

CAREY BEEBE HARPSICHORDS

Construction * Maintenance * Tuning * Hire

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inc. THE HARPSICHORD CENTRE

HARPSICHORD NEWS BRIEF

14th March 1984

MOZART WAS PORTRAYED in the recent six-part series shown on the ABC as an exceptionally gifted musician who never seemed to be out of debt. Characterised by superb costume design and on-location filming, as well as enchanting photographic direction, the one disappointment of the series was the poor overdubbing of the dialogue in English and much of the music with it. It would have been much more satisfying to read subtitles. The director had no qualms about showing the hands of the performer, and these were always a very close representation of what was heard. This synchronisation of music and action was the best I have seen anywhere (except, of course, films where the real performer is shown on screen). However, the instrument heard was not always the instrument seen being played! Many of the instruments were hollow props, but one of the later breed of Neupert harpsichords was readily identifiable. For the English soundtrack, a few harpsichords were heard, but instead of the pianos of Mozart's day, a modern piano was used almost exclusively.

Mozart played and praised the instruments of Johann Andreas Stein of Augsburg, who invented the Viennese action, a mechanism subtly worked out, but very simple. The key dip is small, and the action is light, fast, and expressive. The resulting sound is transparent and clear, yet loud enough to work very well in ensemble and with the smaller Classical orchestra. The music and the instrument belong to each other.

For Romantic music, of course, nothing but the modern piano will do. The instruments used by Mozart and Haydn, by Schubert, and by Beethoven for most of his life, were so completely different from what the piano has become that many musicians are preferring to play Classical music on an instrument that more accurately reflects the composers' expectations.

In the States, Zuckermann have spent several years recovering enough understanding to make a 'Mozart' piano. Most of the visitors to Hurstville who have seen the Fortepiano here in the last few months have been amazed that an "early piano" doesn't have to be tinny or brittle in tone. Mozart didn't have to put up with instruments that clanged and rattled when played, so why should we? Once you have heard or played the Classical repertoire on such an instrument, you will never forget how naturally the music comes.

OUR COUNTRY HAS A WIDE RANGE of climatic conditions, and people from as far afield as Darwin and Coober Pedy have been requesting information about the suitability of instruments like the harpsichord for weather conditions that have little in common with eighteenth-century Europe.

Some concerned well-wishers, who feel that the harpsichord is not designed for our climatic conditions, have suggested various "improvements". These suggestions, which range from the odd iron frame to bizarre hidden aluminium reinforcements, are always contrary to historic construction principles and most often reduce rather than increase the durability of the instrument. Of course, it is widely recognised that such "improvements" drastically alter the historic instrument to the stage where tone and touch are often unrecognizable. It is possible to buy "harpsichords" with these contraptions, even with aluminium soundboards; such instruments are better referred to as "plucking pianos".

Well then, how can an instrument like the harpsichord, designed centuries ago in an area blessed with a relatively stable humidity, be made to survive the onslaught of our Australian climate?

Humidity, rather than temperature, is the variable that needs to be watched. Wood expands across the grain with a rise in humidity, but hardly moves along the grain. Plywood, which is used quite extensively in the "plucking piano" type of harpsichord construction, expands an even amount in both directions. This results in non-compatible expansion rates for different parts of the instrument, and when metal bracing of any kind is used, the problem is aggravated. This kind of instrument does not necessarily have good tuning stability!

The soundboard is the heart of any harpsichord, and in instruments of classical design is normally spruce at most only 3mm thick. On a normal-sized harpsichord, the board can expand and contract up to 15mm with extremes of humidity! The Construction Manual for each Zuckermann instrument talks about your local climate and teaches you how to install the soundboard at the correct humidity level for your location. This level should be slightly lower than you expect the instrument to live at, and often can be accomplished by warming the soundboard slightly before installation.

The soundboard is held firmly around its edges by glue, and if it tries to shrink because of prolonged dryness, it may crack. This is easily repaired, and is not the disaster for a harpsichord that it is for the piano. Wood also shrinks with age, and often old harpsichord soundboards have had slivers of additional timber let into the board every few inches where cracks have appeared throughout more than a century of use, with no detriment to the tone of the instrument. A cracked soundboard is always improved by the crack and the mending, but the mending should be done neatly and invisibly.

The board expands in humid times, and this expansion is accommodated by the gentle curvature of the soundboard. If the board is installed at too low a humidity, it may form waves and valleys in the wet months, and if this happens to excess, parts of the board may begin to interfere with the strings. In this case, the remedy is to bore a hole in the bottom of the instrument, and tie the soundboard down. This limits the rise of the board, and forces deflection of the board within itself without inhibiting vibration.

I recently had the opportunity to see how a harpsichord could live in climatic extremes with little maintenance when I visited the little Flemish Single that I built over a year ago for the Northern Rivers College of Advanced Education at Lismore. Those Melbournians who visit me in Sydney and always seem to mention the humidity here in their first sentence have nothing to complain about, and I will admit that I didn't notice the flood mark painted on the college building that houses the harpsichord when I delivered it there in December 1982. The 1974 floods left only the first floor and roof of the building visible--fortunately, the harpsichord is not kept on the ground floor!

After a year living in the tropics with only the odd tune before performances by David Urquhart-Jones, the Senior Lecturer in Music, I only had to tune the instrument and perform the few odd minor adjustments that are necessary for all new harpsichords after they have been played in. The soundboard had neither cracked nor waved, because it had been installed at the correct humidity.

"Tropicalized Harpsichords"? - No, thank you.

AUSTRALIA'S FIRST ZUCKERMANN HARPSICHORD has just been completed! Andrew Ham, a young flautist who has just entered Commerce at Melbourne University, reports that the original Zuckermann Slantside his father brought out from the States in 1963 is at last playing, after the parts spending some years untouched in the cupboard. The "Zee-box", as it is affectionately known, was the instrument that accelerated the world-wide harpsichord revival. Many thousands were sold, because there were not many other instruments readily available, except for heavily built models made in European piano factories. In those days, many materials were left for people to find locally, and the 'kit' that was bought and built by people from Alaska to Zambia was priced at \$150. Wolfgang Zuckermann reported in his book "The Modern Harpsichord" that the New York Metropolitan Opera used to keep their Z-box in the backstage boiler room when not required for performances!

THE ZUCKERMANN ORGAN PROJECT that was reported on in the last News Brief has created quite an amount of anticipation throughout the country. Latest news is that the ten-rank organ prototype has found a permanent home in Harvard Divinity School, and Zuckermann's resident organ builder, Scot Huntington, is spending most time in the drafting room with David Way, together planning for the future. Considerable pressure is being felt in Australia for small but fine Positive organs, and details will be passed on as the project's attention diverts to the development of smaller organs. New instruments spend at least six years in the research and development stage at Zuckermann before being released for construction throughout the world.

Sole Australian Agent for ZUCKERMANN HARPSICHORDS INC.

COMING EVENTS . . .

- Canberra Friday 23rd March 8pm Room 2 Griffin Centre
 Canberra Recorder + Early Music Society presents WHY THE HARPSICHORD?
 Carey will be playing three instruments - a fretted-clavichord, bentside spinet, and his recently completed Flemish Single with marbled exterior, Latin inscribed papered lid, and historic action of pearwood jacks with crow quill plectra and holly tongues sprung by boar bristle - music by Sweelinck, Byrd, Bach + Rameau. A discussion with those present of the construction, maintenance, tuning and playing of historic keyboard instruments.
 Admission - \$ 1 Further Information - Richard Milner (062) 30 2312
- Sydney Saturday 31st March 8pm Hurstville HARPSICHORD DECORATOR'S ARMCHAIR TRAVELOGUE
 A leisurely slide tour with Carey Beebe of the main keyboard instrument collections of North America, as well as the 1983 Boston Early Music Festival. Visit the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Yale University, New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Smithsonian Institution. See the instruments that are never displayed to the public. Tour the workshops of Dowd, Hubbard, and Zuckermann. Particular emphasis will be placed on the decoration of both historic and modern instruments, and there will be ample time for discussion.
 Admission - \$ 3 including supper. Advance Reservation Essential - (02) 570 8541
- Sydney Saturday 14th April 8pm Hurstville FORTEPIANO OPENING RECITAL
 Carey Beebe, Fortepiano - Music by J C Bach, Mozart + Beethoven
 There will be Carey's usual verbal programme annotations, as well as a pictorial display of various information on Mozart and the early pianoforte, and opportunity for interested persons to play the instrument after the recital. Warning - You may never want to hear Classical repertoire played on the less-suited modern piano again!!!
 Admission - \$ 8 including supper Advance Reservation Essential - (02) 570 8541
- Sydney Saturday 28th April 10pm 2MBS-FM 102.5MHz CLAVECIN by CANDLELIGHT
 Broadcast of Recital held at Hurstville on 12th November last.
 Carey Beebe, French Double Harpsichord - Music by Louis Couperin, Rameau, Duphy, Balbastre + Couperin le Grand
 For those out-of-town folk who have asked, a few recordings of this concert are left. Recorded in Dolby stereo on Maxell UD-C90 cassettes - \$ 10 including airmail postage + packing.
- Melbourne 12th - 19th May FOURTEENTH MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF ORGAN + HARPSICHORD
 Overseas performers this year include Stephen Darlington (England), Peter Planyavsky (Austria), Glen Wilson (Holland), and New Zealand's leading early music group, Ensemble Dufay. As in previous years, many fine local musicians will also be taking part.
 Further Information - James Camilleri, MIFOH Manager, 24/67 Queens Road Melbourne VIC 3004, (03) 529 4322

IN BRIEF . . .

English Harpsichordist Christopher Hogwood recently gave two concerts in Sydney with the Australian Chamber Orchestra as part of the Music + Heritage Series. Chris played two programmes, each including two Brandenburg Concertos and works by Vivaldi, Corelli, and Handel in St Stephens Church, Newtown...

David Kinsela has been appointed to the staff of the NSW Conservatorium of Music. After returning a few years ago from a period of ten years study in Basel and London, he established the Lambing Flat Early Music Festival. David owns a Dowd harpsichord, on which he recently performed the complete works of Rameau. An organist as well as harpsichordist, David's special interest lies in early fingering methods...

Belmore Lodge, an 1840 Coach Inn at Kurrajong Heights in the Blue Mountains which for the last few years has been enjoying new life as an important Sunday Concert venue and accommodation house is to be sold. Established in its role by Sydney harpsichordist Robert Goode and restaurateur Trevor Hodges, many people have mentioned they will miss the atmosphere of the old home and the high standard of performances that have been heard there. Robert reports that his attentions have been drawn to the seductive charms of the Mighty Wurlitzer, and he has many appearances scheduled on his new instrument. He has left the "clang box" (as he affectionately refers to the harpsichord) behind...

The French Double Harpsichord owned by the Canberra School of Music has just had the action converted to the modern materials that most instruments use. Originally specified by John Winther, the Head of the School, to incorporate the historic action of pearwood jacks with holly tongues, crow-quill plectra and boar bristle springs working in leathared registers, it was found that under conditions of institutional use, where no one person is responsible for the upkeep of the instrument, the utmost reliability was of prime importance, and authenticity took second place...

Sydney musician Pastor de Lasala is claiming the record of owning the country's most heard clavichord. Pastor, a prominent organist who teaches on the staff of a private school and regularly attends the Hurstville Open Weekend every Spring, says that his instrument has been broadcast frequently, and has played it in public at Vaucluse House. Pastor owns other instruments, including a Neupert Spinet similar to one owned by Adelaide's Flinders Street School of Music. Challengers to Pastor's record should write...

The recent exhibition by the Australian Association of Music Instrument Makers in Canberra attracted more than 600 people. The work was of a very high standard, and this year small recitals were held throughout the weekend, enabling the public to hear some of the instruments on show. Many people remarked on the Flemish Double that Carey Beebe exhibited "in the raw" - the outside was unfinished, but the soundboard was decorated in the style of early Ioannes Ruckers by the use of the Zuckermann Soundboard Painting Kit, and the instrument strung. There was no bottom attached, and members of the public were able to see and touch parts of a harpsichord not often visible...

WANTED Harpsichord, reliable instrument suitable for study. Phone Margaret Czako (02) 95 5697

IN STOCK, ready for immediate delivery - Complete Parts for a few Fretted Clavichords, one only Fretted Clavichord Stand, and one only Italian Harpsichord. Next shipment orders closing shortly - If you would like an instrument reserved in your name, contact Carey Beebe

FOR SALE Neupert "Philipp-Emanuel" clavichord 5-octaves (FF-f''') single-strung good condition 8 years old \$ 2000 Phone Margaret Scrivener (02) 818 1231

FOR SALE Keeping my Flemish Double Harpsichord, but after my marriage must sell partly assembled Zuckermann fretted clavichord kit with stand + carry case, also Flemish turned stand kit. Write to Christopher Wagstaff, c/- Geelong College, PO Box 5, Geelong VIC 3220, or phone work (052) 21 1930 home (052) 9 9749

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THIS NEWSLETTER is published by Carey Beebe Harpsichords as an aid to the development of public awareness of fine early keyboard instruments and their music. Your contributions and suggestions are welcomed...

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