INTRODUCTION

A word from our Guest Editor
Leading the Charge: Women and the Contemporary harpsichord  
PAMELA NASH

FEATURES

● Rituals to Mould Her With: Multimedia harpsichord at Handel & Hendrix in London.  
PAMELA NASH

● Harpsichord and Electric Guitar: A Potent Musical Alchemy  
MARK WINGFIELD  
and PAMELA NASH

● "Au diable le conformisme": anarchic world of Vivienne Spiteri  
PAMELA NASH

● The Ladies’ Defence: Feminist poetry, composing for the harpsichord, and Marina Minkin  
GILA CARCAS  
and PAMELA NASH

● Close Relations: harpsichord and electronics  
EVELYN FICARRA

● Les Nuits Sonores: karaoke harpsichords, Latin groove & JSB  
GARY CARPENTER  
and PAMELA NASH

● Gośka Isphording takes up the Reins: Unpacking ‘Box Toccata’  
ALED SMITH  
and PAMELA NASH

● ‘Panorama’: Women’s Part in the Revival of the Harpsichord  
PENELOPE CAVE

● Manoeuvering and Finessing: Looking Back to the Masters  
PAMELA NASH  
and ROB KEELEY

● Aliénor: patron, muse and inspiration  
PAMELA NASH

OBITUARY

● Elisabeth Chojnacka (1939-2017)  
KASIA  
TOMCZAK-FELTRIN

ANNOUNCEMENTS

● Three Conferences about the Care and Preservation of Early Instruments, their Life Cycle and the Repertoire  

Please keep sending your contributions to info@harpsichord.org.uk

Please note: Opinions voiced here are those of the individual authors and not necessarily those of the BHS. All material remains the copyright of the individual authors and may not be reproduced without their express permission.
Welcome to Sounding Board No. 11

We do hope that you will enjoy this, our eleventh edition, of Sounding Board. It has been some time since the last one but I can assure you that it was worth the wait.

Our volunteer Guest Editors are always busy people and it is only right that their professional work must take priority. For this reason we are unable to promise to publish at regular intervals and must accept that some potential editors have to eventually withdraw and time is lost. We are therefore very grateful that Pamela Nash volunteered to take on this role and she has, in a very short time, produced a fascinating edition on a subject close to her heart.

Pamela was also Guest Editor to our very first edition in early 2010, when the magazine was a fairly modest affair that replaced the Newsletters published on our website from 2003 – 2008, (still available to view on the ‘Archive’ pages). Since then Sounding Board has developed and the subject matter broadened, always harpsichord related but very diverse. We have discussed in detail; the role of the harpsichord in the East in Japan and across the pond in America; Learning and Education, here and in France; the instrument itself from the historical perspective but also the actual construction, now and in the future, and of course, the Music, the history, the playing and interpretation. However this is the first time we have had a whole issue dedicated to the place of the harpsichord in the 20th and 21st centuries and about the music written for it during that time. If the word ‘Modern’ springs to mind, do not be put off from reading further. Composers writing for the harpsichord for the first time look at the instrument with ‘new eyes’ and give us valuable insights into the possibilities - and limitations - of the instrument. This is a helpful reminder to us when playing music from any period. Performing ‘New’ music also poses many problems and prior choices have to be made; the style of instrument, the pitch and the temperament for a start, and if other ‘modern’ instruments or electronics are involved, the balance and the blend can be mitigating factors. True, these choices are relevant to the performance of music of earlier times but we usually have written guidance from the period. Do read on: this issue certainly covers an interesting and fascinating subject.

A huge ‘Thank you’ to Pamela Nash for her hard work in preparing this Edition of Sounding Board. We hope you enjoy reading it, and do remember your letters and comments are always welcome.

Edna Lewis - Secretary BHS

Please send your comments and your contributions to info@harpsichord.org.uk
INTRODUCTION

******** From our Guest Editor, Pamela Nash ********

Leading the Charge:
Women and the Contemporary Harpsichord

It gives me great pleasure to present this edition of *Sounding Board*, which is devoted in large part to the work of women in the field of the contemporary harpsichord. It is not entirely clear why the resurgence of new music for the instrument has abided as an almost entirely matriarchal domain, but the long and venerable tradition of women who have championed the cause since the 20th century ‘revival’ is very much alive and well. 21st century ambassadors for the contemporary harpsichord, some of whom are represented here, have long put paid to the notion that new music on old instruments is a rarefied, alternative practice. Their efforts have ensured that the harpsichord take its rightful place within the mainstream remit of today’s composers, with an increasing number of harpsichordists of both genders programming new works and leading new initiatives. We salute the trailblazers whose work has steered us to this point - Landowska, Violet Gordon Woodhouse, Sylvia Marlowe, Zuzana Růžičková, Valda Aveling, Antoinette Vischer, Annelie de Man et al: women who raised their heads above the parapet, flew in the face of convention, then handed the baton to a new generation. Elisabeth Chojnacka was also one of those indomitable figures, and her passing in May of this year lends a further poignancy to our theme. Working at the extreme sharp end of the contemporary spectrum, Chojnacka was in fact her very own iconoclastic milestone on the timeline of the harpsichord, but she leaves behind an incredible and historically important legacy which I believe will come to attract renewed appreciation in time. *Sounding Board* dedicates this issue to her memory, and you can find Kasia Tomszak-Feltrin’s tribute at the end.

And so to the women of today in different corners of the world who continue to lead the charge - initiating, devising, promoting, performing and disseminating new works. The spotlights are turned on some of those in the field: Vivienne Spiteri, Jane Chapman, Elaine Funaro, Marina Minkin, Goška Isphording and Penelope Cave. And in so doing, I hope that something of their symbiotic partnerships with composers whose music they champion is revealed.

In approaching the featured composers to write about their music, my choices were formed not only from a particular sense of admiration for, and identity with, the individual pieces but also - and moreover - a desire to represent the originality, as well as the sincerity, of compositional thought which the harpsichord has inspired and stimulated in these diverse contexts; multimedia staging; interfacing with electronics; with electric guitar; with second harpsichord, and as an acoustic solo and ensemble instrument. To this end, I am most grateful for the contributions of composers Evelyn Ficarra, Gila
Carcas, Mark Wingfield, Gary Carpenter, Rob Keeley and Aled Smith and for the cooperation of composers Litha and Effy Efthymiou.

I hope the balance of items in this edition makes for interesting reading; at the very least by throwing light on diverse, bold and innovative contexts, and thereby raising new awareness of musicians who create and inspire such wonderful music as the plethora of contemporary harpsichord activities charges on in international music hubs and beyond.

There are links to artists’ websites and CD information etc. at the end of each article, and those readers wishing to sound out events with contemporary harpsichord in the UK can visit the monthly edition of the BHS Concert Diary which aims to cover all kinds of concerts which involve the harpsichord. If you are new to the website, you will find it a unique and thriving resource in the dissemination of news, views, links and happenings - irrespective of whether they concern early or contemporary repertoire - as the Society continues to keep its finger on the pulse of all things harpsichord.

I would like to express my thanks to all the artists featured in this edition, and to Kasia Tomczak-Feltrin for her tribute to Elisabeth Chojnacka. Special thanks go of course to Sounding Board’s Co-ordinating Editor Edna Lewis, whose unflagging support has buoyed me through the last many weeks.

Pamela Nash has been involved with the harpsichord since 1975, when she encountered her first instrument while a student of Chetham’s in Manchester. Going on to study with Valda Aveling in London, Huguette Dreyfus in Paris, and Edward Parmentier in Michigan, she developed an interest in the work of living composers and has since written on contemporary harpsichord matters for publications including Contemporary Music Review, Harpsichord & Fortepiano and KCWToday, as well as Sounding Board, for which she was guest editor in 2010. She curated the Manchester new music festivals Harpsichordfest 2004 and 2006 and was artistic director of the BHS International Composition Competition in 2013 which culminated in the release of the showcase CD, Shadow Journey: 21st Century Music for Harpsichord, which she also produced. She has edited the complete solo harpsichord works of Stephen Dodgson for Cadenza Music. Pamela also writes non-harpsichord articles and is a concert reviewer for Bachtrack. She directed the 2016 Brontë Bicentenary event, Love, Loss and Longing for Elizabeth Gaskell’s House in Manchester.

Her awards include the Raymond Russell Harpsichord Prize and the Harkness Fellowship.

Shadow Journey- 21st Century Music for the Harpsichord
PFCD036 http://ascrecords.com/primafacie/shadow_journey.html
Earlier this year, an all-woman troupe led their audience through the rooms of Handel’s home in a medieval-inspired odyssey with the harpsichord at its musical heart. I was pleased to be among their number, and interviewed harpsichordist Jane Chapman and composer Litha Efthymiou about the work and the event itself.

Two centuries apart, George Frederick Handel and Jimi Hendrix changed the course of music history. They both chose London as their spiritual and creative home, and by a stroke of serendipity, their legacies will forever be intertwined. Separated by time but not space, the two musicians occupied adjoining residences on Mayfair’s Brook Street: recently amalgamated as “Handel & Hendrix in London”, the double shrine has become one of the capital’s - if not the world’s - most prestigious musical landmarks where visitors can view the original Handel House museum and the rooms where the master lived and worked, as well as Hendrix’s restored 60s pad next door, complete with authenticated décor and rock paraphernalia.

That Hendrix himself was intrigued by his illustrious connection comes as no surprise: tales of jamming sessions to recordings of Handel oratorio and baroque-inspired guitar riffs are typical of the artistic curiosity of a true ‘crossover’ musician. A similarly eclectic spirit continues to infuse the ethos of music at Handel Hendrix: one which embraces the contemporary alongside the historic, and which recognises live music as a way of bringing a building to life. The venue, formerly named Handel House, is of course the long-standing residency of the British Harpsichord Society’s recital and workshop programme, and although there can be no doubt that the Hendrix provenance has raised the museum’s profile, the harpsichord remains central to its musical life and is still the beating heart of its Handelian origins. The instrument was to be found under one of the venue’s new music spotlights on May 19th, in an event which may in fact have been one of its most provocative and cutting edge to date: the culminating performance of the enigmatically titled Rituals to Mould Her With. The multimedia work fuses music for harpsichord, electronics and percussion with theatre and movement and united “Britain’s most progressive harpsichordist”, Jane Chapman, with up and coming stars of theatre and dance, actor Esmé Patey-Ford and dance artist Harriet Parker-Beldeau.

The composers of the work, twin sisters Litha and Effy Efthymiou, are fast becoming names to watch. Although they devised and directed it, their artistic approach exemplified an interdisciplinary, theatre-based model. As Litha explained, “the work was a truly collaborative effort which continued to evolve each time we prepared it, whereby each art form and practitioner affected it at each stage of its development.”
Based on the ritual that celebrated the Virgin Mary in Medieval Spain, the piece draws on 1500-year-old manuscripts which reveal how male clerics of the time used the ‘Mary Ritual’ to impose their authority. “We began with several meetings with Dr Ihnat, our consultant historian, discussing the themes of the rituals and deciding what meaning it has for us in the 21st century. We then embarked on a series of workshops and gradually, our conceptual ideas began to transform into music, dance and theatre. Jane, as the harpsichordist, has been absolutely essential to the creation of the whole piece, including the theatre and dance elements which she often played a big role in.”

Throughout the development of the show, the team grappled with the tensions which still exist between patriarchal control and female emancipation, discussing ways in which to extract modern resonances of the gender ideals communicated by this liturgical celebration, and exploring the impact that the paradoxical paradigm of Mary continues to have on women today. “The idea of a group of men crafting a female ideal was poignant for us as women living in a society where everything from the exploitation of women in advertising to regulation of birth control, is still controlled by a predominantly male minority. We see everywhere women making the best for themselves of the situation they are given.”

Part of the work’s progress as a collective, evolving performance was in its physical adaptation in exploiting the diverse spaces of the various concert venues it has inhabited. The team’s ideas for using the smaller and more intimate space of HH included using the adjacent rooms throughout the house - including Handel’s bedroom and rehearsal salon - affording the dancer an unusual brief; to not only produce choreography for herself, but to create movement for harpsichordist and actor, thus contributing greatly to the fluidity of the piece, and allowing each artist to move seamlessly from one discipline to another, with the harpsichord (actually two in this incarnation
of the work) being the only static element of the piece: a sort of mainstay for the action around it, despite its itinerant performer. The composers found the harpsichord to be an instrument full of exciting possibilities. “Through working with it, it has influenced other pieces, especially as we each begin to think of different approaches to texture and volume. The challenge of achieving a sense of sustain has been interesting to work with, and we exploited the use of the different stops throughout. We had to think about volume in connection to texture and enjoyed experimenting with the juxtaposition of chordal and single line textures.”

Naturally, for many concert-goers to HH, the harpsichord symbolises the historic and musical provenance of the house. Seeing and hearing it in a more ‘extended’ performance context, enhanced by the sonic experience of transition from one room to another as the tale unfolded, proved quite as dramatic as the expression of the Mary Ritual and the physicality of the choreography, and although the ambient quality was largely determined by the electronics in the score, it was undoubtedly the visceral immediacy of harpsichord sound - refreshed by the timbral shift from the Kennedy/Ruckers harpsichord to the Kirckman in different rooms - which proved one of the most compelling aspects of the experience. Perhaps for the very fact of the instrument being a musical factor in a piece which is as much about the emotive theme of female suppression as it is about new music, that tension which the contemporary harpsichord as a historical ‘defector’ can provoke seemed conspicuous by its absence, even within these particularly hallowed walls. Jane Chapman sees the piece as “building on the harpsichord’s traditional legacy and the inventiveness of great composers like Handel who wrote so much rich music for it. The instrument has actually been given a character, becoming a focus for the actor and dancer, and as a player, I take on my own persona, with the music becoming far more than just accompaniment. The use of electronics - a lot of which was originally generated by the harpsichord - moves the instrument into another soundscape, creating startling contrasts. Not as extreme as Hendrix, but certainly pushing the boundaries.”

Pushing boundaries is key to Jane’s role as ambassador for the contemporary harpsichord as she constantly seeks to challenge mainstream expectations of the instrument. Parallels with Hendrix’s musical thinking spring to mind, and indeed there is real potency in the relationship between the two iconic instruments of rock and baroque. “For me, both the electric guitar and harpsichord are strong cultural symbols, * and immediately trigger images which signify a particular time or era, and a certain flamboyancy. The harpsichord is an incredible piece of kit. Architecturally, it’s perfect as a frame or structure for a dance or theatre piece, and we make the most of this, as it becomes an icon to be adored and worshipped, and also a refuge to retreat to. It was very interesting using the space in HH, creating a drama which hopefully engaged the audience in such a way that music and theatre become one.”

James Douglas, writing in *Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster Today*, certainly thought so, and enthused about “the privilege of attending this evocative and esoteric event. The dancing was excellently choreographed and the setting never short of sublime, but Jane Chapman’s stunningly flamboyant harpsichord stole the show - Handel would surely have loved the music; I hope he would have supported the exquisitely presented feminist sentiment. I’m sure Hendrix would have.”

*Pamela Nash

* Read on to explore the combination of electric guitar and harpsichord: Mark Wingfield’s article on his collaborative work with Jane Chapman, and a review of their recording ’Three Windows’.
‘Cultural symbols’ who share ‘a certain flamboyancy’: the harpsichord and the electric guitar are icons of rock and baroque whose partnership, far from the notional conceit some fancy it to be, is one of the edgiest and most potent instrumental alliances in the field of contemporary fusion. Mould-breaking musicians Jane Chapman and Mark Wingfield have explored its myriad possibilities, performing in venues around Britain including – where better? – Handel & Hendrix in London. Pamela Nash revisits their inceptual recording “Three Windows” and Mark Wingfield talks about their work on an upcoming CD release.

When I first heard the 2008 recording *Three Windows* - dubbed “one of the most consistently brilliant and forward thinking collaborations in years” by Guitar Player Magazine - I predicted a potential following as diverse and adventurous as the themes and the players themselves. The album, incorporating the third “window” of saxophonist Iain Ballamy, is indeed a heady and eclectic mix, forging frontiers at every turn and putting new spin on everything from 17th-century French preludes to minimalism, and from Hindustani airs to rock, all with the drive of “Nu Jazz” behind it. A bold ‘world music crossover’ venture such as this is unlikely to attract many from the mainstream harpsichord audience, but regardless of who is listening, we find the harpsichord breaking out and emerging as liberated and anarchic a musical presence as both of its partners. That being said, it may be pertinent to mention that the role of the saxophone is not as integral to the musical forms and structures, and with its softer colouring, is often heard as more of a counterpoint to the harpsichord and guitar, whose clear affinities inspire many of the musical ideas. Yet whilst the associations between them (the vibrating strings, the attack, the similarity of harpsichord bass to electric guitar sound) are predominant, the colour and energy of the music derive largely from the juxtaposition of the three disparate instrumental characters - not so much blending together as illuminating one another.

The compositions are in the main by Mark, in collaboration with Jane, whose perspective as a harpsichordist is a pervasive influence throughout the twelve tracks. Harpsichord technique is central to the manipulation of material as well as integral to Jane’s own improvisations. Even Baroque repertoire is reborn in the two d’Anglebert unmeasured preludes, with the harpsichord providing a sonic and harmonic ‘environment’ for the guitar’s flights of imagination, coloured with Indian and Middle-Eastern melodic strands expressively evoked by string-sliding and pitch-bending. *Claveciniste* purists may balk, but they may also venture to discover a meeting of two worlds where intricately devised classical form and jazz improvisation merge into an organically integrated whole. This is d’Anglebert dramatised and embellished, not compromised.
The use of guitar electronics - creating the kind of sustained note-layering and voicings not actually possible on the guitar alone - is a pervasive element in both the title track and *The Serpent*, with the resultant washes of sound forming the backdrop to an almost cinematic atmosphere of panoramic space, punctuated by the harpsichord and saxophone rippling through the texture. Elsewhere on the album, the same theatrical, almost filmic sense of place and time is subtly enhanced by sound effects, woven in by producer Ashley Slater.

*African Sea*, derived from traditional mbira (thumb-harp) music, is a jubilant guitar and harpsichord showcase whose motoric, buoyant rhythmic interplay (worthy of Steve Reich’s best) underpins a horn synth patch simulating a fourth voice - sometimes blasting out fanfare-like, sometimes resonantly but subtly shadowing the saxophone. *Shufnah*, based on an 18th century Hindustani air, is here re-cast for solo harpsichord, undergoing transformations as it breaks into increasingly jaunty jazz moods. Perhaps the closest thing to light, boppy jazz on the album is *Sunbird*, based on an Ethiopian tribal song, whilst *Diablada*, a frenetic, virtuoso, rock-influenced romp for harpsichord and guitar, exploits the growling punchiness of the harpsichord’s bass.

This pioneering recording is a testament to the spirit of artistic discovery. Whether you’re a firm classicist or a curious jazz fusionist, the musical statements are wholly innovative and utterly persuasive. And if this has piqued your interest enough, *Three Windows* (Dark Energy Music, 2008) is available from JazzCDs and iTunes.

*Pamela Nash*
The idea behind the new album came in part from Jane Chapman and I deciding we wanted to return to the sound world created by the harpsichord and electric guitar. Since our first album *Three Windows*, we have both been involved in many other projects and each explored numerous new musical directions. So for me, it felt like returning to our collaboration, with everything we had gained in the interim, would be a rich source for new ideas and would generate a fresh energy.

The concept I had at the back of my mind at the outset was to create a tapestry-like sound world through which the stories of the pieces would unfold. This approach occurred to me because I was fortunate enough to meet someone from Iran who has an enormous collection of music from the country. This included ancient Persian music, modern improvisational and contemporary Iranian classical music. He kindly allowed me to copy his entire library. Because of the political system in Iran, almost none of this music is available to buy. Many musicians struggle to even be able to play in Iran, yet they continue to create astonishingly beautiful new music as well as carrying on the ancient musical traditions dating back to Persian times.

I spent many hours immersed in a music library and ended up transcribing some traditional Persian music which I used as a starting point for writing a piece for harpsichord and guitar. Much of traditional Persian music is played on the Santur - a dulcimer-like instrument - and the Setar, which has some similarities to a lute. To my ears these two instruments are related directly to the harpsichord and guitar, so hearing this music immediately sparked ideas for a new album with Jane.

As composing for the album progressed, many other influences came in, but even so the Persian sound world infused everything to one degree or another. On this album in particular I worked with the sonic textures of the instruments compositionally and I extended that into the use of electronics to expand the sound world.

While researching Persian music I came across many beautiful Persian tapestries, and throughout the composing process I kept seeing these in my mind as I wrote. So the music became, for me, a series of sonic tapestries which form a series of illustrative or atmospheric backdrops for each piece.

There are still strong influences from jazz and a wide range of classical music as well as other world musics however. Apart from the one track which was inspired by the
transcription of Persian music, I don’t feel the album overall has a Persian or Iranian feel to it. But conceptually, in the ways I’ve explained, it does.

The composing process was by no means an isolated activity on my part, and Jane gave feedback and suggestions throughout the process. Her ideas and insights as a harpsichordist were a huge help and a significant influence in the process.

When it got to the stage where we were thinking about recording the album, both Jane and I were hearing the idea of percussion as being a big part of the sound. So we asked the Brazilian percussionist Adriano Adewale to play with us on the album. We chose Adriano because of his sense of space and his ability to create imaginative sound worlds with percussion and vocal sounds. The inclusion of Adriano added a whole other dimension to the sound, and for me added to that sense of tapestry and story telling I wanted to bring out in the music.

In terms of the sound world, Jane made another significant contribution. Halfway through the composing process she and I did a concert at Kings Place in London with the pianist Kate Ryder. At the concert, Jane and I played two of the new compositions I was working on for the album. Part of one of these involved using the harpsichord as a percussive instrument. A video of this particular performance is on youtube. The idea of using other sounds which the harpsichord can produce was something Jane was keen to explore on the album. So we set about recording all the sounds it was possible to make with the instrument that didn’t involve actually playing notes on the keyboard. This included tapping on various parts of the instrument, and in particular stroking the strings in imaginative ways to produce many interesting, ghostly and ethereal sounds.

We worked together during the mixing phase to incorporate these sounds into the music. At times this made use of some quite involved electronic processing, which Jane and I worked on together. Our aim when using electronics on the album was to create a sense of beauty and spaciousness in the textures, again harking back to the idea of soundscapes as tapestries which enhance the feeling in the music.

Mark Wingfield

Mark Wingfield is one of today’s most acclaimed jazz guitarists. He regularly features in the world’s top guitar magazines, and his most recent album “The Stone House” was awarded five stars by Down Beat. As both player and composer, he is inspired as much by the voice and by instruments such as the saxophone and harpsichord as he is by the guitar itself. He records on the New York City jazz label MoonJune Records and the Greydisc label.

www.markwingfield.com
Enigmatic maverick of the harpsichord, Vivienne Spiteri is credited with single-handedly reviving the contemporary instrument in her adopted homeland of Canada, and she is one of that small but tireless band of women harpsichordists devoting themselves entirely to the work of living composers.
Pamela Nash opens a window on her world and writes about her most recent recording, “Isadora Sings”.

The professional profile of this elusive musician is a hard one to pin down. Her poetic online reflections under the pen of alter ego vivie' vinçent reveal a playfully coy, free spirit, but this is only one of several strands of a multifarious yet truly iconoclastic musical persona.

“Au diable le conformisme” - an apt byword for Vivienne Spiteri’s musical philosophy - betrays an anarchic approach to all things traditional. For the past 30 years she has resolutely eschewed expectations of what a harpsichordist should be, throwing off what she considers as the deadweight of the harpsichord’s heritage as well as questioning the conventions of performance practice: in particular, the adherence to, and reverence for, the written score.

Following Vivienne’s immigration to Canada from Malta as a teenager, her Baroque studies in the ‘70s took her as far as a Master’s degree at McGill University as a student of John Grew (an acolyte of Kenneth Gilbert), and masterclasses with Koopman, Gilbert, Tagliavini and Tilney. “The problem I encountered, especially at McGill, was just exactly that I was instructed to play as others had played before, to adapt to, follow and ‘bow down’ to the status quo. After all, there was a tradition to adhere to. I knew I was in trouble then. And once I heard Ligeti’s Continuum, played by Antoinette Vischer, I never looked back.”

By 1986, her personal ethos had become fully galvanised, centred on the belief that new music demands and deserves as much intelligent interpretation as early and classical music. Although by no means exclusive of early repertoire, her performance practice precluded the mixing of old and new together in a programme. “I had always felt this as a compromise, an excuse to cover up the “evil” music (contemporary) with the glorious, to drag it in on the heels of the familiar.”

So, what of her performance of early music? “I do not play the early works as one is supposed to play them. I try to instill them with passion in a more dramatic fashion, and in doing so, must needs go against ‘authentic’ harpsichord playing and history.” As for ensemble playing, she was from the start dissatisfied with conventional,
historical/baroque instrumental combinations with harpsichord, preferring instead to
develop new repertoire, both solo and in combination with folk, non-Western and
unconventional instruments. She still fiercely resists all forms of ‘artistic righteousness’
concerning the use of instruments, including the stipulation of modern composers for a
particular type of harpsichord, even within that grey area of ‘reverse authenticity’, so to
speak, in adapting music from the ‘modern’, pedal harpsichord to the classical instrument.
“I was once told emphatically: “Non - vous ne pouvez pas jouer cette musique sur un clavecin
baroque. Je ne vous donne pas la permission” - by someone under the illusion that a
composer has the right to give or not give permission! Music - not just that written for
pedal harpsichord - that can be refurbished to be played on the harpsichord, without
concern for fidelity to the score, is to be encouraged. A composer’s opinion is neither here
nor there, to me. As for instruments: they are only mediums - and so concrete that they
are almost antithetical to the very notion of music itself. The essential is Music, not
instrument, and the task at hand is to transcend the instrument.”

These days, her concerts are played
behind a screen, in response to a
fundamental musical truth - that hearing
diminishes and music suffers by the
visual distraction of seeing the artist
perform. The screen scenario thereby
provides the best of two worlds: the pure
acoustic nature of the space and
instrument that live concerts can provide,
and the ‘blind’ state of listening: “where
music has a chance to BE its own real
PURE sonic life, and people have a chance
to be drawn into it, to transcend physical
existence. I speak to the audience before
the concert starts about the reasons for
this, and when asking audiences’ opinions
following such concerts, they agree that
their listening capacities become more
acute; not only do they hear the positive aspects of the harpsichord more clearly
(resonance, harmonics etc), but - the winner: they LISTEN to the music.
There is so much emphasis placed on the visual today in instrumental music concerts that
it confirms my view that contemporary music now rides on the back of that (as if riding on
the back of early music wasn’t enough). It all has to do with my rejection of - as Coleridge
I believe spoke on it - the despotism of the eye. I want to give music its rightful space in
the experience of listening. No distractions. No cover-ups.”

Performance ethics notwithstanding, there lies at the heart of Vivienne’s uncommon
musicianship a kind of schismatic tension between artistic soul and scientific brain, for
which her electroacoustic studies (between 1989 and 1991, in the Hague and Paris) are
perhaps partly responsible, fuelling her early resolve to explore the interactive performance of harpsichord, live electronics and tape. She has continued to pursue headlong the possibilities for transforming and ‘extending’ harpsichord sound, producing cutting-edge collaborative work with composers who share her vision of the harpsichord; its predisposition for mechanistic virtuosity, and the reaches of its affinities with technology. “In the past, because of the deficiencies in the expressive capabilities of the harpsichord, and in order to circumvent them somehow, to camouflage them in order to insert and absorb its sound in such a way that our natural sense of natural sound is not offended, I have worked in and tried to find solutions within the electroacoustic domain (that was not the reason at the outset, but later it became so, with further demands), of inter-disciplinary, live spatialisation.

But more than anything, the solution that I have found that works best - certainly for me - is the recording studio: multi-channel pick-up of a single instrument, where spatial manipulation replaces dynamic, where space becomes a dynamic device par excellence.”

Vivienne’s most recent recording, Isadora Sings opens a window on this world: where harpsichord and electronics merge, diverge and alchemise, where symbiotic collaborations create unique and dazzling sound fields - rich rewards for the willing listener. Read on for the review!

REVIEW: Isadora Sings

In order to appreciate the technological diversity as well as the fine recording quality of this disc, I would urge the use of headphones, not only to allow the listener to enter the ambient spaces of each sound field, but to engage fully with the immediacy and intimacy of harpsichord sound, whether in its purely acoustical form or in one of the many transformations it undergoes - “deconstructed” harpsichord, so to speak. The least complex and most musically direct piece in the collection, and the only one without a fixed medium or tape part is Cinéma - mode d’emploi for harpsichord and effects by Pierre Desrochers, where blocks of rich density enhance what is essentially the work’s minimalist-driven, metrical character. It’s a riveting, propulsive 16-minute ride by a composer who knows how to capture - to quite devastating effect - the power of rhythmic ‘groove’ on the harpsichord, as well as how to create pulse and accent through the textural and rhythmic manipulation of layered harpsichord sound. This work was originally intended to be played on a harpsichord inside a deep and highly resonant stairwell, thus creating massive resonance and harmonics and exploiting the harpsichord’s natural propensity for punching out intricate polyrhythms between lines. Equally interesting is that in the studio, they were able to use a reverb machine to simulate the resonance and other locational effects.

If the Desrochers piece exploits harpsichord rhythm, then the title track - the result of a collaboration with composer Kent Olofsson - explores more the nature of mechanism with its exhaustive treatment, over the course of 25 minutes, of the harpsichord strings through pitch-bending, muting, strumming and harmonics. The sense of relish in treading the
line between playfulness and seriousness is tangible here, and whilst there may appear to be a protracted series of random effects, the patient and searching listener will discover the joyousness of the sonic transmutations: the echoing of the harpsichord effects in the electronics and the myriad sonic impressions it generates - among them bells, voices, wind, machinery, knocking and ringing.

*Isadora’s Box* for harpsichord and tape is another collaborative effort, with composer Eleazar Garzón. Assuming its title alludes to the mythical unleashing of uncontrolled forces, Garzón captures the notion perfectly. Indeed, the tension between the more structured musical statements in the harpsichord (analogous to the containment of the ‘box’?) and the almost breathtaking flight of tape sounds (the dervish-like menace of its contents) makes for a near-unhinged, giddy listening experience, but one well worth the discovery.

*Tangram* for bass clarinet, harpsichord and tape by Hope Lee owes its title to a kind of Chinese puzzle, a premise echoed in the ways in which the conundrum of this unlikely pairing is turned completely on its head. The bass clarinet supplies not only the lower registers the harpsichord lacks, but also a soft-edged foil for the stridency and immediacy of harpsichord tone. But the real solution to this puzzle lies within the essential ‘trio’ disposition of the piece, with the disparate instrumental characters merely sonic counterpoints in a musical game - the harpsichord and clarinet as partners, both fitful, whimsical and improvisatory in feel, diametrically pitted against the pre-set, fixed dimension of the ‘third player’.

Jean-Claude Risset’s *Pentacle* for harpsichord and tape is a five-part work of high energy and calibre and of such technical complexity that I wish there had been a programme note to support it. Even for the inexperienced electroacoustic listener however the spatial use of different channels is evident, and its essential thrust is clear in the frenetic dialogue between harpsichord and digital sounds (mostly it seems, harpsichord-derived) with each of the five sections stressing an individual construct relating to harpsichord timbre. Least gratifying of these was the distortion of tuning temperament in the third section, but by contrast, one of the highlights of the disc arrived in the dazzling fifth and final section: two minutes of frantic *perpetuum mobile* in cascading scales with the devastating effect of being surrounded by multiple amplified harpsichords.

This recording is no doubt duly recognised by electroacoustic music enthusiasts, but I hope it reaches the shelves of harpsichordists who wish to look through the windows of this world and hear how the instrument continues to excite and inspire major composing talent.

**Pamela Nash**

*NB The harpsichord used is Vivienne Spiteri’s own Hubbard French double kit after Taskin, 1979.*

*Isadora Sings*: Vivienne Spiteri, harpsichord / isidorArt: isi 03  Available: vivie@isidorart.qc.ca  Web: [http://www.isidorart.qc.ca](http://www.isidorart.qc.ca) (artist name vivie’ vincent)
The Ladies’ Defence: Gila Carcas on feminist poetry and composing for the harpsichord

Israeli composer Gila Carcas talks about writing for the harpsichord: how strong sentiments inspired by 18th century feminist texts influenced her in “The Ladies’ Defence” for mezzo soprano, baroque cello and harpsichord, and how she commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of Apollo 11’s moon landing with “Imaginary Moonwalk”, a solo piece of other-worldly atmosphere. Pamela Nash reviews this piece in the following article, and profiles the harpsichordist who recorded it, Marina Minkin.

Although I have had little experience of actually playing the harpsichord as opposed to the piano - and once damaged a friend’s harpsichord when I pressed too hard, not realizing that a more gentle technique was required - I have nevertheless always found it a fascinating instrument. When I met David and Clare Griffel at Dartington in the early nineties and they commissioned me to compose a piece for their ensemble Musica Mundi of mezzo soprano, baroque cello and harpsichord, this was a challenge that I knew I would enjoy.

At that time I was still reeling from the traumatic discovery that, contrary to the way I had been brought up, not everyone regarded women as being worthy of equal respect to men where their education and careers were concerned. David and Clare were keen that I composed whatever and however I wished to do so, and I discovered a book of poetry by 18th century women poets in the library at Durham University where I was partway through a PhD in composition. As well as the expected descriptions of flowers, gardens and scenery, I was struck by various poems about the position of women in society and the strong feelings they expressed about their treatment because of their gender. For instance:

" Tis hard we should be by the men despised,

Yet kept from knowing what should make us prized:

Laughed out of reason, jested out of sense,

And nothing left but native innocence..."

(From “The Ladies’ Defence” by Mary, Lady Chudleigh, 1656-1710, written 1701)

There was even an example of sexual harassment in “The Repulse to Alcander” by Sarah Egerton, 1670-1723, written in 1703:

"...At first I could not see the lewd abuse,

But framed a thousand things for your excuse.....

Your rude love my privacy invades:

Why should I suffer for your lawless flame?"

Tragically, there are undoubtedly still too many women (and others who are relatively powerless compared with the perpetrator) suffering similarly from such damaging and deliberately humiliating mistreatment.
In creating the musical language for my setting of parts of several poems in five sections, for which I took the title of Lady Chudleigh’s poem, I began with an 18th century pastiche which very quickly developed into something more modern. Based fundamentally on a pitch row of G, F, C#, D, E, Bb, Ab, the music was meant to reflect the question of how much has really changed in the last three hundred years.

The challenge of writing for harpsichord is to be able to create the effect of dynamic contrast and emotional expression on an instrument where there is no difference in the sound produced however you press a key. Here, the presence of voice and cello allowed me to position the timbre of the harpsichord to appear against varying different backcloths of sound. At the time I was playing in a Javanese gamelan for which music is based on a heterophonic structure, whereby the shape is of one essential melody with related decorations around it. Although much freer in flow and staggered between parts, I also included some heterophonic-style repetitions of material in my own piece.

When composing the second section for a poem describing the fall from an exalted object of admiration to that of low regard upon marriage, I created an ostinato figuration in the harpsichord alongside cello pizzicato over which the voice sings lyrically. The sexual harassment poem was used for the third segment of the piece, where I began the music with pointillistic and jagged writing for harpsichord under a brief Sprechstimme for voice. Later the cello enters with a more legato line and the harpsichord drops out while the cello forms a solo accompaniment for the rest of this part of the work. Here the music is meant to travel emotionally from puzzlement to outrage. As well as sometimes using chords with a cello and bass continuo, in the final two sections trill-like textures, deliberately rhythmically uneven in places, are incorporated into the writing for the harpsichord thereby creating a more dynamic effect to match the intensity of the words.

In the late nineties I was Visiting Lecturer of Composition at Southampton University. Harpsichordist Jane Chapman was due to perform there and I was asked to compose a piece for her for a concert in October 1999. As a very young child I had been fascinated by the Apollo space flights and as it was now thirty years since man had first walked on the moon, I decided to commemorate that event in a piece which I called “Imaginary Moonwalk”.

For solo harpsichord, how to create an expressive contrast was paramount. Landscapes and places have often been inspirational to me and here I was attempting to evoke the lolloping gait of astronauts on a barren and cratered landscape with a sixth of Earth’s gravity.

Composer Gila Carcas (photo by GC)
Essentially, you either increase the tempo or play many notes together, or both, to create some kind of sense of dynamic contrast. Interspersing playing using the buff with the normal register, I used figurations of notes of increasing and decreasing tempo, with lines on the harpsichord interplaying with one another. Sometimes I used chords and octave displacements of notes semitones apart. The piece ends with a more modal fast passage in the right hand using the buff over somewhat dissonant left hand chords without buff formed from the scale of E major which rise up to a figure of D#, D, E in a high register at the end. In constructing my music I often like to use notes taken largely from E major with the addition of D, albeit not used in a traditional way, a key which is particularly bright.

When I had the opportunity to create a CD of various instrumental works, I wanted to include this piece. By now, I had moved to Israel and composer Dan Yuhas organized some of the players for me, including Marina Minkin to perform the harpsichord piece. One of various fine Israeli musicians who was born elsewhere and brought their talent to Israel, I was delighted with the rendition that she produced when this work was recorded in Jerusalem in 2014.

While I have not composed again for the harpsichord, I would certainly relish the opportunity to do so once more, from a position nowadays of greater compositional experience.

Gila Carcas 2017

Born in England in 1963, Dr Gila (known outside Israel as Gillian) Carcas is an accomplished composer, musician and teacher. Her qualifications include a PhD in Composition from Durham University, and she has taught at various British institutions including Southampton University and the Royal College of Music. Since moving to Israel in 2004, Gila has also arranged many Jewish melodies for classical ensemble, and she teaches piano, violin, theory and composition to students of all ages.

REVIEW

Composer Gila Carcas has long been pre-occupied by the concept of transformation in sound, specifically the shifting of tonality, modality and atonality and the exploration of instrumental timbres, and her recent CD, Transformations, reveals this across a spectrum of eleven works of diverse instrumentation, composed over the past 25 years. Carcas also taps into her strong nostalgia for time and place throughout the collection, with specific locations providing inspiration - though in Imaginary Moonwalk for solo harpsichord, the impetus comes from an imagined sense of place by way of commemorating the thirtieth anniversary in 1999 of the Apollo 11 Moon landing. Premiered by Jane Chapman in the same year, it is performed on the disc by Marina Minkin, recorded in 2013 using a harpsichord by Michael Johnson (1985).
The piece is utterly successful in its evocation of the barren strangeness of lunar landscape, of weightlessness and what the composer describes as the “lolloping gait of astronauts” - though this implies something rather less refined than the sophistocation and quality of the highly idiomatic writing; “the extremely effective, intriguing and enigmatic use of the instrument,” as Jane Chapman describes. Indeed, the composer’s use of the harpsichord in depicting that sense of disconnection with gravity and temporal reality reveals an unavering confidence in her medium; the imaginative use of the keyboard compass, the bold spaciousness of pace punctuated by outbursts of erratic activity, and a clean delineation of the two manuals.

The off-setting of the buff stop in one hand and unmuted strings in the other - a prominent timbral strategy of the piece - emerges at times as a dialogue of two starkly contrasting voices, such as the almost deliriously meandering, improvisatory treble underpinned by a darker, more linear buffed bass, and in the final section, the high register use of the buff in a final flight of scalar flourishes against stark fourths on the second manual conjectures an image of twinkling stars against the blackness of space.

The performance here (as elsewhere on the disc) is exemplary and Marina Minkin accentuates the transparency of the writing to eloquent effect. The programme of works on this recording is impressive across the board, from the cutting edge extended string writing in Indigo Dreams - an evocation of the didgeridoo for double bass - to the sweetly lyrical Autumn - a miniature for viola and piano - to the impassioned but accessible writing in the String Quartet no 3, and of course the imaginatively atmospheric use of instrument in the harpsichord solo.

All tracks were recorded at the Ha’Teiva studio in Jaffa, Israel, with the exception of the harpsichord piece which was recorded at The Jerusalem Music Centre.

Pamela Nash

Transformations: Music by Gila (Gillian) Carcas  Music&Media/MMC109
http://www.musicandmediaconsulting.com

PROFILE

Marina Minkin

Harpsichordist Marina Minkin is one of Israel’s most active and productive musicians, devoting much of her time to contemporary repertoire and encouraging composers to create new music for the harpsichord. Her recordings include Harpsichord Music by Israeli Composers (Albany Records), the harpsichord music of Vittorio Rieti with Mark Kroll (New World Records) and, hot off the press, Conversations (Omnibus Classics) - a CD of contemporary music for two harpsichords with David Shemer. In fact, Shemer was Marina’s first harpsichord teacher at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance at a time when the early music scene in Israel was blossoming, in stark contrast to her native Ukraine, which, like Russia, was distanced from the burgeoning early music movements of Europe and elsewhere. Like so many musicians before and since, she had first been entranced by the sound of the harpsichord through the recordings of Ralph Kirkpatrick, and it seemed serendipitous to her, after pursuing intensive postgraduate piano study in New York, that she was drawn to Boston to study with Mark Kroll - himself a pupil of Kirkpatrick. Doctoral studies followed with a dissertation on the life and works
of the Italian 18th century composer, Anna Bon di Venezia, who as a child prodigy, had published her Six Chamber Sonatas for flute and continuo when only sixteen, with her Six Sonatas for harpsichord a year later in 1759.

Marina's return to Israel saw a prodigious amount of activity, as teacher and as performer of early and new repertoire, playing with several ensembles, among them the Israeli Contemporary Players (Ensemble 21) and she now teaches harpsichord, chamber music and basso continuo at the Tel Aviv Conservatory and the Jezreel Valley Centre for the Arts. Like many contemporary music performers today, Marina usually tries to take an active part in the composition process by discussing the idiom and exploring instrument possibilities. “As an example, my solo piece on the Conversations CD - the Partita for Harpsichord by Jakov Jakoulov - was conceived after spending a few hours with the instrument, and looking into various composition techniques of Scarlatti, Frescobaldi and French composers; Jakov's fascination with the préludes non mesurés had resulted in composing one as part of the suite. In the case of Imaginary Moonwalk (from Gila Carcas’ Transformations CD), I received the music from the composer by e-mail, and met her for the first time at the recording session. Luckily, she is a very nice, easygoing person and we did not have any major disagreements about my interpretation, use of color or the timing.”

This brief profile concludes with a tempting nugget about a strictly non-contemporary piece on Conversations. Something of a wild card on the programme, Prokofiev’s Polka and Waltz may also come as a revelation, as the performers' sleeve note explains: “Strange as it may be to imagine Sergei Prokofiev writing harpsichord music, the charming miniature in this album is not an arrangement, but an original piece for two harpsichords. In 1936, Prokofiev wrote incidental music to Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin, a theatrical work which was never performed. The ball scene of this work includes a Polka and Waltz, to be played on two harpsichords placed offstage. We are proud to put this piece - to the best of our knowledge never before recorded in its original form - in the limelight!”

Pamela Nash

Conversations: Contemporary Music for Two Harpsichords (Omnibus Classics) www.cduniverse.com
Harpsichord Music by Israeli Composers www.albanyrecords.com
Vittorio Rieti: Music for Harpsichord and Instruments www.newworldrecords.org

Marina Minkin and David Shemer  (photo credit: Avi Elbaz)
Close Relations: Evelyn Ficarra writes about harpsichord and electronics

Evelyn Ficarra is a composer and sound artist whose work is both rooted in music and sound and is strongly interdisciplinary. She seeks to find the connections between music and other art forms at every level - conceptual, material, rhythmic - and her work explores the connections between disciplines, where music becomes gesture becomes image, in a recursive, reversible journey, evoking contradictory impulses towards movement and stillness. A focal point for her work is recorded sound from a variety of sources - vocal, instrumental, environmental, mechanic, and electronic. Here, she offers a perspective on how she has applied this to her harpsichord works, with special emphasis on “Close”, a dazzling musical ménage-à-trois for two harpsichords and electronics.

There are a number of interesting challenges in writing contemporary music for harpsichord. A harpsichord is, in some respects, a moving target, and there are many issues that need to be addressed before composing can begin.

There is, initially, the question - Modern Harpsichord (concert pitch A = 440), or Baroque Harpsichord (a semitone lower at A = 415)? Then, what range does the instrument have? How many keyboards (double manual or single)? How many stops and what type? Does it have a buff stop (my favourite ‘lute’ like sound)?

Then there are even more tricky questions, to do with the context of the piece in a given concert programme. Next to what pieces will your new work be programmed? If they are historical pieces, on a Baroque Harpsichord, will the instrument be tuned in just intonation¹, in a specific key? What key? Or will it be in equal temperament (more flexible, but sneered at, understandably, by some players eager to stay true to the original sound and spirit of the historic music)?

To add to this complex scene, since I am known as an electroacoustic composer, my harpsichord commissions have so far been for harpsichord with electronics. This raises a whole different raft of questions. Will there be a decent PA and playback system in the concert venue? How many speakers? Are there microphones available for amplification, so that the live harpsichord sounds can come through the speakers and thereby blend more easily with the electronic sounds? Where will the mixing desk be, will the engineer have a good chance of doing an excellent live mix during the performance? Will the sound engineer be capable of triggering the electronic part at the right moments or do I need to be there myself at the mixing desk? Are the other pieces in the programme also going to be amplified? If not, then programme order will be extremely important, and concert curators need to be aware of this fact. An amplified piece will inevitably sound louder than an acoustic piece so it should probably be placed later in a mixed programme. Otherwise our ears will adjust to the amplification and any acoustic piece played directly afterwards will potentially sound unfairly quiet.

It’s good to know the answer to these questions before beginning to compose, but even so, be prepared to remain flexible. For example, you may have an opportunity to have your piece

¹ ie. based on the natural overtone series of a given fundamental, as opposed to equal temperament.
performed by a different artist or on an unanticipated instrument, so the chances of you having to make other ‘versions’ of the piece are very high. My piece Deuce, for example, exists in 3 versions, the original, scored for Baroque Flute, Baroque Harpsichord and electronics (A=415); a second ‘Waterford’ version for a concert in Waterford where the harpsichord had a more limited range; and a third version at modern pitch for modern instruments, with transposed score and a completely re-written flute part reflecting the different expressive and sonic capabilities of the modern flute.

Close, the focus of this article, was no exception. Originally commissioned in 1994 by Annelie de Man for 2 harpsichords (modern instruments) and electronics, it was later re-versioned for Jane Chapman at baroque pitch, for solo instrument with electronics (this time I kept the score the same and transposed the electronic part). Luckily for me both artists were happy with equal temperament, so I did not need to fundamentally change my harmonic conception of the piece!

Having said all that, it’s an absolute joy to write for harpsichord. The sound palette is extraordinarily varied, intricate, and subtle. The textures can be extremely delicate but also quite powerful. The presence of two manuals allow for certain types of textures and effects that would be difficult or impossible on a single keyboard instrument such as the piano. The harpsichord’s particular quirk - the sound of the key release as the plectrum brushes the string lightly whilst resetting itself back into place at the end of a note - is to my ear a particularly attractive and pleasingly delicate sound. It evokes definitive endings and alludes to the mechanical nature of the instrument - mechanical structure and materiality being one of my aesthetic preoccupations.

Having said all that, it’s an absolute joy to write for harpsichord. The sound palette is extraordinarily varied, intricate, and subtle. The textures can be extremely delicate but also quite powerful. The presence of two manuals allow for certain types of textures and effects that would be difficult or impossible on a single keyboard instrument such as the piano. The harpsichord’s particular quirk - the sound of the key release as the plectrum brushes the string lightly whilst resetting itself back into place at the end of a note - is to my ear a particularly attractive and pleasingly delicate sound. It evokes definitive endings and alludes to the mechanical nature of the instrument - mechanical structure and materiality being one of my aesthetic preoccupations.

My approach to writing for any instrument starts with an exploratory meeting with the player in which I record sounds from the instrument and learn about that player’s musical and technical perspectives, likes and dislikes. Together we explore the different possible sonorities, some of
which are only revealed by close proximity of the microphone, picking up details of sounds that
would be lost to a more distant audience. Generally these initial recordings form the bedrock of
my electronic explorations. I bring the recordings to the studio (now my laptop) and work with
them electronically, seeing what sonic worlds and gestures I can create with them, whilst
simultaneously beginning to explore notated materials for the acoustic instruments themselves.
Usually quite early in this process a central ‘idea’ or metaphor emerges which provides motivation
for developing the structure and materials for the piece. It’s often closely connected to how I am
conceiving the relationship between the players and the electronics, and between the players
themselves. I often envisage the relationship between the players and the electronics as a
metaphor for the relationship between humans and technology - in other words, a relationship
with potential for creativity and destruction, in equal measure.

In **Close**, the initial focus is on the relationship between the players themselves, which is then
disrupted by the entry of the electronics, as summed up in my succinct programme note at the
time:

*Close takes as its starting point the idea of a relationship in which identities are confused
and overlapping. The relationship is rent asunder by the intrusion of a third party, an
increasingly destructive force. After a time of alienation all the ‘players’ reassemble
themselves into a workable ménage-à-trois.*

The structure is quite simple - exploratory, modal, imitative gestures gather up into a high-energy
interlocking rhythmic texture, which is then disrupted by increasingly aggressive percussive
electronic sounds (which are nevertheless entirely created from original harpsichord recordings -
as if the players were being attacked by their own alter egos). The harpsichord parts scurry to
opposite ends of the pitch spectrum before slowly gathering themselves up again into a new
collaborative/coercive texture with the electronics, once again a high-energy rhythmic scene. I
think there may be some ambiguity here, whether the live harpsichords are understood as eagerly
participating in a new integrated way of being in the world, or whether they are trapped by the
electronics into a mechanism from which they can’t escape.

**Close**, for two harpsichords and electronics was commissioned by Annelie de Man in 1994. Most of the
sounds on tape were developed from recordings made with harpsichordist Jane Chapman. It received its
British première in the Brighton Festival in 2000, performed by Jane Chapman and Pamela Nash. The
score and performing materials will be available from Babelscores: [www.babelscores.com](http://www.babelscores.com)

---

**Evelyn Ficarra**

*Evelyn Ficarra lectures in Music at the University of Sussex. She has a strong focus on electro-acoustic
and collaborative work and has written music for dance, music theatre, multi media, experimental film,
radio, installation and the concert hall. Her music has been heard in the UK, Europe, the Americas,
Australia and the Far East, and her solo CD **Frantic Mid-Atlantic** is available on the Sargasso Label.
[www.sargasso.com](http://www.sargasso.com)*
Les Nuits Sonores:

*karaoke harpsichords, Latin groove and JSB*

The realm of duo harpsichords with electronics returns here as Pamela Nash introduces Gary Carpenter’s anarchic and playfully-conceived piece, ‘Les Nuits Sonores’, with a note by the composer on its premise and strategies.

The forum of multiple harpsichords was the main emphasis in HarpsichordFest, the second of two festivals devoted to the contemporary harpsichord in Manchester (UK). One of the premièred works, *Les Nuits Sonores* for two ‘karaoke’ harpsichords and soundfile by Gary Carpenter, made a memorable impact for its funky, high-energy sound world in which the synergy of its collective components contrive to create harpsichord alchemy - most definitely a case of the musical whole vastly surmounting the sum of its parts. Much of the work’s success is owed to the composer’s grasp of harpsichord idiosyncracies; of attack, delay and timbre, in pitting the harpsichord against the third-party interface of electronic sounds, and in creating the off-beat rhythmic accents which define the music’s internal groove. And all is controlled to irresistible effect through the ‘amplified’ medium of the richer, sonorously complex palette of double harpsichords.

For the players, the fun bit is aligning with the fixed time ‘playback’ track at the same time as feeling as if engaged in pinpoint ensemble, and the writing is technically intricate without being onerous. For the listener, the effect of drama and tension from the harpsichordists is offset by perfectly-timed gear shifts and scrunchy textures, spiked by the jangling resonance of counter-tuning in the eerie shadow of a faded Bach prelude. Buoyed along by the groove of a Latin quick-step, it makes for a heady mixed cocktail, and if you were duo harpsichordists looking for a piece to make the audience smile throughout, this is it.

*Pamela Nash*

In 2006, I wrote *Les Nuits Sonores* for two harpsichords and fixed media for Pamela Nash’s contemporary music festival, HarpsichordFest, in which one instrument is played at modern pitch (A=440Hz), the other a semitone lower at ‘Baroque’ pitch (A=415Hz). This exploited the fact that players have moveable keyboards to enable them to do this and that their repertoire is split between the historical and the contemporary, although there were other philosophical and aesthetic issues to do with Bach, Edwin Fischer, performance practice and the nature of music played ‘live’ or via ‘playback’. The key compositional drivers were Fischer’s expressive
performance of the C# minor Prelude from Book 1 of Das Wohltemperierte Klavier (although sounding in D minor from a Baroque tuning perspective!) which is fixed in time by the recording which runs throughout the whole piece (if not always fully audibly), against which the harpsichords play in strict time as defined by the backing track – although the absence of a click track tends to lead to some flexibility, intended or otherwise! The piece thus conceptually explores a rhythmic/performance ambiguity that is intended to parallel the 440/415 tunings. The title Les Nuits Sonores is borrowed from a French music festival, although in this instance has a different, more resonant connotation.

One other thought: in a nod to the joys of serendipity and the occasional elements of chance employed in the writing of this piece, it is worth mentioning that Fischer’s recording lasts exactly 4’33”!

Gary Carpenter

Gary Carpenter is a prolific composer, having written operas, musicals, ballets and orchestral music, with performances from orchestras such as the LSO and the BBCSO, including a commission for The First Night of the 2015 Proms. He has also worked as musical director and/or arranger-orchestrator on many stage shows and films (including ‘The Wicker Man’ [1972]). He won the British Clavichord Society’s Composition Competition in 2003 with ‘Van Assendelft’s Vermeer’ (included on the CD of his music, “Die Flimmerkiste” (NMC)), and has written several pieces for the harpsichord, both solo and ensemble.

www.garycarpenter.net
This brief profile of Gośka Isphording is followed by Aled Smith’s article on his solo harpsichord piece which Gośka premièred and recorded for the BHS Composition Competition.

Gośka Isphording has become a formidable figure on the global musical stage and is a leading member of the female cohort whose names are synonymous with the breakout of the contemporary harpsichord. A virtuoso who doesn’t like to turn good work down, no matter how challenging, she is a prolific and industrious force, performing and collaborating tirelessly on the cutting-edge of many contemporary harpsichord territories. She was a student of both Elizabeth Chojnacka and Annelie de Man and has taken up the reins of de Man’s work in Amsterdam, heading up the department of contemporary harpsichord studies at the Amsterdam conservatoire as well as spearheading initiatives for the Prix Annelie de Man - the Amsterdam festival and symposium centering around competitions for both composition and performance. *

I first encountered Gośka in the final stages of ‘casting’ the performers for the BHS Composition Competition Concert at London’s Foundling Museum in 2013, when she agreed to step in at the last minute for the première of Box Toccata, the Third Prize entry by Aled Smith. Embracing the challenge of Aled’s exacting score with her typically forensic approach, she gave the most lively and precise performance I could have hoped for. Indeed, like each and every one of the harpsichordists on the programme, she proved the optimum player for the individual piece. Returning to the UK for the recording of Box Toccata for the BHS’s Shadow Journey CD the following year, Gośka was able to afford the music the benefit of her intervening interpretative development, and with Aled also present at the session, the intense recording scenario served as an invaluable experience for this young composer just starting out. Read on for Aled’s article on his composition and on working with Gośka.

Pamela Nash

* The next Prix Annelie de Man takes place in May 2018: www.admf.nl/NL/competition.html

Gośka Isphording’s solo CD Per Clavicembalo Moderno available from: www.allmusic.com/album/per-clavicembalo-moderno

harpsichordist Gośka Isphording
photo credit: Riot Ensemble
Returning to this work is a trip down memory lane, in certain respects. It was written over a short period in 2012 whilst I was still an undergraduate and it represented my first success in an international competition: the British Harpsichord Society’s Tenth Anniversary Composition Competition. It was also one of my first performances in London, as well as one of my first recorded works.

One cannot help but be overshadowed by the massive body of work written for the harpsichord over the centuries. Around the time Box Toccata was composed, I remember listening to Scarlatti’s D minor Sonata, K.517 (probably a Comparone recording). Scarlatti’s Sonata is built around fast, descending runs, in the form of arpeggios. What really interested me about this music was that, unlike the ‘perfection’ of Bach, the Scarlatti seemed to me to convey visceral, improvisatory qualities.

I decided to use an antique form for the work; in this instance, the Toccata. The ‘Box’ part of the title of comes from the various processes used in its composition. I decided to retain a level of visceral aggression - like Scarlatti - combined with a ‘broken’ mechanical, perpetuum mobile. Here, the musical language is entirely gestural and has no discernible sense of melody.

The harpsichord is certainly a limited instrument in many respects. It offers a fresh challenge, however, for those willing to work patiently within its idiosyncrasies. It would be a mistake to assume this instrument as being similar to a piano (in terms of writing for it) as, apart from its general shape and the presence of a keyboard, that’s pretty much where the similarities end. Instead, the music must be written to circumnavigate the lack of (sustain) pedals and the completely different ‘touch’.

At this time, I had been experimenting with composition processes concerned with self-similarity, but not with repetition. Defining the structure of the work are several overlapping cyclical processes which control the harmony and rhythm. The harmony operates as a simple four-part canon, itself divided into smaller cycles, shifting between the white and black keys.

composer Aled Smith, photo credit: Paul Cliff
Even more simply, the rhythm for each cycle is a simple permutation pattern of semi-quavers, from one to ten. With all these cycles having different spacings, they cross over and clash together, creating ‘resulting’ gestures. It took a long time to find patterns which were interesting and would share a space well. Very many pieces of paper were discarded in trying ideas out - an inevitability in the process of writing. In all, Box Toccata runs to just under three minutes in length, but with the use of these cyclic processes, the work could have been much longer. The titular ‘boxes’ are a result of four pitches, or points, being present in each gesture. ‘Boxes’ are quite metaphorical, as they change shape, size and perspective, frequently.

I had the pleasure of meeting many wonderful harpsichordists through the society, not least of whom the player who premièred, recorded and subsequently performed the work, Gośka Isphording. Gośka is such a wonderful player to work with, and someone you can instantly feel comfortable around. She is also direct - which, in my opinion is a great thing in a performer-composer relationship. Her excellent, detailed playing style has a special colour that lends well to contemporary music. Gośka and I didn’t get chance to meet before the première, which was in the beautiful setting of the Foundling Museum in London on a sweltering mid-summer day back in 2013. Instead, we chatted quite a bit over social media, discussing our ideas for the work. Since the première, Gośka has given a few more performances of Box Toccata in Europe. I was fortunate to be offered the opportunity to have Box Toccata appear on the album showcasing the BHS Tenth Anniversary event - Shadow Journey: 21st Century Music for Harpsichord. I would highly recommend picking up a copy or listening on streaming services. It’s a pretty eclectic disc with plenty of stylistic variety and quirk, and is an excellent compendium of differing approaches and ideas as to possibilities and offerings for the harpsichord in 21st century art music.

Aled Smith

Aled Smith (b.1990) is a prolific compositional voice in the British contemporary music scene. His music is frequently performed throughout the UK and internationally and he has written works for the likes of Alexandra Dariescu, Clare Hammond, NEW Sinfonia, London Sinfonietta and the BBC Singers. Aled also works as a teacher, editor and copyist. He undertook undergraduate study in Liverpool before moving to the RNCM in Manchester, where he received an MMus with distinction. He was the recipient of this year’s RNCM Gold Medal, and is currently reading for a PhD.

https://soundcloud.com/aledsmith

* Shadow Journey is available from: ascrecords.com/primafacie
A “fantastic collection of little-known gems…. succeeds utterly, as does the immaculately sensitive [Penelope] Cave…. a marvellous achievement altogether, from a marvellous musician.” - Music & Vision, CD Spotlight

‘Panorama’, Penelope Cave’s recent recording for Prima Facie of a century of British harpsichord music, from 1919-2013, finishes with a Raymond Head piece, ‘Le Panorama en Rondeau’, that provided the title. Produced and edited by Pamela Nash, it forms a showcase of music from each decade of the twentieth century, comprising fourteen composers and twice as many tracks.

Penelope Cave writes about the music, and also about the roles of the women behind it.

The English term,"Fancy", is an apt title for much of the music that displays a fanciful re-evaluation of the past. In the war-torn early part of the twentieth century, there was a nostalgia for lost national culture. A trend for ‘Mock Tudor’ was exemplified in vernacular architecture; Cecil Sharp was collecting folk-songs before they disappeared; whilst recorder-music and maypole-dances were revived for celebratory pageants for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Classical composers, such as Vaughan Williams, utilised music contemporary with the first Queen Elizabeth, along with British folk-tunes. The English ‘Scarlatti Sect’ seems to have a continuous line of descent going back to the first publication of his sonatas in London, in 1738/9, and his influence can still be detected in some of these pieces. Collections of ancient instruments were being established and, as the twentieth-century progressed, copies of original historic keyboards, including virginals and clavichords, were proliferating. In the 1970s and 1980s, the building of harpsichords based on French models led to a rediscovery of French ornamentation, and good copies of these instruments that concentrated more particularly on sound, per se, re-invigorated a compositional fusion of current international styles with tropes of the past.

Inevitably, in writing for the harpsichord or clavichord, composers look back from their own standpoint of the present, applying their knowledge, experience and imagination to the task of revisiting the past. Many of these short pieces may only have been intended to supply a taste of a quaint instrument, or a glimpse of a bygone age; if any of this music already feels ‘dated’, that is, perhaps, its value; it tells much of a century of change and upheaval, where holding on to the past seemed both a place of safety and comfort, and yet a source of new inspiration.'

Harpsichordist Penelope Cave (photo credit Leena Rana)
Women’s Part in the Revival of the Harpsichord

It is of course pertinent, in this issue of Sounding Board, to take notice of some of the female harpsichordists who feature on this CD, as either dedicatee, performer, or in one case, composer. The opening work, Delius’s *Dance for Harpsichord*, was written for Violet Gordon Woodhouse (1872-1948); the first keyboard player to make a recording of the harpsichord (in 1920), she gave Delius and his wife hospitality in 1918 on their retreat from France. Gustav Holst’s *A Piece for Yvonne* was written for the daughter of pianist, Adine O’Neill (1875-1947) for whom he wrote his first Toccata, and works equally well on the harpsichord. Anthony Freskyn Charles Hamby Chaplin, 3rd Viscount was a pupil of Nadia Boulanger, although his 1930 *Bourrée* is much more indebted to Domenico Scarlatti. Murrill dedicated the *Suite Française* to Marcelle de Lacour (1896–1997), a pupil of another famous harpsichordist in her day, Wanda Landowska. Bax wrote the incidental music for *The Golden Eagle* for one of Mary Queen of Scots’ ladies-in-waiting to perform. *Three Dance Variations* by Geoffrey Bush were composed for Ruth Dyson’s 1951 Wigmore Hall recital, and her own score was used for this recording. It was Ruth Dyson (1917-96) to whom this disc is dedicated,”a keen exponent of music that was ’new’ from the early nineteen-fifties onward and a much-loved mentor who exemplified a life of integrity, and lived during a turbulent century. The pieces chosen for the following sixties, include two of the late Stephen Dodgson’s many *Inventions*, gaining the comment in a review of this recording, by Alice McVeigh in Music & Vision: ”made me wish she’d done the lot!” The Glasgow teacher and composer, Janetta Gould (b.1926) wrote, perhaps, the most experimental works on the CD, with titles based on crossword clues. Head’s first two harpsichord pieces were requested by Klyne Williams, and dedicated to his harpsichord teacher, Mary Potts (1905-1982). Sema Mevlana was a commission, written for Penelope Cave in 2007, inspired by whirling dervishes.

*Penelope Cave*

Penelope Cave is an international prize-winning harpsichordist and specialist in early keyboards and has performed and broadcast throughout Europe. She has recorded for Naxos, Hyperion, Pace Recordings and Prima Facie and for Classic FM and BBC Radio 3. She was awarded a PhD on ‘Music in the English Country House’ in 2014 by the University of Southampton, and is currently performing and advising on music at Dyrham Park for the National Trust. She was married to the instrument maker, the late Michael Heale.

[www.impulse-music.co.uk/penelopecave](http://www.impulse-music.co.uk/penelopecave)

‘Panorama’ is available at:
[ascrecords.com/primafacie/penelope_cave.html](http://ascrecords.com/primafacie/penelope_cave.html)

For a complete CD of Stephen Dodgson’s Inventions for Harpsichord, played by Ekaterina Likhina go to [https://naxosdirect.com/items/dodgson-24-inventions-for-harpsichord-392464](https://naxosdirect.com/items/dodgson-24-inventions-for-harpsichord-392464)
Composer Rob Keeley talks about drawing on early and baroque models in writing his highly idiomatic solo harpsichord works, and Pamela Nash introduces his first three volumes from a player’s perspective.

The first of Rob Keeley’s solo harpsichord works, Manoeuvering and Finessing, is written specifically for a two-manual harpsichord, a medium through which the composer exploits a more ‘modern’ style than the others, and with apparent relish. Written without the use of time signatures, it explores the more percussive nature of the instrument and also its contrapuntal and ‘dialoguing’ capacities. Indeed, the title, taken from Jane Austen’s Emma (on account of Austen’s prose style suggesting to the composer certain musical analogies) seems perfectly appropriated, particularly perhaps in the second of the two movements - written as a pièce croisée - which could be seen as reflective of complex and strategic social machinations and interactions! In any case, for the player, Finessing is technically satisfying and its substantial length enables much greater immersion in the fascinating croisée sonorities than any of its claveciniste prototypes.

extract showing croisée from ‘Manoeuvering and Finessing’ (© Cadenza Music)
Of his *Suite for Harpsichord*, the composer notes that performance would also be effective on the piano or clavichord, and that the piano is also possible for his eight *Two Part Inventions*. As already noted, *Manoueversing and Finessing* is by definition only possible on the harpsichord due to the use of two manuals - including the extensive *croisée* writing – but the composer takes the unique clarity of harpsichord voicing very much on board in all three works, and there is very little in the *Inventions* or the *Suite* which would lend itself to the tonal properties of any other keyboard instrument. It would indeed be a shame if they were played *by choice* on the piano, and/or - more to the point - by musicians not versed in harpsichord technique.

In the *Inventions*, although they are clearly indebted to the Bachian model, it might be pertinent to point out from a player’s or teacher’s point of view that the rhythmic challenges which characterise each one set them apart from any Baroque counterpart: beware any player expecting uniformity of meter. The qualities of the two-part writing here are reminiscent of those found in Stephen Dodgson’s own Inventions: clean spacing between the hands, judicious use of the tie for throwing the accent off the beat and the application of graces as rhythmic as well as melodic inflections. For the same reasons that Dodgson’s music is so grateful to play for the harpsichordist, so too is Keeley’s. And elsewhere (in the non two-part works), the composer’s control of texture and tessitura, of cross-rhythms and off-beat accents (through the use of tied chords in particular) are all techniques which enliven harpsichord sound.

For the *Suite*, the composer acknowledges allegiance to Bach and the French *clavecinistes*, with the unmeasured prelude clearly following the Louis Couperin model. He adheres to the Baroque Suite format, but ‘doubles’ of the Courante and Sarabande form ‘extra’ movements to give eight in total. The composer’s techniques of ornamentation here are beautifully thought out for the experienced harpsichordist, and as the composer says, they “give variety to the music, and I hope, pleasure to the performer - which for me is essential in the kind of music I write.”

*Pamela Nash*

**On writing for the Harpsichord: Looking Back to the Masters**

I have so far composed four works for the instrument, published mainly by Cadenza Music: first a piece entitled *Manoeuversing and Finessing* (the title from Jane Austen’s *Emma*), two sets of *Inventions* (one of eight quite substantial and demanding pieces, strictly in two parts) and a smaller group of three (this one from Composers Edition), and a *Suite ‘after Bach’* - there is also a set of *Four Anachronistic Dances* for the perhaps unlikely (but to my mind) highly effective combination of clarinet with harpsichord.
(recorded by Linda Merrick and the composer on a forthcoming CD *Twists and Turns* from Divine Art/Metier, the sheet music published by Composers Edition).

I’m attracted to the instrument for many reasons - above all, as a pianist who has spent many happy hours exploring the works of Scarlatti, Rameau, Bach, the Couperins, and the Elizabethan virginalists, I love to write music that, like most of this repertoire, is conceived principally for the player’s enjoyment, with or without an audience: it is a pleasure to write music where one isn’t expected to notate a huge amount of dynamics and articulation, and where much can be (and is expected to be) left to the performer’s taste and discretion.

I also love the challenge and discipline of writing strictly in two parts, like Bach; of (in the Suite) keeping to binary forms (with repeats, where the performer is invited to subtly change articulation and even add ornamentation), and re-thinking the ancient dance forms of allemande, courante, minuet and so on.

In two of the Three Inventions, I use the old form of the hexachordal fantasy, in which a simple scale rising from C to G and back again becomes the ‘scaffolding’ on which my spontaneous invention is allowed free rein.

In *Manoeuvering and Finessing* I take a rather more virtuosic and more obviously ‘modern’ approach to the instrument, with crunchy chords and roulades of grace-notes interspersed with cool two-part counterpoint, with, I think, the ghost of the Hispanic-tinged Scarlatti jostling with more recent Italian masters such as Berio and my old teacher Donatoni.

Further chamber pieces are certain to involve this wonderful instrument - I’m especially intrigued at the moment by the problematic combination of harpsichord and piano, and the compositional (and balance!) issues this may involve. A recent composer with whom I feel kinship is the late Stephen Dodgson, whose contributions to the contemporary harpsichord’s repertoire is unequalled, and who, as I do, enjoyed exploring unusual combinations!

*Rob Keeley*

www.soundcloud.com/rob-keeley

http://composersedition.com/composers/robkeeley

Rob Keeley studied at the Royal College of Music, Magdalen College Oxford, the Accademia Santa Cecilia in Rome, and also at Tanglewood as the Benjamin Britten Fellow in Composition. He has written over a hundred pieces including two symphonies and two piano concertos and has released two CDs: ‘Songs, Chimes and Dances’ (NMC) and ‘Dances with Bears’ (Lorelt), with two new releases on the Divine Arts and Clarinet Classics labels due for release this year. He has taught Composition at Kings College, London since 1993.

*composer Rob Keeley*
Aliénor: patron, muse and inspiration

No edition of this kind would be complete without acknowledging the Aliénor Composition Competition and the work of its Artistic Director, Elaine Funaro. And so in this the final article, we end as we started: reflecting on the effect of women leaders in the charge of the contemporary harpsichord.

Politician, warrior, Queen of England and France: Eleanor of Aquitaine was one of the most extraordinary and ambitious women of the 12th century, and indeed of the whole of history. Not only did she manage to over-ride many of the rules of medieval patriarchy, but she did so without losing her feminine powers, attaining as much fame as muse and symbol of courtly love as she did as strategic ruler. Her love of the arts still carries resonance and influence today and she is the inspiration behind the naming of the Aliénor Competition - the venerable American institution for the promotion of the contemporary harpsichord whose figurehead is that other mover and shaker, Elaine Funaro. Elaine’s great female role model is seldom far from her thoughts in driving the mission forward: “Eleanor herself was a great patron of the arts, and that’s what ‘we’ do at Aliénor - promoting the harpsichord as an exciting contemporary instrument and encouraging composers to write for it.”

Founded in 1980 under the aegis of SEHKS (the South Eastern Historical Keyboard Society) and now with nine competitions and 700 scores to its name, Aliénor continues to flourish under its original manifesto of encouraging music which is “intentionally accessible” - in compositional styles which I suppose you could say lean towards the more overtly expressive and melodic. Elaine’s passion for this cause manifests itself in taking responsibility for promulgating its outcomes: publishing scores, making them available internationally, and taking up the mantle as performer-exponent including ‘exporting’ Aliénor pieces through concert tours abroad, as well as - and perhaps the most valuable of all for composers - recording them for commercial release: on the Centaur and Arabesque labels, and now on the dedicated Aliénor label.
Aliénor, though by now synonymous with Elaine’s professional profile (“it’s what I do best”), is by no means her only musical concern, and aside from the afore-mentioned recording initiatives, her other releases are mostly musically ‘independent’ from the Aliénor connection. These include Overture to Orpheus, an album dedicated to another subject close to her heart. “It’s all about women as muse, and every piece is written for a woman - and all harpsichordists but one!”

The album’s programme is indeed a fascinating modern testament to the inspiration of the female muse through the medium of the harpsichord: Alexander Voormolen’s Suite, written for Lucie van Dam van Isselt (the painter); Lou Harrison’s Sonatas for Sylvia Marlowe; the Martinů Deux Impromptus for Antoinette Vischer; Daniel Pinkham’s Homage à Wanda for Landowska; Louis Andriessen’s Overture to Orpheus for Annelie de Man; Albert Glinsky’s Sunbow for his wife, Linda Kobler; Michael Nyman’s Tango for Tim for Elisabeth Chojnacka, and Edward McLean’s Sonata No 2, for Elaine herself. (For details of this and all of Elaine’s recordings, see her website, linked below.)

Back to Aliénor again, Elaine muses about composer-performer partnerships and how several of the competition’s winning composers are married to harpsichordists. *(That deserves an edition all of its own!)* One such composer, Lei Liang, got it right when he said: “I am not surprised that [so many] winning composers are married to harpsichordists - it is the most attractive instrument ever!”

*Pamela Nash*

www.elainefunaromusic.com
http://historicalkeyboardsociety.org/competitions/alienor
* To read the article on this subject, go to:
   http://historicalkeyboardsociety.org/alienor/_docs/fall_2011.pdf

To find out more about the North American scene, readers are referred to Sounding Board 9

SoundingBoard9
Kasia Tomczak-Feltrin writes in memory of the great Polish harpsichordist who took the world by storm, and the instrument to new limits.

Elisabeth Chojnacka - “the Empress of the contemporary harpsichord” (Le Monde) passed away on the 28th of May 2017 in Paris, aged 77.
She was born in Warsaw, on the 10th of May 1939, ten days after Nazi invasion of Poland. After graduating from the Fryderyk Chopin Music Academy in Warsaw (piano) she soon found her interest in the harpsichord. She left Poland in the early sixties in order to pursue studies at the Paris Conservatoire with the Belgian harpsichordist Aimée van de Viele - one of Wanda Landowska’s favorite pupils.
In 1968 Elisabeth Chojnacka won First Prize in the International Vercelli Competition. Two years later she was asked to give the French première of Continuum by Georgy Ligeti, after which the Museum of Modern Art in Paris proposed that she give her first entire contemporary music recital. This was followed by making a record for Philips, Clavecin 2000; a cult disc entirely devoted to harpsichord contemporary solo pieces (including Continuum) which assured the artist international fame.

From that point her career accelerated and she formed various collaborations: in duo with organist Xavier Darasse, and percussionist Sylvio Gualda, and she worked with ensembles such as Ars Nova (Marius Constant), 2e2m, London Sinfonietta, Asko Ensemble, Xenakis Ensemble and Ensemble Intercontemporain. She was invited as a soloist by leading orchestras: Cleveland and Minneapolis Symphony, French Radio Orchestra, Munich Symphony, Warsaw Philharmonic and San Francisco Symphony among others.
In 1991 she started her long term collaboration with American choreographer Lucinda Childs, and as Music Director she advised and performed live music to Childs’ creations. Her individual approach to harpsichord technique and repertoire attracted the attention of the Mozarteum in Salzburg where she was appointed a Professor of Contemporary Harpsichord in 1995 (a post created specially for her) and she taught there for many years.

Settled in Paris, city of French baroque harpsichordists and of Wanda Landowska - the Polish harpsichordist of the Belle Époque responsible for a revival of this instrument - Chojnacka, the fellow Pole, adds another chapter to its history. Alongside the revival of historical performance practice and instruments established by people like Huguette Dreyfus, Kenneth Gilbert and Gustav Leonhardt, she found her own path by carrying the repertoire of the harpsichord through to the 21st century, reassuring its continuity. She chose to perform on a modern harpsichord, two manual, five-pedal instrument which, under her fingers, had no technical limits.
A charismatic figure, full of vitality and energy, with a storm of red hair, stilettos reaching to the sky and striking, sexy clothes, she had almost the quality of a rock star. Her torrid and passionate playing and prodigious and insolent style very early on inspired the greatest composers of our time to write for the harpsichord. At least 80 pieces were dedicated to Chojnacka by such composers as Ligeti, Donatoni, Xenakis, Ohana, Mâche, Bussotti, Gubaidulina, Nyman, Gorecki and by the younger generation of artists such as Montague, Sotelo, Szymanski, Mykietyn, Campo, MacLachlan, and many others.

She inspired, encouraged and provoked very effectively. Through her passionate, honest, virtuoso and brave attitude to the instrument and her carefully staged performances, Chojnacka became an ideal medium for contemporary music and she has made a profound impact on the history of the harpsichord.

She was a beautiful, striking person and a warm host whom I had a chance to meet in 2009 while playing at the Bibliothèque Polonaise in Paris. I will never forget a crazy ride in her little car through the streets of Paris after the recital, listening to the Michel Petrucciani disc at a full volume. At that point she was 70 years old: a stylish, mysterious, unpredictable beauty. A true artist.

Continuum...

It’s there. Her energy will sparkle, and inspire every time a harpsichordist dares to play her repertoire and it should encourage us not to stop pushing the boundaries of this instrument and taking it to ever newer horizons.

Kasia Tomczak-Feltrin
28 July 2017
CONFERENCES

NEMA Conference: *Early Keyboard Instruments: Repertoire, Use and Design*

The National Early Music Association’s 2017 conference will take place at Murray Edwards College, University of Cambridge, on **Saturday 2 September 2017**

The Conference will be chaired by Francis Knights, *NEMA Chairman*.

The Keynote speaker will be Derek Adlam, the eminent keyboard-maker and recitalist.

Papers will be presented by Andrew Woolley *FCSH/NOVA, Lisbon*; Pablo Padilla *National University of Mexico*; Daniel Wheeldon *Edinburgh University*; Eleanor Smith *Edinburgh Napier University*; Frauke Jürgensen *Aberdeen University*; Christian Kjos *Norwegian Academy of Music*; Aleksander Mocek *Cracow Academy of Music* and Kris Worsley *Royal Northern College of Music*.


Costs, to include lunch and all refreshments, NEMA members £45; RMA members £40; Standard rate £50; Student rate £30. There are five subsidised Student places available. The Conference is supported by the Royal Musical Association and the Keyboard Charitable Trust.


The Conference will end with a **Recital of Bach’s Goldberg Variations, by Dr Dan Tidhar**

******************************************************************************

MIRN Conference: *The Life Cycle of Musical Instruments*

This First Conference organised by the Musical Instrument Resources Network UK will include MIRN’s first musical instrument Q&A surgery. This day long event will be held on **Thursday, 12 October, 2017** at the *Horniman Museum and Gardens*, London, SE23 3PQ

The conference registration fee will be £25 (*MIRN members*), £20 (*MIRN members who are retired, students or unwaged*) or £30 (*non-members*), to include all presentations, lunch, coffee, tea and an introductory tour of the Horniman Music Gallery.

Registration is now open. Full programme details see [https://mirn.org.uk/events/](https://mirn.org.uk/events/)

******************************************************************************

COST WoodMusICK Conference

*Preservation of Wooden Musical Instruments; Ethics, Practice and Assessment*

This fourth conference focuses on the problems involved in the preservation of wooden musical instruments. On the dilemmas faced when balancing the demands of conservation, restoration, repair and playability. [http://woodmusick.org/](http://woodmusick.org/)

It will take place **5-7 October 2017** in Brussels at *Musical Instruments Museum (MIM)*

******************************************************************************