

# The Boston Clavichord Society

## Newsletter

Number 11, Fall, 2001

### Clavichord Day at the Boston Early Music Festival

On June 14, 2001, the BCS presented Clavichord Day in conjunction with the Boston Early Music Festival and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The event, which took place in Remis Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, consisted of two sessions, one in the morning (10:30 a.m. - noon) and one in the afternoon (1:00 - 3:30).

The morning session began with opening remarks by Richard Troeger, President of the Boston Clavichord Society. Following this, our museum host, Darcy Kuronen, Curator of Musical Instruments at the Museum, introduced the various clavichords belonging to the Museum, all of which were on display. These included the famous "Tosi" (with an apparently inauthentic signature), the J.C.G. Schiedmayer of 1796, the 1800 Horn and Mack, a 1907 Dolmetsch/Chickering, and an experimental reconstruction of a sixteenth-century clavichord by the late Edwin Ripin. Also on stage were a clavichord built by Allan Winkler on the model of the Museum's Schiedmayer, and two seven-foot copies of the 1806 Lindholm/Soderstrom by Andrew Lagerquist, based on the instrument at Finchcocks. Following Mr. Kuronen's very charming and informative speech, our guest artist from Finland, Mikko Korhonen, played a series of improvisations on the various clavichords. He began with the "Tosi" and an Italianate toccata. Next, several dance-suite movements in the style of the eighteenth-century were heard on the Schiedmayer. The Winkler/Schiedmayer was heard in a march-like movement. The improvisations on the Lagerquist instruments included a fantasia of strong contrasts,

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*The BCS hopes to present Pamela Dellal, mezzo-soprano, and Peter Sykes, clavichordist, in a program featuring songs of C.P.E. Bach in 2002. Professor William Youngren, an expert on these songs, describes this little-known part of Bach's oeuvre in the following article.*

### The Songs of C. P. E. Bach

The music of C. P. E. Bach has become increasingly popular over the last few decades – indeed, it is hard to listen very long to an FM "concert music" station without encountering one of his chamber or orchestral pieces. Yet even listeners who are quite familiar with his work are not aware that he wrote any songs. In fact, he wrote almost 300, which were very popular during his lifetime and many of which still sound splendid today. This treasure trove of hitherto neglected music is of great interest not only to singers but also to their accompanists. Bach's favorite keyboard instrument was, of course, the clavichord; because his best songs are religious, many of them dealing with intense and intimate emotions, they are particularly well suited to the delicate and expressive accompaniment of a clavichord.

One reason for the astonishing neglect of Bach's songs is that late-19<sup>th</sup>-century music historians were fascinated by the question of how "absolute music," lacking a verbal text to guide the composer, could be as finely organized as the great symphonies and chamber works of the Classical period. They minutely examined the relations between the binary forms of the Baroque and ternary Classical sonata form. Because they were writing under the influence of Darwin, they assumed the necessary presence of a middle term or "missing link" between the two sorts of form. This many of them discovered in C. P. E. Bach's instrumental works. Thus while historians writing early in the century praised Bach's vocal works almost as warmly as 18<sup>th</sup>-century critics had done, those writ-

ing in the century's latter half, after the 1859 publication of *The Origin of Species*, directed their attention solely to Bach's instrumental works and almost unanimously dismissed his vocal works – which most of them had probably barely looked at – as "weak."

Another reason is that most of us think of the German *lied* as beginning with Schubert and the later Romantics. Though histories of the *lied* may deal briefly with Heinrich Albert, Adam Krieger, and the other well-known 17<sup>th</sup>-century song composers, they usually tell us precious little about the 18<sup>th</sup>-century song. For in fact almost no strophic songs were published in Germany between the mid-1680s and the mid-1730s, a period Germans still refer to as *die liederlose Zeit*, the songless time. The through-composed arias of Italian operas, cantatas, and oratorios, in which the music could follow every twist and turn of the verbal text, had made strophic songs, in which the same music is repeated for each verse of the text, seem woefully inexpressive. How the strophic song was gradually reinstated as a viable form is an interesting story but a long and complex one, and I cannot go into it here.

The absence of strophic songs from the musical marketplace accounts for the fact that C. P. E. Bach, so far as we know, composed none for publication until 1741, when he was 27 years old, and had already served three years as harpsichordist at the Prussian court. By the end of that year

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## An Interview with Paul Irvin

**P**aul Irvin has been an important part of the American early-keyboard scene for decades, well-known for his fine and painstakingly constructed instruments. Other builders have commented to me on his generosity with sharing information and insights. In this two-part interview, Irvin explains the basis of his approach to reconstructing early keyboard instruments.

**Richard Troeger**

**RT: What drew you to instrument making? And to the clavichord and harpsichord in particular?**

**PI:** As in many things why I came is not why I stayed. I first became acquainted with the existence of the harpsichord while studying chemistry in college. A little later, a friend of mine was interested in playing harpsichord in addition to flute and piano. Buying one ready-made was not a financial option, so kits were discovered, and a Zuckermann 6' slantside (David Way's first design) was purchased and successfully built with two 8' stops, a 4' and a buff.

Later, the woman who was to become my wife expressed an interest in starting keyboard lessons as an adult. She had discovered in college that she preferred the sound of the harpsichord and its music to the piano and its music (a preference I had also acquired), so kits were investigated again and another one purchased. This was from a different maker. I initially thought, upon inspecting the parts, that some apprentice had made it up and got it out the door without the boss seeing it: the parts were warped, cupped, twisted, worm-eaten (the pinblock!), and burned from a very dull saw blade; and the case sides were all of different heights. Trying to dry-assemble it revealed that no matter how it was attempted there was always a very sizable gap where parts would not meet. Upon calling the outfit the man with whom I spoke told me that if I could not handplane a four-foot long board to height I should not be trying to build a kit. I explained that I did not have the tools to do so, which was

why I was buying a kit, and that I had successfully built a harpsichord before without the need for such tools or skills. He replied that I was too damn fussy and hung up on me.

Feeling I could do no worse than this example of some supposed twenty years experience, I reread Hubbard's book, designed my own harpsichord, and built it. Along the way, there were always design choices to be made. When I had successfully finished this double-bentside spinet I was curious about some of the things I had

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## A Note from the Editor

**A**lan Durfee was a co-founder of the Boston Clavichord Society and our first president. He has also been the editor of our newsletter since its inception. A few months ago Alan decided to step down from this responsibility. Alan has produced eleven excellent newsletters (the first one is numbered "0") and we are extremely grateful to him. The newsletter has been a valuable resource for all Friends of the BCS and is our key link to those Friends who live far from the Boston area. Alan told me recently that he will have more time to write for the newsletter now that he is not editing it. He has acted on his word and has submitted an entertaining report which you will find in this issue.

As the new editor of the newsletter I wish to reiterate our invitation to our readers to send us articles, letters, and questions. Graphic material is also welcome. ***I especially urge you to let us know about any clavichord or clavichord-related events that take place in your locality.*** I feel sure that recitals, house concerts, and so forth are taking place that we never hear about – and therefore cannot publicize or report.

Thanks to Paul Monsky and Justin Kim for their assistance with many of the details of producing this newsletter. Ben Martinez of Walden Associates has done the graphic design, as he has since issue number 1. The visual attractiveness of this newsletter is due to Ben whose undercompensated work makes him a true Friend of the BCS.

**Beverly Woodward**

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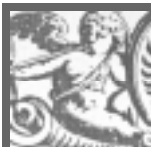
**Submissions:** This Newsletter is a forum for its members. We welcome articles, letters, questions and other contributions. Copy can be submitted by mail, e-mail or diskette to the Editor. Please contact her about preferred format before making a submission. The copy deadlines are February 15 and September 1.

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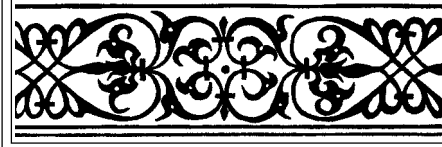
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C.P.E. Bach, continued from p. 1

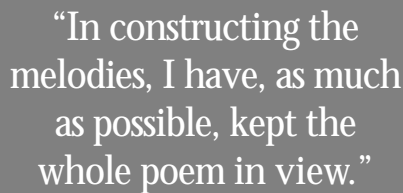
he had composed 27 keyboard sonatas (including all but one of the so-called "Prussian Sonatas"); nine keyboard concertos; two sonatas for violin, nine for flute, and one each for oboe and cello; six trio sonatas; his first symphony; and five lost cantatas – but only one song: the next one would not come until two years later. Moreover, while he wrote only nine songs during the years 1741-1755, he added to his oeuvre 75 sonatas and other major keyboard pieces; 25 keyboard concertos; and many chamber works in all categories. It was only in the late 1750s that he began to compose songs with regularity and in volume.

Though Bach was characteristically cautious about testing the market for songs, he soon established his preeminence among the composers who made up what is often referred to as the First Berlin Song School. He did not immediately venture a song collection of his own, but instead offered contributions to the first important anthologies: of those first nine songs, three appeared in the last two (1741 and 1743) volumes of J. F. Gräfe's four-part *Samlung [sic] verschiedener und auserlesener Oden*, and five in the two volumes *Oden mit Melodien*, published in 1753 and 1755 by C. W. Ramler and C. G. Krause. These were the collections that spearheaded what Germans call the "Aufschwung" (upswing) of the strophic song, and most of the songs they contained were rather light and jaunty. Bach's, though secular, were far more thoughtful and inward-turning, their music far more expressive of the word-to-word progress of the text.

It was in 1758 that Bach found his true voice as a composer of songs with *Herrn Professor Gellerts geistliche Oden und Lieder mit Melodien*. Christian Fürchtegott Gellert (1715-1769), in addition to being a well-known playwright and novelist, was one of the most important German lyric poets of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. When his collection of religious poems, *Geistliche Oden und Lieder*, appeared in 1757, Berlin composers hastened to set selections from it to music. But only Bach set all 54 poems – as 55 songs, one poem being divided into two songs. As he tells us in the preface to his collection, "I, for my part, was so deeply touched by the excellence of the sublime, instructive thoughts with which these poems are filled, that I was unable to restrain myself from

setting all of them, without exception, to music." Instead of arranging his settings to follow the order of the poems in Gellert's collection, or some other plan, Bach tells us that he has simply given us his songs in the order in which he wrote them – perhaps another sign of the enthusiastic fervor in which they were composed. Moreover, Bach here, as in some of his later prefaces, shows his awareness of the difficulty of making one strophe of music fit all the stanzas of a lyric poem: "In constructing the melodies, I have, as much as possible, kept the whole poem in view."

The success of his Gellert collection encouraged Bach to collect his early songs,



"In constructing the melodies, I have, as much as possible, kept the whole poem in view."

and to add some new ones to them, to produce the *Oden mit Melodien* of 1762. Two years later he once again turned his attention to religious subjects, and published 12 settings, of religious poems by poets other than Gellert, as an "Anhang" or appendix to the Gellert volume. During the next few years he contributed songs, mainly of a secular nature, to various magazines, particularly to J. H. von Voss's *Musen-Almanach*, which was to play such an important role in the folksong movement of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. But the success of the Gellert collection had made it clear that religious songs were Bach's real forte. For it was only religious texts that called forth the exciting, sometimes even bizarre, experiments with harmony that were so prominent a characteristic of his best work.

Therefore his next big song-writing project was to set 42 of the elaborated poetic versions of the Psalms published a few years earlier by Johann Andreas Cramer (1723-1788). Cramer was many things: village pastor, magazine editor, all-round man of letters, and, eventually, court preacher to the Danish Court – a post in which he behaved with exceptional courage during the years when the court was filled with corruption and intrigue. But

although he was a friend and disciple of Gellert, and in fact wrote Gellert's first biography, Cramer was not much of a poet. There are a number of reasons, too complex to go into here, to believe that Bach set Cramer's rather mawkishly sentimental Psalm translations because of his admiration for the man rather than out of aesthetic appreciation of his poems.

*Herrn Doctor Cramers übersetzte Psalmen mit Melodien*, published in 1774, is a most curious volume. It is not simply a collection of songs but rather contains songs, both simple and complex, very simple chorales, and wildly joyous, extended cantata-like pieces. Gradually one sees that Bach has arranged the various types of pieces in sequences, each sequence containing a number of songs, at least one chorale (usually to a grieving, penitential text), and finally an elaborate outpouring of joy in one or more of the cantata-like pieces. The mystery is how Bach imagined the work being performed, whether entire or only in parts, and under what conditions.

By this time in his career it was established that Bach's most characteristic and successful vocal genre was the strophic religious song, and yet he continued the sort of vigorous experimentation undertaken in the Cramer volume. During the mid-1770s, just after the Cramer volume had appeared, he was writing simple quasi-folksongs for Voss's *Musen-Almanach* and also elaborate through-composed vocal pieces – in particular a long through-composed setting of a poem by the Swiss poet and scientist Albrecht Haller, of which he had earlier done a strophic setting, and an extremely complex, 206-bar cantata based on Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg's difficult, allusive poem "Die Grazien."

For his last big song-writing project Bach once again chose the poems of a lesser poet – lesser even than Cramer. Christoph Christian Sturm (1740-1786) is not even mentioned in most histories of 18<sup>th</sup>-century German poetry. He was not a professional man of letters but was head pastor of St. Peter's, one of the five great Hamburg churches over whose music Bach had charge. Earlier, Sturm had written two very popular collections of gently pious, easy-going, prose ruminations on every aspect of the human and natural worlds, redounding of course to the glory of God. The 60 poems by Sturm that Bach set, in two vol-

umes of 30 each, published in 1780 and 1781, came from a 1780 collection called *Lieder und Kirchengesänge*. As with Cramer, one has the distinct feeling that Bach's choice of texts was again based not so much on aesthetic judgment as on personal admiration of the poet, who in this case was a close friend.

It was in the 1780s that the liberal faction of Hamburg Lutherans struggled against the conservatives to allow open worship in Hamburg for other sects than their own. Their success came with the passing of the Toleration Mandate of 1785. From what one can gather, Sturm was a key figure in this victory, and Bach, though probably not an active participant, was sympathetic to the liberal cause.

The very last group of songs that Bach published during his lifetime sprang, one suspects, from similar political motives. In 1788, the year of his death, he contributed 12 songs to a volume of 38 *Freimäurer-Lieder*, the others being written by Johann Gottlieb Naumann, capellmeister at Dresden, and Johann Abraham Peter Schulz, who collaborated with Voss in popularizing the folksong movement. Bach was not, so far as we know, a Freemason. But his friends Lessing and Klopstock were, and so were many of the liberals who took part in the toleration struggle. For Freemasonry, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was the Enlightenment movement *par excellence*. While espousing no particular religion, it sought to instill in its members the ethical tenets recognized by all major religions. A cosmopolitan organization, it minimized differences among nations and creeds, seeking to recommend (and to practice) the universal constructive principles conducive to peace, harmony, virtue, and the advancement of human knowledge. We have evidence that Bach, at least four times in the late 1770s, conducted works of Handel in the building that was used for meetings by three of the Hamburg Masonic lodges. Though he was probably not himself a Mason, the conducting of these concerts, together with his contribution of songs to the Masonic collection, can probably be viewed as what we today should call a gesture of solidarity.

Finally, there is Bach's last volume of songs, which appeared posthumously, in 1789. Though it is usually referred to as *Neue Lieder-Melodien*, its carefully phrased full title is *Neue Lieder-Melodien nebst einer*

*Kantate zum Singen bey dem Klavier von Karl Philipp Emanuel Bach*. Evidently Bach thought it important to include the information that the volume contained not only songs but also a cantata – in fact his most ambitious cantata, the one written to the Gerstenberg poem. Moreover, he gave it pride of place, at the end of the volume.

C. P. E. Bach's songs, therefore, present both the singer and the player of 18<sup>th</sup>-century keyboard instruments with a wealth of new music to play and to enjoy. The trouble lies in getting hold of the songs themselves. Volumes of selections were published in 1922 by H. Roth and Otto Vrieslander, and in 1973 G. Olms of Hildesheim issued a facsimile reprint of the Gellert songs and Gellert "Anhang." For the other songs, you have to look at *RISM* to determine which library has which collection, and then make a phone call, describing exactly what you need. In my experience, all libraries involved are most willing to supply good clean photocopies, quickly and cheaply. One does, however, look forward to the day when Bach's songs can be bought, in good music stores, over the counter. And one also looks forward to the day when good recorded versions are available. At the moment, I know of only three: a reissue of a recording made in 1971, featuring Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, accompanied on the tangent piano by Jörg Demus (DG Archiv 435 169-2), and two fine recent discs (cpo 999 549-2 and 999 708-2), on which the baritone Klaus Mertens is accompanied on the fortepiano by Ludger Rémy.

*William H. Youngren*

*Clavichord Day, continued from p. 1*  
from dreamily romantic to impassioned. All of the clavichords projected very well in the room, and the audience was warmly receptive to Mr. Korhonen's outstanding playing.

Richard Troeger began the afternoon session with a brief address to welcome the new audience members and to introduce guest speaker Howard Schott, who gave a witty and wide-ranging lecture on the clavichord's revival period from the late nineteenth century to the advent of historically-based clavichord building in the later twentieth century. Following this, Peter Sykes and Richard Troeger played some brief passages on the Schiedmayer original and on Mr. Winkler's copy, and on the two Lagerquist/Lindholms, to demonstrate various contrasts and similarities. Peter Sykes then played Beethoven's variations on "Kind, willst du nicht schlafen?" using the Winkler/Schiedmayer, and Richard Troeger played the opening movement of the Sonata in F Sharp Minor by Friedrich Wilhelm Rust, using a Lagerquist/Lindholm. Finally, the two players joined forces (and the two Lagerquist instruments) in the Duetto in F Major by Wilhelm Friedemann Bach and the Duetto for Two Claviers by Johann Gottfried Muethel.

The two events drew gratifyingly large audiences (in all, some two hundred people), whose enthusiasm was infectious.

The BCS wishes again to express its gratitude to the Boston Early Music Festival and the Museum of Fine Arts for making Clavichord Day possible. We would also like to thank -Andrew Lagerquist, Allan Winkler, and Richard Troeger for providing clavichords.

*Paulette Grunden*

## Brauchli Book Awarded Prize

The American Musical Instrument Society's Publications Prizes Committee has announced that the Nicholas Bessaraboff Prize for 2001, honoring the best book-length organological study in the English language published in 1998-99, goes to Bernard Brauchli for his work *The Clavichord*, which appeared in 1998 in the series *Cambridge Musical Texts and Monographs* (Cambridge University Press). The book, with a preface by Christopher Hogwood, presents a history of the



clavichord. Beginning with the earliest-known references, it traces the clavichord's evolution up to the mid-nineteenth century, ending with a study of performance technique. What emerges is an overview of the critical role this instrument played both musically and socially for more than four centuries. Brauchli is also

well-known as a performer and as the founder, with Christopher Hogwood, of the *International Centre for Clavichord Studies* in Magnano, Italy, which offers symposia and specialized courses in clavichord construction and performance.

## The BCS 2001 Fall Season

The first BCS event this fall was held in late September when we were privileged to present a return appearance by Igor Kipnis. (Kipnis last performed for the BCS in September 1999.) He played a varied program which included works by Boehm, Kuhnau, J.S. Bach, C.P.E. Bach, J.G. Goldberg, Haydn, Benda, and Dussek. Kipnis is the editor of a critical edition of Dussek's *The Sufferings of the Queen of France* and has often performed the piece. He ended his recital with a spirited rendition of this work.

As of this writing there are two more events on the BCS calendar for the fall. On Saturday, November 3, the BCS will host a "Hands-On Clavichord Tryout for Keyboard Players" at the Slosberg Music Building at Brandeis University (10am-noon). A variety of clavichords will be available to try, as well as instructors to assist. Only a few days later, on Wednesday, November 7, Peter Sykes and Richard Troeger will present a lecture-demonstration on the clavichord for several music history classes at the New England Conservatory in Boston.

*Paul Irvin, continued from p.2*

not chosen for this instrument, and so decided to build a few more to find out how they would turn out structurally, acoustically, decoratively, and with respect to the action. After a few more such experiments, somebody one day asked how much one of them cost, and so a new career was born.

I first built a clavichord because I was intrigued by the mechanism and what I had read about the expressive possibilities of its sound. Soon after, I began taking intensive keyboard lessons at a piano institute that was willing to teach someone who would be playing a harpsichord at home. I found after a short time that when I was having trouble with a passage on the harpsichord, trying it on the clavichord brought more rapid improvement. Playing it on the harpsichord then seemed quite easy, and it was a snap on the pianos at the institute.

**RT: Do you make exact copies, or work in the style of a given maker?**

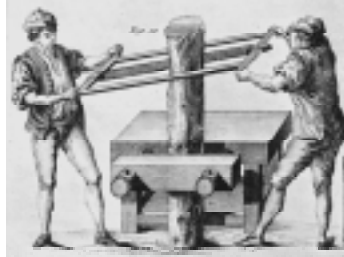
**PI:** I have at times made some pretty close copies of historical instruments, but I am wary of the words "exact" and "copy," and even of the concept ultimately.

One needs to ascertain what aspect it is that someone is trying to copy. It seems that what is most often copied is the visual appearance of an instrument: first the decoration (which is the most obvious to the lay person), then the dimensions, followed perhaps by the wood species and other materials. However, when it comes to trying to copy the sound—and a reasonable argument can be made that the salient characteristic and reason for the existence of a musical instrument is its sound—many of these elements are *correlates* and not necessarily *causes*.

Let's take soundboards for an example. The basic boundary shape of the soundboard is the major determinant of its modes. The specific pitches of these modes will be determined by the mass and stiffness of the board (or, more accurately, by its distribution of masses and stiffnesses). For copying soundboards "maps" are often made of the original by measuring the thickness of the wood in various places across its width and length. The thickness blends two primary causative factors into one correlating factor. If the board were thicker it would have more mass and be stiffer, and if it were thinner it would be have less mass and be less stiff. But that thickness measurement

does not tell us just what the density and stiffness characteristics of that soundboard are, and those are the factors which are going to actually determine the structural and acoustical properties of that soundboard. Considering the relatively wide range of densities and stiffness (especially cross grain stiffness) that typical soundboard species can have, a thickness measurement is not enough information to make an accurate copy of another instrument's soundboard. Measuring wood density is probably not so easy, but measuring stiffness does not take very high-tech instruments, although I know of no one doing it quantitatively.

Similarly if a brass bridge pin of certain dimensions is used in the original, often copiers seem to use the closest brass size they stock. A few might make a real effort to get the same size as the original. But so far I have not heard of anybody checking the stiffness and hardness characteristics of that brass to match those factors which directly relate to energy transfer and frequency filtering. In short, to copy the looks of an instrument is a relatively straightforward, visual process, but to make an acoustical copy the vibratory properties of the instrument need to be examined.



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