

Westfield

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Serving Professionals and the Public Since 1979*

Spring 2018

Tilman Skowroneck, Editor



A very warm welcome to the spring issue of the 2018 Westfield Newsletter! We begin with some in-depth information about the Westfield Center Study Day at the Berkeley Early Music Festival, which will take place on June 8, 2018. The colloquy is led by Nicholas Mathew, who kindly answered a number of interview questions about the ideas that have led to this event and that have served as inspiration for its thought-provoking title *Debussy as Early Music: The Piano and the Pianist in the Early Twentieth Century*. During the Study Day, renowned early piano specialist Alexei Lubimov will play a Debussy program on a 1901 Bechstein piano (more on the connection between Debussy and Bechstein in the interview below). Tickets and more information about this recital are available [here](#).

Following the interview, Annette Richards presents Westfield's fall conference *The Organ in the Global Baroque*, September 6-8, 2018 at Cornell University, with its impressive array of scholars and performers, contributing to the talks and concerts to be heard during these eventful three days.

We continue with various announcements, including one for the first ever Berkeley International Early Piano Competition, also part of the Berkeley Festival and Exhibition.

The University of Michigan will host two events this year that are related to early keyboard instruments: one is the annual meeting of the Historical Keyboard Society of North America, held on May 9–12. The meeting's inspiring theme is "Professionals and Amateurs: The Spirit of *Kenner und Liebhaber* in Keyboard Composition, Performance and Instrument Building." The other event is the second annual University of Michigan Early Keyboard Institute (June 3–8), co-directed by Matthew Bengtson and Joseph Gascho, which focuses on harpsichord and fortepiano, offering masterclasses, lectures and performances.

The Historical Piano Summer Academy and *Concours révolutionnaire*, directed by Tom Beghin and Erin Helyard, will take place on July 3–12 at the Orpheus Institute, Ghent, Belgium. Please see Tom Beghin's detailed and enticing text about this event which concludes our newsletter.

—*Tilman Skowroneck*



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DEBUSSY AS EARLY MUSIC – AN INTERVIEW WITH NICHOLAS MATHEW

Nicholas, you are hosting a colloquy at the upcoming Berkeley festival entitled “Debussy as Early Music.” What kind of development has made it possible for “early music” to represent a composer like Debussy?

Well, part of the question here has to do with what we take “early music” to be. I think many of its practitioners, historically—and here one could think back past Norrington or Harnoncourt to Hindemith and others—took it to be fundamentally a matter of method. It involved using archival information or antique hardware in order to intimate lost historical truths about music we thought we knew. Accordingly—a bit like the ideology of the so-called Urtext edition—this frequently meant “scrubbing clean”: the intervening history of performance or changing technology was always seen as the problem—the hiss and crackle that one had to rub out to get at the real thing. Early music meant purity and nakedness!

But I think it’s clear now—and especially clear to the folks who run early music festivals, actually—that “early music” is as much an ethos as a method (and here I think of a tradition that might include England’s oratorio culture, Mendelssohn’s Bach revivals, or the various early twentieth-century neo-classicisms). More than anything else, it seems to me that the various “early music” turns throughout history have tended to disrupt and de-center what we thought we knew. They have not (of course!) found definitive answers to questions of historical performance as much as they have revealed the contingency and ephemerality of all performance traditions. The effect can be very freeing: the music doesn’t have to sound this way—we can come up with great reasons for experiencing it differently, because all the canonical music we love has a long, long history of having sounded very different from the music we think we know. That’s the vision of “early music” I would endorse: an ethos committed to creating possibilities; the idea that knowing about earlier performance practices doesn’t foreclose or limit our musical choices, but offers still more of them.

If one of the selling points of the performance practice movement of the mid-20th century was the argument that romanticism had messed with our minds and our ears, and as a result, our natural access to Baroque gestures was lost, one would surely think that the argument of a broken tradition does not apply to the 20th century and Debussy. So what reason would there be to look backwards over

Cortot’s and Michelangeli’s shoulders for an “earlier” approach?

I think it is clearer than ever now that the pofaced “purity” of the generation of postwar “historical performance practice” pioneers had a great deal more in common than it may have seemed with the high-modernist (and anti-romantic) styles of performance and composition that became fashionable in the 1950s and 1960s. The suspicion of romantic sentimentalism or any aesthetic of expression was a basic instinct among musicians such as Boulez, after all.

One could easily argue that (say) Cortot’s performance aesthetic had more in common with practices that extend far back into the nineteenth and even eighteenth centuries—his conception of rhythm and gesture, his flexible vision of what a musical text is, his necessarily greater comfort with the more plural piano ecologies of the time (he would have played on a lot of Pleyels, for example), and his core assumption, hardly different from C.P.E. Bach’s, that the performer was an orator whose basic duty was to move somebody. The modernist purism of some has, in my view, tended to obscure a more radical tendency among all early music practitioners—to make things messier, not neater; more expressive, not less; more flexible, not more rigid. Go talk to any modern pianist in a conservatory about the kinds of things their teachers tell them. It turns out that, if anything, the modernist notions of the second half of the twentieth century have made us deaf to Cortot!

Early music thus has arrived at a repertoire and at composers, of which and by whom we actually have recordings made at the time the music was new. There are even some piano rolls recorded by Debussy himself. What do these recordings tell us?

People argue about what they tell us. But it’s certainly unsettling. Like a lot of people, I had a piano teacher at a conservatory who constantly told me to “play what the



Nicholas Mathew

composer wrote.” When, aged twenty or so, I finally heard recordings by Bartok and Prokofiev, I couldn’t believe my ears! Were they not playing what the composer wrote? Or maybe... just maybe... we simply didn’t know how to read what they had written. Prokofiev, it dawned on me—as it has dawned on generations of young pianists who have heard his playing—wasn’t a “Russian pianist”! Where is that relentless, motoric style we’re used to nowadays? Instead, we hear something rhythmically supple, oriented towards an intimate, expressive articulacy, and highly (gulp) “romantic” in style. Clearly, this was a different vision of what a text even is, and what notation even tells us.

Now, Debussy’s piano rolls are rather more ambiguous: some people would like to say that the “primitive” reproduction technology at his disposal changed his playing, and that we can’t draw any conclusions from it (certainly his wildly expressive tempo changes are pretty startling). But when has reproduction technology not changed people’s performance styles? My inclination is to say that Debussy’s recordings are a resource no different from an “early music” classic such as C.P.E. Bach’s *Versuch*: not a series of prescriptions that we can understand unproblematically, but a text that we have to grapple with in order to get inside a world view very different from ours: a wholly different conception of what a performer’s role is when faced with a text.

It seems to me that the one area where we in fact have something of a broken tradition in the 20th century is the world of the piano. True, many modern pianists are increasingly considering alternatives to the otherwise ubiquitous Steinways, but still—the variety of pianos in Debussy’s time that were considered concert-worthy was far greater. So here we address technology, and techniques to tackle this technology, as well as ways to re-learn to listen to the results. How and for whom is this interesting, or important?

Well, I think my preferred take on the “early music” ethos is to say that variety, as opposed to uniformity, is surely a good in itself. In the late twentieth century—and particularly in places such as Berkeley CA—the practice of “early music” (along with folk music and ethnomusicological performance) went hand in hand with political outlooks that were instinctively skeptical of the uniformities and monopolies of global capital (of which the Steinway is a good example), and more interested in the homemade, the local, and the culturally diverse. Yes, this may seem a world away from the austerity of

Hindemith or Leonhardt—and in a way it is—but “early music” has also long been about quirky antiquarianism, tinkering garden-shed experimentalism, and the idea that one can dream up “alternatives” to the musical mainstream (without this, nobody would ever have bothered to build a replica of some old Walter piano in the Smithsonian). But where we have only few playable examples of pianos from the 1780s, we still have lots of beautiful examples of instruments from around 1900. Why not play them and see what they have to offer? They won’t be around forever, and, to me, vanishing technologies are rather like all the vanishing languages around the world: with them goes not only the particular textures of a culture, but an entire mode of expression. What was Debussy using to express his musical ideas?

If we now replace the safe platform of a known “black” piano and its well-adjusted pianist with various “brown” pianos and a necessarily more experimental approach to playing them, how does this change our approach to the scores?

It doesn’t necessarily change our approach to playing scores, but I think it makes a changed attitude more likely. If you practice on a different instrument, you tend to get different ideas, tend to develop a different conception of the music. Change only one element in the complex configuration of text, performer, audience, instrument, and all of sudden all kinds of things are up for grabs: what a slur or dot means, what a tempo or pedal marking means, what a musical gesture feels like, and so on. It seems to me that a uniform musical technology (the Steinway) frequently gives piano students the impression their job is simply to play The Music, which means following all the orders correctly. There is little room here for the idea that a score may be a recipe for a moving performance, which could be very different each time. And our vision of what a score means, even down to the smallest detail, is surely transformed when we start (as C.P.E. Bach did) from broad questions of atmosphere, stance, and affect—the aesthetic “worlds” that performers ought to create. So the premise of this whole enterprise is less to treat Debussy’s scores or his “recordings” as exclusive sources of authority, than to take inspiration from them, as Lubimov has done—the inspiration to elaborate musical performances on his early twentieth-century model.

You mention Alexei Lubimov, world-renowned pianist and historical keyboard specialist. I am vividly recalling his mind-blowing Debussy performance at Westfield's Forte/Piano festival in July 2015 (which, incidentally, addressed many of these same themes in a pioneering way). Lubimov will—as part of the Debussy study day—perform on a 1901 Bechstein owned by UC Berkeley (June 8, Chevron Auditorium, International House — 2299 Piedmont Ave, Berkeley). What is it that ties Debussy to Bechstein?



Alexei Lubimov

Debussy (and Ravel, actually) were nuts about these Bechsteins. Debussy had a Blüthner at his home for most of his professional life, but he endorsed Bechstein pianos several times. There was a general recognition in his circle that these were special instruments, and their reputation at the time was greatly advanced by close ties to the British royal family (the Wigmore Hall, of course, used to be the Bechstein Hall). In fact, the company was well placed to achieve a global monopoly by the middle of the century—but it was World War II, and the politically unsavory connections of the Bechstein family, that ruined the company's reputation. Bechsteins of the sort that Berkeley owns are thus a particularly exquisite example of the most admired turn-of-the-century piano technology. It seems odd to me that the modernist ideology of *The Music Itself* or *Pure Music*, somehow thinkable apart from the instruments and mediums that have produced and reproduced it, ever stuck to Debussy, of all composers. This is a musician, after all, credited with placing the parameter of timbre at the front and center of his music—a master orchestrator and manipulator of

sound. One would have thought that the technology he used to explore his distinctive sound worlds would be of enormous importance to us. After Chopin, and perhaps Clementi, Debussy is one of the ultimate piano composers, a composer whose music would be unthinkable without the affordances of a piano—the kinds of resonance and gestural nuance it makes possible. The light but fluffy hammers of the Bechstein, its distinctive balance of bass fundamental and treble, would surely have been among his inspirations.

What are some other highlights of the colloquy?

The idea here will be to explore what “early music” means in relation to Debussy, to interrogate the status of his early “recordings,” and to better understand the nature of piano playing and piano pedagogy in early twentieth-century France. George Barth from Stanford is known to many of us as wonderful pianist and writer, an expert in the meaning of historical recordings and how they change our notions of musical text. Daniel Seyfried is an exciting young pianist-scholar who has recently completed an ambitious project about piano pedagogy and piano practice in Debussy's circle. The singer Rebecca Plack, from the San Francisco Conservatory, has spent her career studying vocal style and technique on early recordings, and will help us to consider Debussy's music in the broader context of early twentieth-century performance. Desmond Sheehan, finally, will explore how the “ethos of early music” is related to the aesthetic values of Debussy's music.

Thank you very much for this interview!

Information about the Debussy colloquy can be found at <http://www.berkeleyfestival.org/westfield> .

—*Tilman Skowronek*





The Organ in the Global Baroque
Conference † Concert Festival
In honor of the late Jacques van Oortmerssen

An artifact of global culture produced by international networks of artists, artisans, traders, & adventurers.

Presented by the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies with support from Cornell University and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

An international all-star cast of performers and scholars will gather in Ithaca, New York this September 6-8 for the Westfield Center's 2018 Fall conference, co-sponsored by Cornell University. Concerts and talks over three days will explore *The Organ in the Global Baroque*, while honoring the achievements and legacy of the late Dutch organist and teacher Jacques van Oortmerssen. Please mark your calendars and plan to join us!

Performers will include Philipp Christ (Germany), Hans Davidsson (Sweden), Matthias Havinga (The Netherlands), Shinon Nakagawa (Japan), Anne Page (UK), Atsuko Takano (Spain), Wim Winters (Belgium), and, from the USA, Edoardo Bellotti, David Higgs, Ilona Kubiaczyk-Adler, Annie Laver, Kimberly Marshall, William Porter and Annette Richards. Keynote speakers Andrew McCrea and John Butt will introduce the themes of the conference, and additional talks will explore the dissemination of organ culture within Europe, and from Europe to Asia and the Americas in the long 18th century and beyond.

The conference focuses on the baroque organ as an artifact of global culture, produced by international networks of artists, artisans, traders, and adventurers. Organs were instruments of trade, exported from Flanders to Spain, from Hamburg to Brazil in the 16th to 18th

centuries. And just as these instruments embodied and participated in global musical and material networks, so too did the 'baroque organ' in the 20th century, with the creation—especially in Asia—of landmark instruments built in historically informed styles that fostered new organ cultures.

In parallel with conference sessions exploring these ideas, recitals on Cornell's early 18th century German-style organ, original Italian baroque organ, and clavichord, will circle around the idea of a 'global' baroque, while focusing, too, on the particular legacy of the teacher of a generation of organists around the globe, Jacques van Oortmerssen.

The full schedule will be posted at www.westfield.org/global-baroque,

where registration

is open and much information is already available. Space is limited, and we would love to welcome as many Westfield members here as possible, so please register early! As an added bonus, early September is the perfect time of year to visit Ithaca, New York. We hope to see you in September.

—Annette Richards



The Cornell Baroque Organ



Jacques van Oortmerssen
Photo: Hester Doove

ANNOUNCEMENTS



As part of the Berkeley Festival and Exhibition, San Francisco Early Music Society and Valley of the Moon Music Festival are co-sponsoring the first ever *Berkeley International Early Piano Competition*. The final round of the competition will be a free public concert on June 7th at 11 am in Hertz Hall on the UC Berkeley campus. The winner will receive a financial prize and a paid performance with Valley of the Moon Music Festival.

This competition will be a great opportunity to hear the three finalists, all of them extremely talented and accomplished young pianists with a special interest in performing Classical and Romantic music on historic instruments. If you can stay for a short time after the concert concludes, you will hear the results live from the jury. Please come hear this unique event on June 7th!

-- Eric Zivian, Music Director, Valley of the Moon Music Festival



The annual meeting of HKSNA (Historical Keyboard Society of North America) will be held at the University of Michigan, May 9 - 12. The meeting's theme, "Professionals and Amateurs: The Spirit of *Kenner und Liebhaber* in Keyboard Composition, Performance and Instrument Building," hopes to inspire exploration of an idea that has been important in the rebirth of historical performance and instrumental design and construction. Selected instruments from the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance, the Stearns Collection, and private collections will be featured in this meeting. Three and a half days of morning and afternoon events (Wednesday afternoon to Saturday) will include papers, lecture-recitals, mini-recitals, and an exhibition of publications, recordings, and the work of contemporary instrument makers. A highlight of this meeting will be a retrospective concert featuring selections from award-winning compositions from the past nine Aliénor International Harpsichord Composition Competitions over the past thirty-five years.



Matthew Bengtson and Joseph Gascho are directing the second annual University of Michigan Early Keyboard Institute (UMEKI), June 3 - 8, 2018. UMEKI is an intensive 6-day experience focusing on harpsichord and fortepiano, offering daily masterclasses, chamber music, midday lectures, and performances by both students and faculty. This year's theme is *Ornamentation, Variations and Improvisation*. Solo repertoire is focused on music of the Couperin family (for harpsichord) and music of Haydn and Mozart (for fortepiano). Collaborative repertoire will include classical four-hands repertoire and basso continuo on harpsichord with guest instrumentalists and singers. This workshop is open to keyboard players regardless of their specific experience with early instruments. Primarily intended for collegiate level musicians, the institute also welcomes amateurs and young professionals for an immersion in early keyboard performance.

https://smt.d.umich.edu/special_programs/adult/harpsichord.htm



HISTORICAL PIANO SUMMER ACADEMY

CONCOURS RÉVOLUTIONNAIRE

ORPHEUS INSTITUTE, GHENT (BELGIUM), JULY 3 - 12, 2018



The Orpheus Institute in Ghent, Belgium is holding its first Historical Piano Summer Academy. Directors of the workshop are Tom Beghin (also the PI of a research cluster at the Orpheus Institute) and Erin Helyard (University of Melbourne, Australia). Special guests will be Jeanne Roudet (Université Sorbonne, Paris) and Frédéric de La Grandville (Université de Reims). Eight participants have been selected: Hannah Aelvoet (Belgium), Domitille Bès (France), Luca Montebugnoli (Italy/France), Liselotte Sels (Belgium), Joshua Villanueva (USA/Canada) and Akkra Yeunyonghattaporn (Thailand/Canada).

The ten-day workshop consists of two components. Choosing an instrument that matches their interest (from a collection of Stein, Walter, Erard, Longman/Clementi, Broadwood, and Graf fortepianos) participants will have a chance to develop and present their individual artistic research. In addition, both as teachers and as players, we will explore the new historical reality of a concours as it took form in the early years of the Paris Conservatoire (1797-1807).

What did it take to win a *premier prix*? The Parisian journal *Le pianiste* asks in 1833, “Who of us does not recall that Clementi’s [Sonata in C] Opus 33 [...] was solemnly banned from the *concours* at the Conservatoire because it always made the person who played it win the prize?” At an institution that made professional

performance its core educational business, the confusion would have been both novel and unavoidable. Judges would have wondered: which or who dazzles us more—the accomplished performer or the competition-tailored composition? That it was sometimes the teacher who wrote the *concours* piece, to show off the prowess of the student he had trained, would have added to the ambiguity.

Showcasing our newly built replica of an 1803 Erard, we will hold a *concours révolutionnaire* at the Orpheus Institute on July 11, 2018. Participant-“competitors” will prepare “prize-winning” sonatas (i.e., sonatas that yielded actual first prizes) by Cramer, Clementi, Adam, Hérold, and Zimmermann, as well as Hummel’s Fantasy Op. 18, Variations by Adam, and (including a piece that did not result in the winning of a prize) a sonata by Hélène de Montgeroult. The “winner” will be chosen on the basis of collectively agreed upon historical criteria, which we plan to distill from Louis Adam’s 1804 *Méthode de piano*, the piano department’s official textbook. In this exercise of historical role-playing everyone wins—through seminars, workshops, and performances.

Several of these, and especially the *grand concours*, will be open to the public. For more information, please go to <http://www.orpheusinstituut.be/en/historical-piano-summer-academy-2018> .

-- Tom Beghin





The Westfield Center relies on donations from its members. Please consider making a donation towards our program of conferences, festivals, publications and the support of young keyboard artists.

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

Submissions and questions may be directed to:

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