

Yearbook of the
Westfield Center for
Historical Keyboard Studies

Keyboard *Perspectives*

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Keyboard Perspectives VIII

The Yearbook of the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies 2015

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Contributors

ROBIN BLANTON

Robin Blanton received her PhD in musicology from the University of Gothenburg in 2012. Her dissertation investigated the role played by keyboard instruments as works of art in the late eighteenth century. She has worked for Taylor & Boody Organbuilders and for the Research Workshop of the Göteborg Organ Art Center (GOArt), where she built clavichords and metal organ pipes. In 2016, she will join the research project “Creative Keyboards” at the University of Gothenburg’s Academy of Music and Drama to study the musical, behavioral, social, and cultural affordances of novel keyboard instruments. She also works as a freelance translator.

REBECCA CYPRESS

Musicologist and harpsichordist Rebecca Cypess is assistant professor of music at the Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University. She holds a PhD from Yale University, master’s degrees in harpsichord from the Royal College of Music (London) and in Jewish studies from Yeshiva University, and a BA in music from Cornell University. She has received research grants from the American Association of University Women, the American Bach Society, and the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, among others. Her book, *Curious and Modern Inventions: Instrumental Music as Discovery in Galileo’s Italy*, will be published in 2016 by the University of Chicago Press.

ULRIKA DAVIDSSON

Ulrika Davidsson teaches historical keyboard instruments and thesis writing at the Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg. She is also Director of Music at Björkö Church, Öckerö. Previously, she has taught at the Eastman School of Music and the Bremen Hochschule für Künste. Davidsson holds a DMA in piano performance and historical keyboards and an MM in harpsichord performance from the Eastman School of Music, and an MFA in piano performance from the University of Gothenburg. She maintains a performance career on the fortepiano, harpsichord, clavichord, and the piano.

EMILY I. DOLAN

Emily I. Dolan is the Gardner Cowles Associate Professor of Music at Harvard University. Dolan works on the music of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She focuses on issues of orchestration, timbre, aesthetics, and instrumentality, exploring the intersections between music, science, and technology. Her first book, *The Orchestral Revolution: Haydn and the Technologies of Timbre*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2013. Currently, Dolan is working on a collaborative project on timbre with Alexander Rehding for Oxford Handbooks Online and on her second book, *Instruments and Order*, which explores the concept of instrumentality.

JOHN KOSTER

John Koster studied music history at Harvard College. He set out as a harpsichord maker, and maintained the keyboard instruments in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. In 1991, following a Mellon Senior Fellowship (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), he became Professor of Music, Conservator, and Curator of Keyboard Instruments at the National Music Museum, University of South Dakota. He has published widely, and is editor of *Early Keyboard Journal*. His book, *Keyboard Musical Instruments in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (1994), received the Bessaraboff Prize of the American Musical Instrument Society and his 2011 article “A Harpsichord by Diego Fernández?” received the Densmore Prize. Koster continues to be active as a scholar with principal interests in the history of musical instruments and their contexts in the histories of music, art, and technology.

LAURENCE LIBIN

Laurence Libin is editor-in-chief of the *Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*, honorary curator of Steinway & Sons, and emeritus curator of musical instruments at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. A Life Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, he was awarded a Likhachev Foundation Fellowship for study in Russia, and has received the Curt Sachs Award from the American Musical Instrument Society and the Anthony Baines Memorial Prize of the Galpin Society. Mr. Libin has taught at Columbia University, New York University, and the Escuela Nacional de Música, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, and lectures internationally on organology.

TIFFANY NG

Tiffany Ng is Assistant Professor of Carillon at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She holds a doctorate in musicology and new media studies from the University of California, Berkeley, where her dissertation explored how two contemporaneous developments shaped each other: cold war technology and diplomacy, and the historicist revival of organ and carillon building in America and the Netherlands. Ng earned a master's degree in organ from Eastman and a licentiate from the Royal Carillon School in Belgium. Her concert career has taken her to major festivals in a dozen countries in Europe, Asia, and North America, where she has premiered over two dozen acoustic and electroacoustic works.

ANNETTE RICHARDS

Annette Richards is an organist and musicologist who writes on eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century music and aesthetics. She is the author of *The Free Fantasia and the Musical Picturesque* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) and editor of several studies relating to C. P. E. Bach, including the reconstruction of Bach's portrait collection (Packard Humanities Institute, 2012). Her current project is a book on death, fantasy, and the grotesque entitled *Music on the Dark Side of 1800*. She is Professor of Music and University Organist at Cornell, and is the Executive Director of the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies. She recently began to learn to play the glass harmonica.

TILMAN SKOWRONECK

Bremen-born Tilman Skowroneck studied harpsichord with Bob van Asperen, Anneke Uittenbosch, Ton Koopman, and Gustav Leonhardt, and fortepiano with Malcolm Bilson. Between 1991 and 2006 he was the harpsichordist and fortepianist in the Swedish baroque ensemble Corona Artis. With this group, he played an abundance of concert productions, and made several recordings. Today, Tilman works as a freelance musician, scholar, and translator. His book *Beethoven the Pianist* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2010. A second book about Viennese piano building in the early nineteenth century is in preparation.

ELEANOR SMITH

Eleanor Smith is a graduate of the University of Edinburgh where she was awarded a PhD in 2013 for her thesis *The History and Use of the Claviorgan*. Her research interests, which have largely focused on how keyboard instruments were used in

performance (particularly in regard to accompaniment practice), relate to her activities as a singer specializing in baroque music. Currently working on the “Declassifying the Classics” project at the Orpheus Institute in Ghent with Prof. Tom Beghin and Chris Maene, she intends to expand her PhD research on the claviorgan further into the sphere of performance practice.

Website

For this issue of *Keyboard Perspectives*, the accompanying CD that the reader has come to expect has been replaced by a website. Organized essay by essay, it contains sound and video files in conjunction with the musical examples already printed in this volume, as well as additional photographs. The reader's experience will be enriched by having ready access to the website.

Please visit:

<http://kp8.westfield.org/>

Preface

ONE OF MY PARENTS' DREAMS, as I was growing up, was to own a *claviorganum*, a combined harpsichord and organ.¹ This was at a time when my keyboard playing was still in its infancy (to say nothing of myself), and relied on a pedagogy rooted in printed 'music books,' with a pedagogue (Jan Goens, the local organist) who, admirably mellow-mindedly yet persistently, sought to convince me of the benefits of reading my pieces from the pages of these books. This was quite literally playing *vom Blatt*, instead of *auswendig* ("by heart"). My resulting focus on "pieces" (old, new, easy, difficult, but always *printed*) may have been responsible for the fact that, for years, the question "but what music would I actually *play* on a claviorganum?" made me view the idea of such a combination instrument with some suspicion.²

The question of a suitable repertoire for combination keyboard instruments is indeed not easily answered. When Patrick Alströmer, a businessman and music enthusiast who lived in Gothenburg, received his own combination instrument in 1781—a small organ combined with a fortepiano of the newest kind, made by J. A. Stein of Augsburg—his diary entries about the new instrument simply do not mention any repertoire at all. Time and again, Alströmer notes that he "tried out" the instrument for friends or "made music" with others, but what he played remains unmentioned.

In fact, combination keyboard instruments, together with other instruments with uncommon actions, names, or shapes, tend to fall between the gaps of history in more than one way. We wonder about their appropriate repertoire; we often have little or no idea about their place and function in their owner's house and in the history of music-making in general; and it is not at all uncommon that we have fundamental doubts about their technological makeup. "Experimental instruments," they are often called in hindsight. In narratives of technological development, they occupy at best the position of a perhaps well-intended, but ultimately unsuccessful dead end. In cultural historiography, they either stand for

¹ Other families' dreams may be different; I want to emphasise that I have not made up this one for the sake of this Preface.

² Fifty years later with half a life as a continuo player behind me, these questions have largely solved themselves.

the paying crowd's misguided taste for passing fads or, if expensive, for a culturally aimless indulgence in curiosia by the wealthy few. Today, non-mainstream historical keyboard instruments typically occupy strategically confusing places along the museum walls, someplace between the harpsichord, the inevitable Zumpe square piano, the concert grand, and some other 'real' instruments of the past and present.

This issue of *Keyboard Perspectives* looks at keyboard instruments through the lens of variety—as essentially varied objects, that invite a variety of interactions with them. Some of the essays focus on some important, but now-forgotten instrument, on combination instruments, unfamiliar constructions or details of construction, or on the variety of approaches necessary to play a certain kind of instrument. Other contributions discuss the variety of historical and social realities that put these instruments on the map, and explain how technological sidelines can be seen as enrichment rather than dead ends. By showing what these instruments were, how they were played and what they meant, these essays highlight an important part of the keyboard world that is too often eclipsed by the organ's and the piano's evolutionary narratives of success.

Annette Richards moves us as far away from the comfortably standardized world of the ivories as we will likely ever venture. In the glass harmonica—Benjamin Franklin's, at the time sensational, invention—glass bowls were taken, as it were, out of the cabinet and nestled one inside another, arranged in keyboard fashion—an arrangement that serves, in itself, as tangible evidence for the variety of possible interpretations of the term “keyboard.” This is a fascinating account, involving an arranged wedding, a young English Armonica soloist and her singing sister, the composer Johann Adolf Hasse, and the librettist Pietro Metastasio. Richards provides a glimpse into the instrument's first-hour reception history, showing that the glass harmonica's reputation transcended the “Romantic tales of nocturnal madness and the reanimation of corpses” that have survived into our times. In terms of affordance, the instrument offered the possibility to sustain the tone and to increase and decrease its volume at will. The wish for keyboard instruments that possessed exactly these two capabilities was universal in the late eighteenth century. In spite of its short heyday, the “Armonica” thus proves to be firmly rooted in the basic aesthetics of the time. For the listener, on the other hand, there was more to it: the instrument's ethereal sound revealed a “strange musical voice that surpasses the human...textless, yet speaking,” ultimately a “crucial conveyor of meaning.”

In her essay about Philipp Jacob Milchmeyer and the concept of *Verände-*

rungen (stops to alter and enrich the timbre of a given instrument), Rebecca Cypess draws a concise picture of late eighteenth-century German keyboard aesthetics, where the central goal of the musical performance was to move the listener. Based on the idea of “variety as a key to musical expression,” Cypess places the combination keyboard instrument at the center of these aesthetics. Her focus is Milchmeyer’s so-called *mechanischer Clavier-Flügel*, a three-manual instrument that allowed for a very large number of timbral variations, in which the third keyboard could be pushed out to allow for playing duets. The many possibilities of Milchmeyer’s instrument invite a discussion of repertoire for keyboard duet and solo repertoire (significantly in this order). Cypess’s basic tenet is that Milchmeyer’s work reflects a noteworthy, and hitherto neglected, facet of the musical culture of his time. She thus provides an important corrective to an established picture of Milchmeyer as a business-minded advocate of sound effects produced by expensive, but tasteless gadgetry.

Robin Blanton writes about Johann Andreas Stein’s combination instruments and other special inventions, showing how these instruments fit into their maker’s social world. Tapping into modern theory about the public sphere, she considers the question of the significance (for Stein and his onlookers) of showing these instruments off in public. Which discourses did they spur, beyond the obvious musical one? How did they serve the self-defining ambitions of an upcoming bourgeoisie?

Gently guiding us away from sociology, John Koster invites us to contemplate harpsichord stops, non-aligned keyboards, and dog-legged jack shapes. The variety of keyboard instruments is here addressed from the standpoint of an organologist’s close knowledge of a vast variety of historical models and building styles, and their affordances. Koster argues against a “whatever works, works fine” attitude when choosing instruments and registrations. Adding substantial nuance to the still-canonical picture that only a few national harpsichord-building schools are truly worth considering, his article provides an abundance of information for an informed choice of registration in various national styles and specific repertoire.

Finally we turn to the claviorgan proper and the unanswered question of its repertoire and performance practice. Using evidence from the long history of the claviorgan, Elly Smith shows its prominence in various courtly cultures throughout history; Smith discusses the instruments’ varying elaborate constructions, and their predominant use as a continuo instrument or a medium for improvisation when demonstrated on their own. This article helps us understand how these

instruments were an important part of musical awareness over a long stretch of time, in spite of being expensive, unwieldy, and relatively rare.

Laurence Libin invites us to consider American piano making of the mid-nineteenth century and its many inventions and patents. In an already well-established industrial setting, the importance of marketable novelty and superiority was growing. Not everything in this world, in which “patented” equaled “modern,” gained full acceptance. Some inventions, like Alpheus Babcock’s ribbon-wound bass strings (which were not even patented) remained a momentary phenomenon. With countless examples and historical accounts, Libin elegantly helps us navigate this unwieldy terrain of innovations (most had to do with metal treatment and processing)—those many efforts by “hopeful inventors,” some of which were short-lived “dead ends” or “solutions in search of problems,” whereas others, such as Coleman’s Aeolian attachment, attracted substantial attention for some time.

Continuing a discussion that began during the Westfield Center’s conference “Sensation and Sensibility” (October 2–4, 2014), this volume includes a Portrait by Emily Dolan of composer Andrew McPherson and his Magnetic Resonator Piano. Taking one of the basic problems of the late eighteenth-century keyboard—that is, the production of “sustain and nuance”—as a starting point, Dolan introduces the Magnetic Resonator Piano as a modern solution that offers the same “allure of the infinite tone” that had made the glass harmonica a short-lived but resounding success. The portrait offers a glimpse into McPherson’s career, and addresses the important question of how to introduce new technologies into music: how to make them available, how to travel with them, and how to make players understand and use them.

A set of reviews of recent publications rounds out this volume. Tiffany Ng eloquently presents the English translation of Luc Rombouts’s *Singing Bronze: A History of Carillon Music* (2014). Her review serves as an excellent introduction to the history of the carillon, this “keyboard instrument of at least two octaves of precisely tuned bronze bells, played from a mechanical-action keyboard and pedalboard, and usually concealed in a tower.” Rombouts’s book is here portrayed as an important first scholarly treatment of its subject. Joan Benson’s *Clavichord for Beginners* (2014), reviewed here by Ulrika Davidsson, is a document of its author’s enthusiasm for the clavichord that, with some caveats, can also serve as a valuable first introduction to those who want to know more about the instrument. Using her own considerable experience as a clavichord performer and teacher, Davidsson provides detailed analyses of the written text as well as the sound examples on the CD that accompanies the book, and she carefully evaluates the teaching sessions shown on the included DVD.

In conclusion, my own review of five CDs points in various ways to the essays in the rest of this volume. The claviorgan is presented in two of these recordings, once as a continuo instrument in Biber's 'Mystery' sonatas (with Alice Piérot, violin; Marianne Muller, viola da gamba; Pascal Monteilhet, theorbo; and Elisabeth Geiger, claviorgan), and once as a solo instrument (played on one of the last solo recordings by the late Gustav Leonhardt). The third CD features Haydn's music for the *lira organizzata*, an instrument that combines the principle of the hurdy gurdy with a small organ (Christophe Coin, Ensemble Baroque de Limoges, Quatuor Mosaiques). This oddly endearing instrument is mentioned in passing in Elly Smith's article. One of J. A. Stein's combination instruments that are at the heart of Robin Blanton's essay is the *Vis-à-vis*, a large instrument that combines a harpsichord and a fortepiano. The earlier *Vis-à-vis* of the two existing ones from 1777 was restored not too long ago. It can be heard both in composed music and in duo-improvisations on the fourth CD reviewed here, played by Andreas Staier and Christine Schornsheim. Finally, to illustrate perhaps the most familiar member of the harpsichord family and the corresponding section in John Koster's article, I consider a new recording with music by Jacques Duphly, played by Aya Hamada on a French harpsichord.

Many people have contributed to this volume. My thanks, first and foremost, to the authors and their patience in dealing with my suggestions and requests. Many thanks, too, to Annette Richards for her unfailing readiness to discuss matters and read texts (even lengthy ones), and for never losing her cool. Thanks to Mat Langlois for taking on the Sisyphean task of proof-reading and copy editing, and Evan Cortens for turning it all into an actual volume.

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