

# Harpsichord & *fortepiano*

Vol. nn, No. n Season, YYYY

© Peacock Press.

Licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#).

You are free to share and adapt the content for non-commercial purposes, provided you give appropriate credit to Peacock Press and indicate if changes were made. Commercial use, redistribution for profit, or uses beyond this license require prior written permission from Peacock Press.

Musical Instrument Research Catalog  
(MIRCat)

# Michael Thomas (1922–2022): a centenary tribute

Thomas McGeary



Illus.1 Michael Thomas playing one of his clavichords

This essay marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Michael Thomas (illus.1), one of the colourful and lively presences in the world of early keyboard music of the last century. For over 45 years, his activities as a performer, builder, dealer, restorer, collector, recitalist, lecturer, mentor to young builders, and performer and speaker on BBC radio programmes were single-mindedly devoted to what he called his ‘missionary zeal in promoting the real thing plucked by quills’, but especially to the clavichord, which he himself called his ‘consuming passion’.<sup>1</sup>

The early keyboard scene he entered in London in the late 1940s was dominated by building and playing of modern revival instruments. Thomas was an early pioneer in turning away from these modernized instruments and performing on historic instruments and building instruments based on historical principles.

## Early years

Michael Thomas was born in Cambridge on 1 November 1922 (he disliked his middle name, Harold). His father Harold abandoned the family, and he grew up with his mother (Kathleen Claydon) and grandparents in modest circumstances. His mother taught him piano, and at the age of thirteen he was playing as a church organist. He was able to attend the prestigious Perse School in Cambridge from September 1934 to July 1940 as a ‘minor scholar’, which was a county scholarship given to boys from state schools. His final year was spent in the Science Lower Sixth.

In 1940 he began a two-year course at the College of St Mark and St John, Chelsea, a training college whose specific aim was to provide trained teachers for disadvantaged children. Michael received a teacher training certificate in April 1942 (although some students did further education and qualified with a degree). His advanced courses were chemistry and music.

As a lifelong pacifist, in lieu of military service, he worked for the War Office as a lorry driver from 1942 to 1945, moving around Italian prisoners of war. For a short while after the war he taught science and he earned a Teaching Licentiate in pianoforte from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London, in April 1947, passing the practical exam with honours.

## London’s early keyboard scene

Probably during his Guildhall years he acquired what would be his passion for early keyboard instruments, which turned into a missionary zeal. London at the time was a centre of activity for early keyboard instruments and performance of music upon them, and he likely heard in concert Valda Aveling, Aimée van de Wiele, Lady Susi Jeans, George Malcolm, Ralph Kirkpatrick, Joseph Saxby and Raymond Russell, who was already building his collection of instruments.

In 1948 he went down to the Dolmetsch festival at Haslemere, where he recalls he heard Dorothy Swainson, a member of the Dolmetsch family circle. The following January, he was introduced to her after one of her clavichord lecture-recitals in London and in July began taking lessons. He was struck by what he called Swainson’s ‘complete mastery over the clavichord. But . . . even more striking was her interpretation, which derived from a deep insight into the exact pattern of every group of notes, giving a new meaning and value to every phrase, to every individual note. At the end of the concert Miss Swainson told her audience it took fifteen years to get a really good clavichord technique. I went away feeling it would be time well spent’.<sup>2</sup> He also took lessons in Cambridge from a Rudolph Dolmetsch pupil, Mary Potts, who also taught Christopher Hogwood, Peter Williams and Colin Tilney; he also took lessons from Aimée van de Wiele.

Michael's interest also turned to building instruments. He learned much from visiting the workshops of Tom Goff and Hugh Gough. Thomas built his first clavichord in 1950, and Swainson, with whom he and his wife June became friends, recalled how in 1952 he came regularly to take lessons and 'show me some clavichords he had made which seemed to get larger and larger'.<sup>3</sup>

He admired the clavichords made by Goff and his skilled cabinetmaker Joseph Cobby for their beautiful cabinetwork and sweet, singing, sustaining tone, but he, like others, thought their tone too thin and feeble,<sup>4</sup> although he adopted some features of their construction (such as arched clavichord soundboards and heavy bridges) in his own instruments.

Most of the instruments used in concerts at the time were the revival instruments by Dolmetsch, Goff, Robert Goble, Pleyel and others, which tended to be improvements of old instruments influenced by modern piano manufacture with heavy framing, leather plectra, weighted jacks, bushed and weighted keys, heavy stringing, abundant adjusting screws, pedals, and often 16' stops.

Thomas probably was motivated by the example of Hugh Gough, who already in the late 1940s was taking an historically oriented approach to the study and building of instruments and undertaking restorations. Thomas could have seen historical instruments at the Victoria and Albert Museum and was able to play on the instruments collected by Raymond Russell, a fellow pupil of Swainson, and Captain John Lane. There were occasional performances on historical instruments in those days by Russell, George Malcolm and others, but performing early music on historical instruments and instruments built on historical principles became Thomas' lifelong calling.

He was by now an accomplished early keyboard performer, and for a 17 November 1952 concert in Chelsea Town Hall he played clavichord solos and Byrd's 'O Mistress Mine' variations on an old Italian harpsichord, which Dorothy Swainson recalled 'he played extremely well'.<sup>5</sup> At the time, he was playing on a Hass clavichord and also a Kirkman harpsichord that had real quills, which he strongly advocated instead of hard leather (and later delrin).

Thomas believed the clavichord was still open to development: he wanted an instrument more powerful than Goff's, with a bright, clear attack; singing and sustaining treble; built with resonant wood; and one

which would allow control of vibrato (*Bebung*).<sup>6</sup> A pentagonal clavichord he made in 1953 was his prototype and was continually modified over the years; it remained his lifelong companion (see *illus.2* for another of the same design). He valued it for its strong, sustaining treble, and it was used by him, Thurston Dart and Alan Fenn Taylor for BBC radio programmes and for his own recordings.

In January 1953, Thomas secured an audition at the BBC, for whom he would go on to present programmes through the 1970s. But driving home, a van skidded into his car on the icy road and the accident seriously broke his leg.<sup>7</sup> A significant financial settlement from the accident allowed him in 1954 to buy Hurley Manor, Berkshire, which was being sold off by the government after being requisitioned during the war. He could now leave teaching, and at Hurley he established his workshop and set himself up a builder, restorer, collector, instrument dealer and recitalist. Here he raised a family with wife June and their children Andrew, Catherine and Alison.

### Hurley Manor

Hurley Manor has become a legendary (if not a mythical) place. The manor was a magnet for builders, students, performers, and just visitors who were free to play and study instruments and learn from Thomas. Here began his generous practice of lending out instruments (often for years at a time) to students and performers. At his workshop many future builders learned about historical instruments, building, and restoration through direct observation and hands-on experience with instruments. As became his practice, much of the actual building of his instruments was done by a network of craftsmen, Thomas himself being especially involved in the barring and layout of bridges on the soundboards. With an active workshop, he could experiment varying construction features on new instruments. Among those who learned from, or worked with him, at Hurley were John Horniblow, Richard Clayson and Andrew Garrett, David Law and Trevor Beckerleg. The BBC once sent out a crew to film Thomas at Hurley, showing him playing and restoring instruments, snipping off strings from one Italian instrument, and pulling out the soundboard from another. The climate at Hurley was famously described by Wolfgang Zuckermann in *The Modern Harpsichord*, after what must have been a brief visit:

His instruments are scattered about in a Charles Addams type heatless mansion, but Thomas himself lives in a modern bungalow at the edge of the property. Hurley is another quaint picturesque

English village, but Thomas is much too atypical to qualify as the village harpsichord maker. ... A number of antiques of all kinds, sizes, shapes and conditions are strewn about.<sup>8</sup>

In these years he drove throughout France and Italy in antiquated vehicles with a knack for locating instruments to bring back to put into playing condition. Over the years, at least 50 instruments passed through his hands as a restorer or dealer, but he kept back for his own evolving collection a number of significant historical or representative examples (for more information, see the online Supplement at <https://hfmagazine.info/archive>, hereafter indicated \*).<sup>9</sup>

He began broadcasting regularly for the BBC Third Programme in 1954, with programs produced by Basil Lam, appearing on over 30 live programs until 1973.\* Playing clavichords, harpsichords, a claviorganum and small organs, his BBC programmes reveal the range of his performing repertory. Often recorded on location, he exposed radio audiences to early keyboard music performed on appropriate historical instruments. Many programs were presented on location from Hurley Manor, Dr Roger Mirrey's collection at Redhill, East Croydon Church, and the Earl of Wemyss' Gosford House (illus.3). The BBC sent him to Brussels in 1964 for a pair of programmes demonstrating instruments in the collection at the Conservatory of Music,<sup>10</sup> and to Germany and Italy in 1966 to introduce recitals on organs.

### Performing

The great influence on his clavichord playing was Dorothy Swainson, who taught Thomas how to exploit vibrato (*Bebung*): 'By using many kinds of vibrato', he recalled, she 'was able to show a particular note as an up beat or down beat or a suspended harmony'.<sup>11</sup> Like Dolmetsch, she taught 'there was a silence of articulation before the accent, then one held the main accent for longer than written and passed over the notes as soft resolutions between the beats'.<sup>12</sup> The excessive use of vibrato has now fallen out of favour.

Thomas appeared on recordings playing historic instruments as well as his own clavichords, beginning in 1960 with the LP of new music that he commissioned for keyboards; followed by albums devoted solely to the claviorganum, Elizabethan music, Froberger, Fux, Weckmann and Bach; and culminating ambitiously in CD sets of both books of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* on clavichord in 1985 and 1994.\*<sup>13</sup>



Illus.2 Pentagonal unfretted clavichord (c.1957)  
by Michael Thomas (collection: Francis Knights)

Reviews of his recordings were mixed. Reviewers generally found his playing interesting and musical, thoughtful and sensitive. They welcomed the new repertoire and chance to hear the different instruments and read about them. Reviewers found his use of vibrato on the clavichord sensitive and produced expressive results. Some found his phrasing and articulation varied and flexible, but others found it rather clumsy, laboured and stilted. One thought his Bach *Well-Tempered Clavier* 'conscientious but dull', and another found the recording and performances on a Bach recording were not up to current standards of professionalism.\*<sup>14</sup>

Michael also played in ensembles, and in about 1963 he established the Michael Thomas Ensemble and Baroque Trio. The ensemble, managed by the Helen Jennings Concert Agency, consisted of Graham Kinsman (flute), Celia Gough (oboe), Christina MacRae (cello), and himself (harpsichord, clavichord, organ). They toured England, Ireland and Holland, and presented a programme for the BBC in February 1964. Several composers also wrote music for the ensemble.

One aspect of his advocacy of early keyboard instruments was commissioning new music, primarily for clavichord. Five composers, including Eugene Goossens and Lennox Berkeley, wrote solo pieces for harpsichord or clavichord, and a duet for clavichord, which he recorded in 1960.<sup>15</sup> He lent the composers clavichords so they could explore the instrument's possibilities for modern music. Thomas thought that modern music for clavichord 'should not be a backwater for precious little pieces'. The modern composer, he believed, should be concerned with the modern empirical sciences of our civilization and be 'alive to the rhythms of the "steam combustion engine"

(as Eliot says of poetry), and not only the engine, but the particles of the quantum theory, the endless space'. Modern music, he thought, 'should lead to a state of mind in which man can accept his modern environment'. He hoped a step has been taken toward relating 'modern clavichord music with the central points of modern thinking'.<sup>16</sup>

Michael Thomas was also an advocate for the claviorganum and brought to notice four examples. That of the Earl of Wemyss was the subject of a BBC programme,<sup>17</sup> and the John Crang harpsichord of 1745 with Snetzler pipework was featured on recordings.<sup>18</sup> He thought these combined instruments can add 'a certain quality or spice' to 18th-century music, 'which it is a pity to have lost'.

### Building and restoration

Most formative for Thomas' ideas about instrument building and restoring was his extensive experience seeing the inner construction of historic instruments. His early science training gave him an enquiring and empirical desire to understand the relation of even the smallest difference in construction features and the tonal qualities produced. As the supervisor of a workshop, he was in an unparalleled position to experiment with instruments to test how valid were his inferences about the effect of construction features.

Instead of what he called 'superficial mechanical aspects' of instruments, Thomas attended to the 'deeper aspects' of instrument construction that he thought more important than measurements of string lengths and plucking points, which perhaps were the easiest variables to record. He believed that (although their importance had been recognized) soundboard barring, case depth, thickness of sides, air resonance volumes, bridge placement, thinning of the soundboard, vibrating areas around the bridge, the curve of the bass end of the bridge, and types of wood were of greater importance in affecting the instrument's tone than string lengths and plucking points.<sup>19</sup>

As a result of his close examination of historic instruments, he came to reject many of the orthodoxies of the field. The prevailing historical frame for understanding the field, as established by Raymond Russell, was that the subject can only be approached intelligibly in terms of the five major national schools (Italy, the Low Countries, France, the British Isles and Germany). From his continuing discovery of instruments with singular construction features at variance to the

representative instruments of the national schools, he rejected the utility of the national schools concept (at least until the standardized instruments in the later 18th century) and the concept of the polarization between northern (Flemish) and southern (Italian) instruments. He often speculated about the circulation of practices between national builders. Given this 'tremendous variation' within the national schools and the international circulation of features, he urged builders abandon the fixation on slavishly copying the canonic instruments. In his own instruments, he applied many of the construction features he found in historic instruments.<sup>20</sup>

More controversial was his belief that historical instruments in museums or collections should not be treated as furniture, not as artifacts for display, but made available to be heard and played.<sup>21</sup> Thomas believed restoration 'should be made with the minimum of change'; new keyboards and jacks (which were recognizably new) could be added to make them playable. Instruments should be restored to a state prior to recent restoration, and not according to preconceived ideas about instruments. The goal was 'to repair as simply as possible and make instruments play music'.<sup>22</sup> He insisted on the use of natural quill.

### The Harpsichord Centre

In 1971 Thomas set up The Harpsichord Centre on Chiltern Street, just off Baker Street and Marylebone Road, which he owned and managed with Janine Jackson.<sup>23</sup> Here he had much of his instrument collection. Shortly afterwards he sold Hurley Manor. The Harpsichord Centre became a magnet for anyone interested in early keyboard instruments, who had an unequalled opportunity to examine and play the instruments. In the lower floor were presented recitals on instruments. Among the performers were Lady Susi Jeans, Gillian Weir, William Christie, Ian Harwood and Thomas himself. Craftsmen working for Thomas included Peter Wilder, Trevor Beckerleg, Alan Whear, Keith Theobald, John Bowen, John Isaacs, Jean Mauer, David Law, William Mitchell and Clifford West, and later Roger Murray.

About this time, he began collaborating with Wolfgang Zuckermann, for whom he designed clavichord and harpsichord kits, which were sold through the Harpsichord Centre, in addition to his own finished instruments. For a short time had a branch in Amsterdam. In 1976, he issued a pamphlet catalogue of his collection at the Harpsichord Centre.



Illus.3 Michael Thomas tuning one of his double-manual harpsichords

When Philip Shirtcliff, who was an enthusiast for early music, started a programme at the London College of Furniture for early musical instruments, Michael taught there from 1971 to 1973. He brought in instruments to study and copy and used the classes as a laboratory to have experimental instruments built according to his ideas. Ultimately, a three-year course was established, and students who attended the London College of Furniture include Ian Tucker, Miles Hellon, John Rawson, Sean Rawnsley and Anne Fahy.

With Edgar Hunt's founding of the *English Harpsichord Magazine* in 1973, Thomas had a sympathetic venue for a series of technical articles in which he shared the results of his examination and restoration of historical instruments from his own collection and those of others (see the Bibliography below). Although the documentation of instruments and their locations are not as exact as might now be wished, the well-illustrated articles have an abundance of observations that could be used – as Michael desired – by modern builders not beholden to building 'slavish' copies.

In June 1975, while in Cork delivering an instrument and giving lessons, he met Pauline Mac Sweeney who became a student and later partner, with whom he toured giving recitals. He closed the Harpsichord Centre in 1976, and Malcolm Greenhalgh took over the premises for his Early Music Shop. In 1977, he bought the Old Rectory at Whissonsett, in Norfolk, and moved there with his collection, from where he directed his instrument business. He sold the rectory in 1984.

### Saussines

Michael had always loved southern France, and long had a little holiday house near St Tropez, where he spent

much time. His friend and collaborator Michel Foussard arranged for a three-year exhibition of his collection in the Palais Lascaris in Nice, for which a colour catalogue was published in 1978. After selling the Old Rectory he moved to France permanently, and in 1990 bought a château in Saussines near Montpellier, where with Pauline he raised a family with two sons, Eoin and Alex. Several of his new acquisitions were shown at an exhibition at the Musée Vulliod-Saint-Germain in Pezenas in summer 1996.<sup>24</sup>

When Clifford Bartlett started his *Early Music Review* in June 1994, he enlisted Michael as reviewer. He reviewed CDs monthly until March 1997. From Château de Saussines he sent in handwritten reviews, which Bartlett recalled required a lot of guesswork in deciphering his handwriting.<sup>25</sup> He approached reviewing not as a severe critic, but in the spirit of a listener who wanted to convey (when possible) his delight in a recording; he wasn't afraid to say when a performance was 'enjoyable and cheerful'. While he felt an exact and accurate technique was admirable, he liked finding 'drama and lyricism'. He valued singing, expressive playing, with proper phrasing, articulation, and 'natural feeling and understanding'. Like Couperin, he preferred to be moved by a performance than amazed by the technical brilliance. For a brief notice of a performance of his 'favourite music' on a 'lovely harpsichord' played with a 'gentle swaying rhythm', he closed that 'instead of writing more I'll listen to it again'.<sup>26</sup>

He was generous with praise for performances that pleased him. When disappointed, he phrased his reservations as suggestions for achieving better musical results. With his knowledge of instruments, he was alert to whether the choice of instruments was appropriate to the music. He was not without some flashes of wit: lamenting how a repeat spoils the effect in Froberger's *Tombeau de Monsieur Blancrocher*, he observed, 'To die once thus is a tragedy, to do so twice is sheer carelessness'.<sup>27</sup>

But he was sympathetic toward the earlier generation of performers and instruments. Of a reissue of Landowska recordings, despite the 'dull thud' of the harpsichord, a performance of a C. P. E Bach concerto 'survives as an intelligible musical experience', and two Mozart concertos have 'colour, variety of tone, [and] impeccable runs in a performance that is both virtuosic and poetic'.<sup>28</sup> He called a performance by Dr Andreas Beurmann of the Bach *French Overture* on a Maendler-Schramm of 1936 a 'dramatic and splendid performance on this splendid machine which tends to steal the show' from the others on historic instruments.<sup>29</sup>

Thomas began to realize the need to disperse his collection. In 1986 he approached the Bate Collection, Oxford, about depositing instruments there, no doubt because the Bate's remit was to make instruments available for playing and teaching. From an initial list of 17 instruments available, after protracted delays in obtaining funding, the Bate finally bought (or had donated) 11 instruments in 1992.<sup>30</sup> Earlier, some instruments had entered the collection of Dr Rodger Mirrey. He sold some instruments to Dr Beurmann for his collection at Schloss Hasselburg, and to the Cobbe Collection.

At Château de Saussines, he established a life he had always enjoyed with family and instruments around him and a stream of visitors. Amazingly to his friends, he gave up smoking. Despite ill health he continued to locate instruments to restore, sell, trade or add to his collection. But mostly he loved to spend the late evenings playing the clavichord when everyone else had gone to bed. In 1997 he suffered a stroke and passed away in Montpellier on 14 March.

Michael Thomas' advocacy of early keyboard instruments was his life's ruling passion. He is remembered for his humorous storytelling, unfailing generosity in lending instruments to students and performers, and ceaseless willingness to share his time discoursing on all aspects of keyboard instruments. Unmistakable was his calling card: a pile of cigarette ash on an instrument he had recently played.

His enthusiasm and impatience in rescuing antique instruments and making them playable for performers and collectors often meant his restorations were not up to the prevailing best practices, nor were the instruments he produced always of the highest quality. His experiments to produce singing, resonant instruments occasionally produced instruments in later need of repair. But undeniable are his contributions to the field of early keyboard instruments, a legacy that is manifest in historical instruments that made their way to players and collections worldwide, the careers of builders he fostered, performers who had access to historic instruments for performance and recordings, and his recordings and recitals that introduced listeners and audiences to early music played on historic instruments – and of course especially on the clavichord.

One could do no better than, as did his longtime friend Charles Mould, to think of him 'in the midst of a celestial instrument collection, where he will never need to tune again, but can play his beloved clavichord for the delight of the entire heavenly host'.<sup>31</sup>

*Thomas McGeary worked for Michael Thomas in 1972 and 1973. He later pursued musicology and among other interests between 1973 and 1995 published over a dozen articles and reviews about early keyboard instruments in the Organ Yearbook, Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society, English Harpsichord Magazine and Early Keyboard Journal. Following in the path of Frank Hubbard, many articles are translations of early treatises and encyclopedia articles.*

### Articles by Michael Thomas

'The claviorganum', *The Consort*, xvi (1959), pp.29–32.

[Tribute to Dorothy Swainson], *The Consort*, xvi (1959), p.34.

'Modern music for the clavichord,' *The Consort*, xviii (1961), pp.96–103.

'String gauges of old Italian harpsichords', *Galpin Society Journal*, xxiv (1971), pp.69–78.

'The fretted clavichord', *English Harpsichord Magazine*, i/2 (April 1974), pp.39–47.

'Early French harpsichords', *English Harpsichord Magazine*, i/3 (October 1974), pp.73–84.

'Venetian harpsichords', *English Harpsichord Magazine*, i/4 (April 1975), pp.109–120.

'The development of the tuning and tone colour of an instrument made in Venice about 1500', *English Harpsichord Magazine*, i/5 (October 1975), pp.145–153, 155.

*The keyboard instruments of Michael Thomas* (London, 1976).

'The tunings and pitch of early clavichords', *English Harpsichord Magazine*, i/6 (April 1976), pp.175–180.

'Harpsichords which have been found recently in France', *English Harpsichord Magazine*, ii/7 (October 1976), pp.158–163.

'The harpsichord at the Courtauld Institute', *English Harpsichord Magazine*, i/7 (October 1976), pp.194–197.

'Notes and corrections to former articles and new information', *English Harpsichord Magazine*, i/7 (October 1976), pp.211–219.

'Further thoughts and notes', *English Harpsichord Magazine*, i/8 (April 1977), pp.233–235.

'A harpsichord method', *English Harpsichord Magazine*, i/8 (April 1977), pp.240–243.

*Clavecins et clavicordes*, museum catalogue, Musée Instrumental du Conservatoire National de Région de Nice, Palais Lascaris (Nice, 1978).

'Thoughts on the restoration of harpsichords', *English Harpsichord Magazine*, ii/3 (October 1978), pp.62–67.

'The upright harpsichord,' *English Harpsichord Magazine*, ii/4 (April 1979), pp.84–92.

'Recent harpsichord restorations', *English Harpsichord Magazine*, iii/3 (October 1982), pp.71–72, 79.

'The temperament of Bach's "48"', *English Harpsichord Magazine*, iv/2 (1986), pp.18–21.

Booklet notes to J.S. Bach, *Well Tempered Clavier, Book II*, 2 CD set, Alpha CDCA 931–932.

'Clavichord symposium', *Early Music Review*, xv (November 1995), p.8.

'On hearing Dr. Beurmann's collection' *Early Music Review*, xxiv (October 1996), pp.18–19.

## Acknowledgements

In preparation of this article, I am grateful for the assistance of Pauline Mac Sweeny, Peter Bavington, Judith Wardman, Christopher Nobbs, Francis Knights, David Law, William Mitchell, Mimi Waitzman, Lewis Jones, Roger Murray, Brian Blood (Dolmetsch Foundation), Andrew Lott (London Metropolitan Archives) and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. For the *New Grove* entry on Michael Thomas, see Christopher Nobbs, 'Michael Thomas [Harold]', *Oxford Music Online*.

## Notes

- 1 *Early Music Review*, x (May 1995), p.17.
- 2 Michael Thomas, tribute to Dorothy Swainson in *The Consort*, xvi (1959), p.34.
- 3 For Thomas on Goff, Michael Thomas, booklet notes to J.S. Bach, *Well Tempered Clavier, Book II*, 2 CD set, Alpha CDCA 931–932 (live recording, 1987–1988); 'The fretted clavichord', *English Harpsichord Magazine*, i/2 (April 1974), pp.39–47 at p.39; 'On hearing Dr. Beurmann's collection', *Early Music Review*, xxiv (October 1996), pp.18–19; and 'Clavichord symposium', *Early Music Review*, xv (November 1995), p.8.
- 4 Despite Goff's persistence, Swainson insisted on using her Dolmetsch clavichord; see Dorothy Swainson, Unpublished autobiographical memoirs, transcribed by Katharine Cobbett. Private collection, Cobbett family, Bishopsbourne, Canterbury. For extracts from Swainson's memoirs, see Katharine Hawnt, '*Strange Luggage*: Raymond Russell, the Harpsichord and Early Music Culture in the Mid-Twentieth Century', PhD thesis (University of Southampton, 2021), pp.235–239. Swainson did not like Gough's clavichords because the tangents were too close to the string.
- 5 Swainson, Memoirs.
- 6 For his thoughts on clavichords, see especially David Law, 'Clavichords in Britain No.5: the pentagonal clavichord, 1982, by Michael Thomas in the Bate Collection, Oxford', *British Clavichord Society Newsletter*, v (June 1996), pp.3–6 [with unpublished letter], Thomas (1974) and Thomas (1987).
- 7 Swainson, Memoirs.

## Obituaries of Michael Thomas

Charles Mould, *Early Music*, xxv (1997), pp.539–540.

Michele Hanson, 'Instruments of Desire,' *Guardian* (24 March 1997), p.10, reprinted in the *British Clavichord Society Newsletter*, viii (June 1997), p.21.

Clifford Bartlett, *Early Music Review*, xxx (May 1997), p.20.

Christopher Stembidge, *Early Music Review*, xxx (May 1997), p.1.

David Law, *British Clavichord Society Newsletter*, viii (June 1997), p.22.

J. R. & L. M. Mirrey, *British Clavichord Society Newsletter*, viii (June 1997), p.23.

Nicholas Dicker, *Early Music Review*, xxi (June 1997), p.24.

- 8 Wolfgang Zuckerman, *The Modern Harpsichord: Twentieth Century Instruments and Their Makers* (New York, 1969).
- 9 In addition to those listed in catalogues of his collection, a provenance search through the online Boalch-Mould database will identify many of these instruments: <https://db.boalch.org/instruments/advancedsearch>.
- 10 The first of the two BBC programmes from Brussels is preserved at the British Library, Sound and Moving Images catalogue, C1398/0186.\*
- 11 Thomas (1974), p.44; he reported that Thurston Dart ‘used to say there are five types of vibrato on every note, but one can develop the tone on every note and he used to feel the keys using a sort of double touch’; ‘Clavichord symposium,’ *Early Music Review*, xv (November 1995), p.8. To achieve vibrato, Thomas held the strings needed to have low tension and a greater than usual distance to tangent (Thomas (1974), p.45).
- 12 Thomas (1987), p.5.
- 13 For the clavichord recordings, see Francis Knights, *Clavichord Discography* (Mytholmroyd, 2020).
- 14 Many reviews can be located in the index to *The Gramophone*, <https://www.gramophone.co.uk>; see also the online discography.\*
- 15 Issued on Record Society RSX 16. An audio copy is preserved at the British Library, Sound and Moving Images catalogue, 2LP0076564. The compositions are: Anthony Leonard Winstone Scott, *Adagio for Two Clavichords* (with Mary Verney); Edmund Duncan (Charles) Rubbra, *Introduction, Aria and Fugue*, Op.104; Robert Still, *Suite for Clavichord*; Lennox Randal Francis Berkeley, *Prelude and Fugue*, Op.55/3; and Eugene Goossens, *Forlane and Tocata for Clavichord*. Fuller information about composers and compositions from Francis Bedford, *Harpichord and Clavichord Music of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, 1993). See also Francis Knights, ‘The evolution of modern clavichord music’ (forthcoming).
- 16 Michael Thomas, ‘Modern music for the clavichord,’ *The Consort*, xviii (1961), pp.96–103.
- 17 Introduction by the Earl of Wemyss and performances by Thomas; broadcast on 18 February 1959 from Gosford House, East Lothian (the harpsichord by Kirkmann is Online Boalch-Mould No.930). The programme is available from the British Library, Sound and Moving Images Catalogue, T10538 RC1. See also Michael Thomas, ‘The claviorganum’, *The Consort*, xvi (1959), pp.29–32.\*
- 18 The Crang-Sneztler (the Crang harpsichord is Online Boalch-Mould No.315) was featured on *The Claviorganum* (1968); Oryx 757; 1757 (stereo). He also located an upright example by Robert Woffington (1785); see Thomas, ‘The claviorganum’; Online Boalch-Mould No.2058)), now at the National Museum, Dublin, and an early 17th French example (now at the Beurmann Collection at the Museum für Kunst- und Gewerbe, Hamburg, No.27); see Andreas E. Beurmann, *Harpichords and more: harpsichords, spinets, clavichords* (Hildesheim, 2012), and Michael Thomas, *Clavecins et clavicordes*, museum catalogue, Musée Instrumental du Conservatoire National de Région de Nice, Palais Lascaris (Nice, 1978a). See also Stephen Wessel, ‘The claviorganum in England’, *English Harpsichord Magazine*, i/8 (April 1977), pp.226–233.
- 19 See especially, Michael Thomas, ‘Early French harpsichords’, *English Harpsichord Magazine*, i/3 (October 1974), pp.73–84; ‘Venetian harpsichords’, *English Harpsichord Magazine*, i/4 (April 1975), pp.109–120; and ‘Thoughts on the restoration of harpsichords’, *English Harpsichord Magazine*, ii/3 (October 1978b), pp.62–67.
- 20 Especially, for example, thinner than usual case walls that were glued to a heavy frame, and experimental soundboard thinning and barring. He tended to use keyboards made by piano manufacturers, which by consensus were too heavy.
- 21 Thomas (1978b).
- 22 Thomas (1978b), p.67. Unlike restorations done by curators for museum collections, Thomas unfortunately did not document his restorations according to prevailing best practices.
- 23 See Thomas McGeary, ‘The Harpsichord Centre’, *The Harpsichord*, vi/3 (August–October 1973), p.12.
- 24 See *Exposition ‘Voyage Musical’*. Exhibition catalogue, Musée de Vulliod-Saint-Germain, Pezenas, 15 July–15 October, 1996; *The Keyboard Instruments of Michael Thomas* (London, 1976); and Michael Thomas (1978a).
- 25 *Early Music Review*, xxx (May 1997), p.20.
- 26 *Early Music Review*, xix (April 1996), p.15.
- 27 *Early Music Review*, vii (February 1995), p.16.
- 28 *Early Music Review*, vii (February 1995), p.22.
- 29 *Early Music Review*, xxi (April 1996), p.13.
- 30 David Millard, ‘Michael Thomas & the Bate Collection,’ *Sounding Board*, vii (Summer 2013), pp.55–62.
- 31 *Early Music*, xxv (1997), p.540.