

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)

Remembering Malcolm Rose (1948-2022)

Paul Simmonds



Malcolm Rose

On the occasions I need to write something about a friend or colleague, I always ask myself the same question; how well did I know this person?

I first met Malcolm Rose (3 February 1948-29 December 2022) in the mid-1970s. He then lived in Mayfield, and was on the committee of the Mayfield Festival, and my ensemble Brighton Baroque had been booked for a concert. I remember little of the event, but it would certainly have been the first time I played one of Malcolm's harpsichords, probably one of his first Hensch copies. Certainly a friendship ensued then which lasted nigh on half a century. He was present at our wedding celebration when he and Karin Richter helped with the disposal of a magnum of champagne, a gift from my then-landlady. My first, informal, recording of Duphy harpsichord works was made on his house instrument.

We kept contact after my wife and I moved to Switzerland in 1982. By then he had married Karin. Unlike many

of today's makers, Malcolm was strictly a 'harpsichord man' – clavichords were not his thing, so when asked to make a clavichord, he passed the order onto Karin, which proved for her the start of an international career as a clavichord maker. But I digress...

My wife and I returned to the UK in 1990, which coincided with the move of Malcolm and Karin to Lewes. Here I must mention the commodity with which Malcolm's name is firmly associated – music wire. In the mid-1970s Malcolm began his researches into historic music wire, with the aid of a metallurgist. He built the drawing machines himself and in 1981 began production. What started out as a project to benefit his own instruments and those of a few colleagues grew into the international business it is today. Back in 1990 I had time on my hands and agreed to help out in the wire room two days a week, little dreaming that this would be an ongoing employment for the next 17 years.

This was the period in which I learned most what I know of Malcolm. He was a reserved person, who rarely allowed one glimpses of his innermost thoughts or past life. Once, on exchanging thoughts on our respective school days, I learned that he'd been to Hurstpierpoint College, where I understood he was not overly happy, and to get a few hours away from it had taken up jogging. I did not get to know Malcolm so much from what he related but I got to know him well from his actions, and these revealed more than any words. With time I could read his moods in his facial expressions and actions, and could sometimes see where his life was leading him, before his internal decisions translated into actions.

Making and restoring instruments of the harpsichord family was his passion. He did not work fast, which meant that a new harpsichord was long in the gestation, but the end result was impeccable. He had discovered an artist who produced exquisite soundboard decorations so, customer willing, the soundboard would sometimes undertake a journey to Cornwall, often delaying the completion of the harpsichord by months. In Lewes he employed a fine metal worker to make stop levers and other metal accessories. I think he respected me as a player, and I was often diverted from wire-making to play, comment on or set up an instrument. This had



Malcolm in the workshop with his daughter Sarah

to be done with meticulous precision, and I follow his guidelines to this day. I learned a great deal from him and I like to think that he appreciated my input.

While waiting for a soundboard to return after decoration, he would often be restoring an instrument, mainly from the then-collection of Rodger Mirrey. We would discuss the problems presented by each instrument. His work on these instruments was a source of wonder to me. In particular I remember the harpsichord by Thomas Barton arriving in the workshop, almost in its component parts and much eaten by woodworm. He restored it to playing condition, and after I had given an inaugural recital on it, I ordered a copy from him. This harpsichord will be the last instrument I part with. Readers may know that the original has a split-key short-octave, a feature which would normally prohibit making the keyboard transposing. Malcolm came up with a solution, so my copy can be transposed up or down without the loss, or drastic retuning, of the bass notes.

Malcolm and I were often of-like mind, without much verbal interchange. His move to Lewes necessitated the thorough restoration of the timber-framed building

which was to become The Workshop. On first seeing the space on the upper floor, with its ancient roof timbers, my wife and I suggested the possibility of small concerts, only to discover that Malcolm and Karin had much the same idea. Timbers and doors were adjusted to be wide enough for workbenches to be moved out. We shared the cost of 50 chairs, and the first concert took place in 1991. From then on five concerts a year were organized, mainly in the field of early music. To my knowledge the series is still alive and running.

Apart from harpsichords, Malcolm shared with me a mild obsession with long-case clocks and Balkan music. Regrettably he never made it to Switzerland after our move here so I could not introduce him to our Lenzkirch 'Standuhr', or to hear his opinion of the music of Romica Pucianu.

I would like to extend my deepest sympathy to the family. His early and unexpected death is a tragic loss for all of us who were privileged to know him. I would also like to thank Karin Richter, his first wife, and Sabine Klaus, to whom he was married at the time of his death, for looking over and correcting my text.