

Westfield

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Serving Professionals and the Public Since 1979*

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Tilman Skowroneck, Editor



A very warm welcome to our Winter 2015–16 issue of Westfield and a Happy New Year to everyone! This issue begins with a sneak peek into the upcoming issue of *Keyboard Perspectives*, of which I again have been the guest editor. Nicholas Mathew announces “Cembalophilia: Hidden Histories of the Harpsichord,” the Westfield Center’s 2016 conference at the Berkeley Early Music Festival next June.

In late November, the eminent Dutch organist and pedagogue Jacques van Oortmerssen very suddenly passed away. Jacques was a strong presence in the musical

lives of many performers around the world (not only of my generation), at Academies in Gothenburg, Westfield conferences, and innumerable other events internationally. Teacher and friend to many, and an outstanding and very active performer, he leaves a large empty space behind. David Yearsley here pays tribute to the great man in a heartfelt personal commemoration.

Becky Lu, finally, revisits a series of lectures and concerts organized by Westfield last October in celebration of Alexander Scriabin.

—*Tilman Skowroneck*



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The eighth volume of *Keyboard Perspectives* is well underway. This issue looks at keyboard instruments through the lens of variety—as essentially varied objects that invite a variety of interactions. Some of the essays focus on an important but now-forgotten instrument, on combination instruments, unfamiliar constructions or details of construction, or on the variety of approaches necessary to play a certain kind of instrument. Other contributions discuss the variety of historical and social realities that put these instruments on the map, and explain how technological sidelines can be seen as enrichment rather than dead ends. These essays highlight an important part of the keyboard world that is too often eclipsed by the organ and piano's evolutionary narrative of success.

In her discussion of the glass harmonica and its players and repertoire, Annette Richards moves us as far away from the comfortably standardized world of the ivories as we will likely ever venture. In this instrument,

glass bowls are nestled one inside another, arranged in keyboard fashion. Rebecca Cypess's essay about Philipp Jacob Milchmeyer and the concept of *Veränderungen* (stops to alter and enrich the timbre of a given keyboard instrument) reflects on late eighteenth-century German keyboard aesthetics and the idea of “variety as a key to musical expression.” Robin Blanton writes about Johann Andreas Stein's combination instruments and other special inventions, and considers the question of the significance (for Stein and his onlookers) of showing these instruments off in public.

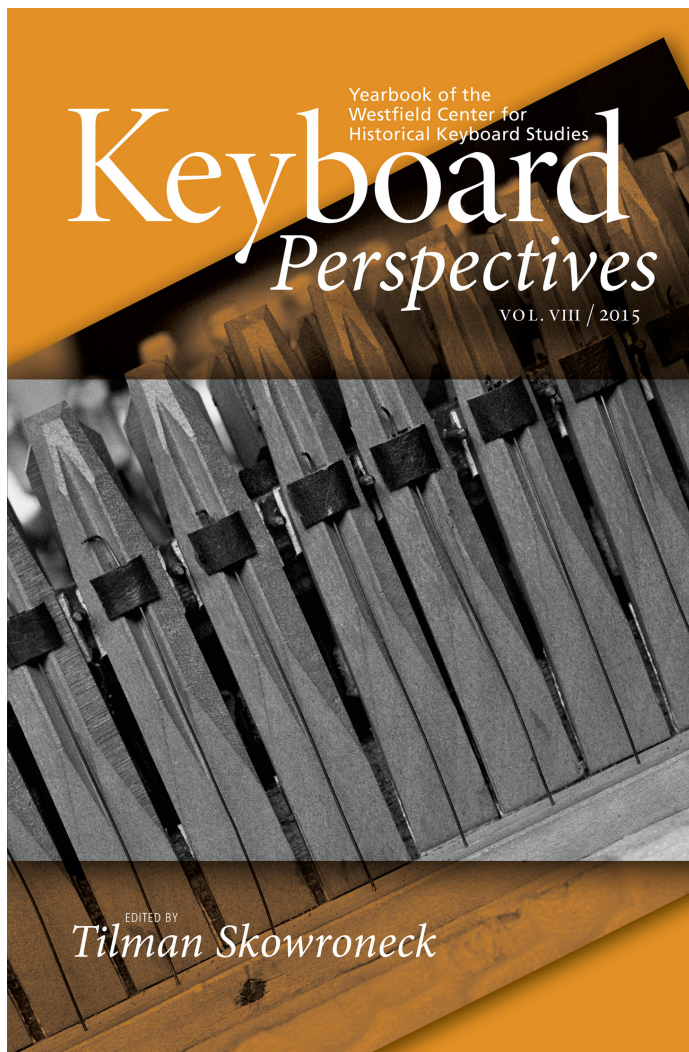
John Koster invites us to contemplate harpsichord stops, nonaligned keyboards, and dog-legged jack shapes. The variety of keyboard instruments is here addressed from the standpoint of an organologist's close knowledge of a vast variety of historical models and building styles, as well as their affordances. Using evidence from the long history of the claviorgan, Elly Smith demonstrates the instrument's prominence in various courtly cultures throughout history and provides examples for its use and repertoire. Laurence Libin considers American piano-making of the mid-nineteenth century and its many inventions and patents.

Continuing a discussion that began during the Westfield Center's conference “Sensation and Sensibility” (October 2–4, 2014), this volume also includes a Portrait by Emily Dolan of composer Andrew McPherson and his Magnetic Resonator Piano.

Tiffany Ng reviews the English translation of Luc Rombouts's *Singing Bronze: A History of Carillon Music* (2014). Joan Benson's *Clavichord for Beginners* (2014) is reviewed by Ulrika Davidsson.

In conclusion, my own review of five CDs points in various ways to the essays in the rest of this volume. The claviorgan is presented in two of these recordings. The third CD features Haydn's music for the *lira organizzata*, an instrument that combines the principle of the hurdy-gurdy with a small organ. One of J. A. Stein's combination instruments, the *Vis-à-vis*, can be heard both in composed music and in duo-improvisations on the fourth CD reviewed here. Finally, to illustrate perhaps the most familiar member of the harpsichord family and the corresponding section in John Koster's article, I included a new recording with music by Jacques Duphy, played on a French harpsichord.

—Tilman Skowroneck



CEMBALOPHILIA: HIDDEN HISTORIES OF THE HARPSICHORD

JUNE 6–10, 2016, BERKELEY, CA



Detail of a Ruckers virginal

On June 6–10, 2016 the Westfield Center will be sponsoring a thrilling harpsichord event at the Berkeley Early Music Festival, “Cembalophilia: Hidden Histories of the Harpsichord.” This three-day event will feature lectures, concerts, a masterclass, and a musical tribute to the late Alan Curtis.

An international group of performers, scholars, and harpsichord builders will examine, from various perspectives, the central role of the harpsichord in European social life, and the many faces of the instrument itself—technological wonder, historical curio, art object, and luxury commodity.

On display will be a collection of instruments that represent a diversity of historical traditions by builders

including Derek Adlam, Owen Daly, Phillipe Humeau, Joel Katzman, Bruce Kennedy, John Phillips, and Martin Skowronek. Featured performers include Diego Ares, David Catalunya, Carole Cerasi, Jean-Luc Ho, Edward Parmentier, and Ignacio Prego. The keynote address will be given by Richard Leppert; other speakers include Leon Chisholm, Matthew Hall, Edmond Johnson, Jonathan Rhodes Lee, John Roberts, and Saraswathi Shukla.

Applications to participate in the masterclass with Edward Parmentier on June 9 should be sent to Kiko Nobusawa at info@westfield.org.

—*Nicholas Mathew*



Alan Curtis at the harpsichord c. 1963. Photo: unknown.



JACQUES VAN OORTMERSSEN, REMEMBERED BY DAVID YEARSLEY

On November 21, Jacques van Oortmerssen, one of our time's great organists, indeed one of its great musicians, died unexpectedly from a brain hemorrhage at the age of 65. At the time of his death, van Oortmerssen was at the height of his powers as a player and teacher. He was still ensconced in his position as professor at the Amsterdam Conservatory, a post won at the young age—especially for The Netherlands—of 29. Even while fulfilling his teaching and performing duties in Amsterdam and elsewhere, he served as organist of the city's Waalse Kerk. In 1982, he had succeeded another Dutch luminary, Gustav Leonhardt, as master over the church's fabled Christian Müller organ of 1734, one of the most important historic instruments in The Netherlands, a country dense with such monuments.

Oortmerssen's death comes as a shock to the many, like me, who knew and admired him. Yet the fundamental musical lessons and the legacy of his recordings and performances live on in the immediate aftermath of his premature departure and will endure long after, not just in the organ lofts of the world but far beyond them.

A tremendous and prolific recitalist renowned for his interpretation of the works of J. S. Bach but hardly limited to this central repertory, van Oortmerssen died at the same age as the Leipzig master, whose Obituary of 1754 began by lauding the deceased as the "The World-Famous Organist." The same could and should be said of van Oortmerssen, even if the words "fame" and "organist" do not now consort so readily with one another as they did in the eighteenth century, when the organ still represented the apogee of technological advancement and crowned the European instrumentarium as an unsurpassed musical wonder.

The parallels between Bach and van Oortmerssen go deeper than the length of their respective lives and the coincidence that van Oortmerssen was born in the bicentenary year of Bach's death. 1950 was the first

"Bach Year" after the end of World War II, near the start of which van Oortmerssen's native Rotterdam and its organs had been laid waste by German aerial bombardment. Any future history of the great organists might well consider the effect of this rupture on van Oortmerssen's eventual musical path, one that led him not only towards a thoroughgoing engagement with his country's rich organ past surviving beyond the devastated city of his birth, but also that may well have nurtured the vigorous modernism, ranging from the unforgivingly brutal to the devastatingly lyrical, to be heard in his small

corpus of published compositions and countless improvisations, some captured on record. His talent for spontaneous composition, grounded through arduous practice and erudition, won him prizes at improvisation competitions in The Netherlands and England.

Like Bach, van Oortmerssen enjoyed renown for his immaculate technical control over organs of widely different character and qualities: his ability to adapt to instruments thought to be difficult, even intransigent, by most and to bring them to sounding life with apparent ease and profound subtlety, was something fellow organists and his numerous students could only marvel at—and, as far as possible, learn from.

Over the many years of my friendship with van Oortmerssen,

I had the privilege to accompany him to many historic organs. Among these was that of the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam, an architectural and acoustic masterpiece of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries adorned with tooled and gilded pipes, a classical pediment laden with sculpture and sumptuously painted doors that could be closed on those occasions when its visual and sonic splendors offended the austere Calvinists. (http://www.orgelnieuws.nl/wp-content/uploads/converted_files/img4d2dc3abd921b.jpg) The organ's richly appointed console of three manuals and pedals is flanked by Corinthian columns so that seated there, even



Jacques van Oortmerssen. Photo: Hester Doove.

a lowly human fumbler can be spurred by inklings of heroic resolve. More than simply that is needed, however, even to depress the keys when playing on the full organ with manuals coupled, since this requires the relaxed application of weight and robust determination in the mind and fingers. Few have the mental and physical endurance required to make it through a mighty Bach Prelude and Fugue on this instrument with even a modicum of musical conviction.

At this Olympian temple of the organ on that afternoon nearly a quarter century ago, van Oortmerssen appeared a musical demigod, easily up to the Herculean labor of making music on this sublime, unforgiving machine. He demonstrated the peculiarities and potential of the organ with a relaxed energy and unbuttoned humor that was often partially submerged in his more studied concert appearances. After these improvisatory explorations, he played from memory the Bach Toccata in C, BWV 562 (heard here on his 2004 recording made on an organ of similar size and vintage in the Dutch city of Alkmaar (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5odg6g-gJOkw>) with a nonchalant majesty that rings in my ears to this day.

A few days later, van Oortmerssen played a Sunday evening concert in the same church for a large audience of tourists, colleagues, devotees, and students. Along with works by Sweelinck (his celebrated predecessor as “organist maker” in Amsterdam) and Bach, van Oortmerssen played Mendelssohn’s C-minor Sonata and his own shimmering and propulsive *Fata morgana*, which had recently been published. After the program, Gustav Leonhardt, then organist of the Nieuwe Kerk and a man whose tastes were studiously anti-Romantic, had a collegial word with the recitalist and told him, only half-jokingly, that the new composition was a much better piece than Mendelssohn’s. The composer-performer laughed off the remark, but it was plain to me that he also heard the active dose of sincerity in the compliment.

Parallels between van Oortmerssen and Bach extend to their expertise in organ construction and design. Oortmerssen advised and consulted on many such projects. To watch and listen to him recognize the beauties and diagnose the flaws of organs both old and new was another unforgettable experience.

But most importantly, it is his legacy as a teacher that ties him to Bach. Just as Bach trained two generations of eighteenth-century organists, so too did van Oortmerssen mold hundreds of students from around the world during his thirty-six-year tenure as the head organ professor in

Amsterdam, and through a relentless schedule of master classes in Europe and North America.

Now that he’s gone, van Oortmerssen’s contributions as a performer can best be judged from his project to record the complete organ works of Bach on historic instruments. Begun in 1995 the undertaking was abandoned in 2007 after nine volumes, not due to lack of commitment on van Oortmerssen’s part but because of the changing economic landscape of the recording industry. Those discs that were issued can be perused on his website (<http://www.oortmerssen.com/>) along with live videos of just a few of his innumerable performances. In the unflinching perfection of these recordings can be heard those attributes that made him one of the finest organists of this or any age: supreme technical control always serving the larger goals of expression and communication; painstaking attention to the score as historical and musical document; mastery of detail that made each moment a thing of beauty, even while this level of nuance always served the grand designs of Bach’s oratory. In short, van Oortmerssen was a musician who was always thinking and feeling. His Bach series, though incomplete, ranks as one of the towering monuments in the history of classical music recordings.

On the website that offers these discs for sale you will be greeted by a photograph of van Oortmerssen presenting himself as a deep thinker and profound artist: praying hands held to lips; penetrating brown eyes partly obscured by the shadows of his scholarly tortoise-shell glasses; deep lines of study and worry etched on his forehead. He took himself and his art seriously. What the digital technology of websites and even his masterful recordings cannot capture or convey is his love for those he taught and the musical lives he touched.

(This article is a reprint from <http://www.counterpunch.org>.)

SCRIBIN CENTENARY: {Re}HEARING SCRIBIN IN THE 21ST CENTURY

OCTOBER 22–25, 2015, ITHACA, NY

To celebrate the centenary year of Russian composer Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915), the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies, with support from Cornell's Departments of Music, German Studies, and Comparative Literature, organized a series of concerts and lectures October 22–25, 2015. Pianists and scholars interacted with each other through revelatory performances and intriguing talks, asking the audience to hear—and re-hear—the composer's music in ways that addressed the current landscape of Scriabin studies and suggested new ways forward. Professor Simon Morrison of Princeton University, a noted specialist of Russian and Soviet music and culture, set the tone for the weekend with a thought-provoking keynote address that critiqued the so-called “Mystic chord” and eroticism, two tropes in Scriabin scholarship. Dispelling the notion that these are unidimensional abstractions through which we understand Scriabin's music and writings, Morrison advocated a multidimensional approach. Instead, the apparent eroticism is but one facet of Scriabin's “creative urge,” which encompasses the spiritual as well as carnal, and the mystic chord resists such a singular categorization, for this recurring collection of pitches extends in multiple directions simultaneously in his works—in the motives and structure as well as in the harmonies—and links tonal, octatonic, and atonal spaces with earthly and heavenly realms as Scriabin imagined them.

A panel discussion of Scriabin performance practice revealed a similar need for the emphasis on multiplicities. Scholars have often questioned the notated score and recordings as reliable means of storing and transmitting the “essentials” of a musical work, and in the case of Scriabin, these objects seem particularly unreliable. Scriabin's careless notation, his improvisatory style at the piano, and that he was the primary disseminator of his works means his scores might only partially encode his ideas and intentions. The surprisingly clean quality of his recordings veils the limits of piano roll technologies, which, at best, capture a single performance that may have been more commercially than creatively oriented. The panelists, some of whom trained at the same conservatory as Scriabin, also raised the issue of the composer's “Russianness,” which, other than his use of octatonic and whole-tone scales, seems much less pronounced than his compatriots Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich, and Stravinsky.

ALEXANDER SCRIBIN

Celebrating 100 Years of
Mystery and Rapture

(Re)Hearing Scriabin
in the 21st-Century

Speakers

Simon Morrison (Princeton)
Nancy Pollak (Cornell)
Geoffrey Waite (Cornell)

Pianists

Matthew Bengtson
Xak Bjerken
Stanislav Ioudenitch
Becky Lu
Ryan MacEvoy McCullough
Dmitri Novgorodsky
Miri Yampolsky
Andrew Zhou

Concerts and Lectures

22-25 OCT 2015

Cornell University

www.westfield.org

Free and open to the public

Sponsored by the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies

With support from Cornell University's Departments of Music, German Studies, and Comparative Literature

National identities may be just as unstable as scores and recordings, as the talks by Geoffrey Waite and Nancy Pollak showed, on the one hand, the heavy influence of Nietzsche, and on the other, the impact of Russian Symbolist poetry on Scriabin's life and music.

The diverse group of pianists gave no less varied performances of the complete Scriabin sonatas, which were amenable to flexible renderings without losing their distinctively Scriabinesque qualities. A recital by Van Cliburn gold medalist Stanislav Ioudenitch ended the weekend in front of a packed audience, and the music of Rachmaninoff and Chopin again allowed us to hear Scriabin from other perspectives. If a single takeaway could be gleaned from the weekend, it is the irreducibility of Scriabin's music. Indeed, the more we try to define the terms of analysis or study, the more his music resists to reveal the very opposite of those terms. Looking ahead, the task for those interested in his music is to animate its multiplicities and reconsider the objects of Scriabin studies—the mystic chord, the scores, the recordings, his Russianness—not as stable entities, but as conjunctions in a vast musical and cultural network.

—Becky Lu

ACADÉMIE D'ORGUE DE FRIBOURG
ORGAN SCHOLARSHIP 2016–17

Following the statutory aims that provide promotion of the Historical Organs Heritage in the Fribourg region and the encouragement of young people in organ studies, the Fondation Académie d'Orgue de Fribourg is offering a scholarship for organ students who want to study at Fribourg University of Music (HEMU – Site de Fribourg www.hemu.ch) in the Academic Year 2016–17. The successful candidate will also be invited to play a concert in the Fribourg International Organ Festival. Closing date for applications: March 1, 2016.

Candidates must send the application form, a detailed curriculum vitae, a copy of academic degrees, a copy of ID, and three letters of recommendation to the address:

Fribourg Organ Academy
C.P. 51, CH 1701
Fribourg, Switzerland
info@academieorgue.ch

At the same time, all candidates must apply for entrance examination at HEMU by sending a mail to Mr. Jean-Pierre Chollet, director of HEMU, site of Fribourg: Jean-Pierre.CHOLLET@hemu-cl.ch.

Scholarship Amount: 5000 CHF/year and a concert in the Fribourg International Organ Festival.

THE 2017 CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL ORGAN COMPETITION IS CALLING FOR APPLICATIONS
(DEADLINE: JANUARY 30, 2016)

Applicants must be under the age of 35. The CIOC covers the full cost of participation for the 16 chosen competitors. Competition prizes total \$120,000 in cash and other prizes.

The 2017 jury members are:

David Briggs (UK/Canada), Silvius van Kessel (Germany), Réjean Poirier (Canada), Lynne Davis (USA), Bernard Focroulle (Belgium), Bine Bryndorf (Denmark), Neil Cockburn (Canada), Carole Terry (USA).

President of the jury: John Grew (Canada).

More information can be found at:

<http://us5.campaign-archive2.com/?u=526fe05e03d-7c10e7ad275747&id=651691b81a&e=d0ca973dad>



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<http://westfield.org/donate/>

Submissions and questions may be directed to:

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