

Newsletter October 2006

Welcome to the seventh e-newsletter of the British Harpsichord Society.

Contents:

William Mitchell

Travels with my
Clavichord

John Erskine

New Music

Scarlatti 2007

Couperin

FIMTE 2006

New Music

MBF Christmas Cards

Guestbook

Instrument for sale and wanted

Membership

Feedback

[Harpsichord & Fortepiano](#)



Editorial

I am by no means a serious listener to Radio 3, but I do sometimes tune in for a bit of musical wallpaper. Occasionally I catch some keyboard music. It's often

Bach. This morning I switched on, and someone was playing some Scarlatti. And, do you know, when I tune in it's never ever a harpsichord that is being played, always a piano. Sod's law being what it is, for the rest of the time, when I'm not listening to Radio 3, they may well be broadcasting harpsichord music being played on the harpsichord. Nevertheless, I am disappointed if Bach played on a piano is still what people want to hear. We have splendid young British harpsichordists; we have lovely harpsichords being produced. Let's hear them!

As a result of our requests for assistance, John Erskine has offered his services as membership secretary and events publicist. This is great news, and I'm immensely grateful to him for what he is doing. Obviously, the more people who get involved, the more effective the BHS is going to be, so I do urge you to consider the possibility of volunteering.

I'm grateful to John for having written an article for this issue, offering a few personal points about harpsichord matters in the hope that they may strike chords with other members' experiences and interests and perhaps lead to some discussion; the article also covers aspects of membership and events. He writes about his enthusiasm for Thomas Tomkins. I share that enthusiasm and earlier this year made a pilgrimage to Worcester and to Martin Husingtree. The exact whereabouts of his grave in the churchyard of Martin Husingtree is unknown, and, as John points out, there is no memorial to him in Worcester Cathedral. Perhaps the BHS may be instrumental in rectifying that omission.

William set up an internet BHS networking group. I had a look at the joining procedure and was completely flummoxed. It looks as though other people were as well, since the take-up has been miniscule. He is now working on some 'Noddy' instructions that even I can follow, which will be published on the website, so we shall all be able to join and network away to our hearts' content.

I've written below about my visit in May to try William Mitchell's claviorganum, and William has written of this instrument's amazingly peripatetic life so far. Quite an epic!

I desperately need feedback: please inundate me with suggestions, comments, articles and anything else you feel would be useful!

Michael Ackerman

William Mitchell

In 1981 John Paul published a book called *Modern Harpsichord Makers*. One of the makers featured was William Mitchell. He is described there

as being mainly interested in Franco-Flemish instruments, particularly the 1636/1763 Ruckers-Hemsch, and as having built a claviorganum. He retired from building a few years ago but continues to maintain instruments he has built. Being an organist as well as harpsichordist, I was eager to inspect the claviorganum, which is at the moment in his house in Southbourne, so William kindly allowed me to go down and have a look.

The instrument is a two-manual Mitchell Ruckers-Hemsch copy on a one manual organ. The pipework comes from an early nineteenth-century Walker organ. It has been handled extremely well, and is a very attractive and character-full chamber organ in its own right. If you follow the claviorganum link on William's website (<http://www.harpsichords.co.uk/>), you will see illustrations of the instrument.

However, they do not really convey the handsomeness of the instrument: the lid decoration elegantly combining strings with pipes by illustrating Apollo playing a violin (!) in competition with Pan playing his pipes, and the breathtaking sight of three manuals with naturals of rosewood

In 'Modern Harpsichord Makers' William said that he intended to build a portable claviorganum. That never materialised, but apparently other builders are taking up the challenge. I have to say that as an organist/harpsichordist, I found the instrument totally beguiling and I should certainly like to have regular access to such an instrument.

As I mentioned, William has now retired from building, having succeeded in making a living (just) from it. He regrets that there is not a greater proportion of his oeuvre in Britain: he puts that down to the greater interest in harpsichords elsewhere in the world^[1]. He remained faithful to the Ruckers-Hemsch ideal, and retains a fine one-manual for himself, as well as an Italian 2x8'. Other



instruments make guest appearances for one reason or another in his music room. Finally, I ought to make a brief mention of a modern extension two-manual chamber organ which has taken up permanent residence there, in need of a bit of tlc.

William is a terrific supporter of the British Harpsichord Society, regularly coming up for the 'second Tuesday' recitals at the Handel House.

Travels with my Claviorganum

William Mitchell's own account of incredible adventures.

John Erskine

John introduces himself, membership and events.

Scarlatti 2007

Next year marks the 250th anniversary of the death of Scarlatti. Guildhall School of Music and Drama is participating in a Scarlatti Marathon on December 1st this year.

A few people have come forward with ideas for some Scarlatti events next year, and more are welcome. We could arrange some Saturday events at the Handel House next year.

Couperin Series

The series of Couperin afternoons, conceived and organised by Jane Clark has finally come to an end after over a year, in which many performers contributed their own ideas on Couperin performance, and aimed to show the work in a more satirical style than the rather more genteel approach often taken. The darker side of characters at the French Court and Couperin's imagination were brought to life.

7th International Festival of Spanish Keyboard Music

The 7th Annual International Festival of Spanish Keyboard Music FIMTE 2006 will take place October 11-15 in Almeria-Andalucia, with concerts, courses, exhibitions and the 7th International



Symposium on Spanish Keyboard Music 'Diego Fernández'.

New Music

Raymond Head - Le Mystere - Two Pieces for Harpsichord

Sky Dance Press email tel: +44 (0)1608 642025 Price £6.50 plus postage

These pieces were written in 1997 at the suggestion of Klyne Williams, who wanted a new work to play at a Taskin conference at Dartington.

The request for these pieces gave me the longed-for opportunity of writing something to commemorate the life of a great friend of mine, Mary Potts, the pioneering harpsichordist who lived in Cambridge and who died in 1982. Her interest in French music stimulated these pieces, so that the first piece is an expressive homage to Couperin's sensual style and the second celebrates Rameau's love of playful linear development. Both pieces are within the capacities of those who play eighteenth-century French music. There are no shamanic tricks, like hitting soundboards or plucking strings.

Subsequently they have been played by Michael Bardsley at a Penelope Cave Harpsichord course in France in 2003. That performance created quite a lot of

interest in the work and I sold several copies to participating players. Michael has since played the works several times. Recently, in July 2006, Penelope Cave played them at a Handel House recital with great success. She wrote to me afterwards, saying 'I thoroughly enjoyed playing them and can't wait to perform them again'.

Harpsichordfest 13-14th October 2006

The second Harpsichordfest is being held in Manchester, under the Artistic Direction of Pamela Nash. A two-day contemporary music festival featuring five premieres, three concertos, a workshop for young composers and Steve Reich's Piano Phase on two harpsichords.

Stephen Dodgson

Stephen's collection of works for Harpsichord are in the process of being published, and we are hoping to feature a number of them in an event at the Handel House next year.

Terry Charlston writes:

I thought you might like to know that I am making some of my performing scores available as pdf free downloads on my website. I hope these will be of interest to players, especially as much of the material is difficult to come by. These are transcriptions of single sources not finished editions. So far I have included some keyboard, vocal and instrumental music. The



webpage address is:

http://www.charlston.freemove.co.uk/free_sheet_music_downloads.htm:

Christmas Cards from the Musicians Benevolent Fund

Janet Weston, MBF Public Affairs & Legacy Officer, writes:

Judith from the British Clavichord Society has suggested that I contact you to find out whether it might be possible for the Society to help with the Musicians Benevolent Fund Christmas card campaign in any way. The MBF is the music business's own charity, helping musicians, those in related industries, and their dependants.

We produce our own musically-themed cards each year to raise funds and profile, and would be very grateful if members of your Society could be told about them via the website.

We produce a brochure for the cards, which I would be delighted to supply. You can also have a peek at the cards via our website,

<http://www.mbf.org.uk>. We would be most grateful for any help that you could offer.

Guestbook

Please visit the Guestbook: you may be able to help other members with their problem, or initiate your own discussion.

Instruments for sale and wanted

Please visit our Sale and Wanted page with a number of instruments available and

requests. If you have an instrument you would like to sell, you can place an

advertisement with picture for £20. Instruments wanted ads are FOC. The Sale



page currently gets about 600 visitors per month, interested in buying or selling harpsichords.

The English Harpsichord Magazine

Carey Beebe would like to complete his collection:

Here is the complete list of my spare copies of the English Harpsichord Magazine:

Volume 1: no3, no8

Volume 2: no5, no7

I'm missing the following:

Volume 1: no5, no6

Volume 2: no1, no3

Volume 3: no1, no3, no4, no5, no6.

Email [Email Carey Beebe](#)

Membership

Membership is now over 618. Please Let us know when you change your email address: we don't want to lose you! Some people have already disappeared because of this.

In October 2007 we shall be five years old. Can we get up to a thousand members by then? If everyone invites one person, we can. Please invite your harpsichord friends to join us.

Feedback

Please tell us what you think of this Newsletter and the Society. New ideas are always welcome, especially when people can offer a little time to make them happen.

Harpsichord & Fortepiano

The next issue - out in November includes

An Introduction to Restoration Keyboard Music II: Bryne, Roberts and Moss
by Terence Charlston

Flamenco Sketches, Part I
by Richard Lester

From the Performer's Perspective: Interpretation On Multiple Keyboards
by Richard Troeger

The Pantalón Clavichord: Resonance from the Eighteenth Century
by Paul Simmonds

English Upright Grands and Cabinet Pianos.
by Kenneth Mobbs

[\[1\]](#) I have to agree, but would love to be proved wrong. When I was a student in the late 60s and early 70s, I thought that 'Early Music' was really going to take off here. We produce some wonderful performers, but the take-off at more modest level never seems to have happened.