

Tuning Without Tears

- *Temperament* is the division of the various notes of the keyboard and the relationship between them, often producing intentional musical results.
- *Tuning* is the art of accomplishing this successfully throughout the instrument.
- *Beats* are the interference between notes — Listen to the beats, not the notes.
- When two notes get closer in tune, the beats progressively slow until they disappear. The interval is then perfectly in tune, or simply *perfect*.
- Beats are often easier to hear when the interval in question is spread over an octave.
- Pitch level has varied according to location, time and other factors.
- Today's pitch standard is A440, but many orchestras tune sharper for a more brilliant effect (especially) from modern violins. This annoys singers, wind players and instrument makers.
- Purely for the convenience of keyboard instruments, *Baroque pitch* is A415, a semitone lower than A440. Also becoming common is *French Baroque pitch* at A392 (a tone lower than modern pitch). Some period instrument orchestras play in between at *Classical pitch*, sometimes A425 or A430.
- In *Equal Temperament*, every note is equally out of tune. Because of the lack of key color and the difficulty of tuning this temperament, latest research shows it wasn't used until 1917: For most of the nineteenth century, when they thought they were tuning equally, the results were a mere approximation.
- Almost without exception, any harpsichord sounds better in an historic temperament.
- The centre of Western tonality is C, and many historic temperaments are most easily set from c'. Unfortunately, modern convention demands most instrumentalists tune from a'.
- Hit the tuning fork on your kneecap, then place it on the cheek or bridge. Or, if you need both hands free, put it between your teeth.
- If you must use an electronic tuner, use it only to help you divide the notes of the scale in the middle of your keyboard. Then tune up and down in octaves by ear.
- A transposing keyboard is only of the quickest convenience when equal temperament is used, otherwise you transpose your key colors and good keys can become bad.
- If your instrument is very sharp or flat, do not try to immediately fine tune it. Rather, quickly reestablish the correct pitch level, then do a fine tuning. It is always harder to flatten an instrument than to sharpen it.
- If the harpsichord tuning pins are finger tight, they are tight enough. If the historic tapered pins rise up in their holes and become loose, reseal them with a tap from your tuning hammer.
- Keep your harpsichord away from draughts and direct sunlight, and close the lid when your instrument is not in use.