

## *Lateral thinking for Harpsichordists*

Do we understand the music we love as well as we think we do? Jane Clark reflects on what mental time-travel can teach us about the music of the C17th and C18th centuries and what we can learn from contemporary literature an example of which is reviewed in the article which follows this one.

At first glance it might seem that the review of an apparently not too successful book<sup>1</sup> about an obscure instrument that was perhaps never completed, has little to do with members of the British Harpsichord Society. But anyone interested in the 17<sup>th</sup>. and 18<sup>th</sup>. centuries, which these members must surely be, should perhaps pay attention to anything that can help them understand how a 17<sup>th</sup>. or 18<sup>th</sup>. century mind worked. One thing is certain; it did not work like a 20<sup>th</sup>. or 21<sup>st</sup>. century mind. Today we can never hope to fully comprehend the values of Bach, Byrd, the Couperins, Frescobaldi, Froberger, Handel, Rameau, Scarlatti, the composers whose music we play every day, but we can at least attempt to understand them. We all worry about style and we study 'performance practice' but how close does this get us to the message of the music? Is there a danger that we may be putting the cart before the horse?

To take an example we all know, Rameau's '*La Poule*'. To a modern mind the meaning is obvious, a hen, happily clucking away laying eggs. But this scene is unlikely to have occurred to an 18<sup>th</sup>. century mind writing at the date of this piece (1728). In '*Recherches sur la musique française*' (1978, pp.7-8) Françoise Petit refers us to the art of falconry. The rituals of stag-hunting (still alive in France today) and falconry would have been part of every day life to Rameau, just as bull-fighting would have been to Scarlatti.



HOOBY, WITH LEASH AND BLOCK.

Hens were used in training and feeding the falcons. Rameau is describing the cries and the desperately beating wings of these terrified birds as they meet their doom in the dramatic chords before the piece fades away as the hen finally expires. The piece is worthy of the solemn rituals that accompanied this ancient art. And in *'Le Rappel des Oiseaux'* Rameau is not imitating small, twittering birds but falconers calling home their birds of prey.

Louis-Bertrand Castel was an exact contemporary of Rameau. He was a Jesuit, and Rameau had been the organist of the Jesuit Church in the Rue Saint Jacques in Paris, so the chances are the two men knew one another. Even if they had not met, Rameau with his theoretical mind has to have been aware of Castel's *'clavecin oculaire'*. Whether, as a master of orchestral colours, he ever reacted to Castel's ideas may or may not be known, but it is quite possible that by drawing attention to these ideas, as does the following review, it may encourage someone, somewhere to explore this possibility, so affording us another glimpse into Rameau's 18<sup>th</sup>. century mind.

It was Telemann who translated and annotated Castel's *'Nouvelles experiences d'optique et d'acoustique'* and had it published.<sup>2</sup> Can we say categorically that he was the only composer to take an interest in Castel's work? \* Jane Clark

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## Notes

*1 Françoise Roy-Gerboud 'Le Piano des Lumières: le grand œuvre de Louis-Bertrand de Castel'. Paris: L'Harmattan. 2012.*

*2 Kenneth Peacock, 'Instruments to Perform Color-Music Two Centuries of Technological Experimentation', p. 399, [www.paulj.myzen.co.uk/blog/.../08/instrumentstoperformcolor.pdf](http://www.paulj.myzen.co.uk/blog/.../08/instrumentstoperformcolor.pdf)*



## *Sound and Visionary*

Derek Cannon reviews Françoise Roy-Gerboud's new book about the work in the eighteenth century of Louis Bertrand Castel and his '*clavecin oculaire*' an instrument designed to explore the relationship of sound and of light.

Since it was during the period we know as the Enlightenment that the piano was first developed, one might be forgiven for supposing that a work entitled *The Piano of the Enlightenment* was an examination of the early versions of that instrument. However, the subtitle alerts us to the fact that the main title

is a play on words: hiding behind the obvious meaning is another, for this is about Castel's piano of lights – or, more precisely, *clavecin oculaire*, for eighteenth-century terminology linked it to the harpsichord, as that name implies, or sometimes to the organ, not the new kid on the block the piano. One of the fascinating aspects of the Enlightenment was the

fact that, although it was a time of great scientific and intellectual advancement, the sciences had not yet advanced to the point where they were beyond the grasp of all but specialists. Hence the *philosophes* could be equally interested in the sciences and the arts, and could even make a contribution to each.

**F**rom this point of view, Castel, a Jesuit priest characterized by Diderot via a character in his novel *Les Bijoux indiscrets* who is clearly based on him as ‘moitié sensé, moitié fou’ (quoted p. 98), is a typical Enlightenment man. For, as Françoise Roy-Gerboud shows, the artistic aim of the *clavecin oculaire* was based on a sound knowledge of Newton’s principles of light – indeed, Castel even disagreed with Newton on some points. She discusses not only the science behind Castel’s invention, but also the practicalities of actually building the instrument – even though Roy-Gerboud quotes more than one witness who claims to have seen it, it remains doubtful whether Castel or anyone else ever completed a prototype – certainly none survives, and Castel’s writings are more concerned with what the instrument would do rather than how to go about achieving this. Another issue that remains unresolved is whether

Castel intended the instrument to combine colour with sound, or to produce colour-music independently of acoustic music: Castel himself wrote on occasion of the instrument as a way of allowing the deaf to appreciate music, suggesting that the colour-music should be regarded as an artistic form in its own right, whereas other commentators clearly expected the colours to be linked to sounds. With that latter point in mind, it seems odd that when Roy-Gerboud discusses more recent developments of colour music, Scriabin’s *Prometheus*, surely the most famous such experiment, merits not even a mention.

Castel’s ideas were bound to be of interest at a time when thinkers were so interested in the senses and the way they worked, but there were gainsayers too: particularly interesting is an anonymous Gascon who points out that sight and hearing clearly operate differently from each other, so that an experience like music cannot simply be transferred from one sense to the other.

**A**lmost half of this relatively short study (the main text fills less than 100 pages) is devoted to introductory material, and consequently one often finds oneself longing for a more complete and systematic presentation of Castel’s

ideas as well as more detailed analysis. Similarly, much of the introductory material is too compressed to be helpful, and the broad generalizations are often not backed up with evidence to support them. Some introductory material also seems redundant: since the *clavecin oculaire* is not a harpsichord, why do we need a detailed description of the construction of the mechanism of harpsichords during this period? And the summary of the contents of the harpsichord suites of Couperin and Rameau, although too abbreviated to be informative, seems, with one exception, equally redundant. But then, when we arrive at that exception – Couperin’s *Folies françaises*, which attributes a colour to each movement – the commentary is limited to two sentences, the second of which contains a leap of faith – ‘Couperin utilise son clavecin traditionnel comme un clavecin oculaire’ (p. 51) – which is simply not justified by any argument. And this is not the only occasion on which too much literal weight is placed on an expression which is fundamentally metaphorical.

There are also errors and inconsistencies, many of which could have been eliminated by attentive editing: footnotes and endnotes are confusingly identified by Arabic numerals and readers are left to their own devices to work out that the asterisks in the text refer to a glossary; the choice use of ‘ibid.’ or short or long titles in the notes is inconsistent; ‘vielle’ (hurdy-gurdy) is spelt ‘vièle’; Giles Farnaby is called Gil; and what is one to make of the sentence ‘Couperin, par sa musique, peint des toiles faisant appel, le plus souvent, à la nature, mais aussi à la féminité traduite par le genre adopté pour les titres’ (p. 50)? The feminine is used for so many of Couperin’s titles (even when the subjects are male) simply because it is the gender of the word ‘pièce’, and it is surely just wrong to say that most of his pieces are nature paintings.

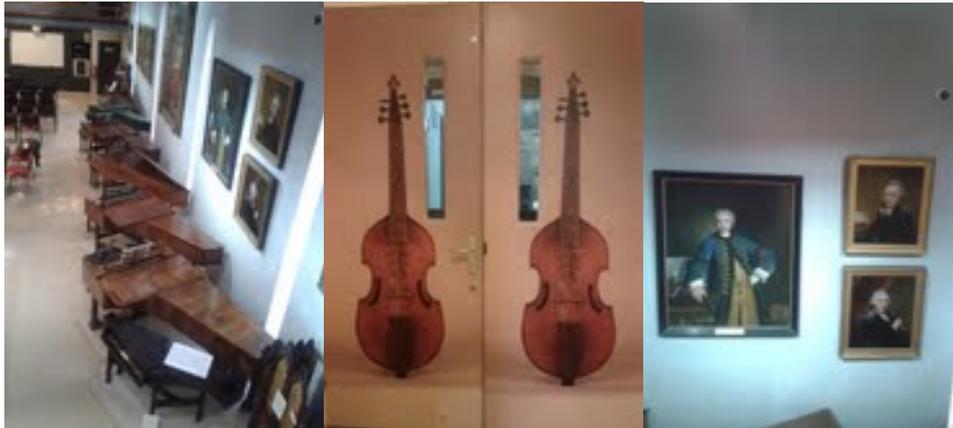
This is an interesting topic, and there are useful comments and facts here in the section devoted to Castel himself and his creation, but the subject deserves a more developed and more systematic study. \*

Derek Connon

***‘Le Piano des Lumières: le grand œuvre de Louis-Bertrand de Castel.’***

Françoise Roy-Gerboud. Paris: L’Harmattan. 2012. 144 pp. €16. ISBN 978-2-296-56983-6.

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## *The Museum of Instruments at the Royal College of Music*

Jenny Nex has been curator of the Museum of Instruments, at the Royal College of Music, since 2005. Her research interests include the design and construction of historical keyboard instruments, and she is working towards a PhD on the lives and businesses of instrument makers in London, 1750–1810. The museum's wonderful collection of over 1000 instruments includes the late 15<sup>th</sup>-century clavictherium, believed to be the earliest surviving stringed keyboard instrument. She answers our questions on her plans for the future of the museum

**Q:** Tell us a little about what you feel is special about the collection?

**A:** I just like the way instruments show so many aspects of human ingenuity and thought. At a particular point in time, people were using things, and then perceiving problems, which they would solve. From where we're standing now, it looks like a completely mad thing to have done, but back then somebody clearly thought it was a good thing. The insight that instruments can give you as to what people wanted from their music is fascinating.

**Q:** Can you tell us about the background of the collection?

**A:** When the college was founded it was deemed important to have collections here – it was very forward looking as we would think of learning resources these days – so the college acquired the library of the Sacred Harmonic Society, which happened to be looking to sell its collection, which it

brought in. One of the earliest donors included a member of the Tagore family, who was very keen to demonstrate the importance of Indian culture all over the world, so he gave a number of instruments and books and manuscripts to collections all over the world, and we were fortunate to be one of the beneficiaries of that. Art dealer and collector, Sir George Donaldson, gave a big collection of instruments in 1894 – and a museum in which to house them! That room is now the Donaldson Room in the library, used for quiet study, but there are some wonderful old photographs of it as it used to be, with fabulous old Victorian cases with fancy legs and glass boxes on top with instruments in them. So right from the beginning, it was part of the plan that there would be collections of instruments here. This particular building came out of a process in the 60s, when they were looking at where the collections were housed, and where and how they were being cared for, and it came to the attention of people in the library, that there were these wonderful objects deteriorating and they really needed to be better cared for. So there was a huge fundraising effort and this particular building opened in 1970.



*Left, the downstairs main gallery, housing the collection of harpsichords, spinets, virginals and early pianos. Previous page, left to right, the view from the mezzanine; the museum entrance; other important parts of the collection, such as paintings, are now on display*

**Q:** So was it the case that there was a substantial collection from the very start, but there wasn't a purpose built home for them?

**A:** Well, Donaldson did build his museum but it was specifically for his collection, so any other bits ended up in the General Museum, which was in the Parry Rooms, right at the top of the college, so it was slightly dispersed, but the focus was Donaldson's museum. He did offer, I believe, to build a

larger museum space, on the ground floor, but the college turned him down: I've no idea why!

**Q:** So the instruments, are they from all sort of backgrounds?

**A:** Well, yes. A lot of our collection is European art music, simply because we're in London, but other things have come from all over the world, and our donors have come from all over the place. We obviously have a focus in London because that's where we are, but I think that instruments from other cultures help us to understand all cultures, in terms of their construction and use.

*"Forty years after this museum opened, people maybe want to think about instruments in different ways. Some museums have gone very minimalist, but I didn't want to go quite that far, because we have a lot of stuff we want to share with people"*

**Q:** Yes, and like you say, showing ingenuity and how people adapt, and that will be a kind of constant...

**A:** Exactly. And whether using the materials that are readily available, or looking for the exotic, if you're trying to show status, or affluence, or something – I think that's probably fairly universal as well.

**Q:** And we were talking about the building...

**A:** Yes! The current building was opened in 1970 and the displays were put together at that point, and were very much instrument-focused, and looking at the history of each instrument group, so they'd be 30 flutes, 30 clarinets... For the organologist, that's exactly the way they want to look at it, and there's nothing wrong with that kind of display, but, 40 years on, people are maybe wanting to think about them in different ways as well. Some museums have gone very minimalist, so you get a glorious white space with one thing in the middle, and I didn't want to go quite that far, because we've got such a lot of stuff we want to share with people. So we've been trying to find some kind of balance. Also we wanted better to address our key audience: we weren't getting that many students of the college through the door; mainly specialists and the general public, so we thought that by taking things out, we would actually be able to do more, so the main downstairs display has had a lot taken out. We also wanted to tell more of a story in general and to contextualize the instruments: so rather than showing one flute, we would have perhaps one flute, plus some music from the library, plus some contextual information from elsewhere in the collection – concert programmes, for example.



*“We’re trying to tell more stories but about fewer objects, that’s really what it’s about. I’ve tried to keep a little bit of the traditional feel of the museum, to remember our history, but also to say well, this instrument is interesting because of these reasons...”*

**Q:** So it’s more of a narrative.

**A:** Exactly. We’re trying to tell more stories but about fewer objects, that’s really what it’s been about. I’ve also tried to keep a little bit of the traditional feel of the museum, particularly with the very dense display upstairs of the wind instruments. I’m trying to remember our history, but also to say well, this instrument is interesting because of these reasons... Downstairs is mainly playable keyboard instruments, apart from the Trasuntino, which is not itself playable, but there are copies elsewhere. There is a technical drawing for this, so if anyone wants to buy one, they are very welcome to get in touch with us!

**Q:** So who has made Trasuntino copies?



*Harpsichord (RCM 2): Alessandro Trasuntino, Venice, 1531*

**A:** Most recently, Malcolm Rose made two copies. The Trasuntino originally had an 8’ and a 4’ set of strings, and then at some point, like many early

Italian instruments, was converted to 2 8s. He made copies of both versions, I think for a customer in America. And we were very lucky that before they went to America, we were able to borrow them, and had a lovely event in here, with the copies sitting next to the original. And to my mind, that's a great event: where you have the original instrument, the maker talking about what he's done and why, and you've got the two instruments which you can then listen to and hear musically how they are different, you can get our students in working with them, so it's a really holistic project – I seem to be saying that word a lot at the moment!



*“we’re trying a more holistic approach, and we’re not too worried about getting things wrong at the moment – we’re seeing what works. It’s these narratives, drawing on all the material from the museum’s collection”*

**Q:** Well I think it seems to be key to your thinking about how the museum is moving forward...

**A:** That's what we're trying to do. And we're not too worried about getting things wrong at the moment, we're seeing what works. We've finished one display on Coleridge-Taylor, looking at British music and aspects of Coleridge-Taylor himself, having mixed parentage, so that fits in with research going on in other fields; literature and all sorts of areas like that. We've got a display on music in the military, we're developing one on music and gender, we're looking at the historical performance movement in another showcase – so again, it's these narratives that you were talking about, and again, drawing on materials from all of the collections, because up until now there's been not much visible from the library, or any of the special collections, in the longer term. The library does do special exhibitions, but they're limited in size.

**Q:** And how do you see the display and its turnover? I see we've got the display as it stands now, but do you see it changing every few months, every couple of years?

**A:** The permanent exhibition we don't envisage changing that much. Certain items, such as the manuscripts, we're discussing how to conserve, because of course, for these manuscripts any light is bad – but we need light in order to be able to see them! It's trying to get the balance right, so we're going to work on moving manuscripts along, so they're there for a little while, and then they're gone and replaced by something else of interest.

**Q:** And 'we' – you keep talking about 'we', but who are 'we'?

**A:** Well it's rather complicated! We have Professor Paul Banks, Head of Special Collections, whose main responsibility is portraits and performance history, but he also oversees the museum and some of the special collections of the library. He has an assistant who mainly works offsite at the store at Ravenscourt Park, so we don't see them that much. There is a chance that that may move back on site, but it's a question of finding space at the moment...

**Q:** That must be a constant challenge...

**A:** It's an interesting challenge! I've got some researchers coming in, who want to see 12 instruments, and of course six are here, and six are at College Hall, so it just makes life that little bit more complicated. Then the museum specific staff – I'm full time, but I have one day a week research. Dr Michael Mullen is assistant curator, and he's here two days a week, helping with tours, research access, publications, sales, all that kind of thing. Until now that was it in terms of staffing, but we have a new Museum Administrator, Lydia Cracknell, who has really developed our outreach programme, working with schools and creating a series of lunchtime concerts as well as our 6pm concert series. We have some wonderful volunteers who help look after the public, most of whom tend to be friends of the RCM.

**Q:** You could recruit some students?

**A:** Well, yes, we do have a number of students who come in and meet and greet visitors. It gives them a nice quiet place to work whilst helping us with Museum work, and is good for their CVs

**Q:** I suppose they wouldn't be able to practice, would they?

**A:** (Laughs) We don't 'practice' on these instruments! No really, it's more about keeping an eye, and helping people.

**Q:** That was a terrible thing to say – but it would make a difference to their touch; they could try out their party pieces!

**A:** Yes! We do let people come and play the instruments, but they have to have a legitimate reason to do so as we have a duty of care for the instruments. At the moment, the volunteers are mostly retired people, and we've just had someone who was after a job in a museum, so he's just left to try to get paid employment.

**Q:** And you mentioned that you're looking to get more researchers and more students through the door?

**A:** It's growing gradually. The new Museum Administrator, who is full time, helps a lot with the basic admin, which is absolutely vital to keeping us going. She is also freeing me up to do a lot more collections-based stuff, so we're cautiously optimistic. Part of her job is to develop the access and tours; trying to get in more school groups, liaising more with other higher education institutions who don't have the benefit of these collections, and seeing how we could help them more. We get quite a few University of the Third Age groups in anyway, but we're trying to be more proactive in letting other people know that we're here.

**Q:** So it's very much about blowing your own trumpet?



*"We see ourselves as even more crucial in this area now that the V&A have closed their music gallery, because we are the music place in South Kensington, amongst all these fabulous institutions"*

**A:** Exactly: Making sure people know we're here. And we also see ourselves as even more crucial in this area now that the V&A have closed their music gallery, because we are *the* music place in South Ken amongst all these fabulous institutions. And of course the whole setting up of this area was about collaboration between arts and sciences and all these different institutions, so we really want to build on that tradition. We're working with the Science Museum in a number of ways; the person who curated our Stroh violin exhibition is actually based there, and he's already done some work with some of our students. We're also potentially doing a collaborative exhibition with them in a few years' time; that's all under discussion at the moment. We also have colleagues at the V&A who sit on our collections committee, so there are strong connections all around. I've just had a Masters student from the physics department of Imperial College doing some acoustics work on the clavichord copy (pictured above).

**Q:** What did they come up with for that?

**A:** Well, interestingly, he found that the sound does come out from all around, it's not just the soundboard, as with a flat harpsichord, with a solid base board, it is I think a lot more harp like, which I found quite interesting. The reason I asked him to think about that was that we had some dendrochronological analysis done on the original, and the same tree was used for the front soundboard and for the back, which surprised me, because

you wouldn't expect that in a traditional horizontal instrument, or a later horizontal instrument. That's why when Professor Thompson from Imperial said, I've got this student wanting to do some research, I said, Aha! Can you do this? There's also a German scholar doing some research on the art history of the clavicytherium, so I'm hoping we have a flurry of information coming on that. Because we really do rely on external researchers to come in, there's no way that we internally can be experts on every single instrument, so we're very open to people coming in and measuring, and studying.

**Q:** What's the visitor split?

**A:** In terms of public use versus college use, I would say, at the moment, we're probably at least 75% public visitors. But we run a Masters now, where students can learn about using collections – the instruments, the iconography, concert programmes, all that sort of thing – and I also do lectures for undergraduates, one on history of stringed instruments, the other on history of pianism, as there are two history teachers that regularly ask. I'd like to encourage more of that as well. Encouraging the students to think about these things can only be good in terms of their performance, and these are useful tools for the future. We've all got to make a career these days, and when you know how to use collections and research things yourself, it gives you a world of opportunity. I think that's an important part of our role.

**Q:** What about concerts in the museum?

**A:** We try to put on three concerts a term. I've got one DMus student who has put on a concert every year as part of her course; she will do her last one in the Spring term. Each term we try to do a gamba concert, because we've got this wonderful collection of 17<sup>th</sup> century gambas. We're also thinking about doing a concert as part of a broader exhibition, 'London Calling', which runs until 14 June, and the exhibition is going to be looking at lots of 20<sup>th</sup> century names, and part of that is the early music revival, so Arnold Dolmetsch, whose clavichord we have over there, and Alfred James Hipkins, who was a harpsichordist, and did a lot of performances on that harpsichord (points at the Kirkman), which his children gave us in his memory.

**Q:** I think it's interesting as well looking at the programmes that Hipkins would have played, and reconstructing that...

**A:** Yes, we're so used to going to hear an orchestra across the road at the Albert Hall, and you have your overture and then your concerto, and then your interval and your symphony, and then you go home! Which is fine. But of course, concerts have not always been structured like that, and if you go back in time and look at different places... and of course, the fabulous resource we have here with three-quarters of a million concert programmes... You can really look at how people were programming.

**Q:** Three-quarters of a million! Where do you store them all?

**A:** They're all out at College Hall. It's mad, but it's fabulous! What's been a very important project in the last three years is just simply getting them organised; they're now all sorted by venue, and there's an online database, which was a big project between here and Cardiff, run by somebody at the British Library – and they've basically done a collections-level catalogue of all concert programme collections in the UK, which is the first stab anyone's made at this.

**Q:** What's very special about this collection is that you do allow people to play the harpsichords. I think it makes this particular collection so relevant.

**A:** We very much work on the basis that conservation and education need to work hand in hand. There's no point in looking after these objects if they're just kept in a darkened room under lock and key, you know, what's the point? But similarly, you cannot use them to destruction either. It's finding the right balance, which really is an impossible task, but you do what you can, and you try and make the right decisions based on all the different pressures. We are an educational institution, we are primarily here for our students, but we do see ourselves as a broader educational centre as well. So our students get to use instruments in organised concerts. Any keen student can arrange to come and have their lesson in here with their professor to really work with the instrument; we don't do 'practice' – in terms of learning the notes! – in here, but working with their professor, with the instrument, can really help them understand the music. And external folk are welcome to apply to come and play. We follow the CIMCIM (International Committee of Musical Instrument Museums and Collections) guidelines: Idle curiosity is not a good enough reason! But if somebody has a genuine reason to want to come in and play, I'm very happy for them to get in touch with me, with a CV and possibly a letter of recommendation. Each instrument has an allocated number of hours it's allowed to be played each year, and that's decided by our external conservateur and other external experts. And we look after them; everything gets a good tuning once a term, or as and when it's needed for events or tours, and we keep an eye on any little cracks. Occasionally you might have to do a more major intervention. We do get cockroaches – we have traps for them! This is the thing with curation, you've got to do housekeeping, keep an eye out for pests and stop them before they get too far. Any museum is simply about trying to minimize the amount of decay, which is inevitable, you can't stop it: tell that to the producers of face cream! You just have to try and do it gracefully; that's true for instruments as for ladies!

**Q:** And you've got a little spinet, which has been newly restored?

**A:** Yes. A lot of our instruments were restored in the 60s, and of course views have changed quite a lot since then, so that was restrung with more modern concepts in mind. The Dolmetsch was also developing some rather serious

soundboard splits and the bridge started ping-pong, so we had to make a tricky decision on that one, on whether to retire it, or go for a more major intervention. Because Sir George Grove bought it from Dolmetsch, in 1894, as a teaching instrument for keyboard students, we felt it was important to maintain that. And it had undergone a couple of more major interventions before that by John Barnes. So we asked Karen Richter to refix the bridge, see to any problematic soundboard cracks and put some more appropriate strings on, that better match with modern thought, so we thought, let's keep with the traditions of this particular instrument. That's the problem with any restoration: You're based in the now, and of course in 50 years time that's going to be different. We have generally a policy of non-restoration, because we want to preserve things. Anything that's playing, we keep playing, unless it really can't cope anymore, and anything that's not, we keep as a document, as a reference. And there's technology arising all the time that will help with analysis and understanding, and if we slapped a whole layer of 21<sup>st</sup> century stuff on top of it...

**Q:** So-called 'improvements' ...?

**A:** Exactly – it's a dreadful word, isn't it? People have used it right through history. But again, what is an improvement? It's this thing of what people perceived as the problem. But whatever you do, you're changing something else as well, so you may be improving one aspect, but something else is likely to be suffering, and that's a very interesting thing to consider. And we've got things like the fabulous Celestini virginals over there – that's a stunning object, but clearly unrestored and staying that way. And we have fabulous researchers like Grant O'Brien coming and studying it and working out how they laid them out and how they designed them, because of course we still don't know a lot about how they thought about making harpsichords, the processes they went through to build them. We know a lot more than we did 20 years ago, but there's still a lot more to learn, because the tradition was lost. So we do like people coming in, and studying things, and giving us that information, and publishing it, so that everyone can know more!

SOUNDING BOARD: Thank you so much \* *Jenny Nex*

*Photographs taken and supplied by Karen Chung*  
*For all enquiries about visiting the RCM Museum of Music,*  
*please contact [museum@rcm.ac.uk](mailto:museum@rcm.ac.uk) or 0207 591 4842.*



<http://www.rcm.ac.uk/events/museum/>



www.mkcr.cz

## Celebrating the 85<sup>th</sup> birthday of Zuzana Růžicková

Pamela Nash reflects on the eminent career of the brilliant Czech harpsichordist Zuzana Růžicková on the timely release of a double CD

This year sees the 85<sup>th</sup> birthday of Czech harpsichordist Zuzana Růžicková. Acclaimed as the 'First Lady of the Harpsichord' and recognised by many as Landowska's successor, her career has left the harpsichord world a vast legacy, documented by over 100 recordings spanning half a century. Supraphon, the renowned Czech label, is now re-releasing some of this discography in 2-disc compilations, including recordings never before issued on CD.

This timely commemoration serves to remind us of Růžicková's invaluable role in promoting the harpsichord in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An artist of great energy and integrity, she made enormous strides to establish the instrument as a solo and ensemble concert instrument, and there can be no doubt that the status of the harpsichord today owes much to her pioneering efforts. Embarking upon her

career at a time when early harpsichord repertoire was barely acknowledged, or else relegated to the piano, she resolved to re-connect Baroque keyboard music with the instrument for which it was written: in her own words, 'to rid the harpsichord of its museum nature and make it a living instrument.'

A child survivor of the Nazi regime, Růžicková overcame considerable personal tragedy and resumed her piano studies, both in her native Plzeň and at the Prague Academy for the Performing Arts, where she continued to nurture her particular love for Bach, as well as a predilection for other early keyboard composers. Winning the Munich International Competition in 1956 helped to launch her international career as a harpsichordist, she went on to perform all over Europe, as well as the US, Canada and Japan, continuing to tour

internationally until her retirement in 2006. At the beginning of her career, she would play half her programme on the piano and the other on the harpsichord, in the manner of Landowska, but although she was happy to play Bach on both instruments for the enlightenment of her audiences, the harpsichord was paramount for Růžicková, who describes her first encounter with Bach's music on the instrument as 'love at first sight'.



topvip.cz

In 1962 she co-founded, with conductor Václav Neumann, the Prague Chamber Soloists, and in the same year began her long association with the Prague Academy as a teacher, finally being made Professor there after the collapse of communism in 1990. She recorded almost continuously throughout the 60s and 70s, including the complete works of her beloved J S Bach on the Erato label.

Besides performing and recording the music of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Růžicková was a doughty champion of living composers, most notably of her husband, the late Viktor Kalabis, and she did much to promote him as one of the most important Czech composers of the 20th century. Růžicková and Kalabis, whose joint refusal to join the Communist

party did nothing to thwart their ambition or success, have long been revered by their native land's musical establishment, alongside such fellow luminaries as Karel Ančerl, Václav Neumann and violinist Josef Suk, with whom Růžicková enjoyed a particularly celebrated partnership.

Recipient of the highest possible national awards throughout her career, she also received the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from the French Ambassador in the Czech Republic in 2003, partly in recognition of her Rameau and Couperin recordings and the acclaim from French audiences. Among many recording prizes, she was awarded the Supraphon Platinum Disc, for achieving sales of over 300,000.

The current Supraphon release, *Hommage à Zuzana Růžicková* is indeed a fitting tribute, featuring as it does the music for which Růžicková will be perhaps most remembered. The first disc comprises of Bach and Scarlatti, whilst the second is devoted to 20th century works, three of which are by Czech composers Bohuslav Martinů, Viktor Kalabis and Jan Rychlík. The Martinu was a particular favourite of Růžicková; she performed and promoted it many times around the world and was also a proponent of the other two principle concertos of the period by de Falla and Poulenc, also on this disc. Anyone unacquainted with these concerti can be assured that the performances given here are among the most authoritative and exciting available; Růžicková's articulative powers lend real punch and drive to the fast movements and she clearly relishes the brisk tempi and the exuberance of her fellow players, of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and the Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra. Kalabis' *Six Two-Part Canonic Inventions*

owe their impetus to JS Bach and Scarlatti, and, although brilliantly configured for the harpsichord, are not neo-Baroque in any sense, nor is the *Hommaggi gravicembalista* by Rychlík, a quite eccentric, yet highly original, suite of portraits in memory of Pasquini, Seixas, Cabezón and François Couperin.

The first disc combines ten sonatas of Scarlatti with three works by Bach: Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in d minor BWV 903, French Suite No 5 in G BWV 816 and the Vivaldi/Bach transcription, Concerto No 9 in G BWV 980. Listeners of the Bach may find their enjoyment somewhat marred by an uneven recording balance whereby the bass is dominated by a patchily-bright treble, not helped by the impression that certain notes on the main 8-foot register seem to be voiced louder than others, and further accentuated by Růžicková's off-setting the right hand from the left with the occasional fortification of the 4-foot.



[www.jsebestyen.org](http://www.jsebestyen.org)

There is no reference in the sleeve notes to the instruments used for the different recording sessions, which range from 1967 to 1994, but it is clear that Růžicková plays a reproduction instrument for the Bach, recorded in the 1990s, in stark contrast to the 'European revival harpsichord' used for the modern works on Disc 2, and for the 70s recording of the Scarlatti sonatas. This was of course the instrument she used for much of her career, characterised by pedal registration and the 16-foot stop, a device Růžicková uses liberally, yet not gratuitously, but whilst it is hard to deny the seductive tonal depth of the 16-foot (in K 8, for example) there are other registrations, as in the alternating use of buff with 4-foot in K 11, which the modern listener may perhaps find less persuasive. Notwithstanding the frequent colouristic shifts and general instrumental timbre which does not sit easily with our current sensibilities, these are meaningful, deeply musical performances which remain in the memory, and though very much of their time, they provide us, as such, with an invaluable document of our harpsichord heritage. \* Pamela Nash



supraphon.com

NB: Readers may like to know of Supraphon's other recent re-release by Růžicková: 'Harpsichord Music from England, Spain and Portugal'. (SU 4118-2)



## ***Learning the Harpsichord in France-part2***

*In 'Sounding Board' no.6, H el ene Diot described how the younger generation in France are able to begin learning directly with the harpsichord, she now describes the journey and the many routes available to those who wish to continue towards a professional career as a harpsichordist.*

**A**fter the course of study offered by the Regional Conservatoires and music schools is completed, there are different avenues open to the student wishing to become professional. The most straight-forward route (and the most prestigious) is to be accepted by a 'Conservatoire National Sup erieur de Musique et de Danse' (CNSMD), of which there are only two; one in Paris, the other in Lyon. Entry to these establishments is by international audition and few are admitted (one for every ten candidates on average). This allows smaller classes (eight-10 students per professor) and the chance for each student to benefit from a greater level of supervision. The course is divided into several academic cycles:

**Le Premier Cycle**, lasting a maximum of three years, culminates in the award of the 'Diplôme National Supérieur Professionnel de Musicien' (DNSPM). This is equivalent to a Bachelor's degree. These three years of study are a time of consolidation of fundamental skills and knowledge (practical experience and expansion of general and musical culture), and also a time of discovery and exposure to new experiences. The objective of this initial first academic cycle is to allow the student to become accomplished professionals. A complete integration of the student into his/her department and full participation in the course's projects and activities is necessary, consolidating chamber music practice and public performance in the context of instrumental classes. At the Lyon Conservatoire, the exam which determines the continuation of one's studies, takes place at the end of the third year, and consists of a recital mixing a varied repertoire of solo pieces and chamber music, lasting between 45 minutes and 1 hour.



**Le Second Cycle**, lasts two years and culminates in the award of a Master's degree – recognised as such throughout the European Union. The objectives of this academic cycle are:

- The elaboration of a personal performance project in consultation with the teacher and Director of Studies, this can take several forms: solo recital, ensemble, informal public performance (such as in a retirement home), or an interdisciplinary spectacle which could, for example, include Dance
- Development of the student's aptitude for independent research and greater autonomy overall.
- The student's professionalism and subsequent successful entry into the profession

In the second year, a written submission, wholly or partially linked to the contents of a 1-hour long recital, is discussed in a viva voce.

**Le Troisième Cycle**, which comes in two different forms:

- ‘Doctorat de musique: recherche et pratique’, in partnership with the university, and available in all disciplines taught at the conservatoire to students wishing to pursue practical music making at a professional level, and also carry out research and produce a thesis.
- ‘Artist Diploma’, open to students of all nationalities having passed the Second Cycle, or foreign equivalent, in which the focus is on performance and the creation of a personal performance project in the context of an ever-greater level of professional integration.

**A**s for myself, I studied at the CNSM in Lyon, where the emphasis on ensemble work included projects and concerts, although solo work is also encouraged, (with recitals and encouragement to enter international competitions. The musical instrument collections of the CNSM allow the inquisitive harpsichordist to try other historic keyboard instruments such as the clavichord or the forte-piano. The standard of instrumental playing at the two CNSM’s is generally extremely high, which brings some advantages – emulation, and stimulating exchanges – but also some disadvantages – stress, an unhealthy perfectionism, a competitive mentality, and unrealistic expectations.

*The instrument collections of the CNSM allow the harpsichordist to try other keyboard instruments such as the clavichord or the fortepiano*

The other route is via the new ‘Pôles supérieurs d’enseignement de la musique’ (loosely translated as ‘Hubs for Advanced Musical Studies’). These establishments are few, and at present are located in Aubervilliers, Boulogne-Billancourt, Paris, Dijon, Lille, Poitiers, Rennes, Strasbourg and Toulouse. Access is by audition.

This course was instituted in 2008 to fill a gap in the supply of advanced artistic training, the two CNSM’s on their own being unable to satisfy the demand. Based on a partnership between conservatoires, universities and other specialist establishments, the course lasts either three or four years and leads to three distinct but complementary diplomas:

- ‘Diplôme national supérieur professionnel de musicien’ (DNSPM);
- ‘License de pratique musicale spécialisée’ (BMus in performance);
- ‘Diplôme d’Etat d’enseignement artistique’ (Teaching Diploma)

This new structure allows potential postgraduates the following options:

- Master’s degree in any other member country of the European Union, with recognized equivalence
- Master’s degree either at university, or at one of the CNSMs either in Paris or Lyon.

Some harpsichordists cease formal study completely at this time, and choose instead to launch themselves directly into a professional career. At present this road is fraught with danger; the standard and the number of harpsichordists having increased, it seems difficult to presume to succeed in making one's way professionally without diplomas.

**F**inally, let's not forget the possibility of pursuing advanced studies abroad. The younger generations seem less averse to the idea of expatriation. Being curious about harpsichord teaching outside France, I was able to take advantage of the opportunity of spending the first year of my Master's at the Koninklijk Conservatorium in The Hague. The Erasmus programme was set up by the European Commission to allow exchanges of students between establishments in different countries. The student can spend between 3 months and 1 year in a foreign institution with which his or her original establishment has a bilateral agreement, and benefits from a grant for the length of the stay. This year spent abroad is not supplementary to the length of the course, but replaces a year that might have been spent in the original establishment, and has the same academic value. Whilst the student can only follow classes in his principal study, there may be opportunities to follow classes in complementary subjects, or equivalent to those required by the original syllabus, to the extent that these are not oversubscribed.

*The Erasmus programme was set up by the European Commission to allow exchanges of students between Establishments in different countries.*

I believe this scheme is a great opportunity for a musician, as it allows the discovery of new ways of learning and teaching, of enlarging his or her professional network, and to make many rewarding and stimulating acquaintances. I would recommend this experience to any music student.

**H**aving graduated, the harpsichordist needs to establish a career, and as in all artistic endeavours, outcomes are uncertain. One needs not only to have achieved an excellent technical and musical standard, but also a lot of passion and tenacity. One often hears '10% talent, 90% practice'; I would add to this that one also needs an element of luck. It's often thanks to networks previously established that one gets concert bookings or teaching posts.

In my humble opinion, it seems to me difficult if not impossible to consider a solo career to the exclusion of everything else, whether in France or abroad. The harpsichordist must enlarge on his/her skills to include continuo playing (in orchestra and chamber music), positive organ, conducting and direction from the keyboard, choral training and coaching, instrument maintenance, and finally, act as agent and be able to devise attractive and innovative programmes. And this list is far from exhaustive.

**T**eaching is also an important career path. It allows the status and financial stability of a job in the civil service. One should not believe that one becomes a teacher by default. The road to qualification is a real assault course, requiring much patience and motivation. In France, one wishing to teach in a conservatoire must have obtained one of the following diplomas;

- Diplôme D'Etat (National Diploma) for an assistant's post
- Certificat D'Aptitude for a full teacher's post

Both of these qualifications are obtained after a 2-year course, the first at a "Centre de formation à l'enseignement de la danse et de la musique (CEFEDM - a teacher training establishment for dance and music), and the second at one of the two National Conservatoires CNSMD in Lyon or Paris.

Alternatively, one can qualify by validated experience, but in each case, one also needs to pass a Civil Service exam to obtain tenure of a post. The candidate is not immediately allocated a position however. He or she must wait for a vacancy to open up. The application to the waiting list of vacancies must be renewed each year for up to two years, after which the Civil Service exam needs to be taken again. Once a placement has been found, the teacher needs to do a one-year course before full tenure. All these exams are extremely difficult; the rate of failure is high, and vacancies rare. Many years can pass before obtaining a full-time position.

**D**espite the complexities of the French musical educational system (difficult for parents and students to understand and somewhat inaccessible for foreign students), it seems to me that the possibility offered in France by specialised establishments for the study of the harpsichord, at whatever age and at whatever standard, is an amazing opportunity. Amateur and young professionals alike can benefit from the skills and experience of qualified instructors, and discover and deepen their knowledge of the harpsichord's repertoire - one which remains largely unknown. The accumulation of different experiences and competencies seems to be a pre-requisite for anyone who wishes to embark on a career as a professional harpsichordist. \* *Hélène Diot*

*Hélène Diot began studying the harpsichord at the age of 6; she has since won several important prizes and now performs professionally as a soloist and as a continuo player in France and abroad.*

*Our thanks to Philip Thompson for translating this article from the original French and to Hélène Diot for permission to use her personal photographs.*



## MICHAEL THOMAS & THE BATE COLLECTION

*The vital contribution of Michael Thomas (MHT)<sup>1</sup> to the early music movement is reflected in the fine historical instruments acquired by the Bate Collection – and now a further ‘MHT Project’ has been identified in the wake of the acquisition. David Millard picks up the story*

September 29<sup>th</sup> 1986 Dr Charles Mould, known to many readers of *Sounding Board* as a harpsichord builder, restorer and performer, and also as the editor of the Third Edition of *Boalch* (Boalch, D.H. *Makers of the Harpsichord and Clavichord 1440-1840*. Third edition (ed. Charles Mould). Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995), wrote a letter to Dr Henry Drucker including the following:

*On Saturday morning I had a phone call from a man I have known for many years who has a fine collection of harpsichords and who is anxious to deposit them in Oxford.*

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Harold Thomas (1922-1997). He disliked his middle name, and never used it unless unavoidable (Pauline MacSweeney. *Personal communication*, 2012). However, in these days of electronic search engines, entering ‘Michael Thomas’ generally produces internet material referring to the distinguished American conductor Michael Tilson Thomas. Here I shall use ‘MHT’, especially in relation to the Bate Collection project discussed below, or ‘Michael Thomas’ with reference to the figure in the British and European early music movement familiar to many readers of this journal.

Charles Mould was at that time Secretary to the Bodleian Library; Henry Drucker the newly appointed Director of the first major fund-raising effort of Oxford University in modern times, the *Campaign for Oxford* (1986-1994); and the man – Michael Thomas.

Mould continues:

*I mused over the whole problem during the weekend and it seemed to me that with your arrival in Oxford, it was the right time for the Faculty to start thinking about a new fund-raising campaign to establish the Bate Collection on a more secure financial footing and to acquire funds to enable it to diversify and extend..... [etc.]*

Eventually, the Bate Collection did acquire a group of eleven instruments from Michael Thomas – seven harpsichords (some of the highest historical importance) and four clavichords (three also valuable, though in a slightly different way). My thesis is that the addition of these instruments from MHT's personal collection to the Bate – a Collection of international standing – constitutes his most permanent memorial as a figure of significance, albeit secondary, in the history of the early music movement in England and Europe. He was not only a collector and dealer in historic keyboards, but also a builder and restorer; an innovator, especially in the design of clavichords, and contributor to the technical literature; and a performer both in recitals and the recording studio, with a number of commercial recordings to his credit. These wider contributions are the substance of the 'MHT Project', discussed below. But they are, by their nature, transient and the anchor point of that project is the presence in the Bate Collection of the instruments associated with his name.

### **The Thomas acquisition**

**C**harles Mould's letter encapsulates the context of that acquisition, which turned out to involve considerable delay – being not completed until 1992 – and to place some stress upon both participants in the transaction. It is the beginning of the story recounted here; a story worth telling if only because it explains the identity of the instruments obtained from Michael Thomas within the Bate.

Mould opens by describing MHT as ...*'anxious to deposit [these instruments] in Oxford.'* Michael Thomas was then approaching his 64th birthday and had followed for nearly forty years the stressful career of a dealer: instruments are bought or built, and sold in unrelenting succession. He was not in good health and had been less active for some years. His wish to dispose of the bulk of those in his possession can be understood in terms of retirement from this side of his activities. Indeed, he had hoped to be able to continue to use these instruments in Oxford for teaching purposes<sup>2</sup>, though this proved not to be practicable since he continued to live in France. Also he had plans to continue to perform and make recordings, especially as a clavichordist, and he retained a small number of well-loved instruments for the remainder of his life.

From the university side, Mould's letter expresses his knowledge of some pre-existing considerations. Chief among these was an established understanding that the Bate was in desperate need of more space: this would require newly-built accommodation and an endowment to sustain substantial increase in staffing, together with the funds to secure future expansion of the holdings. He saw that the prospect of the MHT collection coming to Oxford could be the lever for an extensive scheme to meet these needs.

This was not to overlook the importance of Michael Thomas's offer in its own right. The Bate's holding of keyboard instruments was weak, compared with the strength of the woodwind, brass and percussion sections of the collection. In fact, there were eleven keyboards but only two belonged to the Bate, the remainder being on long-term loan (although subsequently becoming permanent acquisitions). Moreover, opportunities for obtaining groups of instruments on this scale are rare, and subject to competition. There was some regret that the Raymond Russell collection had gone to Edinburgh only a couple years previously; and others might be interested in Michael Thomas – possibly Palais Lascaris in Nice, where he had discussed a similar

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<sup>2</sup> He was relying on the practice of the Bate to maintain instruments in playing condition wherever possible, and to allow them to be played under controlled conditions. He also had a precedent, having held there a weekend course on Clavichord Technique in 1992. (Programme and Notes in the Bate archive.)

arrangement. So, from many points of view there was considerable enthusiasm for this scheme.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, MHT's contact with Charles Mould generated a flurry of activity in Oxford. Three strands can be identified: first, to involve Jeremy Montagu, then Curator of the Bate Collection, who played the leading role in the events of the next few years; secondly, to bring into the picture the Music Faculty through which the Bate Collection is administered and in whose premises it is housed (the Heather Professorship of Music was vacant at that time, and the leadership of the faculty was in the hands of Dr. Edward Ollenson), and, thirdly, to begin the process of briefing those involved centrally in the university's fundraising<sup>3</sup>.

The significance of this third group was that the campaign, which Dr Drucker had come to lead, was largely to do with raising finance for large-scale capital projects, and Mould's proposal was by no means outside its scope. This paper will not trace the vicissitudes of this part of the history. Suffice it that the process was lengthy and bureaucratic. It involved working-up a series of detailed applications (mainly the work of Jeremy Montagu), much discussion, and decisions from various committees meeting only infrequently. By April 1987 permission had been given by the university authorities to raise £1.5 million; by the time this had been handed on to Drucker's Development Office, the estimate had risen to £2.25 million; and by April 1989 a millionaire was still being shown round the Collection in an attempt to solicit appropriate support<sup>4</sup>. Ultimately, however, the proposed extension of the Bate accommodation was not built, nor the additional staffing provided, and attention reverted to simply financing the purchase of the instruments from Michael Thomas.

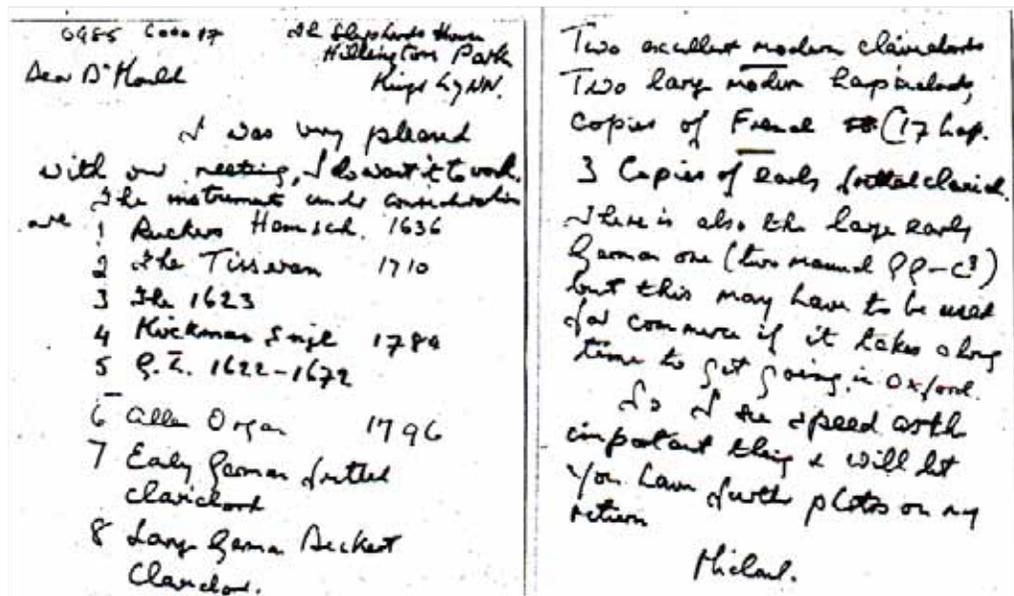
To complete this part of the history: the benefactors finally identified as willing to meet these costs, were the Austin and Hope Pilkington Trust – one of a group of charitable trusts associated with family members of a well-known international company of glass manufacturers. This trust, established

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<sup>3</sup> Letter from Charles Mould to Michael Thomas, 29 September 1986. This and related correspondence in the Bate Collection archive, (1986 *passim*).

<sup>4</sup> This, and much further detail, from the Bate Collection files.

by Miss Constance Pilkington (d.1992), sometime Music Advisor to the Oxfordshire County Council, had long supported musical causes. The gift was arranged by her brother, Dr. Lawrence Pilkington (1911-2000), who became a member of the university's Chancellor's Court of Benefactors.



### The instruments

Illustrated above is a photocopy of MHT's first list of the instruments available for acquisition for this purpose. At this scale it is not altogether easy to read, but a number of features can be made out. Like all his correspondence, of which the Bate holds a quantity of original manuscripts, it is undated; and he never used a typewriter (sending, even from France, material needing typing to his secretary in King's Lynn). These are evidently general features of his business practice. More specifically, he had clearly accepted Charles Mould's invitation to meet him to discuss the proposal, and his comment *'I do want it to work'* is paralleled by several similar remarks in communications as the years rolled on.

Notable also is his remark against the final instrument in the list: *'.... this may have to be used for commerce if it takes a long time to get going in Oxford. So I see speed as the important thing & will let you have further photos on my return'*. The shorthand list totals seventeen instruments.

This letter foreshadows several characteristics of the subsequent proceedings. Charles Mould's initial response had warned that the proposed

fundraising campaign, as outlined above, '*...might take a year or so to develop.*', and several remarks in later documents indicate that those involved in Oxford appreciated that MHT needed to continue to create income during the five years it actually took. His frustration is reported to have reached the point of despair that the business would ever be completed<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, the university found it difficult to pin him down to a precise list of what he might be able to provide, and to cost it – necessary information for potential donors. Thus, the records show that, over the years, the 'shopping list' varied quite considerably, with some items remaining constant but others, including some of the most desirable, disappearing on being sold to other purchasers<sup>6</sup>. Letters and telephone calls, increasing up to as late as November 1990<sup>7</sup>, concerned substitute items, and costs<sup>8</sup>. And this state of affairs clearly led to frustration on the university side.

However, the conflicting, if understandable, imperatives on either side were finally resolved and by 17 December 1990 Professor Brian Trowell was able to write to the *Campaign for Oxford* to say '*... we have at last a distinguished list of old instruments to go with the modern ones he has made himself.*' The total cost of £315K (which Michael Thomas reduced to £300K) was wholly attributed to the historic instruments – the notional value of each being indicated below. The modern copies were included gratis.

Thus the whole acquisition comprised:

### ***Harpsichords***

(1) Joseph Tisseran, Double-manual English harpsichord, 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> octaves, GG-d<sup>3</sup>. London, 1700. (£85K) The earliest surviving English double manual harpsichord. Its provenance is completely recorded from 1712. Bought by Michael Thomas at Sotheby's in 1986. After subsequently restoration by David Law (the soundboard cleaned by Anne MacTaggart), it is now in good playing condition, and is used for occasional recitals. Recording by Martin Souter available from the Bate Collection shop. (Bate No. 982)

(2) Jean Goermans, Double-manual harpsichord, 5 octaves, FF-f<sup>3</sup>. Paris, 1750. (£150K) From

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<sup>5</sup> Pauline MacSweeney, *Personal communication* (2012)

<sup>6</sup> Tracing 'those that got away' is an aspiration included in the Bate's MHT Project.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Brian Trowell (by that time in post as Heather Professor of Music) to Dr N. Goodrick-Clarke (a staff member of the *Campaign for Oxford*). Bate Collection files, 20 November 1990

<sup>8</sup> The details of this fluid situation are traceable through the Bate files. They are of some historical interest as illustrating Michael Thomas's commercial practices; such a study may form part of the MHT Project discussed below. But they are not relevant to the present paper.

Gérard du Pouget, Mauves-sut-Nuigle<sup>9</sup>; previously unknown. Restored by Christopher Nobbs as nearly as possible to its original condition. Recording by Martin Souter available from the Bate Collection shop. (Bate No. 983)

(3) anon, Double-manual harpsichord. 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> octaves, GG-c<sup>3</sup>. (£60K) Probably Flemish, with French features added at later restorations. Described as c. 1670 on accession, but later work? 1700-10. Restored by Michael Cole. Much uncertainty surrounds this instrument: its provenance is unknown. Said to have a very fine sound; but too fragile to move to a suitable recording location and attempts to record *in situ* (even at night) have been frustrated by environmental noise. (Bate No. 986)

(4) Michael Thomas, Double-manual harpsichord. After a French (?) instrument of 17th or 18th centuries. London, date unknown. Not on public display. (Bate No. 985)

(5) Michael Thomas, London, Double-manual harpsichord. After a French 18th century instrument. Date unknown. Not on public display. (Bate No. 981)

### ***Spinets***

(6) Benjamin Slade, Spinet. 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> octaves, G-e. London, c. 1710-1720. (£10K) The stand is reproduction. Earlier provenance unknown. Bought at Sotheby's by Michael Thomas in 1990. (Bate No. x987)

(7) Baker Harris, Spinet London, 1776, 5 octaves, F-f. (£10K) This is the latest spinet in the Bate Collection, square pianos then becoming fashionable. Bought by Michael Thomas at Sotheby's in 1990 and while in his ownership was restored by Jean Maurer. (Bate No. x988)

### ***Clavichords***

(8) Jean Maurer, Reconstruction of a fretted clavichord after Arnaut de Zwolle (c.1440). 3 octaves; B-b<sup>2</sup> 1973. Based on the oldest clavichord of which sufficient details remain to allow an accurate reconstruction to be made. Commissioned by Michael Thomas. This, and the Urbino reconstruction (see below), were specifically included at the request of Jeremy Montagu in order to provide a complete illustration of the history of the clavichord within the Collection.

(9) Jean Maurer, Reconstruction of a fretted clavichord after the Urbino intarsia (c.1479). 4 octaves; F-f<sup>3</sup>. 1975. An instrument capable of delivering a satisfying musical performance of suitable repertoire.

(10) Michael Thomas, Unfretted pentagonal clavichord (1982). 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> octaves BB-d<sup>3</sup>. Casework by Ian Tucker. (Bate No. 984)

(11) anon. Fretted clavichord. (c.1979) 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> octaves C-f<sup>3</sup>. Reproduction based on an unknown late 18th century original, dubiously attributed to the monastery of Cuneo. Commissioned by Michael Thomas; casework and keyboard are certainly the work of different builders. (Bate No. 980).

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<sup>9</sup> Letter from Professor Brian Trowell to Dr Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, 17 December 1990. (Bate Collection file)

## The Bate Collection 'MHT Project'

The 'MHT Project' has been developing since 2011. Its origins lay in earlier discussions within the British Clavichord Society around the possibility of conducting a study of Michael Thomas. It became clear that this collection would be the natural home for such a project.

Its immediate purpose is reassessing the professional contribution of Michael Thomas to the early music movement. A further objective is to establish the Bate as an international centre for MHT studies, central to which is setting up a comprehensive database. Most importantly this would identify instruments built by, or under the direction of, MHT (which are rarely signed, and never given builder's numbers); or have been restored by him; or (especially historic instruments), have passed through his hands as a dealer.

This paper offers an opportunity for any members of the early keyboard community with this information to contribute to the database. Photographs and provenance are features that contribute to the identification of un-numbered instruments, and if, as is proposed, this 'imaginary museum' becomes a permanent feature of the Bate Collection, its accuracy and value should grow over the years.

The project will collect and archive memorabilia and similar relevant material. While copies of most of his audio recordings and printed publications are already in hand, further information would be welcome. The intention is to create and safeguard a resource for future scholarly work. \*

*David Millard*

*Dr. David Millard is a retired psychiatrist, emeritus fellow of Green College, Oxford, and chair of The Friends of the Bate Collection*



## Dear Editor...

Am I alone in thinking that BBC Radio 3 has a contract with Steinway, to push recordings of the pianoforte for all it's worth? It seems that almost every broadcast of a piece of harpsichord music, is played on a piano. I had hoped that its advertised 'Baroque Spring' would bring a temporary change, but no. Advertised for Friday, 8th March was Rameau's Suite in A from his *Nouvelles suites de pièces de clavecin*, played on the piano by Alexandre Tharaud. Despite the BBC's persistence in mis-labelling harpsichord music as 'keyboard music', it is clear that Rameau intended these pieces to be played on the harpsichord.

It is deliberately perverse of Radio 3 to go against the wishes of composers in this way. The late Gustav Leonhardt tried to convince people that, unless one plays music on the instrument that the composer intended, one can not enter into the spirit of the music. We enthusiasts all know that the harpsichord is *not* a failed attempt to invent the piano, but existed as an instrument in its own right for about three hundred years, to the evident satisfaction of composers, performers and listeners, before the early fortepiano came along. It is a totally Victorian concept that harpsichord composers were only waiting – in barely contained anticipation – for someone to invent the piano.

Can we attempt to get the BBC to change its mind, even if only to deal even-handedly with the subject, and play at least as many harpsichord as piano recordings – and at the same times of day, in the same programmes?

Sincerely,  
Anthony Fox, Herefordshire

*ED: Many thanks for your letter, Anthony: Fighting talk indeed! I received the following response from Adam Gatehouse, Editor of Radio 3's Breakfast programme:*

*'I would just say that in Radio 3's Breakfast programme 3's Breakfast programme featuring the 48 Preludes and Fugues of Bach, a good proportion of them are being broadcast on a harpsichord by the likes of Bob van Asperen, Gustav Leonhardt, Ton Koopman etc. But it is also a fact that much of this music has also been recorded on the piano by some of the greatest pianists of their and our days, and it would be churlish not to play those as well.'*

*Sounding Board asked Colin Booth to comment on the response from the BBC...*

Adam Gatehouse's response on behalf of Radio 3 sidesteps the issue. The inclusion of some harpsichord performances in the series on Bach's Well Tempered Clavier (how

could they possibly do otherwise?) does not demonstrate the BBC's even-handedness. Rather, it throws into focus the general bias against the use of old instruments which underlies the performance of early keyboard music on radio.

As some readers will know, I conducted a low-key campaign against this pro-piano bias over a good few years. This included a long telephone conversation with the then Radio 3 controller, Roger Wright, who was also interviewed penetratingly on my behalf on Feedback. The BBC's agenda was both clear and freely admitted. The stated grounds for avoiding harpsichord sound was listener preference (!).

Today, certain "core" composers - Bach, Scarlatti, and to a lesser extent Handel - are frequently performed live by pianists, and are well represented on recordings by pianists. Radio 3 policy is that the piano is the instrument of choice for these composers. As today's pianists follow the example of great pianists of the past, and expand their repertoire into more esoteric areas of early music, they explore works by French Baroque composers and the English virginalists on the piano too. In turn, these performances have become a magnet to Radio 3 producers, for whom the pianists in question are now thought to be "draws" for listeners.

Until recently there was one regular programme of quality on Radio 3 which eschewed this practice: Composer of the Week. Its aim was, and presumably is, to offer an entertaining and educative picture in sound, of that composer's world. Sadly, even this last bastion of intelligent programming has recently been breached, with keyboard works by Handel, CPE Bach, and other early composers offered on the Steinway. If nothing else proves the allegation of bias, I think this does.

Like your correspondent Anthony Fox, I live in 2013, not 1720s Leipzig. There is no right or wrong way, today, to perform Bach's music. But the BBC is contravening the terms of its own charter by the overwhelmingly one-sided sound-world which they employ. Listeners should be offered a fair balance of instrumentation for important repertoire - not have a biased selection repeatedly rammed down their ears. Many would also argue that some areas of early repertoire simply do not work on an alien, modern instrument. But it seems there is no-one at Radio 3 who is bold enough to make such a judgement.

The present-day disproportionate amount of airtime given on Radio 3 to Jazz, World Music, and, I would argue, talk-based programmes, means that other perceived minority cliques, not just our own, are woefully neglected. In other areas the BBC is criticised for over-scrupulousness in giving equal voice to opposing views. Unfortunately they have not made the connection with a pervasive bias in the arts. If they have done, then they arrogantly continue to put their present agenda on a higher level of importance. Wherever the harpsichord appears in my own musical world (whether I'm playing myself or supplying the instrument for others to use), the reaction of audiences is enthusiastic, even heart-warmingly ecstatic. They love the sound. Radio 3 producers should get out more!

*Sincerely, Colin Booth. [www.colinbooth.co.uk](http://www.colinbooth.co.uk)*

*ED. What do other readers think of the harpsichord/piano balance on Radio 3? Your views on this would be very welcome.*

## MARY JEANETTE MOBBS, in Memoriam

3<sup>rd</sup> September 1925 - 4<sup>th</sup> February 2012

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Mary Mobbs née Randall was a multi-talented musician and artist. She was born into a music-loving family in Birmingham. Her father, Charles Randall, a keen amateur cellist, worked for Cadbury's at Bournville, eventually becoming Chief Buyer. Her mother, Gladys née Filkin, had several artists in her family. Mary entered the University of Birmingham Education Department in 1943, qualifying in 1945, having decided to specialise in music, much to the disappointment of the Head of Art. She then entered the Music Department of the University, graduating with a BA in 1948. She obtained her LRAM Diploma in Piano Teaching in 1956.

Having taught music in various schools in the 1950s, [including producing and directing a memorable *Dido and Aeneas* by Purcell], she came to the University of Bristol, initially working in the Physics Department making high-altitude balloons for Professor Powell's cosmic ray research group, for which he later was awarded a Nobel Prize. She then moved to the Office of the Registrar, where she became Head of the Enquiry Office, and eventually, the Administrative Assistant to the Registrar, where she remained until her early retirement in 1983.

Always passionate about Nature, she supported numerous animal charities and enjoyed bird-watching by attending RSPB events and by keeping a detailed diary of what was happening in her garden.

Most of her spare time was taken up with her beloved music. She sang and acted for Bristol Opera; she started the bassoon in her mid thirties and was soon playing in University orchestras, at Bristol Music Club, and in private wind trios. She was also an effective member of a local piano group.

Together with her husband Kenneth, Senior Lecturer in Music, whom she



married in 1979, she built up a nationally-important collection of early keyboard instruments. On retirement from the University she embarked on a new career as a harpsichord soundboard painter. Within a year she found that her work was exhibited at the International Early Keyboard Exhibition in Bruges. The number of commissions, from harpsichord makers all over the country, meant that she rarely had a time in her so-called retirement when a harpsichord was not waiting to be decorated. She painted the flowers and birds on the soundboards with considerable delicacy, following with great attention the styles of the Old Masters. In all, she decorated twenty-six soundboards and a lid in the sixteen years between 1988 and 2004. She also contributed articles to *Harpsichord and Fortepiano*, the most recent being in Volume 13 no. 1



*Above:  
Mary Mobbs' 1993 copy  
of the 1639 Ruckers  
soundboard (Victoria &  
Albert Museum) and  
Left:  
Painting for the Taskin  
1769 (Univ. of Edinburgh)  
copy made by Milan  
Misina, Oxford.*

Sadly, this new career was cut short when Mary was diagnosed as suffering from Multi-Systems Dystrophy, a form of Parkinson's Disease. With music, she found it more and more difficult to handle the bassoon, but, undeterred, she started to learn the oboe. Unfortunately the nature of the illness soon made it impossible for her to continue.

After enduring several years of inactivity she died peacefully in her sleep. She is survived by her husband, Kenneth, nephew Robert and three step daughters.

*We are grateful to Kenneth Mobbs for supplying these details and for permission to use these illustrations of Mary's work*

OBITUARY

## STEPHEN DODGSON, in Memoriam

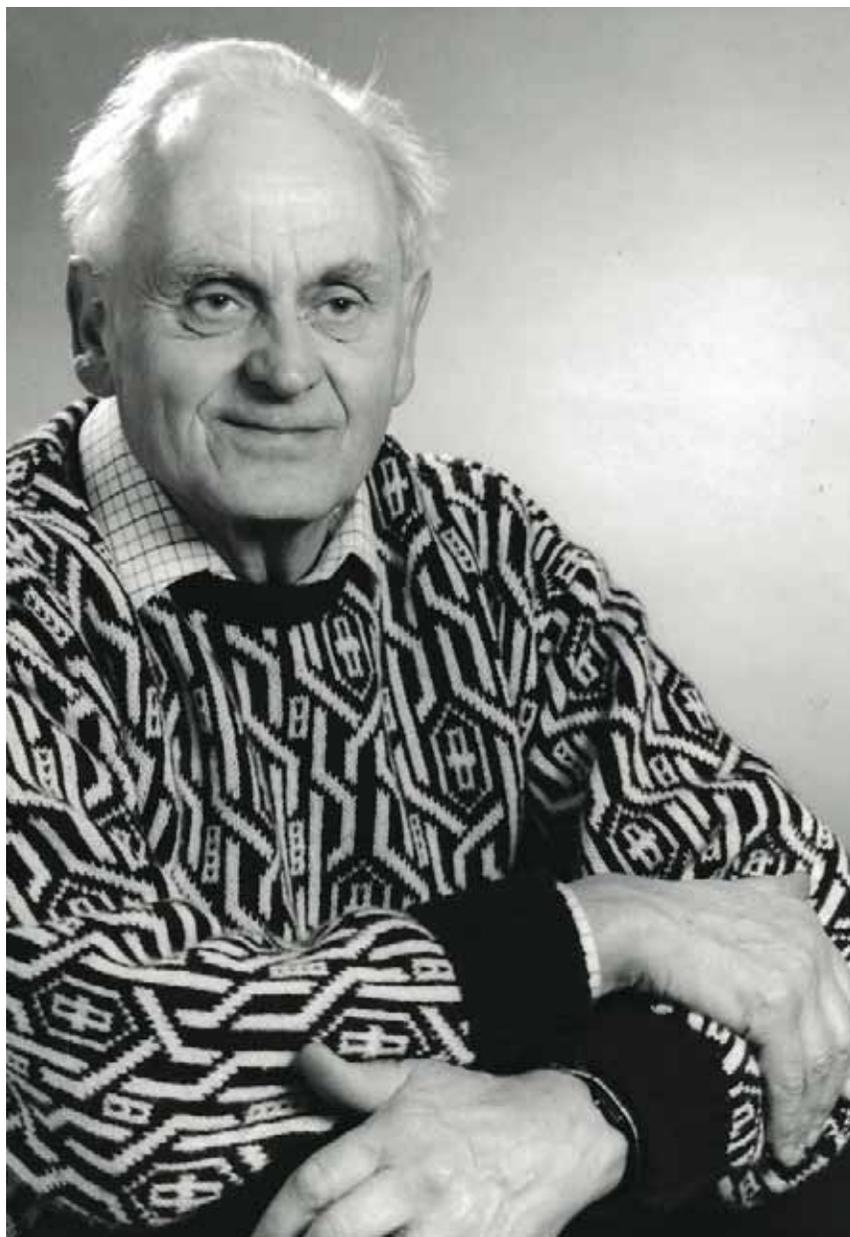


Photo: Robert Carpenter-Turner

**1924-2013**

*A Personal Recollection for Sounding Board  
by Julian Perkins*

**Stephen Dodgson** died at his home in Barnes on Saturday, April 13<sup>th</sup>. He was 89.

Harpsichordists are very fortunate that Stephen took such a shine to their instrument: no other important contemporary composer has written as many as 31 solo harpsichord works. Published by Cadenza Music, they date from 1955 to 1993 and were inspired in part by Stanislav Heller, Thomas Goff and, of course, his indefatigable wife Jane Clark. Comprising five sets of six inventions and the large-scale Sonata-Divisions, the later pieces are conceived more for instruments built on historic principles. Stephen also wrote *Carillon* for two harpsichords, two clavichord suites (recently revised) and a plethora of ensemble music that includes the harpsichord with captivating titles such as *The Snail and the Butterfly*, *High Barbaree* and *Jove's Nod*.

Despite his international reputation, Stephen seemed blissfully uninterested in fame or status. It is only since reading his obituaries in the national press that I have discovered that, inter alia, he twice won coveted awards from the Royal Philharmonic Society and was a Fellow of the Royal College of Music. These were probably mere trifles to Stephen, whose priorities lay very much in his passionate support and encouragement of a wide range of young musicians. I clearly remember his excitement in 2011, shortly before rehearsals for his recently completed trumpet concerto, written for a young Imogen Hancock and the Thames Youth Orchestra. It was encounters like these, which fed his childlike wonder about the world – a quality he never lost.

As a friend, Stephen always radiated goodwill and a sense of mischievous wit. On seeing my apology for a garden, he promptly bought me a bag of manure! In life, as in music, he was ever eager to lend a kind and practical hand to those less skilled and experienced than himself. We must now cherish his wonderfully varied and extensive musical legacy.

*Julian Perkins*  
*April 2013*

*A memorial service will be held at St. Mary's Barnes, Church Road, Barnes, London, SW13 9HL on Thursday, 4<sup>th</sup> July at 3pm.*



## RAFAEL PUYANA, In Memoriam

Rafael Antonio Lazaro Puyana Michelsen, harpsichordist, born 14 October 1931 in Bogotá, Colombia; died 1 March 2013 in Paris, France)

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*'...I look and listen around to confirm with immense satisfaction the recovery of almost all that lost musical past (...) in all the musical epicenters of the Western world renaissance and baroque is habitually played today, with careful and wise observation of its historical and stylistic values...'*

**T**his extract from a letter sent by the Colombian harpsichordist Rafael Puyana, who has recently died aged 81, summarizes his own artistic legacy for South America.

Born into a wealthy family of importers and politicians in Bogotá (capital of Colombia, South America) Puyana had his first piano lessons from his aunt, Blanca Michelsen de Rodriguez, and the Italian piano teacher Giacomo Marcerano, at the age of six, and made his first public appearance at age 13, as part of a charity concert in the Teatro Colón of Bogotá. At 16, he went to the New England Conservatory, Boston, and then Hartt College in Hartford, Connecticut. The Polish-born pianist Wanda Landowska was then based at Lakeville, to the north-west. In 1951, Puyana became her last pupil; his studies with her continued for eight years until her death in 1959. In the summer months he went to France to study harmony and composition with Nadia Boulanger.

From his debut recital at New York Town Hall in 1957 onwards, Puyana established himself as one of the famous musical personalities of his generation, after Huguette Dreyfus and Gustav Leonhardt. Puyana's, taut sense of rhythm together with his fearlessness at the keyboard distinguished

him as the heir of his teacher Wanda Landowska, one of the main driving forces of the harpsichord revival at the beginning of the 20th century.

Puyana essentially played and taught for most of his musical career what he had learned from Landowska and the Pleyel harpsichord, in which he was a specialist. Landowska had commissioned an instrument to her own specifications from Pleyel, the celebrated Paris piano-making firm, with an experimental mechanism and metal frame. Equipped with



pedals for rapid changes of registration, the Pleyel harpsichord was heavily influenced by the modern grand piano. It had various registers which included strings a 16-foot pitch, 8-foot, and 4-foot pitch, plus other several devices for varying the tone of colours. When Puyana was at the height of his fame, performers such as Huguette Dreyfus, Gustav Leonhardt and Thurston Dart were challenging the suitability of the Pleyel model. Copies of original historic harpsichords were increasingly becoming available and the Pleyel harpsichord rapidly fell from favour with the trend towards authenticity in performance. Puyana did not adjust easily to what he saw as the limitations of these newer 'authentic' instruments. However, in the 1960's he acquired an original 18th-century three-manual harpsichord - the only one known to exist today - complete with 16-foot, two 8-foot, 4-foot and even a 2-foot stop, made in Hamburg by Hieronymus Albrecht Hass in 1740. By the end of the 60s and early 70s he started collecting original harpsichords and authentic copies.

He finally settled in Paris, living alone, touring internationally, participating in the main Early Music festivals of Europe, and making a series of outstanding recordings that included Bach partitas, music of the English virginalists, Scarlatti and Soler sonatas (then still a rarity), works by Couperin and the Bach flute sonatas with Maxence Larrieu, for which in 1968 they won the Grand Prix du Disque. Further collaborators included the violinists Yehudi Menuhin, Andrés Segovia, Leopold Stokowski, David Oistrakh and John Williams; Stephen Dodgson wrote a Duo Concertante (1968) for Williams and Puyana. Among other composers to write for Puyana were Alain Louvier, Xavier Montsalvage, Guillermo Uribe Holguín and Federico Mompou.

Among his latest recordings are the ones entitled *The Musical Sun of Southern Europe*, in 2 CDs by Sanctus, which include Fandangos and other Spanish and Portuguese works for harpsichord and virginals, performed on original instruments from the Villa Medici collection.

Puyana practiced up to 14 hours a day, he was more a harpsichord collector and performer than a teacher, preferring his scholarly research to giving lessons. Nevertheless, he did have a few private students, all of whom remember him as a strict and impatient teacher (none of them went on to pursue a career in music)



The last time he gave a concert in Colombia was 14 years ago, he never appeared in public in his homeland again. He dedicated all his concerts in South America 'to the yearned peace of Colombia,

which has suffered more than 100 years of continuous nonsensical war'. In many of his TV and radio interviews he spoke about education in North and South America, stating that '...all the problems of this continent are due to the lack of good education, accessible only to a happy few'.

Between 2005 and 2008 Puyana gave up performing and sold most of his collection of instruments, art and antiques. The next years were spent editing and preparing two double-album CDs, one set of Bach's six Partitas and the other of Scarlatti sonatas, all played on the large Haas harpsichord. (due for release later this year)

Continuing with that letter I first quoted, written by Puyana in January 2000 to a friend in Bogotá, he reflects on the changes he has seen;

*'...The recovery of Early Music has been a titanic labor of more than a century, and it is due to countless musicians and musicologists of various generations. Each one has contributed to make it possible to start the 21st century with a better understanding, more faithful and precise, of how to perform the masterworks of a distant past that, thanks to the conquer, it's now nearer for the younger generations. Nevertheless, I can't but ask myself if we did enough, and wonder who will continue that labor in my own country, if anyone at all'.*

*This obituary was written for 'Sounding Board' by Andrés Martínez Pardo, a young Colombian harpsichordist and sole successor to Puyana in his country. Presently he works as a university lecturer, a private harpsichord teacher and an Early Music missionary in South America, working towards artistic and musical education access for unprivileged children of Colombia.*