

## Some Observations on the Use of the Clavichord as a Practice Instrument for Organists

Peter Sykes

Peter Sykes is the President of the Boston Clavichord Society. In issue #29 of *Tangents* Henry Lebedinsky wrote about the uses of clavichord practice for organists. Peter Sykes continues this theme here.

The clavichord has often been used as a stand-in practice instrument for other keyboard instruments—harpsichord, fortepiano, and organ. At its most basic level, this practice can take the form of simply learning notes on the clavichord used as an alternative keyboard, usually at home and at any time of day or night; a very welcome option for any busy musician. In its most complex form, an organist can practice on a pedal clavichord, in which three separate clavichords combine to produce a two manual and pedal instrument suitable for playing anything in the Baroque or earlier repertoire. (As anyone who has played a clavichord knows, however, control of touch is a paramount element; when this is extended to one's feet on the pedalboard, the level of challenge immediately rises well above the comfort level of most organists.) This article will focus on a middle ground. How can practicing on a single clavichord, fretted or unfretted, help an organist gain musical insight, technical security, and refinement of touch?

There are many different types of clavichords, and even more types of organs. Before going any further, it is important to establish some categories as regards the organ. The mechanical action (or "tracker") organ is the kind we are talking about here, in which there is a direct connection between the key and the pallet valve that

(Continued on p.2)

## A New Critical Edition of C.P.E. Bach's *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*

Mark W. Knoll

Mark W. Knoll is an editor at the Packard Humanities Institute, which is publishing a critical edition of the complete works of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach in cooperation with the Bach-Archiv Leipzig, the Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, and Harvard University. Here Knoll discusses the publication of a new critical edition of Bach's famous *Versuch*.

A new critical edition of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's *Versuch über die wahre*

*Art das Clavier zu spielen* has recently been published as part of *C.P.E. Bach: The Complete Works* (hereafter CPEB: CW). Edited by Tobias Pleblich, the three-volume set consists of separate volumes for parts I and II of Bach's *Versuch* in the original German plus a volume of commentary in English. As with other volumes of CPEB: CW, the *Versuch* has been priced to make it affordable to the largest possible audience.<sup>1</sup>

It is scarcely necessary to extol the virtues of Bach's *Versuch* to the readers of *Tangents*. Besides being dear to the heart of all clavichordists, the *Versuch* still stands, after 250 years, as the foundation of modern keyboard technique in general and as an indispensable resource for information about performance practice in the eighteenth century. It has been translated into multiple languages, cited (and plagiarized) in nearly all keyboard treatises that followed, and used by countless teachers (starting with Bach himself) and self-learners of keyboard instruments.

For all of its fame and longevity, though, the *Versuch* has never been published in a modern critical edition. Most readers of

<sup>1</sup> C.P.E. Bach: *The Complete Works*, VII/1-3. Los Altos, California: The Packard Humanities Institute, 2011. ISBN 978-1-933280-42-4 (set of 3 vols.: *Versuch I*, xxxvii, 161 pp. ; *Versuch II*, xiv, 338 pp. ; *Commentary*, xxvii, 99 pp.), \$75.00. Available for ordering at the CPEB: CW website: [www.cpebach.org](http://www.cpebach.org)

today access the *Versuch* through facsimile reproductions of the first editions or, in this country and Britain, through William Mitchell's 1949 translation into English.\* None of these, however, present all of the material that Bach eventually intended to include. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century German editions of the *Versuch* also leave out much of Bach's text or—even worse—change it to reflect the fashion and language of their times.\*\* Thus an edition that includes all of what Bach wrote along

with a detailed commentary is a significant and welcome addition to the literature.

Part of the reason for the confusion surrounding what should be included in the *Versuch* is its convoluted publica-

tion history during and shortly after Bach's lifetime. The original conception, probably developed in the late 1740s, was for a single volume of instruction on playing keyboard instruments accompanied by extensive musical examples and a set of sonatas to illustrate the points being made in the text. Bach's sincere desire was not only to assert his theoretical chops to his colleagues and peers in Berlin (many of whom were considering or already writing their own treatises), but to raise the level of musical instruction of his time and to pass along the techniques and knowledge that he had learned from his father. In other words, it was a typically enlightened approach to handing down a skill set that had traditionally been the secretive domain of guilds and master/apprentice relationships. Unfortunately, the technology of the time limited what Bach was able to achieve in his first attempt to realize his plan in the early 1750s.

(Continued on p.4)



The beginning of C.P.E. Bach's first Probestück

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Breckenridge in recital . . . .p.2
- Tsalka & Spányi in recital. .p.3
- Pedal clavichord.. . . . .p.7

# Carol lei Breckenridge in Recital

David Kim

David Kim plays historical keyboards as well as modern piano. He is a D.M.A. student at the New England Conservatory.

The Boston Clavichord Society presented Carol lei Breckenridge in a concert on Sunday, March 13, 2011, at First Church in Cambridge. She performed on her own instrument, a five-octave, unfretted clavichord by Paul Irvin, based on a 1765 Friederici instrument in the Yale Collection of Musical Instruments.

Ms. Breckenridge's musical profile is characterized by breadth in every respect. As a performer, she regularly appears on clavichord, harpsichord and fortepiano, both as a soloist and chamber musician. She has performed in numerous venues in the United States and in Italy, Romania, and The Netherlands. She has made recordings, published many articles and is pedagogically active as a private teacher, in lectures and in master classes. She is Professor Emerita of Music at Central College in Iowa, where she held the Farver Professor chair. Given her deep and broad musical investment, it was no surprise that her concert was a very enjoyable one.

Ms. Breckenridge presented an effective and engaging program of compositions by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. Given Emanuel Bach's well-known affection for the clavichord and the exceptional

quality of his compositions, this was a welcome opportunity to hear a full program of his works. The first half of the program consisted of Rondos and Sonatas from the 3rd volume of *Für Kenner und Liebhaber*, Wq. 57, and ran the gamut in expression from the gently searching



Carol lei Breckenridge

*E major Rondo*, to the lively and charming *G major Rondo*. Ms. Breckenridge is a veracious and direct player, and this approach was especially rewarding in the impassioned *F minor sonata*, in which she brought the piece's pathos to life. The clavichord is unquestionably a quiet instrument, but here its strength of character banished any suggestion of instrumental weakness.

The second half of the program began with the *F sharp minor Fantasia*, Wq. 67 ("CPE Bach's *Empfindugen*"), with its anguished and tentative probing gestures and sudden bursts of brilliant passagework. Ms. Breckenridge again succeeded in coaxing from the clavichord an expressive richness that created a diverse musical world on its own terms, once again proving that musical richness is a function of artistic skill, and not of instrumental force.

The evening concluded with the charming *C major Fantasia*, Wq. 61/6, and, as a fitting encore, Emanuel Bach's rondo: *Abschied von meinem Silbermannschen Claviere (Farewell to my Silbermann Clavichord)*, Wq. 66. Ω

(Sykes, Continued from p.1)

admits air to the pipes. This is the kind of organ known to Bach and in universal use before the middle of the nineteenth century. The organ reform movement of the early twentieth century brought back the mechanical action organ, parallel with the revival of early music and original instruments. A new organ built today is just as likely to have mechanical action as 'modern' electric action, and of course there are many surviving organs from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and earlier with mechanical action. Organs with electric action, in which the key operates an electrical switch

that transmits a signal to the (often far away) pipes, cannot respond to the types of refined touch control that practicing on the clavichord can produce. Practicing music on the clavichord can help an organist gain insight and control in playing a mechanical action instrument, but perhaps only further frustrate one playing an electric action one.

### Control of touch

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach is often quoted as having said that if one masters clavichord playing, one can play any other keyboard instrument well, but that the

(Continued on p.6)

## TANGENTS

The Bulletin of the Boston Clavichord Society, published by The Boston Clavichord Society, P.O. Box 540515, Waltham MA 02454.

ISSN 1558-9706

<http://www.bostonclavichord.org>  
Benjamin Martinez, Webmaster

The Boston Clavichord Society is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the promotion of the clavichord and its music. For information on becoming a Friend of the Society, please write to the above address.

TANGENTS is published biannually in the spring and in the fall, and is sent free to Friends of the BCS. Single copies and back issues can be obtained by writing to the address below.

Editor: Beverly Woodward  
P.O. Box 540515,  
Waltham MA 02454  
Phone: 781 891-0814

Submissions: This bulletin is a forum for its readers. 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 submission.

### Board of Directors:

Peter Sykes, *President*  
David Schulenberg, *Vice President*  
Beverly Woodward, *Coordinator & Treasurer*  
Paul Monsky, *Assistant Treasurer*  
Paul Rabin, *Clerk*  
Tim Hamilton, *Assistant Clerk*  
Sylvia Berry  
Paulette Grundeen  
David Kim  
Ellen Pond  
Christa Rakich

### Board of Artistic Advisors:

Joan Benson  
Clifford Boehmer  
Bernard Brauchli  
Lynn Edwards  
Christopher Hogwood  
Margaret Irwin-Brandon  
Mark Kroll  
Darcy Kuronen  
William Porter  
Howard Schott†

# Tsalka and Spányi at the 2011 Boston Early Music Festival Keyboard Mini-Festival

Christa Rakich

Christa Rakich is a distinguished performer on the organ and early keyboards. She lives in Connecticut but is often seen and heard elsewhere.

The 2011 Boston Early Music Festival incorporated a Keyboard Mini-Festival, which took place on June 17 and was directed by BCS President Peter Sykes. The final event of the Mini-Festival featured two clavichord recitals, the first by Michael Tsalka and the second by Miklós Spányi. Both used a 5-octave unfretted clavichord after Schiedmayer by Allan Winkler of Medford, Massachusetts.

Michael Tsalka's program juxtaposed variations and fantasies, beginning with the *Diferencias sobre "El canto llano del Caballero"* of Antonio de Cabezón. This piece is well-known to organists. Tsalka's rendition was deliberate and slow, as if trying to capture the weight of a larger, sustaining wind instrument. Yet his rhythm was elastic, moving moment by moment, gesture by gesture. The final vanishing arpeggio was charming.

Johann Jakob Froberger's *Fantasia II* displayed more serious counterpoint. The clavichord has the capacity to sound plucked, and it was here that Tsalka exploited that color with a gentle *stil brisé*. Close your eyes, and you could swear you were hearing a lute.

We returned to the variation form with J.S. Bach's *Aria Variata in A minor, BWV 989, alla maniera italiana*. This is an early work, written in 1710, at a time when Bach undertook serious study of Vivaldi, Marcello, Corelli and others. Tsalka played 6 of the 10 variations in this set, spinning long phrases, with a delightful *inégal* and a lovely violinistic, vocal quality in the *pianissimo* sections.

Another Spaniard, some 150 years after Cabezón, Joseph de Torres (ca. 1670-1738) authored several pieces rediscovered in Mexico City in the 1990s and published in 2009. Among these is *Obra de 1 tomo bajo*. A work of varied character, it alternates block chords with contrapuntal fantasy. On the clavichord, the result is often excessive action noise. Although this insistent piece requires the flaming reeds and varied registrations of the Spanish Baroque organ,

it is still a rare delight to hear a "new" old keyboard work.

Tsalka maintains "Every clavichord recital should include a piece by Emanuel Bach." The *Fantasia in C, Wq. 59/6* was his selection for this one, and he showed himself a master of the grand gesture. His fast arpeggiation was mesmerizing, and his high notes were squeezed to their expressive limit. One recurring motive of the piece is an ascend-



**BEMF Keyboard Mini-Festival: June 17, 2011.**  
directed by Peter Sykes

## THE KEYBOARD AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE & TRANSFORMATION

ing arpeggio that ends in a quarter-note, followed by a higher-pitched comment of 2 eighth-notes. Tsalka routinely made the quarter into an eighth, which upended the rhythm of the comment, to questionable effect. But one must be allowed some rhythmic freedom in a fantasia. His final cadence was abrupt and quiet, a Tsalka signature whose surprise evokes an appreciative chuckle from the audience.

The program ended with two sets of variations from Mozart, *Six Variations on "Salve Tu Domine" in F, K. 398* and *Eight Variations on "Ein Weib ist das herrlichste Ding" in F, K. 613*. The "Salve" variations incorporate tendinitis-inducing extended trills in each hand, and Tsalka handled them effortlessly. This piece had been played in a fortepiano recital in the previous session. One listener who had heard both concerts remarked that the fortepiano performance was the more introverted. Tsalka is very much informed by the technique and language of both the fortepiano and the modern piano. A musical extrovert, he tends toward the dramatic, the surprising, the flamboyant. Despite the occasional humming along (Pablo Casals was also guilty of this annoyance), this was an outstanding performance.

Miklós Spányi began with C.P.E. Bach, the *Sinfonia in F, Wq. 122/5*, a brave start, this 12-minute, 3-movement keyboard reduction of Wq. 181. It is a particular challenge to communicate a work for such a large ensemble using just one small instrument. Spányi did it with tremendous control and expressivity, especially at the quieter end of the spectrum. He has a way of easing into final cadences that is particularly enchanting. This is highly elegant playing, and it is all sound, with no extraneous noise.

From the fifth collection "*Für Kenner und Liebhaber*," Spányi played the *Fantasia in C, Wq. 59/6*, the same piece we had heard in the previous hour. It was a special privilege to hear this major work played on the same instrument by two such different players. Under Spányi's hands, we became more aware of the variations in timbre in different registers of the instrument. We hear contextually, of course, and never more so than from the clavichord. The instrument assumes and reflects the character of the player like no other. Where Tsalka commanded our attention, Spányi invited it, and we were taken in. The listeners were the same, but the perch was different, closer to the edges of our seats, attention more focused. The *Rondo in C minor, Wq. 59/4*, displayed many of the same characteristics of the previous work: fast arpeggiation contrasted with slower, highly expressive sections, with plenty of teasing silences in between.

Spányi's elegant restraint suits the music of Sebastian even better than that of Emanuel. I have lost count of the number of recordings of the *Art of Fugue* in my library: keyboards, orchestras, string quartets, viols. I have so many because I am so hungry to hear it. And it is so maddeningly hard to hear. The most difficult are modern string quartets: whoever has the subject stands out; everyone else backs off. The result: one hears the subject, but not the fugue.

I mention this because Spányi's four *Contrapuncti* from the *Art of Fugue, BWV 1080* were so blessedly audible. He interspersed two stately fugues with two livelier canons. *Contrapunctus 1* was arresting: no modern string quartet here; we heard all of it. The running triplets in *Canone alla duodecima* were even, calm, and perfectly transparent. *Contrapunctus 3* is the first inversion fugue

(Continued on p.7)

---

(Knoll, Continued from p.1)

The combining of text and elaborate musical examples on the same page in an extended book had been a rarity up to this time. Musical typesetting had been in existence, of course, for some time, but the methods available were limited in the musical complexity they could handle, and those that allowed for a non-structured mixture of text and music on the page were even more limited—usually to a single melodic line. Bach's needs were much more demanding. He therefore chose to separate the music examples from the text in his treatise, and have all notational aspects engraved on plates and printed separately. This decision introduced the first bibliographic difficulty (for both Bach and us) by separating instruction from example. It is almost certain that Bach's text to the first part of the *Versuch* was ready to go (and perhaps already printed) in 1752, but was held up because the engraving of the music was not yet ready. Bach had chosen to have the engraving done by the Schübler brothers, with whom he was familiar through their work for his father on the *Musikalisches Opfer*, the "Schübler" organ chorales, and the *Kunst der Fuge*. Since the Schüblers were in Zella-Mehlis, though, some 200 miles from Berlin, communication between them and Bach was not optimal, and the proofreading/correction cycle had to be done via post.

Eventually the music examples and *Probestücke* (the sonatas that Bach composed specially for the *Versuch*) were finished and part I of the *Versuch* began to be sold by Bach in 1753. The printing of the text had been handled by the Prussian court printer Christian Henning, but the "publisher" was Bach himself—the title page includes "*in Verlegung des Auctoris.*" Bach sold the text (135 pages) and the musical examples/*Probestücke* (20 pages) together, but since the formats were different (the pages of music were much larger), the buyers who wanted to have their purchases bound would have had to have two bindings done (the *Versuch* was sold as loose signatures,\*\* as were most books at the time). In fact, many buyers apparently only had the 135 pages of text bound, and left the music unbound. In either case, text and music were two separate items, and over the years many exemplars of the text became separated from their mates, and while Bach insisted that both parts were indispensable, the notion that the *Versuch* could mean just the text

portion seems to have taken hold fairly early on.

Nowhere in the first edition of part I does the phrase "part I" appear, indicating that Bach was not yet committed to producing a part II. He does mention at the end of the preface, though, that if his treatise were to have a positive reception, he would be encouraged to continue it with some "contributions" (*vermitteltst einiger Beyträge, fortzusetzen*). This could be interpreted as either an expansion of the existing treatise or the addition of a second part that would treat new topics, but either way it is clear that already in 1753 Bach realized that in part I he had not said everything that he could about keyboard playing.

The *Versuch* sold so well that Bach had to reprint it only six years later. This time his typesetter was Georg Ludewig Winter, a Berlin printer with whom Bach had begun collaborating the previous year for his "Gellert" *Lieder* and the *Zwölf kleine Stücke*. The two apparently shared a house in Berlin at some point as well. Since Bach was in possession of the engraved plates for the music pages, these could be reprinted as often as needed without the added expense of re-engraving, and it would not be surprising that Bach, being the clever businessman that he was, would have printed the music pages in smaller batches than the typeset text pages, which out of economic necessity required larger print runs. For the 1759 edition Winter condensed the layout so that it now fit onto 118 pages, but the unchanged music examples remained a separate item, still being printed from the engraved plates. Bach used the opportunity to correct the errors he had noticed in the 1753 edition and also to make a few very small tweaks to the text, but the 1753 and the 1759 editions are otherwise identical. The major differences are on the title page, where Winter is naturally listed as the printer instead of Henning, the book is listed as being the second edition, and the whole is now officially referred to as part I (*erster Theil*), meaning that Bach was definitely planning—if not already working on—a second part. This he brought out a few years later with a text dealing with basso continuo accompaniment.

In the meantime, though—in fact just two years after the first edition of part I had appeared in 1753—the printer Johann Gottlob Immanuel Breitkopf in Leipzig demonstrated the first commercially viable

method of printing complex music using movable type, and Bach realized that he would now be able to incorporate his new musical examples for part II directly into the text. In order to save space and keep the costs down, however, Bach reduced most of the musical examples in part II—which are generally much more complex than the part I examples—onto a single staff. Even so, when the first edition of part II appeared in 1762 it was more than twice as long as part I. The printer again was Winter, who apparently had licensed the new typesetting technology from Breitkopf, and again the publisher was Bach.

Even though part II was a single entity with the musical examples incorporated into the text, Bach still had three items now to inventory, sell, package, ship, and collect money for: part I, the supplement to part I containing the musical examples and the *Probestücke*, and part II. He continued to sell the *Versuch* (or the *Versuchs*, as he usually referred to both volumes collectively) himself, even after moving to Hamburg in 1768. Eventually, though, he tired of the administrative work involved, and in 1780 he sold his intellectual property rights along with all unsold stock to the Leipzig printer Engelhard Benjamin Schwickert. Schwickert naturally wanted to offer something that was new to spur sales, but initially could only offer a new title page. The 1780 "editions" of both parts I and II, then, are nothing more than leftover stock of the 1759 and 1762 editions with new title pages identifying the new publisher, although in Schwickert's defense he made no claim for either one being a new edition. Schwickert did, however, manage to extract a promise from Bach to update both volumes with additional information along with new sonatas along the lines of the *Probestücke* whenever Schwickert ran out of the stock he had purchased in 1780 and needed to reprint the volumes. Incidentally, Schwickert had asked Bach to "improve" his texts but Bach rather curtly replied that improvement was not possible; as everything was correct as it stood, only expansion could be considered. Bach seemed later to have second thoughts about providing the new sonatas, but in the late 1780s, when Schwickert finally ran out of his original stock of part I, he was able to get Bach to supply both the additions to the texts and the new sonatas (or sonatinas, as Bach called them).

Schwickert's new edition of part I came out in 1787, and while the text had to be re-typeset and it was now technically possible to incorporate the musical examples into the text, Schwickert only did so for the new examples provided by Bach—the original examples continued to be distributed on separate sheets printed from the engraved plates, which now also included the new sonatinas.

Bach delivered the new material for part I to Schwickert in a manuscript that now resides in the *Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek* in Hamburg (D-Hs, Scrin A 676). This manuscript is largely in the hand of Johann Heinrich Michel (Bach's main copyist in Hamburg), but contains heavy editing by Bach himself. The nature of the new material is primarily additional support for existing points and additional examples that Bach had found (or composed) in the interim. Bach had little interest in 1787 in spending hours proofreading texts or music examples, most of which he had already proofread decades earlier, and thus left it to Schwickert to make sure no errors were introduced.

Schwickert's original stock of part II lasted even longer, and it wasn't until the late 1790s that he needed to reprint that volume. Of course by then Bach had been dead for several years, but he had supplied Schwickert with additions to part II—probably at the same time he supplied the additions to part I—that were even more extensive than those for part I. Unfortunately Bach's manuscript with the part II changes does not seem to have survived. Since the original part II musical examples had been typeset from the outset, Schwickert had to re-typeset them along with the new examples, and with Bach not being there to proofread them, Schwickert managed to introduce a considerable number of errors in the process.

Thus in order to obtain a complete picture of what Bach ultimately intended for

his *Versuchs* one must rely on the 1787 and 1797 Schwickert editions to include all of the material that Bach provided, while at

of the same page to spare the reader continual flipping back and forth to the critical report. Editorial footnotes are called out

in the text with normal footnote numbers, and the notes themselves are found in the separate commentary volume, allowing the editorial commentary to be followed alongside the text.

The musical examples are incorporated into the main text for both parts, and they appear there as in the originals (updated according to CPEB: CW notational guidelines). This does not, however, alleviate the density issue created by Bach's decision to cram everything—including multi-voice examples with full continuo realizations—onto a single staff. For the more convoluted examples the commentary provides solutions where the material is unpacked onto two or three staves.

The commentary also includes a glossary of outdated German terms that could cause difficulty even for native German readers, as well as an index of Bach's works mentioned in the text or cited in the musical examples, and a general index.

The *Probestücke* and the *Neue Sonatinen* that Bach included in the supplement to part I have already been published in CPEB: CW, I/3, edited by David Schulenberg, and these same pieces along with the engraved musical examples for part I have also been published in facsimile as a supplement to CPEB: CW, Series VII. Ω

\**Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1949.

\*\*For further details regarding the publication history of the *Versuch* and the *Probestücke*, see: Beverly Woodward, "The *Probestücke* and C.P. E. Bach's *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*," in *de Clavicordio II*, Musica Antica a Magnano, 1995, pp. 83-93.

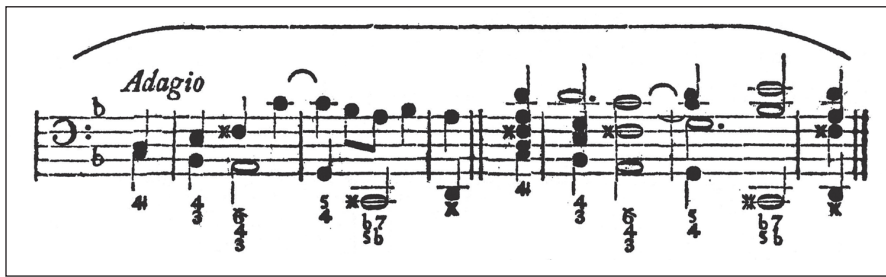


Figure 1. A musical example with solo voice, bass, and continuo realization reduced to a single staff from the 1762 edition of *Versuch II*

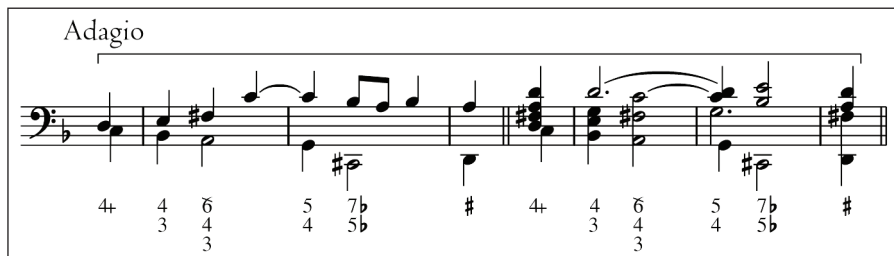


Figure 2. The same example rendered in modern notation in CPEB: CW, VII/2

the same time reading that material with a critical eye to correct the errors introduced by Schwickert. The present edition repre-

sents the first time such an undertaking has been attempted. Facsimile reproductions of any of the editions fall short by not presenting all of the material (and as far as we know there are no facsimiles of the 1787 and 1797 editions), and while Mitchell included much of the added material in his translation, he did not include all of it, nor did he

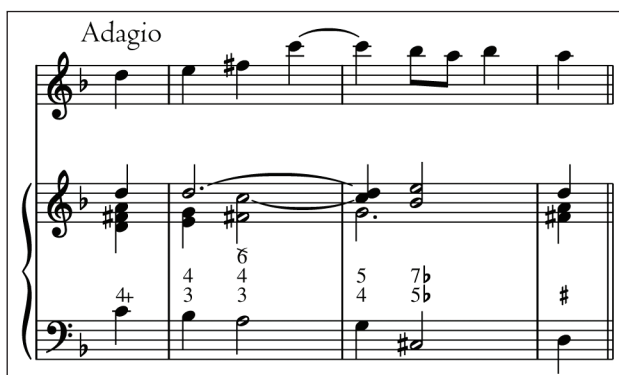


Figure 3. The "unpacked" example as given in the commentary, CPEB: CW, VII/3

catch all of Schwickert's errors.

The new edition accounts for all significant variant readings between the various editions (1753, 1759, and 1787 for part I; 1762 and 1797 for part II). Variants are flagged by call-outs in the margins and the original readings are given at the bottom

(Sykes, Continued from p.2)

reverse is not true. The true benefits of clavichord practice to the organist do not lie in trying to play the organ on the clavichord, as it were, but in mastering clavichord touch and then transferring the insights gained and some of the techniques learned to organ playing. What are some of these elements, and what do the organ and clavichord have in common?

What the organ and clavichord have most in common in terms of musical demand is the necessity for the player to pay equal attention to the attack, duration, and release of each tone. On the clavichord, any note only exists as long as the key holds the string in vibration between tangent and bridge. Unlike the harpsichord and piano, in which the bottom of the key dip is only a resting place (one's job of activating the string into vibration already being accomplished) the bottom of the clavichord's key dip is a vital location of tone production. One must pay attention to the entire length of the note in order to control the tone. At the same time, one must exert a certain firmness of attack for every note, whatever its dynamic level, in order for the tangent not to bounce on the string (or "chuck"), causing a nasty spitting sound instead of a clear tone. Although the clavichord, being a stringed instrument, has in common with the harpsichord and piano the inevitable decay and disappearance of the tone in very long notes, in most music the tone sustains through normal note values. Paying attention to the entire duration of the tone until its release is the great lesson of clavichord playing.

At the organ, the bottom of the key dip is a similar resting place, but the tone continues at full strength until the release of the key, and the player must control the release with the same care as the attack. Since with a tracker organ there is a direct mechanical connection between key and pallet valve, a quick stroke on the key opens the valve quickly, causing the pipe to speak with a prompt attack (or "chiff" in some cases). A quick release of the key, however, cuts off the air supply quickly, causing an abrupt cessation of the sound, while a slow release of the key eases the stopping of the air stream, producing a desired sense of decrescendo. (In some organs with very sensitive actions, a too-quick release can even cause the pallet valve to bounce, producing an annoying hiccup at the end of the tone.) These attack and release elements of the key's travel are evident to the percep-

tive player; the attack feels like the pluck of a harpsichord key as the air pressure's resistance against the pallet valve is overcome, while the release feels like a gentle click as the pallet valve seats into position. Elegant organ playing combines an articulate beginning with a gentle cutoff of the tone. Paying attention to the attack and release of each note is the great lesson of organ playing.

These two lessons are complementary. The clavichord asks us to control the touch of each note all the way to its end, and control



C. B. Fisk organ, Opus 55 (1971), Old West Church, Boston.

the attack firmly in order to produce a clear tone. The organ asks us to control the attack (strongly) and release (gently) of the note in order to properly shape its beginning and end.

#### Musical insight

There are other benefits to the organist that come with clavichord practice. Being a dynamically touch-responsive instrument, the clavichord immediately reveals uneven playing that may only be subliminally evident at the organ. If one can play a passage evenly and elegantly at the clavichord, the rewards at the organ are abundantly evident. Practicing early keyboard music on a fretted clavichord, in which one must be very careful with articulation in order to avoid any overlap in striking two adjacent keys that use the same strings, is very helpful in gaining familiarity with an open, articulate manner of playing the organ in the same repertoire. In playing early organ music, in order to hear the speech of the pipes at the beginning of each note, it is usual to put tiny spaces between the notes, analogous to tonguing a wind instrument or to bowing each note separately on a string instrument. This can become a sort of legato, in which one plays adjacent notes with the same degree of connection that one can ac-

complish in playing a repeated note with the minimum of space between repetitions. (On the fretted clavichord, one can even trill, playing two keys on the same string if touch is sufficiently under control.)

There is a large repertoire of *manualiter* organ music, in which the pedals are not called for, that can be practiced (and even performed) on the clavichord with no loss of musical integrity; many works of Frescobaldi, Sweelinck, Froberger, Buxtehude and Bach, for starters, can serve as either organ or clavichord music. Interpreting these works on either instrument can bring musical insights that would not emerge if the music were played on only one. At the same time, one can practice the manual parts of *pedaliter* works on the clavichord in order to achieve greater evenness of touch and more precise articulation.

#### Technical security

Many players practice by first simply learning the notes and then adding layers of musical sophistication. In my view this approach dulls the spirit. One should always start by making music, at whatever level one is capable. It is impossible to play the clavichord without making music—the instrument simply demands one's best attention to every note. I have always felt that one accomplishes small goals best by aiming at loftier ones; if one is just trying to 'get the notes' one is just as likely to fail as succeed, and this becomes musical existence at only a survival level. If, on the other hand, one is listening to shapes, phrasing, tone, and absorbing the musical result, the notes usually fall into place, since they are becoming a means to an end rather than an end in themselves. That being said, the technical demands of the clavichord force the player to use good fingering and good hand position, as well as to play slowly at first in order to produce good tone. These challenges can make organ playing seem easy by comparison.

#### This can't be bad!

Every organ player will encounter the clavichord differently, finding its special demands variously challenging and rewarding. Every organ player not only will leave clavichord practice a better organist (and all-around keyboard player) but, even more importantly, will become a more observant and sensitive musician. This is the great lesson of practicing one's art in various ways. Ω

## European Clavichord Tour

Beverly Woodward

In May and early June of this year, Peter Sykes, President of the BCS, performed on the clavichord for audiences in Britain, the Netherlands, and France. The very possibility of such a tour is the result of what might be termed “the Second Wave of the Clavichord Revival.”<sup>1</sup> The founding of



Judith Wardman and Peter Bavington of the British Clavichord Society with Peter Sykes (center). Photo by Joan Hatcher, at Hatchlands Park

clavichord societies in the 80s and 90s and the creation of the International Centre for Clavichord Studies in Magnano, Italy in 1995, as well as the multiplication of outstanding builders, has created new audiences for the clavichord. The BCS has presented about a dozen keyboardists who are based in Europe so it seemed fitting that one of our own perform there.

Menno van Delft and I worked on the arrangements. Peter’s tour schedule included performances at the annual meeting of the British Clavichord Society, at Fenton House in London, at Hatchlands Park and in Bath during its annual Party in the City. Peter Bavington and Judith Wardman of the British Clavichord Society facilitated Peter’s London stay, while Judith Eversley and Simon Baker hosted Peter’s stay in Bath. Peter then crossed the channel and performed in Amsterdam under the auspices of the Dutch Clavichord Society, and near Limoges under the auspices of the clavichord builder Renée Geoffrion. Reviews of Peter’s very well-received concerts are posted at: <http://www.musicalpointers.co.uk/reviews/liveevents/ClavichdSocKnights.html#sykes> and at Peter’s website: <http://www.petersykes.com> Ω

<sup>1</sup> See Howard Schott, “The clavichord revival, 1800-1960,” *Early Music*, November 2004, 32 (4), 2004, pp. 595-604.

## On Making a Pedal Clavichord

Robert Duffy

Robert Duffy is a builder of clavichords and harpsichords residing in Indianapolis, Indiana. His early training was in the workshops of Frank Hubbard and Eric Herz.

After reading Peter Sykes’ recent cataloguing of his many clavichords, I thought of my own recent experience making a pedal clavichord, which readers may find of interest.

I have made harpsichords and clavichords for years and often have unsold instruments at home, which I sometimes lend to musician friends. This happened with Jason Overall and his wife Edie Johnson, both organists without a practice instrument at home. Jason had borrowed a 17th C-style clavichord of mine and liked it for its teaching and practice uses, but he and Edie both found its short range limiting. They came across articles describing Joel Speerstra’s reconstruction of the Gerstenberg pedal clavichord and asked me if it would make a good practice instrument for their home.

Not having seen or heard a pedal clavichord “in the flesh,” I was not in a position to recommend it to them. Then I heard Peter Sykes’ BEMF recital in 2007 on a single manual clavichord and pedal clavichord combination. What had been an historical curiosity became a true musical instrument for me. No longer was this in my mind an oddity of history—an experimental white elephant in a museum—with few surviving examples compared with the dozens of manual clavichords whose validity and worthiness have long been recognized.

(Tsalka / Spányi, Continued from p.3) and the first to introduce chromaticism in the countersubject. We were drawn deeply into the earnest character of those gestures. Finally, *Canone all’ottava* sailed in that completely comfortable, reliable, predictable Bachian sense. Spányi’s measured trills—quiet, unobtrusive—fit perfectly within a rhythmic context that was pre-established. When we hear such sounds, the universe makes perfect sense. Anton Heiller played with this kind of certainty, with fundamental faith in the divine truth of Bach’s score and his own understanding of it. That sense of otherworldliness was audible in Spányi’s Bach.

The program concluded with Beethoven’s

I related my concert experience to Jason and Edie and gave my recommendation that the pedal clavichord really is a worthwhile addition to the clavichord inventory. They responded by ordering a pedal clavichord as well as two manual clavichords, the full Gerstenberg! However, they asked for the pedal instrument to be pitched at 8’ only, instead of the 16’-8’ specification of the antique. Their practice of using 8’ pitch on the pedals leads to clarity of the pedal line among the manuals.

By designing a pedal clavichord at 8’ pitch, the overall size of this suite of clavichords is reduced to a more practical size, and the need for overwound bass strings is eliminated. The elimination of the 16’ register also made tuning the 8’ strings less complicated, since the box holding the manual instruments hinders access to the pedals’ tuning pins. A resizing of the pedal board to include a few more notes and a re-arrangement of the levers allowed a vertical tracker run instead of the splayed arrangement of the antique.

Long aware of the value of manual clavichord practice, Jason and Edie have found the same to be true of the pedal as well, and they report a new sensitivity and awareness in their organ pedal technique.

I write about this experience with the pedal clavichord to encourage organists to explore the use of this valuable teaching instrument along with its better known manual clavichord brethren. Ω

*Variations in C on Jakob Haibel’s “Menuet à la Viganó,”* WoO 68. It was a healthy, deep breath to move from the sublime to the pretty, and from the heady absorption of Bach’s last work to some dance variations. One noticed the voicing of the instrument more clearly, the incisive quality in the soprano register, the bass fat but not flabby, the very high notes lyrical and silvery, with good sustain. The occasional *sforzando* and some virtuosic hand-crossing made for a delightful conclusion.

If the clavichord “dials it down” – shifts our listening from the jumble of daily life to a place of real attention – then Spányi’s playing “pulls it in” – absorbs us and opens the door to magic. Ω



THE BOSTON CLAVICHORD SOCIETY

P.O. Box 540515,  
Waltham MA 02454

[www.bostonclavichord.org](http://www.bostonclavichord.org)