students, was considerable, including the kit business that was a major part of the Hubbard workshop's output. Mark Kroll's introduction also traces the story back to Arnold Dolmetsch, whose American years (1905-1911) resonated later, not only because of the instruments he made for US clients and institutions, but because of makers like John Challis (1907-1974) who trained with him later – and before the war, Hubbard studied with Dolmetsch in Haslemere, and Dowd with Challis in Detroit. Hubbard and Dowd worked together for nine years before going their separate ways, and this initial shared vision of American harpsichord building was to set much of the tone for what has happened there since.

The memoir sections are illustrated with interesting photographs and facsimiles, and from the anecdotes and descriptions the reader gets a real sense of the daily workshop business, the personalities of the makers and their colleagues, the influence of client needs, changing fashions in instruments, and the very real financial challenges of craft work of this kind – almost nobody gets rich building harpsichords! Restorations of antiques was also an important part of the learning process, and some of these instruments are listed in Appendix II, as well as the workshop drawings produced.

Although the production values of this paperback do not match some previous volumes in the series (there is no index, for example), this is still essential reading for anyone wanting to understand the harpsichord revival in the 20th century, or learn about some of the key figures who made it possible.

Francis Knights

MUSIC

Sebastián de Albero, ed Ryan Layne Whitney,
Obras for Harpsichord or Fortepiano;
Thirty Sonatas for Harpsichord
 Lulu, www.lulu.com

The six three-movement works included in the *Obras para clavicordio o piano forte* manuscript by Sebastián de Albero (1722-1756), organist of the Royal Chapel, Madrid, were previously edited by António Baciero in the 1980s in five different volumes of *Nueva Biblioteca Española de música de teclado* but are here brought together in one volume for the first time. Each *Obra*, its specific tripartite structure unique in the keyboard literature, opens with a Ricercata, followed by a Fuga and closes with a Sonata.

The 'ad libitum' Ricercatas are written in specific note values, frequently beamed in semiquaver groups adding up to a crotchet, but without any bar lines. There are passages of single notes as well as clear indications of the note(s) of one hand being held on and also lines covering groups of notes. Modulations to quite extreme keys occur. Soler published eight broadly similar preludes in his *Llave de la Modulación* (1762), but no other such pieces are known in Spain. The *Fugas* (from 300-516 bars of loosely imitative writing) include many runs in octaves in the left hand or right hand, and thirds or sixths in the right hand, and some big leaps via the pivoted thumb in the left hand, particularly in No.6, where up to an octave above the thumb is called for.

The binary form Sonatas which close each *Obra* are similar to many of Scarlatti's and to Albero's sonatas in his own set of 30, are usually in 3/8 and also pose considerable technical challenges, including semiquaver passages in thirds, changes of texture from single notes in each hand to thick chords, repeated chords, passages in left-hand octaves including leaps, extended arpeggios and pivoting on the thumb, but hand-crossing occurs only in Sonata No.6

The 30 Sonatas (Nos.15 and 30 are *Fugas*, leaving 28 binary form pieces) are also found in a beautifully written manuscript, and are arranged in pairs, sometimes in the same key and occasionally with a change of mode, and sometimes with contrasted tempi of Andante and Allegro; keys do not exceed three sharps or flats. No.22 in F minor is intriguing in its two sections moving from Adagio in the minor to Allegro in the major with some quite daring modulations. The first *Fuga* is an Andante in G minor, in 6/8 covering almost 300 bars and with many left-hand quaver octaves, while the second *Fuga* is an Allegro in D major in 2/4, somewhat shorter at 158 bars, again with runs of quaver octaves in the left hand. Several sonatas contain extended passages for crossed hands as well as

runs in octaves, repeated octaves and thirds or sixths. There are some differences with the earlier edition by Genoveva Gálvez, indicated in footnotes.

Each volume provides a modern typeset score with as little modification to the original as possible, and has a very informative introduction, well worth reading before playing the music. There are references to further resources for the interested player. The volumes are very clearly printed and are excellent value for money.

John Collins

Francesc Mariner ed Martin Voortman,
Obres per a clave
 Ed Tritó TR00029, www.trito.es

This year we commemorate the 300th anniversary of the birth of Francesc Mariner, organist of Barcelona Cathedral. Martin Voortman has edited 22 works considered appropriate for harpsichord from a large number of Catalan archives. The first, and largest, section contains 11 *Tocatas*, two Sonatas and an Adagio. Eight *Tocatas* are in major keys up to three sharps, five of which are in one binary form movement of up to 185 bars. No.1 in D is in two movements, each in binary form, and after an Adagio in the relative minor with much use of semiquaver triplets, the opening movement is repeated. In No.5 the opening movement in 2/4 is in ternary form, followed by a binary form two-voice Adagio in the tonic major. No.14 in G in C time is in Da Capo Aria form, and the second part reworks the material in the relative minor, typical of Catalan composers. Three are in minor keys, of which No.7 in A minor is unusually in three movements, the opening binary form movement marked 'Muy despacio' (Very slow) followed by a short ternary form Allegro in 2/4, after which the opening movement is repeated, the piece concluding with a binary form Allegro in 3/8.

The Sonatas pose considerable challenges to the player, but the second section contains six somewhat easier pieces, comprising three *Pastorellas* in binary form, two pieces entitled *Tocata Pastoril* and a *Tocata* in F. Most of these six works, played on the organ during Christmas services but also suitable for harpsichord, are in two voices, with occasional thirds in right hand. The final section contains two short binary form pieces entitled 'Juguete' and marked Allegro, one in 2/4, the other in 3/8.

The introduction to this clearly printed volume gives a brief biography and a description of the sources. There is a wide range of frequently changing textures and rhythms, with some melodic writing as well as chromatic

runs. These pieces give us an excellent snapshot of Catalan keyboard music around 1750 and deserve to be far better known and included in recitals.

John Collins

RECORDINGS

Pachelbel, Complete Keyboard Music, Simone Stella (harpsichord/organ), recorded 2016-17
Brilliant Classics 95623 (2019), 13 CDs, 851'

The last decade has seen a number of young performers compile ambitious complete recording projects of particular composers, usually for love rather than money. One such is Simone Stella, not yet 40, who has already recorded the complete harpsichord and organ works of Buxtehude, Böhm, Froberger, Rameau, Reincken, Walther and Zachow, to which he now adds Pachelbel's keyboard music. Pachelbel's entire career (cut short at only 52) was as an organist, at Eisenach, Erfurt, Stuttgart, Gotha and finally Nuremberg. The Bach connection is well known: Pachelbel taught Johann Christoph Bach, who taught his younger brother Johann Sebastian. His organ output was considerable: preludes, fugues, chorales, partitas, variations, fantasias, chaconnes and toccatas, some two hundred pieces. As well as the 95 Fugues on the Magnificat, there are published collections from 1683, 1693 and 1699. The scale of these is 17th rather than 18th century, so most of the works are short, and much of it is for manuals only. In addition to these melodically attractive and well-crafted pieces, there are also a number which seem best suited to clavier (here, harpsichord). These include some 20 suites from a now-destroyed 1683 manuscript, using no fewer than 17 different keys; they follow the manner of Froberger, but nearly all are attributed to Pachelbel rather than definitely by him. This recording offers a welcome opportunity to listen and make a judgment about these, particularly in the context of the composer's other keyboard music (both the suites and the splendid *Hexachordum Apollonis* variation sets are here played on the harpsichord). All the works are distributed through the discs, varied in style, genre and key, such that each CD makes a satisfying programme.

Only two instruments are used: a three manual German baroque-style organ by Pinchi-Škrabl of 2013 located in a church in Ferrara (in unequal temperament at A465), and a Ruckers-type harpsichord by William Horn: both are very fine, and Stella extracts every possible variety of registration from them - there is even a C major fugue with a 'nightingale' stop. The recording

quality is excellent throughout, but there is less praise for the proof-reading: Pachelbel's dates are given incorrectly throughout.

Simone Stella's discography demonstrates his strong interest in 17th-century German keyboard music, and indeed he must have recorded more of it than anyone else. This gives him a very wide context for the different styles in the music; very occasionally, the sheer quantity of music he commits to disc means that an interpretation does not feel as thoroughly embedded as if it had received numerous concert performances first (it is a curiosity of the modern recording industry that some players actually record music they have never played in public). This admirable set makes an excellent case for Pachelbel's music, and is strongly recommended.

Francis Knights

J. S. Bach: The Well-tempered Clavier, Book One; The Well-tempered Clavier, Book Two, Colin Booth (harpsichord)
Soundboard Records SBCD 218 and 219, 2 CDs, 122' and 148'

This is one of the most carefully considered and significant recordings of Bach's complete *Well-tempered Clavier* that I have encountered: stylish, expressive, authoritative and compelling, and with refreshingly individual touches which might raise a few eyebrows. The CDs are well presented in simple cardboard envelopes, and offer extensive notes outlining Colin Booth's approach, surveying at length the question of what 'well-tempered' might mean, and considering tempo, rhythm, inequality and ornamentation. These are familiar performance practice issues, but Booth offers many fresh and stimulating ideas which he puts into practice, resulting in performances of great originality. His book *Did Bach really mean that?* (2010), subtitled 'Deceptive notation in Baroque keyboard music' is well worth acquiring, and discusses the relevant issues at greater length. The CD envelope for Book 2 has a tiny inconsistency in the listing of the movements: the actual numbers of the preludes and fugues stop short after Fugue 12; but this is as nothing. The recording and production are by Booth himself, and the sound quality is superb.

For around 40 years Booth has combined the career of a performer with that of a skilled harpsichord-builder. In 2013 he restored an instrument by Cellini (1661) and in these recordings plays his own 2016 copy based on that original. It has a clear sound, ideal for counterpoint—and Bach's complex textures throughout the set are projected with extraordinary clarity. Many movements are played

on a single 8' register, Booth coupling the two 8's less frequently than we might anticipate; and he makes a policy decision not to use the 4' at all. No claim is made that the temperament ultimately chosen—Kirnberger III—was that intended by Bach, but it certainly works very well for all keys, giving a individual colour to keys like F# and (especially) Ab major.

Tempos have been chosen with care, and nothing is rushed; but this is not to say that Booth's playing lacks bravura and excitement when it is called for. His playing exudes an inner vitality which has nothing to do with speed. I feel that he misjudged in only one movement—the G minor fugue from Book 2—which seems to me just too slow. Listening to these performances, I repeatedly felt that the music seemed to be unfolding, a word which aptly characterises Booth's playing.

Some may find his application of inequality surprising. His intention is that it should be extremely subtle, almost imperceptible—and it usually is, as we hear straightaway in the C major fugue from Book 1. Only occasionally I found this a little overdone, as in the E minor prelude from Book 1 and in the A major fugue from Book 2. Linked with inequality is Booth's interesting views on the notation of triplets, which inform his approach in various movements.

As expected, ornamentation—whether notated or added—is deftly managed and stylish. His views on single-note ornaments—should they be appoggiaturas on the beat or *Nachschläge* before it?—are very convincing. (This is a major consideration in the opening aria of Booth's other recent Bach recording, that of the Goldberg Variations—also superb.) I am not totally convinced by his rhythmically flexible approach in the D major fugue, Book 1, where I find the tirades over-rushed; and in the notationally problematic D major prelude from Book 2 again I find the opening bars treated a little too freely. But these are matters of taste, and it is stimulating to hear such familiar pieces played rather differently from usual; of course there is no one correct approach.

The finest compliment I can pay to these outstanding performances is to assert that the music, not the performer, always comes first.

John Kitchen

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, Complete Harpsichord Music, Claudio Astronio (harpsichord/organ), recorded 2015-17
Brilliant Classics 94240 (2017), 6 CDs, 402'
 Wilhelm Friedemann Bach was the first beneficiary (or victim) of J. S. Bach's keyboard training camp, and many works appear to have been written especially

for him, helping him develop a formidable organ and keyboard technique that established his reputation as a great virtuoso. His musical styles are varied and complex, requiring a connoisseur's engagement - both as player and listener. This box set is the first complete recording, and everything is performed on harpsichord (apart from four short chorales heard on organ), including a 1748 Specken copy by Ugo Casglia and instruments by Keith Hill after Anon (1710) and Bull (1778). Given Wilhelm's known interest in the clavichord, and the success of recordings by Steve Barrell, Paul Simmonds and others, it is a pity that instrument does not feature, as it is uniquely suitable for the Polonaises, for example. Those wanting to find out more about the composer and his music can consult the new ongoing complete edition from Carus, and of course David Schulenberg's 2010 book on the composer; he supplies the booklet notes here too.

The 12 Polonaises are relatively well known, and there have also been a number of recordings of the Fantasias (which are testament to Wilhelm's technical skills) and the 8 Fugues, but it is the 13 Sonatas, only two of which were published in the composer's lifetime, that have been most neglected. These sonatas are tricky, both from the point of view of finger dexterity and interpretation, but are well worth hearing. The remaining miscellaneous works include pieces from Wilhelm's student days, but the major discovery here is a group of works (mostly short) from a manuscript now in Vilnius; this is their first recording. Often, the content of the music reminds the listener of J. S. and C. P. E.; even though Bach's composing sons went their separate ways musically, the thoroughness of their training is evident, and the ways in which Johann Sebastian's music was embedded in their fingers is obvious.

Claudio Astronio has already recorded W. F. Bach's harpsichord concertos, and the complete solo keyboard works was an obvious next project. He approaches the music with an improvisatory flair that captures the wayward genius of the composer. Superbly played and well recorded, at under £20 this set is an unmissable bargain; note that the recordings are also available as part of a 14-box set (Brilliant Classics 95596) which includes the organ music played by Filippo Turri, plus concertos, chamber music and cantatas.

Francis Knights

Tangere - Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: Fantasias, Sonatas, Rondos and Solfeggi, Alexei Lubimov (tangent piano), recorded 2008
ECM New Series 2112 (2017), 67'

Alexei Lubimov's recording of Fantasias, Sonatas, Rondos and Solfeggi by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714–1788), J.S.Bach's fifth and second surviving son, uses a tangent piano (*Tangenterflügel*) built by Späth & Schmahl of Regensburg (1794). An instrument whose strings are struck by freely-moving wooden posts (resembling harpsichord jacks), the tangent piano has the advantage of combining the timbres and potential of the fortepiano, the clavichord and the harpsichord, but with more strength than salon keyboard instruments of the time.

The tangent piano spread throughout Europe, in Italy being referred to as the 'cembalo angelico' and in France as the 'clavecin harmonieux et céleste'. Franz Jacob Späth, a builder of pianos, clavichords and organs, was the most important of those producing tangent pianos in the second half of the 18th century, having built one for the Elector of Bonn in 1751. As demand for his tangent pianos increased, he took his son-in-law Christoph Friedrich Schmahl into the business as a full partner. Their tangent pianos were the prized instruments of some of the most eminent musicians of the time, including Mozart who, in 1777, referred to it as the 'Späthisches Klavier'. By the early 19th century, Späth tangent pianos, now found in many European countries, boasted a range of six octaves. However, as the fortepiano was gaining more popularity than the harpsichord, the tangent piano was also on the losing side. After a short period of popularity, it sank into obscurity around the late 18th or early 19th century. Some ten Späth & Schmahl tangent pianos survive. Dating from 1780 to 1801, they all have the same action and compass of 5 octaves (FF–f3), but are of differing lengths, from 184 to 222 cm.

The tangent is activated by the player's finger, striking the string to produce the sound. Unlike the clavichord, where the tangent remains in contact with the string to keep the note sounding, the *Tangenterflügel*'s tangent leaves the string swiftly, allowing it to vibrate freely. The instrument has an intermediate lever, increasing the velocity with which the jack-striking post is driven towards the strings. Serving the new aesthetic of the early Classical period, the instrument offered a range of tone-altering devices, including an early damper system and a buff stop; the player was now in control of its volume by the strength with which he struck the keys, now free to engage the tangent piano's choice of timbres in playing that was highly expressive, at times, quite intense! It is clear why this instrument, with its substantial expressive and coloristic potential, would appeal to Lubimov, an artist of much temperament and fantasy, just as it had fired the imagination of C. P. E. Bach, inspiring him to write daring new repertoire.

The disc offers a representative selection of C. P. E. Bach's most concise keyboard pieces, many taken from

the *Clavierstücke verschiedener Art* ('Keyboard Pieces of Various Kinds', 1765) and the *Musikalischer Vielerley* ('Musical Miscellany', 1770). Four Fantasias feature here, some more chordal, some more contrapuntal, others a mix of both. Lubimov's playing of them displays humour, offering lush spreads, 'comments' or contrasting subjects, as in the Fantasie in B minor, Wq.112/8. Exquisite miniatures, none exceeding one minute, each emerges in beautifully-sculpted and satisfying *durchkomponiert* ('through-composed') writing. The same can be said for the disc's four Solfeggi – some bristling with ornaments and brimming with good cheer, other spontaneous and improvisational in character. In the recording's two lengthier *Fantasien*, Lubimov gives vivid expression to some of Bach's most unique and unleashed utterances. Fresh, thrilling, unpredictable and inspiring in its sense of discovery, the C major Fantasie, Wq.59/6 (1784), abounds in textural and tonal changes, with Bach's sentimental central melody appearing as an unexpected guest! Another highlight, the *Freye Fantasie* ('Free Fantasia') in F# minor, Wq.67 (1787), probably the longest of the fantasias, comprises different sections (some repeated). It is as if Bach, a year before his death, wishes to present a kaleidoscope of keyboard practice of his era, indeed, a compendium of music from under the fingers of one of the greatest improvisers of all time. A display of contrasts in virtuosic figurations and imposing timbres, Lubimov's personal and insightful playing also gives refined expression to the work's introspective moments.

Of the some 150 solo keyboard sonatas composed by C. P. E. Bach, two from *Für Kenner und Liebhaber* ('For Connoisseurs & Amateurs') appear on the disc. Lubimov's suspenseful reading of Sonata VI in G major, Wq.55 (1779) brings home the spirit of the *empfindsamer Stil* ('sensitive style'), perfectly timed and suited to the discourse of Emanuel Bach's impulsive, volatile temperament, but it should be noted that the composer's musical mannerisms were no less astounding to his contemporaries than to today's listener. Lubimov's interpretation of Sonata II in D minor, Wq.57 (1787), is however more restrained and Classical in concept.

Alexei Lubimov is founder of the Moscow Baroque Quartet and a co-founder of the Moscow Chamber Academy, and has been instrumental in the 'Alternativa' Avant-garde Music Festival. An artist enquiring deeply into the music of C. P. E. Bach, Lubimov harbours no doubts as to the fact that the tangent piano, with its forthright signature timbre, its dynamic possibilities and strong contrasts, is tailor-made to this unique repertoire. His inspired performance of it gives formidable expression to the temperament and fantasy, the unconventional beauty and excitement of the Hamburg Bach's style. The ECM recording offers sound quality every bit as lively as

the works performed.

Pamela Hickman

***Heaven & Earth in Little Space*, Adrian Lenthall (clavichord), recorded 2019-20**

Plus fait douceur PFD CD 01 (2020), 68'

Seasonal music has become very much associated with text – Christmas with choral music, for example – and Adrian Lenthall has taken the unusual step of making an entire disc of instrumental Christmas music for clavichord. Of course, much of it is chorale-based works from the 17th and 18th centuries, but the net is spread very wide, with more than five hundred years of music by 20 composers from some ten countries. The earliest works are from the 15th century, and the latest is from a few years ago, a Nativity suite by Geoffrey Allan Taylor receiving a premiere recording. Other works are from the *Pastorale* tradition, including a *Capriccio* by Frescobaldi and works by C. P. E. Bach, Kobrich and Scarlatti (Sonata in C, K513); J. S. Bach, with four works, is best represented.

None of the pieces is much longer than five minutes, but the careful layout of the programme means that it can be listened to as a varied and continuous sequence, where brief excursions into the 20th century provide some moments of stylistic variety. Some works are grouped together, as in five short settings of ‘*In dulci Jubilo*’, by Zachow, Sicher, Vetter, J. M. Bach and Mareschal.

No fewer than four clavichords are used, copies by Peter Bavington, Andrea di Maio, Richard Taylor and Anon after instruments dating from c.1620 to the 1780s. The differences between them are interesting (soundboard size increases with time, which is a major factor), and the disc is also a useful demonstration of this historical progression, well recorded as it is.

Adrian Lenthall plays with taste and elegance, bringing out the subtle differences between the various composers and the four instruments. He neglects to mention anything about himself in the CD booklet (nor are a producer or engineer credited), but for the record he is a very experienced clavichord specialist, as can be seen from his website www.adrianlenthall.co.uk.

Francis Knights

REPORTS

Collections and Collectors

The Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies

Conference and 40th Anniversary meeting at Oberlin Conservatory of Music on 23-26 October 2019 brought together lovers of historical keyboards and their music of all levels from around the world on the theme ‘Blending Past and Present: Collections and Collectors’. Attendees examined the past, present and future state of this world of historical keyboard instruments, and what is needed to sustain it into future decades and generations. Founded initially as an association for organ performers and scholars in 1979, Westfield has an ambitious mission that allows for varied programmes, workshops, conferences and international study tours. Over the last 40 years they have expanded to embrace harpsichords, clavichords, and pianos from all times and places. In keeping with the conference’s theme, attendees had the opportunity to visit various important local collections. The Riemenschneider Bach Institute at nearby Baldwin Wallace University Conservatory of Music held an open house featuring some of their rare holdings of editions, and conference attendees visited the new Paul Fritts Opus 42 organ at First Lutheran Church in nearby Lorain, visited the Memorial Art Museum or the Caldwell Collection of Viols at the home of Catharina Meints.

The Keynote addresses were given by Annette Richards (Cornell) on Portraiture and music in the late 18th century, while Thomas Forrest Kelly delivered a fantastically engaging and thought-provoking closing talk ranging across the centuries. The papers were given in two afternoon sessions, and included Fanny Magaña and Jimena Palacios Uribe on the collector Antonio Hagenbeck, Elly Langford on combination keyboards and Kenneth Slowik on the history of the keyboard collection at the Smithsonian Institution. John McKean discussed the *Augsburg Wegweiser* organ treatise while Jacob Fuhrman discussed publications of the Genevan Psalter and Anne Laver talked about organist Alexandre Guilmant and his American student William Carl.

Masterclasses were hosted by three fantastic performer/scholars, including Christa Rakich (organ), David Breitman (fortepiano) and Eduardo Bellotti (harpsichord), whose talented students showed impressive adaptability to trying and implementing suggestions. Best of all, I found, was hearing the scholarship backing up the suggestions so clearly stated by each of the professors. Lecture-recitals were given by Christina Fuhrmann and Dylan Sanzenbacher (Bach), Matthew Bengtson (choosing the appropriate instrument), and Susan Youens with baritone Thomas Meglioranza and David Breitman (piano) discussed and performed Schumann songs, capped off with a glorious performance of *Dichterliebe*.

Concerts included performances by Erica Johnson (organ), Jonathan Moyer (organ), Christa Rakich (clavichord), Mark Edwards (harpsichord), David

Breitman (piano), Andrew Willis (fortepiano) and Robert Bates (organ), using a variety of historic instruments and copies. Edoardo Bellotti paired instruments and paintings in the Allen Memorial Art Museum (organ, harpsichord and clavichord), finishing with an improvisation on the Partite sopra Folia.

Panel discussions on the present and future state of historic keyboard instruments included business practices, training, restoration and conservation, and the future of historical music performance. Among the various wonderful historical keyboard associations extant today, the Westfield Center maintains a distinct character, thanks in part to its broad statement of purpose and no doubt thanks to the energy and vision of the executive director, board and members. The October conference exemplified this. Surely this enthusiasm will carry Westfield and this world of historical keyboard instruments and performance onward.

Anne Beetem Acker

NEW SOUNDS FOR VIRGINALS

The harpsichord based on historical models is a preferred instrument for new music – solo, chamber, orchestral, with or without electronics and extended techniques. Most composers write for a generic five-octave instrument, i.e. without specifying a historical-geographical type. Sometimes the use of different manuals or stops is explicitly mentioned. While the soundworlds of (for example) a small Italian single 8' and a big French 8'8"4' are vastly different, few composers seem to have a clear sound ideal in mind when writing for the harpsichord. Virginals and spinets do not appear to function (yet) as pertinent categories in the context of new music composition for historical keyboard instruments. While a very small repertoire of genuine contemporary virginal music has come into being (Francis Knights in Cambridge is compiling a catalogue), many pieces are labelled ‘for virginal or harpsichord’, or allow performance on either instrument type.

In January 2019, I started an artistic research project at the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp on new music for harpsichord, and in February I conducted a workshop concerning harpsichord composition and improvisation, exploring the specific instruments owned by the school. One year later, I ran a second workshop around new music for virginals. Both multi-day workshops were embedded in the conservatoire’s annual NextDoors project week, and were targeted at students and fellow researchers, mostly attracting piano, harpsichord and composition

students. This year’s five-day workshop greatly benefitted from the trust and open-mindedness of local maker Jef Van Boven, who kindly provided his mother-and-child muselaar after Ruckers. The participants did not have any active experience with virginals, although some of them had encountered it in concerts.

On the first day I provided some information about virginals in general and the available muselaar in particular, and played and showed some examples of its historical repertoire. The participants had the chance to try out the instrument afterwards. The following days, ideas for compositions or improvisations were initiated and developed, with an informal showcase of the work-in-progress on the last day.

Many interesting and creative ideas emerged from the group, which was very actively involved. Approaches pursued ranged from ‘conventional’ use (building upon the historical repertoire, or triggered by particular sound characteristics, or linking it with an existing contemporary composition) to innovative, experimental, ‘extended’ ways of using the instrument and its different components, with or without the use of extra tools.

In one duo improvisation on the mother and the child, two piano students applied some less conventional and extended techniques, such as softly hitting the case with the front lid (creating a funny ‘creepy’ effect), or quickly releasing the keys, making the quill and damper fall down on the strings with speed (resulting in rhythmical-harmonic effects). Another student cultivated harmonics on the mother instrument, with a reminiscence of the *Dies Irae* created by tapping the strings with a touchscreen pen when pressing down the keys (with the jackrail removed). A joint performance of another harpsichord student and myself involved conventional playing on the child while trying to evoke a ‘Japanese’ and meditative atmosphere, and extended techniques on the mother and child, such as sliding a hank of horsehair on the soundboard and strings (to imitate the sound of wind) and softly hitting the strings with it, going over the strings with a brush, and making a soft rattling sound with a pencil on the tuning pins.

In conclusion, this workshop facilitated inventing, testing, developing and applying some new approaches in virginal composition and improvisation. Presumably, some extended techniques were applied for the first time on virginals. The mother-and-child-type of instrument in particular offers a multitude and variety of creative playing options and expressive possibilities, while sensitivity towards and considerate incorporation of the micro-sounds and noises proper to the instrument provides an extra dimension. A video of the presented work can be found at <https://youtu.be/KZXmbdSVc6M>.

Liselotte Sels