

**J.S. Bach French Suites  
Played on Two Clavichords  
by Julian Perkins**

**Paul Rabin**

Bach's French Suites, BWV 812-817, with their open textures and intimate scale, have always been favorites of clavichord players, but recordings on clavichord have been scarce. Julian Perkins' new recording (Resonus 10163)<sup>1</sup> is a most welcome addition to the list. To fill out the 2 CD set, Perkins has added two additional suites to the now canonical set of six French Suites, but rather than using the apparent



outtakes from the set, BWV 818 and 819, he includes Johann Jakob Froberger's Partita #2 in D minor, FbWV 602, to introduce Bach's suites in C minor, D minor, and B minor on the first CD, and Georg Philipp Telemann's Suite in A major, TWV 32:14, to introduce Bach's suites in E-flat major, G major, and E major on the second CD. The Froberger and Telemann suites serve to remind us of Bach's own early keyboard study, and provide us with points of reference for the range of styles and expressive gestures explored by Bach (and Perkins) in the French Suites.

Perkins uses two clavichords, both made by Peter Bavington after late 18th century originals, both associated with the city of Nuremberg. The instrument used in the first half of the first CD and the second half of the second CD is modeled on a clavichord made by Johann Jakob Bodechtel, previously owned by Christopher Hogwood. The original is diatonically fretted, with a  
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**Teaching Clavichord Workshops**

**Alissa Duryee**

Over the past several years I have had the privilege of teaching various kinds of clavichord workshops. Here I summarize these experiences, report on what has been brought to and taken away from them, and advocate for the clavichord as a relevant tool for keyboard pedagogy, in particular, for students outside the framework of a professional degree program in early keyboard playing.

Of the workshops that will be described, those in St. Avold, Dreux, and Onzain, as well as the Amherst Early Music Festival in Connecticut have been open to the general public, while those in Paris, Beaugency, and my own teaching studio have been limited to students enrolled in a program at each place. Most of the workshops have taken place in France, so a word about the French cultural environment will be helpful. It is the policy in public conservatories in France to divide pedagogical responsibilities among faculty in a very precise way. Instrumental lessons focus only on instrumental technique and interpretation, while solfège class is where one learns to read notes. Each skill has a separate lesson time and instructor. At its best, this system allows faculty to transmit their domain of expertise, and students to benefit from the best guidance in all areas, with a variety of role models to follow. At its worst, it can result in a fractured sense of musicianship, far from the ideal of "musician first, instrumentalist second" which is healthy in general, and absolutely crucial to early music performance in particular. French policy is based on guidelines issued by the Minister of Culture with the express goal of achieving homogeneity throughout the country's conservatories.

For all but the Amherst workshop, I used my personal clavichord. It is a copy of an anonymous instrument, c. 1740, at the Gemeentemuseum in the Hague, double

fretted, four and a third octaves (C-e), which I assembled from a kit in 1998. The instrument has the advantage of being easy to transport and to tune, while providing a range that is sufficient for much repertoire. The limitations imposed by its compass and fretting scheme are not severe and give the student an introduction to dealing with such constraints. In each case, there was either only one instrument or one room available. This limited lesson and practice time for all involved.

In all cases, I provided repertoire suggestions to participants or their teachers considerably in advance. Generally I suggest pieces well within a student's comfort zone (to leave cognitive and technical resources available for new ideas). I recommend keys with no more than two accidentals. This helps in finding a stable hand position and negotiating fretting. I like to offer the possibility of working without a score, focusing on generating modest progressions and inventing simple preludes. Another approach is to start with a simple score, e.g., a Renaissance tune, and then write or improvise variations; or to play from clavichord-appropriate repertoire. (I have a bank of pieces that I suggest.) I encourage students to start by playing whatever they wish, including pop or movie music, if it seems that this will result in fostering interesting connections.

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*Alissa Duryee teaching*

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# A Visit to Weimar: Summer 2016

## Christa Rakich

In mid-June of this year, I visited Weimar, where J.S. Bach lived and worked from 1708 to 1717. It was my first visit, and naively perhaps, I expected to see a lot of tourist Bachiana. I was a bit taken aback by the plethora of Schilleriana and Goethiana. I should not have been. Goethe spent 50 years of his life here, and founded the German National Theater. His home and Garden House are major tourist attractions. Friedrich Schiller spent his last three years here, where he wrote *The Bride of Messina* and *William Tell*. His townhouse attaches to a museum to which many flock.

If Weimar boasts a musician's tourist attraction, it would be Franz Liszt's house, also museumized. Though Liszt did not take a hand in the founding of the conservatory here, it is named for him: Hochschule für Musik FRANZ LISZT Weimar.

Interestingly, Liszt, Goethe, and Schiller all merit full-body commemorative statues.

J.S. Bach gets only a bust. And his house? Now long a parking area. But there is a plaque marking the spot where he lived, and where Maria Barbara gave birth to Catharina Dorothea, Wilhelm Friedemann, and Carl Philipp Emanuel.

Also born here were Johann Gottfried Bernhard and three more children who did not live to their first birthday, including twins born in 1713.

The impetus for this visit was my favorite CD of 2015, a recording on the Aeolus label by Bernhard Klapprott of the six Georg Benda sonatas for keyboard on a 1788 Joseph Horn clavichord that resides in the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in

Hamburg. This was such compelling playing that I wanted to meet the performer. As I was in Berlin for a concert myself, this was an easy side trip.

Klapprott is Director of the Institute for Early Music at the Hochschule where

he teaches organ, clavichord, harpsichord, fortepiano, and continuo realization.<sup>1</sup> From him I learned that the Bach plaque is misplaced and should be shifted several meters to the left. In recent construction a cellar has been discovered which is

believed to be the Master's beer storage area.

With several other organists, Klapprott performs on Aeolus' recent project to record the complete Bach organ works on historic instruments. He is a wealth of insight, information, and ideas. We spoke about his contribution to a book on piano technique, to be published this year. Many years of research have yielded a chapter on performance aspects of cantabile playing, especially under the influence of the clavichord, as drawn from sources from the time of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach.<sup>2</sup>

While at the school, I was treated to some delightful instruments, among them an unfretted

5-octave clavichord after Friederici by Dietrich Hein of Oldenburg, Germany—one of Europe's finest builders. A stunning 2-manual German harpsichord by the Dutch builder Cornelius Bom was another treat.

As luck would have it, my day was privileged to end with a student concert. A program of music from Italy and Germany for solo keyboard and small ensembles was presented by students from Spain, China, South America,



*The Hochschule für Musik FRANZ LISZT, Weimar.*

## TANGENTS

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Russia, and, of course, Germany. The global village lives in Weimar.

Each half of the concert ended with a major J.S. Bach work. The Sonata in G for viola da gamba and cembalo was played on a baroque violoncello piccolo. The concluding work, Concerto in D minor for two violins, BWV 1043, was jubilant. It is the rare early music department that can pull together a full baroque orchestra. These are students who clearly enjoy working together, exploring music, instruments and techniques, and performing in a way that exudes mutual joy. If I were fresh out of undergraduate school and about to relive my Fulbright years, I would head to Weimar.<sup>3</sup>

Notes: <sup>1</sup>An article regarding the programs offered at the Hochschule für Musik FRANZ LISZT Weimar was published in *Tangents*, Number 34, Spring, 2013. An updated report appears on p.5.

<sup>2</sup> *Aufführungspraktische Aspekte des cantablen Spiels, insbesondere unter dem Einfluss des Clavichords--dargestellt anhand von Quellen der Zeit Carl Philipp Emanuel Bachs.*

<sup>3</sup> Bernhard Klapprott will visit the U.S. in September-October 2017. He will perform for the BCS on Friday, September 29, 7:30 pm (see the BCS website for further details) and will play several organ concerts. Ω

(*Clavichord Workshops, cont. from p.1*)

*The Plunge:* This is a one-time encounter for a group of (usually) piano students. The day starts with a first encounter with the clavichord and culminates in a performance shared with me, for an audience of roughly fifty. I taught this way at a private music school in Paris, a private arts venue in Onzain, France, and a public conservatory in St. Avoild, France. I worked in conjunction with organists Fabrice Muller and Vincent Bernhard (focusing on the relationship between organ and clavichord playing, with a day devoted to each instrument). The day-long format and concluding performance have generally been requested by the organizer. Students are divided into groups based on age and/or skill level, each getting about fifteen minutes of private instruction, and each getting a turn to play in front of others. Each student's performance can be used to illustrate a general issue to the whole group, and in that way to cover a surprising amount of ground in a very short time.

I have been impressed by the neuroplasticity of most children, which allows them to adapt quickly to new sounds and sensations, and impressed by the willingness of even shy and modest teenagers to expose themselves to group scrutiny even though they are accustomed to private lessons. For students to feel comfortable sharing a performance program with the instructor, careful choices about repertoire are crucial. It can be discouraging to a newcomer to perform a modest minuet just following the performance of a large-scale contrapuntal and/or virtuosic work. But it can make sense, for example, to pair a student performance of a sonatina by Vanhal with a professional performance of a Mozart sonata, or a simple setting of a *Follia* with a more elaborate one.

*The Periodical:* In this format I have worked with a group of students for up to five sessions. The sessions took place on consecutive days at the Amherst Early Music Festival and the annual *Rencontre de Pianoforte et de Claviers Anciens* in Droux (which I co-taught with fortepianists Bart van Oort and Juan Manuel Cisneros Garcia). At the municipal music school of Beaugency, the sessions were spread through a semester. In both situations the focus could be more on process than performance. This format provided the opportunity to delve into topics such as the culture of early keyboard playing, the role of keyboardist as

improviser and composer, the relationship between popular and "art" music, and the pertinence of solo public performance as a principal goal for a keyboard player. It has been possible to integrate some wind playing (traverso and recorder) and song into these sessions.

Time is divided between brief individual lessons, sometimes in front of the whole class, and plenary sessions. The first plenary

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sessions focus on providing general information about the clavichord and its history and then turn to projects such as the composition of a musical notebook, co-authored by the participants. Some of the students, at Amherst in particular, have been accomplished professionals in related musical fields; others were less advanced, but made great contributions based on their personalities, center of interest, or sense of humor.

This workshop model seems to stimulate everyone involved in ways that are not common in the culture of modern keyboard (particularly piano) study. It is worth having a long hard look at what made this type of experience so fulfilling; I suspect that it has something to do with heightening the student's sense of his or her aptitudes within a group context, the realization of a sense of belonging as well as of individuality, and a cooperative rather than a competitive model.

*The Full Immersion:* I conducted such a workshop with my own students at the conservatory in Dreux, France where I teach. The group ranged from seven year old beginners to amateur players of retirement age. There were about thirty participants, none of whom were pursuing a professional diploma at the time. They had various backgrounds in playing piano, harpsichord, or organ. As I knew each of these students very well, I was quite eager to observe the effects of the immersion on their short- and

long-term development. I was also eager to explore the trajectory of their enthusiasm (or lack thereof) for the clavichord. To do that, I distributed a questionnaire before and after the immersion. These questionnaires revealed much about my students that I had not realized.

In this format, first on the agenda was to draw a picture of a *clavier*. I hoped to glean a general sense of what that meant to today's music student. The participants responded with drawings of grand pianos, organs, black and white keys, and synthesizers with lots of buttons. I then asked students to rate what was most important to them from the following list: volume of sound, expressivity, playing with others, playing alone. I also asked them about their musical tastes and for their reactions to the clavichord both before and after listening to me playing it. I told them to be honest, even if that meant saying that they didn't care for it. Two months later, I asked these questions again. An exhaustive account of their responses is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that their self-stated preferences evolved in the way one might expect after two months of clavichord playing: increased interest in expressivity, openness to new instruments and to previously unheard-of composers.

It also became evident that the participants had not given much thought to these topics previous to our immersion. Embarrassing though this may be for both students and teacher, it is probably symptomatic of contemporary keyboard pedagogy. Many students study the instrument most readily available to them by default, even though the students may be quite adaptable and open-minded when offered wider options.

The clavichord immersion caused all of my students to slow down, and thereby progress. One student in particular made great strides in her playing by practicing Chopin's *Raindrop Prelude* at the clavichord. (The agreement was that students in the immersion would practice at the clavichord whatever keyboard piece they were working on at the time.) She was able to gain precision in her left-hand reaches, dramatically improve her tone production, and minimize her reliance on the pedal.

I observed similar improvements of various kinds in all of the workshops. The main technical accomplishment has been a universal  
(Continued on p. 4)

(*Clavichord Workshops, cont. from p.3*) improvement in tone production. Other types of improvements included: greater precision and control, improved hand position, economy of movement, enlarged fingering skills, more careful posture, ability to invest each note (particularly in polyphonic textures). Learning to produce a good tone on the clavichord causes one to develop strength in the last phalange, which is extremely helpful to modern pianists in particular.

It is common for new clavichord players to create less sound in their left hand. As they learn to invest more physical and musical weight in the lower register, they gain skills that are especially helpful to harpsichord and continuo playing. Negotiating fretting is especially helpful to organists. It trains the reflexes that they need to cultivate to adapt their touch so as to achieve the perfect balance of connectedness to detachment.

Still another category of deeper benefits resulted from clavichord study: the improved rhythmic stability that results from the ability to invest each note, the increasingly demanding inner ear which is formed by successful polyphonic playing, the deeper learning that occurs when ears are tuned to lower volumes of sound. The clavichord, given a minimum amount of effort, profoundly changes the procedure frequently used by keyboardists: play note, hear sound, react before next note. The procedure becomes: imagine desired sound, produce it, repeat as necessary. This anticipatory path to sound production is a superior one.

A limitation of these workshops is that they do not make it possible to truly cultivate a sense of style. It is possible to indicate appropriate ornaments on given pieces when needed, something for which students and their teachers seem eager. But it seems that only regular study over a long period, covering much repertoire, can be thorough in this regard. However, it has been possible to help some participants become aware of how much else there is to performance practice besides ornamentation.

In all of the workshops, I was impressed by the enthusiasm of young people for the clavichord. Interestingly, in the workshops involving the clavichord as well as other keyboards, children and teenagers did not seem overwhelmed by the challenges provided by several types

of keyboards. Those who showed aptitude for one keyboard tended to show aptitude for another. It is absurd to fear, as do the reticent directors of some conservatories, that exposure to more than one keyboard will cause students to dissipate their abilities. It is beneficial to expose keyboardists to the clavichord at an early age and level, so that they maintain flexibility as players.

Today in France, and elsewhere I hope, there is a movement to democratize access to high quality music lessons. This has resulted in the creation of a great many municipal conservatories with qualified teachers and low enrollment costs. This system strives to make a conservatory education available to all, regardless of geographical location or financial means. New artistic seeds are being sown in this way. Some of those enrolling are the first in their family to study an instrument. Some are practicing on synthesizers. What these students may lack in cultural background and privilege, they compensate for amply with open-mindedness and enthusiasm.

However, any cultural framework is only as good as what is done with it. Teaching clavichord as a visitor has afforded me a special glimpse into what can happen when people are given the chance to learn in a different way: the open-minded, thoughtful, careful, non-competitive and anticipatory way in which the clavichord invites us to learn. Clavichordists of the past, with their multitude of musical identities, provide many role models, challenging the increasing value placed on specialization. For reasons both instrumental and cultural, the clavichord is as pertinent a pedagogical tool in our time as it ever was.

I aim to continue teaching workshops whenever possible, taking care to develop lasting relationships with other keyboardist colleagues, with certain schools (making annual visits, encouraging the purchase of an instrument), and above all with the students.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This work is influenced by my collaboration with Juan Manuel Cisneros Garcia, a Spanish composer, pianist, and fortepianist, who belongs to a collective of teachers in Spain promoting the study of improvisation as a path to the mastery of keyboard literature. Ω

## Large unfretted clavichord for sale / Preethi de Silva.



The highly reputable clavichord maker, Lyndon J. Taylor of Redlands, CA, made this instrument at my request, obtaining the construction plans for it from the Grassi Museum in Leipzig, Germany. No person other than I has used it. It is in an almost pristine condition.



Based on the makers description: This large clavichord is a reproduction of an instrument of ca. 1775 made by Christoph Gottlob Hubert, Ansbach, Germany. The range is FF-a<sup>3</sup>; it is unfretted with soft iron strings in mid and treble ranges. Tuned at a<sup>1</sup>=415 Herz. Width: 158 cm; depth: 42.2 cm; ht: 14 cm. It has a case of fir and a three-panel lid and four screwed in legs. A music desk and tuning key are included.

Decorative options included: Hubert-style herringbone veneer in French walnut and oak; naturals of highly attractive cocobolo; and skunktail sharps.

A recording on an instrument by Lyndon Taylor, which is similar to mine, can be heard at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4M\\_UW5ByFo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4M_UW5ByFo)

*Suggested special price to Boston Clavichord Society members: \$9,000. The instrument is in California. If interested, please leave a message at: 909, 624-0638*

(CD Review, cont. from p.1)  
compass of four and a half octaves, C-f3; in his copy, Bavington has extended the keyboard to include BB. The instrument used in the middle parts of the recording is modeled on an instrument in the Nuremberg Germanisches Nationalmuseum, MIR 1061, now confidently attributed to Johann Heinrich Silbermann. The original is unfretted, with a five octave compass, FF-f3. Perkins' notes don't explain his reasons for using the two instruments in this way. Since all of the French Suites fit in the standard early 18th century range of C-c3, it must be for delight in the very different timbres of the instruments. To my ear, the Bodechtel copy has a more transparent sound, with sharper attack; the Silbermann copy has a more subtle attack, and fuller sound.

The collection of suites that eventually coalesced as the six French Suites appears to have started as a gift for Bach's new wife, Anna Magdalena, in 1722. Bach quickly began using the suites with his students; copies made by these students include different groups of suites, out of the larger set of eight, in various orders. Unlike the so-called English Suites, which stick fairly closely to French models, the French

Suites are more experimental, and show increasing Italian and galant influences. From the evidence of these manuscripts, Bach continued to revise the suites, adding new movements and new sections to existing movements, and adjusting fine details of voice leading and ornamentation, without ever gathering these all into a fair copy. Perkins took advantage of this multiplicity of possible readings to construct his own performing edition. Most notably, he includes an imaginative realization of the prelude from BWV 815a as a prelude to suite 4, and WTC I #9 BWV 854/1 as a prelude to suite 6, following the manuscript copy of Bach's student Heinrich Nikolaus Gerber.

The recorded sound quality is excellent, with clear distinction between the two instruments. The essay by Warwick Cole provides a good overview of the primary sources, with references and links to online reproductions of the most important manuscripts, to which Perkins adds a personal note giving the performer's perspective.

Perkins demonstrates complete rapport with the instruments and music, evoking a wide range of colors and effects. His performances are delightfully unbuttoned but

never mannered, with subtly varied use of inégale, and fluidly improvised ornamentation; his rhythms are vigorous but always plastic. Altogether, this is music making of the highest order, rewarding the attentive listener at every level of detail.<sup>3</sup>

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> This recording was supported by the British Clavichord Society.

<sup>2</sup> Previous recordings include: (a) Thurston Dart performing on a Thomas Goff 1950 clavichord [1961], reissued as JM5CD4, reviewed by Howard Schott in *Early Music*, vol. 27 no. 4, Nov. 1999, and by Francis Knights in issue 11 of *The British Clavichord Society Newsletter*. (b) Colin Tilney performing on an 1895 Dolmetsch after J.A. Hass [2012], CD-1268 Music & Arts, reviewed by Derek Adlam in issue 56 of *The British Clavichord Society Newsletter*. (c) Ilton Wjuniski [2004] GM 2075 performs the French Suites on harpsichord and clavichord (BWV 818, 818a, 819, and 823, a fragment), reviewed by Anthony Noble in issue 31 of *The British Clavichord Society Newsletter*.

<sup>3</sup> Julian Perkins' website is found at: <http://julianperkins.com> Ω

## Clavichord Studies at the Hochschule für Musik FRANZ LISZT Weimar

Report by Bernhard Klapprott, Professor for Early Keyboard Instruments at the Department of Early Music in the University of Music FRANZ LISZT Weimar (Institut für Alte Musik, Hochschule für Musik FRANZ LISZT Weimar).

The clavichord plays an essential role in music studies at Weimar. Students learn how essential playing the clavichord is. I teach in German and English. Students with limited English usually take a course in German at Weimar parallel to their music studies. The University of Music FRANZ LISZT Weimar owns a clavichord after Christian Gottlob Friederici, FF-f3, built by Dietrich Hein of Oldenburg.

**Programs of study that include the clavichord in the Department of Early Music**

**Bachelor of Music in Harpsichord, 8 semesters**

The study of the clavichord is obligatory in the Bachelor of Music in Harpsichord eight-semester program. In addition, there is the possibility to study the clavichord as a secondary part of the harpsichord degree

and then to play the clavichord as part of the final recital for the degree.

**Master of Music, 2 semesters**

In the two-semester master's degree program, it is possible to study the clavichord

degree include a final clavichord recital and a master's thesis.

**Master of Music, 4 semesters**

The four-semester master's degree program possibilities include the clavichord



Clavichord after Friederici by Dietrich Hein as principal instrument. The program includes weekly clavichord lessons as well as optional participation in further early music courses offered by the Department of Early Music. The graduation requirements for the

as principal instrument in combination with another Early Keyboard Instrument (or two other Early Keyboard Instruments) – harpsichord, organ (early music), and early fortepiano. This program includes clavichord lessons as well as instruction on another Early Keyboard Instrument; also, instruction in basso continuo and chamber music and/or participation in other early music courses offered by the Department of Early Music. Graduation requirements are a final recital on the clavichord and one or two other Early Keyboard Instruments and a master's thesis. Ω



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