

Westfield

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A National Resource for the Advancement of Keyboard music, serving Professionals and the Public since 1979

MARCH 2009

Calling for Nominations for the Westfield Concert Scholar!

Extended Deadline: April 1, 2009

We are happy to announce that the deadline for nominations to the 2009-2010 Westfield Concert Scholar competition has been extended to April 1. The concert scholar program offers a wonderful opportunity for talented young keyboard players to gain performing experience on excellent instruments located throughout the country, and to join a distinguished roster of past Scholars.

This program, an initiative of The John Ernest Foundation, provides a three-concert tour during the academic year following receipt of the award, as well as a free membership to the Westfield Center. Concert Scholars can be nominated by any Westfield Center member, and are selected by the Board of Directors. The nominee must be a full time student currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program in keyboard performance who plays organ, harpsichord, clavichord, or fortepiano.

The award is based on the concept of "student mentoring" and experiential learning, and as such, is intended to develop the student's skills as a performer, as well as his or her ability to meet and successfully interact with people in a professional and social context. The winner will also be responsible for the preparation of program information, including a bio and program notes. It is expected that the studio teacher will take an active role, not only helping the student with the program itself, but also discussing the student's role as a Westfield ambassador, including reminders to communicate with and thank the sponsoring individuals.

The three hosting venues will supply room and board and opportunities for the scholar to interact with other students and faculty. The scholar will receive a written document regarding the engagements and his or her responsibilities.

Nominations should include:

1. A recommendation letter
2. An unedited recording of the student's performance
3. One (or two) possible tour programs, including (for each) a short paragraph describing the idea behind the program and the ideal type of keyboard instrument for which it is intended

Nominations and contact information for teacher and student should be sent to:

Paul Tegels
Pacific Lutheran University
Music Department
Tacoma, WA 98447-0003

The winner and her/his teacher will be notified by April 15, and will be published in the May newsletter of the Westfield Center. Further details of the nomination and selection process for the 2009-10 Concert Scholar are available on the website of the Westfield Center: www.westfield.org



Organ Haptics Conference at EROI

By Laurence Libin

Haptics, the study of touch, was commonly neglected by twentieth-century organ builders and teachers because most modern organ keyboards, operating with on-off electrical contacts, are minimally touch-sensitive. With the revival of mechanical actions based on historical principles, the possibility of making organs responsive to nuances of finger and foot pressure has emerged as a controversial concern both for builders of new instruments and for restorers of old trackers, as well as for performers and teachers. The idea that experienced players of mechanical-action organs can control pallet pluck and pipe speech characteristics, and thus perform more expressively, has advocates and detractors whose arguments, until recently, pivoted mostly on anecdotal evidence. Today, improved measuring equipment makes possible the collecting of precise data that place the debate on firmer ground.

In conjunction with the Eastman Rochester Organ Initiative (EROI), an interdisciplinary conference entitled “Haptics in Music: Key Touch Characteristics in Organ Action” took place February 22-24, 2009, at the University of Rochester, hosted by the departments of electrical and computer engineering and biomedical engineering in the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences and the organ department of the Eastman School of Music, with financial support from the Provost’s Multidisciplinary Fund. Some thirty invited participants, including organ builders,



The console of the Craighead-Saunders Organ at Eastman. Photo by Matt DeTurck

engineers, and scientists along with Eastman faculty, discussed the principles of mechanical action design and methods of simultaneously measuring key and pallet motion, wind flow, touch perception, and related phenomena. While the meeting left some skeptics unconvinced that players can consciously exert note-by-note control over pipe-speech transients, everyone agreed that the conference clarified the issues and pointed toward further research on touch sensitivity.

Following a hands-on examination of Eastman’s new Craighead-Saunders organ, modeled after the 1776 Casparini in Vilnius, the group heard Steven Dieck describe the development of various mechanical actions used by C. B. Fisk Organ Builders. With

this introduction, Alan Wooley, of the musical acoustics group in the University of Edinburgh's School of Physics, next discussed his experiments indicating that variable timing of note onset and termination, rather than intentional manipulation of transients, explains the audible effects of control reported by players. Whether the players and organs that were subjects of Wooley's research fairly represent historical performance and building practices remains an open question that was vigorously taken up by, among others, John Brombaugh, Bruce Fowkes, Paul Fritts, Martin Pasi, Munetaka Yokota, and participants representing the Göteborg Organ Art Center (GOArt) and Chalmers University of Technology in Göteborg.

Lively discussion continued during visits to test the anonymous Italian baroque organ at Rochester's Memorial Art Galley, the Craighead-Saunders organ at Christ Church, John Brombaugh's opus 9 (1972) at St. Michael's Church, and Paul Fritts's opus 26 (2008) at Sacred Heart Cathedral, each employing a different type of mechanical action; Eastman students Christopher Petit, Silvyia Mateva, Randall Harlow, and Thatcher Lyman demonstrated these instruments. A master class by Jon Laukvik with additional Eastman students at the Craighead-Saunders organ offered a further opportunity to hear the theory of shaping sound by touch put into practice, or not. As performers Joel Speerstra and William Porter pointed out, the dynamic shaping of motives and phrases at the organ has much in common with clavichord technique and depends on the sensitivity and responsiveness of the action as well as of the player, forming a continuous feedback loop.



Tangents on an unfretted clavichord

Next, Anne Acker and Stephen Birkett, director of the piano laboratory in the systems engineering department of the University of Waterloo-Ontario, demonstrated how ultra-high-speed photography reveals unsuspected motions in piano actions. Acker's and Birkett's studies, supported by Steinway & Sons, have clear implications for research methodology addressing tracker and pallet motion and related aspects of organ actions. Other investigative techniques and results were related by Carl-Johan Bergsten and Joel Speerstra representing GOArt, and Jack Mottley and colleagues of the University of Rochester. Among the matters considered were pallet and spring design, friction, inertia, key bending and roller torque, fluid dynamics (especially airflow around the pallet), tactile and aural feedback, human reaction speed, and less obvious components of the finger-mechanism interaction.

Following a presentation on human perception and psychometrics by the distinguished acoustician Mendel Kleiner, who stressed the importance of understanding arm and hand motion, the participants gathered in small groups to discuss terminology and methodology. The meeting concluded with a summary of these small-group conversations. Among issues raised for future consideration were whether effects presumably attainable in a slow melodic line can also be attained in quick contrapuntal motion; whether the sensation of control depends on which finger depresses the key at what angle; whether affecting pallet velocity is the same as controlling it; whether action noise and variable touch weight (through coupling, addition of registers, moving from bass to treble, etc.) contribute to a sense of responsiveness; what qualities are most desirable for a "sensitive" action; whether unlimited data acquisition might lead to a reductive, mechanistic approach that overlooks psychological phenomena that are harder to measure; and whether haptic studies of airplane cockpit simulators, interactive video game consoles, surgical robotics, and other interfaces can illuminate our subject.

Throughout, the University of Rochester provided fine meals and meeting facilities, convenient accommodations, and efficient management, with Hans Davidsson presiding as master of ceremonies. Participants and student auditors departed with the recognition that although all facts are selected and interpreted, accurate objective measurement offers the best path toward understanding the virtues and limits of mechanical actions. This interdisciplinary conference added luster to EROI's reputation as a leading international research center for the organ.



Summer Courses

The **McGill Summer Organ Academy** will take place from July 6-16 in Montreal. Courses in the literature of the French Classical, French Symphonic, 17-century North German, and German Romantic periods will be offered as well as the music of J.S. Bach, the Spanish Golden Age, Improvisation, and Continuo and Solo Harpsichord repertoire. For more information: <http://www.msoa.ca/index.shtml>

The **2009 International Organ and Clavichord Academy** is offered this summer in Smarano (Italy) from July 25 to August 4. This year's focus is "Ars variandi," or the baroque practice of variation at the keyboard. Through the pages of Pasquini, Pachelbel and other contemporary composers, participants will study and practice the idea of "variation" and its development in the different European regions as well as apply it both in improvisation and composition. For more information: <http://www.eccher.it/gb/>

The **Fortepiano Workshop** will be held August 9-15 at Cornell University. The workshop will be directed by Malcolm Bilson, Andrew Willis, and David Breitman. Information on faculty, instruments, concerts, fees, registration, including the brochure, can be found on the Knowing the Score website: <http://knowingthescore.com/workshop/index.php>

The **International Fortepiano Summer Workshop** by Wolfgang Brunner, Alexei Lubimov and Bart van Oort will take place August 20-23, 2009 in Schloss Kremsegg, Austria. This workshop is hosted by the Hochschule für Musik in Trossingen (Germany). The fee is 180 euro (120 for auditors). It is open to professional keyboardists and keyboard students, including students of fortepiano, modern piano, harpsichord, and organ who are interested in an introduction to the fortepiano. The instruments used in this course are found in the "Clavierland" fortepiano collection of Schloss Kremsegg. More information about the instruments can be found on the website of the castle: www.schloss-kremsegg.at or by contacting Ms. Elvira Schwegler, Secretary of the Early Music Department of the Trossingen Hochschule: AlteMusik@mh-trossingen.de

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