

# The Boston Clavichord Society Newsletter

Number 3, Fall, 1997

## Report on the Boston Early Music Festival

As part of the 1997 Boston Early Music Festival, the Boston Clavichord Society presented eight well-attended recitals on the many clavichords brought by exhibitors. In the busy atmosphere of the festival, these brief concerts seemed entirely appropriate.

Peter Sykes began with Bach's Suite in A minor on a Zuckermann double-fretted instrument. Adam Rahbee played selected Bach Preludes and Fugues on a small double-fretted instrument by Douglas Maple based on an anonymous mid-18th century example.

Richard Troeger gave three performances. He first played movements from Haydn sonatas on Allan Winkler's copy of the Schiedmayer from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. In another concert, he gave a survey of the clavichord literature on various instruments held by the Harpsichord Clearing House, and in his third concert he played on a double-fretted Hubert copy by Thomas Glueck, and also on various clavichords by Jack Peters, one of which was based on drawings of David Tannenberg (circa 1790), and others based on very early fretted designs.

Alan Durfee gave an eclectic program on Carl Dudash's remarkable upright clavichord, the first instrument of its kind. The elegant case of the instrument has a large vertical soundboard and strings divided into two sets which cross, so the sound is projected directly into the room. The surprisingly simple action utilizes a single right-angled joint to translate the motion of the key into that of the

## Capturing the Gerstenberg "1982": Recollections of the Pedal Clavichord for Chico State University

The Musical Instrument Museum of Karl Marx University in Leipzig is home to a large and complex clavichord. It is, in fact, three clavichords in one. This instrument is signed "Joh. David Gerstenberg 1760," and represents one of a rare few designed as a practice instrument for organists. Two basically similar clavichords for the hands are slid into a lidded chest, which sits atop a longer, pedal-controlled clavichord. As the player sits on the built-in bench above the pedals, the manual instruments are withdrawn from the chest to form organ manuals. As a practice instrument the three clavichords give the player the opportunity to finely control articulation and dynamics without a church organ and its blowing apparatus.

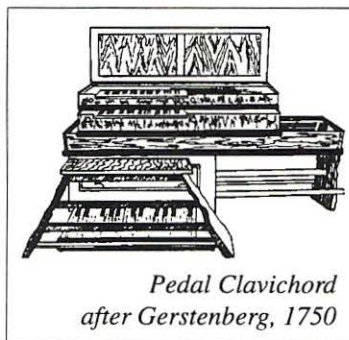
I had been asked to examine this instrument on my trip to Leipzig in 1982 by the organist David Rothe at the University of California at Chico. He specializes in teaching on authentic harpsichords and organs, and wanted an instrument which would provide a different experience for organ students who practice mostly on modern instruments.

Much of the interest in the pedal clavichord had been generated by the

organist Harald Vogel in his charismatic lectures and tours. Harald's drive to find the hidden techniques and experiences of early players swept over his audiences, convincing many of the value of early clavichords for improving expressive and technical abilities.

It became my job to capture the essence and spirit of these instruments, and use them to create new instruments to stir the blood of today's performers, audiences and scholars.

Fifteen years have not erased the vivid memories of my trip to Leipzig: the soft coal smoke irritating the back of my throat, the eerie glow of the mercury vapor lights on the Ring at



*Pedal Clavichord  
after Gerstenberg, 1750*

night, the hard metallic screech of trolley wheels negotiating turns as they careened through the old Leipzig Centrum. In those days, before the wall came down, travel was a chore which included letters and travel vouchers with pre-paid hotels and fixed itineraries. I always felt conspicuous with my bright yellow Golf parked among the grey and brown Wartburgs. The double standards for East Germans and western tourists were exemplified by the obscenely modern Japanese-built hotel Merkur, whose tower rooms were inaccessible by the

*continued on page 4*

tangent. Durfee's program ranged from an anonymous 17th century Dutch piece to Schumann, demonstrating the suitability of the instrument for a wide range of music. Durfee also performed a similar program on a large and resonant unfretted Swedish instrument by Andrew Lagerquist based on Phillip Specken (1743).

Sykes and Troeger played a Mozart duet on the Schiedmayer copy built by Winkler. Because of the tessitura unique to four-hands music, the clavichord's sound filled the room. This type of music presents its own performance difficulties, but Sykes and

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## Teacher's Corner

*In which there will be occasional reflections on clavichord playing from the perspective of one who regularly tries to help others in this most intriguing art, duly improving himself thereby...*

This month there will be some reflections on the value, quality and nature of the clavichord as a practice instrument for players of other keyboard instruments, although these remarks will be undoubtedly be useful for clavichord players as well.

Many historical (and modern) treatises mention the value of clavichord playing as good preparation for playing other keyboard instruments, although they do not go deeply into the exact reasons for this. For certain players, this value becomes self-evident after a few hours' practice; for others, it only seems that practicing the clavichord makes them a better clavichord player, without much carryover into other keyboard endeavors. I will try to examine the keyboard values particularly associated with the clavichord, with an eye towards their transfer to other instruments.

One caveat: If one is only using the clavichord to learn notes, one might as well be playing a cheap electronic keyboard. The true value of the clavichord as a practice instrument lies in learning to play the clavichord well, and then applying what one has learned to other keyboard instruments. So, with that diatribe out of the way, we can begin.

The first and foremost aspect of good clavichord playing is a controlled yet alive sense of touch. In order to produce a pleasing tone with resonance, firmness and flexibility are prerequisites – things happily transferred into any of the other keyboards. In addition, since the clavichord is dynamically touch – responsive, a perfect evenness among notes is also required if a singing musical line is to be drawn. This aspect transfers immediately into fortepiano playing (if the reverse direction does not already apply because of prior experience!) and also into harpsichord playing. In this aspect, the clavichord imperiously demands that which the harpsichord politely requests, although the harpsichord will also politely thank the player who is aware of the values of evenness of touch. Certainly this is one of the most obvious aspects of

the value of practicing on a clavichord.

One immediate result of a new awareness of touch is a new awareness of fingering. It does not matter if one is attempting a historical fingering pattern or not; the clavichord will punish wrong hand position, wrong finger position, and even wrong brain position. In order to make a fingering work musically on the clavichord, many aspects need to be examined and balanced. This prepares one for playing other instruments. Organs and harpsichords can be finicky in this regard, but none are as finicky as some clavichords!

***“One caveat:  
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To a certain extent, I endorse what I call the “bed-of-nails” theory of practice; one’s practice environment should forgive nothing, so that in performance one always feels more comfortable than in practice. Need it be said that the clavichord is the “bed-of-nails” par excellence?

Playing a note on a clavichord is a lifetime commitment – for the duration of the life of the note, that is! Unlike any other keyboard instrument, the quality of touch after the key is depressed continues to be vitally important for the quality of tone; the slightest shift in pressure or position will result in some sort of unwanted sound. Not until the key is released can one relax vigilance. This is in direct contrast to the harpsichord, where after the key plucks the string, nothing happens until the key is released and the string is damped. Clavichord playing is similar here to organ playing, where the key sustains the note produced by the pipe (which may go through changes in intensity) until it is

released. The most difficult aspect of organ playing for the beginner with previous experience on the harpsichord or piano is the matter of managing releases, that is, paying as much attention to the end of the note as to its beginning. Modern pianists are particularly negligent in this regard, no doubt due to the release-annihilating effects of the sostenuto pedal. Clavichord playing, though, forces one’s attention not simply on the release of the note, but on the entire duration of its life. Unaware use of overlegato is immediately punished on fretted clavichord, too, with an unpleasant thwacking sound. In this aspect, the clavichord demands a level of attention, focus and commitment that is above that level required by the organ. This aspect is one that will also carry over into harpsichord playing. Whether or not one chooses to strictly observe the durations of notes or not (one might alter them in order to enrich a style-brise texture, for example) the attention given to that aspect will bring a new degree of intentionality to one’s playing.

No one can deny that the clavichord is a soft instrument. (Come on, admit it!) Harder to admit is that the tone of the clavichord can be rather puny as well, being weak in fundamental and strong in harmonics. Depending on the design and construction of the instrument (but more the player’s abilities), it can be whiny, plunky, mewling, or just plain bad. On the other hand, it can be singing, declamatory, sighing, even crashingly loud. What makes the difference? To my mind, the difference that matters is in the amount of tonal imagination exercised by the player.

Unlike the harpsichord or organ in which tone colors are fixed by the instrument’s builder, but very like the piano, the tone of the clavichord is to some extent putty in the player’s hands. It is subject to the careful manipulation of time, energy, and space, and thereby able to express any musical utterance imaginable. If one can make a line sing on the clavichord, it is much more easy to do this on any other instrument. The clavichord’s tone is then ultimately whatever the player wants it to be. In my mind, this feature makes it the most satisfying keyboard instrument of all to play.

But not the easiest!

*Peter Sykes*

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**Editor:** Alan Durfee, 28 Atwood Road, South Hadley MA 01075.  
Tel: 413-532-5413. Fax: 413-538-3035.  
E-mail: adurfee@mtholyoke.edu.

**Graphic Design:** Walden Associates  
e-mail: walden@ici.net

**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 him about preferred format before making a submission. The copy deadlines are March 15 and September 15.

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# Report on the third International Clavichord Meeting, Magnano

The third International Clavichord Meeting was held from Sept 24th through 27th in the small village of Magnano in the Piedmont section of Italy, the same place it was held in 1993 and 1995. The meeting was a little longer this year in order to allow more time for the participants to socialize and also to have an afternoon off for an excursion to a nearby castle. As in previous years, the sessions were held in the eleventh-century church of San Secondo, a wonderfully quiet and totally appropriate location. The fifty or so people came from all over—Great Britain, The Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Poland, France, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Japan and, of course, the United States (but only three from the last country). For breakfast and lunch we were on our own, but for dinner we all met in a local restaurant for an excellent fixed-course meal. The first dinner was typically Italian, starting at 8:30 PM and not ending until 11 PM, but the others were more efficient since we had to return on time for the evening concert.

The morning and afternoon sessions consisted of half-hour talks and performances. The two-hour evening concerts were more formal, with four performers, two before intermission and two after.

Among the many interesting sessions was one devoted to a paper by Kenneth Gilbert on his book of transcriptions of lute pieces by Kapsperger (1580-1651), a composer and lutenist of German descent who lived in Italy. Gilbert has adopted a new method of transcribing lute tablature; the notes on the staff are all whole notes (as in the French unmeasured preludes for harpsichord) with the note values for a succession of notes given above the staff. The notation thus resembles lute tablature, and Gilbert hopes that this will encourage keyboard players to think more about the process of transferring music from lute to keyboard.

Joel Speestra brought a large van-load of clavichords down from Sweden, among which was a two-manual and pedal clavichord which he and John Barnes had made. For

organists, the instrument is intended as a practice instrument; in particular, it encourages them to play lines more musically. Joel demonstrated the capabilities of the instrument by playing a three-part setting of "Nun komm der Heiden Heiland" by J. S. Bach. The effect was like hearing a trio of string instruments; the individual lines came out in a wonderfully musical fashion. This was a revelation for this listener, who was accustomed to hearing the piece in a more flat fashion on the organ. It was music!

In another session, the Swiss composer Jean-Jacques Dünki demonstrated how he

modified his compositions depending on the instrument, whether it be grand piano, fortepiano, or clavichord. And Benedict Claas and Sebastian Stocker demonstrated how a violin and a clavichord could perform the usual violin and piano literature without the former feeling inhibited and the latter constantly aggressive; the trick is to use a mute on the violin.

This writer was scheduled to play the first day upon his newly-made Lyndon Taylor clavichord, a copy of one belonging to the University of Pennsylvania and formerly on loan to the Smithsonian. (The anonymous and unplayable original, apparently from south Germany and dated about 1650, is a triple-fretted short-octave instrument with a range of four octaves.) Unfortunately the clavichord, which was checked through as baggage, missed connections in London and only arrived an hour before the performance. A quick session of fixing sticking keys, tuning and a run-through was all that was possible, but fortunately everything went well.

There were very different performance styles, some virtuoso, some more ordinary. But they were all interesting, and all communicated something about the music.

One of the evening highlights was the traditional "clavichord merry-go-round," a chance to compare many of the twenty or so instruments present. They all started out in a line in one aisle of the church, were brought in turn to the stage for a five-minute demonstration, and then taken off to the

*continued on p.5*



**PEDAL CLAVICHORD** *continued from p.1*  
ordinary elevators.

Luckily I had acclimatized to Leipzig gradually. A night in Eisenach and the drive from the south the day before had equipped me with the basics of the East German system. I had experienced the warmth of the people, their eager questions about the West and their hope of travel to the glittering world of America. How strange to them must have been my perverse desire to visit their crumbling museum of ancient instruments!

The past was very much alive in Leipzig. The bustle of that city was one I had experienced in early childhood while living in Buffalo, New York during World War II—the bleakness of toil, riding the trolley to work in the munitions factory, posters proclaiming glory to the victorious employees, and the rumble of drab vehicles of war driven by unshaven youth.

Yet within the museum, amid the keyboard instruments with the portrait of Heinrich Schutz looking down from the wall, there emerged the twinkle of an

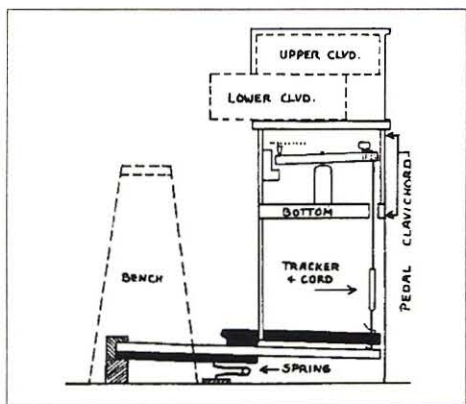


Fig.1 Pedal clavichord elevation

earlier time when art and music filled the hearts of these people, when creativity surged and moved them to great heights. The instruments themselves still hold the creative juices of these people.

Thanks to the friendly cooperation of Dr. Hubert Henkel, director of the museum, I was able to make many measurements and photographs, and from them a thorough set of plans.

Returning to Seattle, there was enough information on the different instruments to keep me busy for a long time! When I think back to all the work I had done, and the vast number of instruments I had examined, it was no wonder that I was exhausted for an entire month on my

return. The deadline for the pedal clavichord was looming, however, so I had to begin immediately with the construction of its many component parts.

Each manual clavichord, 59" x 17", has a compass of C to e3, and is unfretted. The narrowness of the stringband allows for short keylevers, giving a nice, tight touch. There

exceedingly light in weight.

The pedal clavichord consists of a bench, a pedal keyboard, a trestle box, an outrigger foot, its stretchers, and the actual clavichord itself. When the cord and tracker for each key are added to this the result is more of an organ building project. All these units were painted a dark brown, as in the

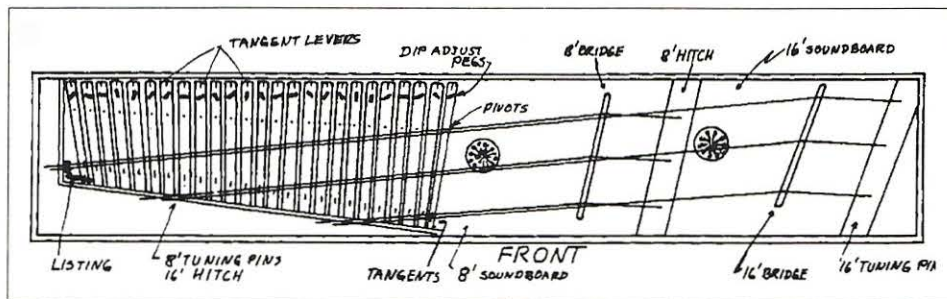


Figure 2 Pedal clavichord plan

are subtle differences in the bridges of the two manual clavichords: the bridge on the lower instrument tapers from bass to treble in the usual fashion by a small amount, while the bridge on the upper clavichord has the taper in the reverse direction. This results in a subtle emphasis in the treble of the upper instrument. Its shallow case helps promote this effect. The deeper, lower clavichord tends toward a more homogeneous, less bell-like tone. I followed the constructional details in the two instruments carefully in order to study the effect of these small differences.

Each clavichord was made from pine, dovetailed at the corners, and then veneered with walnut. Bridges were blackstained maple on spruce soundboards. They had shallow grooves carved into the crown for the strings to pass through. I chose maple also for the the angled wrestplanks, a material most likely used in the original, though not positively identified. The naturals were covered with ebony, with bone for the tops of the accidentals. For the inside case above the soundboard, a simple green and gold border paper was chosen that captured the color scheme of the original. Around the top edge are black stained moldings. This is especially attractive with the black bridges and walnut case sides. The 19th century pullrings on the front were easy to obtain. The chest with its panelled lid was built by my cabinet maker, who was allowed some freedom in design treatment. The results were quite handsome and

original. In the original, black moldings ran along the upper edge of the clavichord case, and a curious sky blue panel, framed white, was painted above the player's toes. This panel might have been originally for a date or something else, but was never filled in over the blue. The same paper as in the upper instruments was used around the perimeter of the pedal clavichord, which served to tie the units together visually.

The pedal clavichord proper is quite a credit to Mr. Gerstenberg's engineering genius. By running the trackers along the back of the instrument and facing the tangents backwards, he saved space and moved the noise away from the player. The tangents are at the front of the case, and the stringband angles away from the front left to the right rear, a mirror image so to speak. My instrument was to have additional top c# and d above the original compass, and I was asked to narrow the very wide pedal spacing to conform to the modern tracker organ standards. As one may see in Fig. 2, there is a 16' choir with its own bridge and soundboard set slightly higher than the 8' choir with its bridge and soundboard. By keeping the two soundboards at the right end of the case, Gerstenberg was able to get the best sound projection without the interference of the upper chest. The volume of sound is quite surprising, and it takes a discreet player to balance the pedal to the manuals. From the design, it seems that the owner of the

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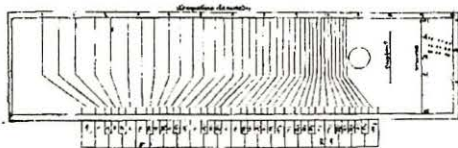
## CD Review

A recent clavichord recording, one of several which have appeared in the market within the last few months, is **Paul Simmond's Ernst Wilhelm Wolf, Keyboard Sonatas** (ARS MUSICI AM 1206-2). This recording of a selection of the Wolf sonatas will be a particularly welcome addition to anyone's collection of clavichord disks. The repertoire is little known and delightful, and the performance is impeccable. The instrument used is a copy built by Karin Richter of a late eighteenth-century south German unfretted clavichord.

Ernst Wolf (1735-1792) spent the greater part of his active career in the service of the Duchess of Weimar. Over seventy of his sonatas have come down to us. Very much a part of the *Empfindsamkeit* movement of that period, his sonatas include profoundly emotional slow movements as well as delicate, dance-like fast movements of a more traditional character. Discovering this repertoire is a joy, and one is left with the impression that the composer Wolf has been unjustly neglected. Simmonds renders the music with the control and depth of understanding necessary for a just interpretation of this style and period of music.

Praise should also be bestowed on the quality of the recording. Capturing the soul of a clavichord in a technical recording has proven to be a difficult task, with few satisfactory results to date. Microphones placed at a distance fail to render the intimacy of the voice of the instrument and much is lost. Yet recordings where microphones have been placed too close to the instrument are often marred by the persistent castanet-like sound of the keys, a sound which is not usually audible to listeners in a room but which detracts terribly from the music on the recording. This CD is a happy exception, and free of extraneous noises one is able to fully appreciate the delicate voice of the instrument. It is a little gem to which one will return more than once.

**Susan Brauchli**



## New Music

Two collections of sonatas especially appropriate to the clavichord have been recently published, "Solo Keyboard Works," and "Six Sonatas for Two Persons at One Keyboard," both by Franz Seydelmann. Franz Seydelmann (1748-1806) spent his entire life in Dresden where he was active as church composer to the court and Kapellmeister. His output was principally in the form of operas and church music. The collections are edited by Bernard Brauchli, published by Harwood Academic Publishers (The Netherlands)



Printer

and available in either hard or paper covers. They are easily accessible to players who do not have the advanced technique necessary to perform some of the more virtuosic keyboard music from eighteenth-century Germany and are fine examples of ideal "house music." The duos are extremely entertaining. As so often is the case, the word "cembalo" in the title must be taken generically; a closer look reveals music which is well suited to the clavichord with its gentle, expressive voice.

These two volumes are the first in a series of music intended for the clavichord and promoted by the International Centre for Clavichord Studies in Magnano, Italy.

**Susan Brauchli**

**BEMFE, continued from p. 1**

Troeger were at ease and their audience enjoyed the unusual beauty of the sound.

All these concerts were advertised on a flyer which was available in many places around the festival. This organized effort was well appreciated; in fact, a frustrated fortepiano exhibitor was overheard saying "Why can't we be as well organized as the clavichord people?"

**Adam Rahbee**

## An Invitation

As in past years, Friends of the Boston Clavichord Society will be able to subscribe (essentially at cost) to the Newsletter of the British Clavichord Society and the magazine Clavichord International. Both these publications contain many interesting articles; the contents of past issues can be found on our web site. Information about subscribing will be sent out in early January.

**PEDAL CLAVICHORD, continued from p. 4** original was not looking for a dainty sound.

Throughout the project my admiration and respect for organ builder Gerstenburg increased, as did my appreciation for his ingenious solutions to problems. One solution in particular was the use of cello-type tuning pegs to regulate the key-dip of the pedal instrument. Each tracker is fastened with a heavy wire hook to the pedal key, and at the upper end a cord continues through a hole in the baseboard of the pedal around this peg in the tangent lever. The tangent levers can be brought nearer or further away from the strings, giving more or less dip and more or less volume. I had never realized what a great value this regulation device would be to an insensitive player for improving his technique. In the manual instruments, the reverse taper in the bridges of the two clavichords effects a subtle difference which is unique in keeping the timbre separate and distinct.

Lastly the challenge of keeping 420 strings in tune required learning a technique using two tuning hammers on the pedal, since the sixteen and eight foot pins are at opposite ends of the case. It was also necessary to remove the lower clavichord to get access to the pedal tuning pins.

Re-creating old musical keyboards has always been for me an enjoyable pursuit. The Gerstenberg has provided me with one of the more memorable adventures of my career.

**Jack Peters**

**MAGNANO continued from p. 3** other side aisle.

The Magnano conference is a wonderful event and is highly recommended; the next meeting is planned for the same time two years hence.

**Alan Durfee**

## Events

The **Fall Clavichord Day** of the Boston Clavichord Society will be held on Saturday, November 22. At four in the afternoon there will be a class to introduce the clavichord to novice players, and at eight in the evening there will be a concert by Richard Troeger.

Peter Sykes will join Richard for Mozart's Sonata in C major for four hands at one keyboard and for W. F. Bach's Duetto in F major for two keyboards. Both events are at the Friends Meeting House, 5 Longfellow Park, Cambridge. (Donation requested). For more information, please call (781)-891-0814.

**Carol lei Breckenridge** will play a clavichord program at Cornell on January 29, 1998 which will include pieces by Kuhnau, Benda and C.P.E. Bach.

On Monday morning, April 20, 1998, the Boston Clavichord Society will sponsor a master class by **Christopher Hogwood**. The details will be available later; for more information, please call the above number.

## News

**Glenn Giuttari** has left the Board of Directors after two years of service, and we thank him very much for all his work. He is being replaced by **Richard Troeger**.

Glenn's work includes the **web site** for the Society at <http://www.harpsichord.com/clavichord>, which was started by his son



**Aidan**. We are currently working on the web site, and much larger version will appear shortly. It will be accessible from the same address.

The society now has a **newsletter**

**exchange** with the other clavichord societies around the world. For further information, contact the Editor.

**Beverly Woodward**, Treasurer of the Boston Clavichord Society, took a course this summer in piano performance at the New England Conservatory of Music. Nearly all the pianists in the course were unfamiliar with the clavichord, so David Hagen, the instructor, suggested that she bring one of her clavichords to a class and demonstrate it. The demonstration went well and some of the pianists will be coming to the upcoming Boston Clavichord Society novice class and concert on November 22. (Never lose an opportunity to proselytize!)

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# The Boston Clavichord Society

P.O. BOX 515  
WALTHAM, MA 02254

