Westfield

Newsletter of the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies
Volume xxx, Number 4

A National Resource for the Advancement of Keyboard Music
Serving Professionals and the Public Since 1979

Winter 2020

Stephen Craig, Editor

As Winter comes to a close, we warmly welcome readers to discover the new projects that the Westfield Center along with its associates are developing; the conference *Beyond Beethoven, 2020-1770*, at Cornell from September 17-20, is at the top of this exciting list. In the previous newsletter (Fall 2019) the new space, 726 University Avenue, at the Cornell Center for Historical Keyboards was announced. Malcolm Bilson's collection of historical pianos will be featured here and for the above mentioned conference. He has kindly provided us an insight into his enthusiasm for collecting these fine instruments.

Tilman's interview with Joel Speerstra delves into the "Creative Keyboards" project, which was featured in the Göteborg International Organ Festival program in 2019. Thank you for sharing this fascinating initiative!

The Organ Historical Society invites applications for its 2020 OHS Research Grant. More information is given below.

An essential part of this newsletter is for members to share their own happenings. The deadline for pieces for the next newsletter in Spring is Friday, May 15th.

—*Stephen Craig*

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From the Desk of Kathryn Stuart, Executive Director

Although it's still winter, the lengthening days and an occasional appearance of the sun here in Oberlin is wonderfully promising. And the Westfield Center along with the Cornell Center for Historical Keyboards are hard at work developing exciting and inspired programs for the 2020-21 season. I am happy to mention one: *Beyond Beethoven, 2020-1770* at Cornell from September 17-20, 2020, a conference and concert festival to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth. According to the Westfield website, "the programming will explore keyboard culture around the edges of, in the shadows below, on the distant horizon from the monument that is Beethoven." Annette Richards gives us more detail in her piece below.

You may remember reading about the September 6, 2019, opening of the Cornell Center for Historical Keyboards in the Fall 2019 Westfield newsletter (http://westfield.org/public/newsletters/Newsletter_30-3.pdf). Wonderful photos of the instruments in the collection are posted at https://music.cornell.edu/keyboard-collection. In addition, I am confident you'll enjoy (and be inspired by) Malcolm Bilson's account of the history of the piano collection that chronicles his interest in these instruments beginning in 1969.

This newsletter also includes a fascinating interview by Tilman Skowroneck of Joel Speerstra about his "Creative Keyboards" project. In this piece, Tilman skillfully draws out Joel about the three parts of the project that include a claviorgan, a duo clavichord and, finally, new music for the North German organ. In each of these three cases, the instruments are based on historical models, "but the goal was to extend them with new design elements."

—*Kathryn Stuart*

Beyond Beethoven, 2020-1770

Conference and Concert Festival

Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, September 17-20, 2020

Cornell Center for Historical Keyboards and the Westfield Center

For music-lovers, 2020 is going to be full of Beethoven, marking as it does the 250th anniversary of the composer's birth. Here at Cornell, with our collection of period keyboard instruments and our scholarly strengths in the music of the long 18th century, we felt that we couldn't let the year pass without joining in the celebration. Yet as we wondered about what we might do, various voices hinted that perhaps, by the second half of the year, our ears would be saturated, such that we might, in fact, be calling out, to quote the master himself, "Nicht diese Töne": "Not these sounds"!

But of course we want those sounds too. And so, our decision that our fall conference and festival, jointly with the Westfield Center, would feature *Beethoven*, and yet—crucially—it would go *Beyond*. We want to explore keyboard culture around the edges of Beethoven, colored and crowded by the indomitable monument that is "Beethoven," and hovering in the long shadow cast by that figure well into the late 19th century and on to today. Our goal is to think about the music, ideas and practices that informed the keyboard culture of Beethoven's day, but also to go beyond, in terms of time and place, politics and aesthetics, performance and ideology.

We're just now in the process of planning a full program that will include concerts, lecture-demonstrations and talks that place Beethoven's music in new historical and contemporary contexts, rethinking questions of influence and impact, production and reception, and touching on a multitude of topics, including later 18th-century keyboard culture (Haydn, C. P. E. Bach and precursors), composers and performers in Europe's urban centers (and rural satellites) around 1800, Beethoven's contemporaries and students, later 19th-century disciples of Beethoven, 20th- and 21st-century responses to (and even rejections of) Beethoven, and the global dissemination and transmission of Beethovenian sounds.

The festival will make full use of the diverse collection of historical keyboards at Cornell, and we are just now

putting in place a varied roster of performers and scholars—with many new faces as well as old friends. Contributors already confirmed include Tom Beghin, Matt Bengtson, Malcolm Bilson, Xak Bjerken, Christina Dahl, Nicholas Mathew, Alexander Melnikov, Stefania Neonato, Tomasz Ritter, Petra Somlai and Andrew Willis—and there will be many more. September is one of the most beautiful times of the year in Ithaca, NY, and we can promise a wonderful time for all of our friends and colleagues. We hope you will join us to go *Beyond Beethoven*. Please mark your calendars now!

—*Annette Richards*

The Piano Collection at the Cornell Center for Historical Keyboards

A History

By Malcolm Bilson

When I encountered my first historical piano in 1969, a "Mozart piano" by Philip Belt (the word "fortepiano" had not yet come into general use), it rather took me by surprise, and not a particularly pleasant one at that. I had imagined an "old" piano to be much mellower and sweeter than today's instruments; this one was light and quick and clear (and a bit hazardous to control). But after practicing on it for a week (towards a Mozart concert, for after all it was a *Mozart piano*), I began to realize that many of that composer's specific markings of expression that are virtually never realized on modern instruments were suddenly quite possible and, more than that, wonderfully expressive on this instrument. And I ordered one.

But one bite of forbidden fruit inevitably leads to hunger for others. I eventually started buying later instruments as well. This bad habit has continued to the present day with the purchase last year of an 1865 Pleyel and a commission this year of a 1749 Gottfried Silbermann by Paul McNulty (as I write almost complete).

In the early 1970s, a talented young builder named Thomas McCobb went to work in Philip Belt's shop while Belt was restoring a 1784 Johann Andreas Stein fortepiano; McCobb built himself a very good copy. In 1972, he offered it to Cornell and we got our first fortepiano for the department. Then, in 1980, a generous gift from alumnus Otto Doering allowed us to commission McCobb to build the first Conrad Graf copy anywhere. Interest in these instruments slowly developed among students, both undergraduate and graduate.

In the mid-80s, we instigated a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in 18th-Century Historical Performance. At the time, the three members of the Amadé Trio (Sonya Monosoff, baroque violin, John Hsu, baroque cello, and myself) were giving masterclasses all over the world; it therefore seemed logical to introduce a professional degree here at Cornell. As our DMA candidates worked their way steadily into the early 19th century and later, "18th Century" eventually disappeared from the title, and the program has now been extended and transformed by my colleagues Xak Bjerken, Annette Richards and David Yearsley into a DMA in Critical Keyboard Studies extending into the 21st century. The number of distinguished musicians that have traversed all parts of this program, from everywhere in the world, have given Cornell a musical reputation that is widely recognized and admired.

The new Cornell Center for Historical Keyboards offers the opportunity for everyone to study and experience firsthand the long history of keyboard instruments and their music. The Center's goal is to foster original and imaginative approaches to the performance and study of keyboard music and instruments in festivals, workshops, concerts and masterclasses. Crucially, the Cornell Center supports our longstanding relationship with the Westfield Center and will enable that collaboration to continue and strengthen, as Westfield's national and international networks of performers, scholars and instrument makers continue to bring their expertise to keyboard studies at Cornell.

The instruments are somewhat scattered across campus. In addition to the magnificent Arp Schnitger-style organ completed in 2010—a collaborative project with the Gothenburg Organ Art Center, under the direction of project designer Munetaka Yokota—at Anabel Taylor Chapel, there is an 18th-century Neapolitan organ and a 1940 Aeolian-Skinner at Sage Chapel, an 18th-century style chamber organ at Barnes Hall, along with a Wolf harpsichord and various pianos (when they are not at Lincoln Hall or the Center's new room at 726 University

Avenue—a periodic rotation of instruments between the venues is anticipated). The collection currently in the room at "726" includes a Friederici clavichord copy made by Dietrich Hein in 2017.

At present we can boast the following pianos: a Thomas McCobb copy of a 1784 Johann Andreas Stein, Paul McNulty copies of a ca. 1800 Anton Walter and 1815 Johann Fritz, a Rodney Regier copy of an 1824 Conrad Graf, an original 1799 Broadwood, an original 1825 Wilhelm Leschen, and an original 1835 Joseph Simon. By summer 2020 we will have an original 1824 Graf and the Paul McNulty Silbermann. Although all so-called "modern" pianos are based on the Steinway model developed in the United States in the 1860s and 70s, there were contemporary competitors to that recipe. We have acquired an 1865 Pleyel, an 1868 Erard (both straight strung), an 1870 Schweighofer and an 1878 Blüthner "Aliquot grand." With our collective musical thinking of today, true lines of demarcation between all these instruments have gradually grown fainter.

From September 17-20, 2020, we will celebrate the instrument collection and the Center in a conference and concert festival, *Beyond Beethoven, 2020-1770* (see separate article on the Festival).

—*Malcolm Bilson*

Tilman Skowroneck Talks to Joel Speerstra about the "Creative Keyboards" Project

Tilman: Joel, you are reaching the conclusion of a tripartite research project about historical instruments and their affordances (or about making "something new using historical ideas and models," as you phrased it during a recent seminar).

Joel: Thanks Tilman! Yes, the research project is called "Creative Keyboards: Old Keyboard Instruments with New Affordances." The last decades have seen so much progress collectively in our understanding of how to reconstruct keyboard instruments from previous centuries. So what do we do now? Can we start to play with these historical models, keeping the sound qualities and performance characteristics that we love, and adding experimental functionality?

The three instruments in the study are all based on historical models, but the goal was to extend them with new design elements. It's important, I think, to stress that these new design elements don't exceed the aesthetic frame of the original models. Adding electronic extensions would be an example of stepping outside the aesthetic frame of the original model, allowing a vast new field of affordances to open up, like what has been done with the SINOA technology that allows a remote keyboard to be able to manipulate the organs in the Orgelpark in Amsterdam.

The idea behind this project was to try to stay close to the essence of the original instruments, but inspire people to explore them in new ways, and try to trace a kind of map of creativity. Under what conditions do creative people start to use instruments in ways that they were not designed to be used? When they do that, what will they find? And will the new things that they find actually help us to understand the old models in new ways?

I have a few questions about each of the project's three parts. Let's begin with the claviorgan that was built by Mats Arvidsson for Göteborg Baroque in Gothenburg, incorporating a one-manual German harpsichord by Andreas Kilström. This quite unbelievably magnificent instrument was inaugurated in February with the ensemble, and then the international inauguration happened last October during the Göteborg International Organ Festival (a 36-minute lecture-presentation can be found at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZZr9NuzVGo).

Yes, and we are developing a website called "Creative Keyboards," where we are going to try to present the whole history and design process of this instrument, and share the rest of the project too. It will, hopefully, launch later this year.

Now, claviorgans have been around in historical performance practice for a while, albeit sporadically. Usually they consist of one or another kind of harpsichord stuck on top of a small chest organ and made to sound simultaneously or separately by means of a coupler mechanism.

The claviorgan built by Mats Arvidsson for Göteborg Baroque at Varnhem, Sweden.
Photo: Jon Liinason

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Right, but that modern solution isn't as good as many historical ones. The modern solution of putting a harpsichord on top of a chest organ gives you an organ sound that speaks at floor level, already a problem for sound dispersion in the bass notes, and then the pipes speak backwards, away from the audience and under the harpsichord. This solution affords easy transportation, but not much else, compared to an organ with a façade.

What really inspired Göteborg Baroque's conductor Magnus Kjellson to design this new instrument was his experience using the North German Baroque research organ as a continuo instrument. The split sharps gave him so much flexibility in continuo playing in meantone, and the speaking quality of an organ with a façade affords a completely different control over the ensemble.

Having control of both the harpsichord and organ continuo resource also affords the conductor a precision in continuo playing that is harder to achieve with two separate keyboardists following a conductor, but having high-quality sound dispersion from an organ with a façade was most important. He really wanted the North German organ, but portable!

What is it that makes this particular instrument special and, indeed, magnificent?

When Magnus knew he wanted a portable continuo organ with a façade that spoke from the back of the ensemble, he discovered that Händel solved the problem in exactly the same way. Händel ordered an organ with a façade and a so-called long movement so he could sit at the harpsichord several meters in front of the organ in the middle of the ensemble. That organ is lost now, but the idea was the model for Mats to build a new long-movement continuo organ.

What other ideas were incorporated to lead to this quite exceptionally grand design concept?

There's a lot we could discuss! But the most innovative, I think, is Mats's solution for a keyboard with 18 notes per octave, but a normal keyboard with only 12 keys per octave. The windchest design with three layers of sliders is based on an organ contemporary to Händel by Parker in Edinburgh. Using these extra sliders, three levers to the left of the keyboard can reprogram all of the sharps and a few of the naturals so that the meantone keyboard can be played in almost all keys.

If we talk about the claviorgan's affordances for the keyboardist-conductor, we are perhaps first of all thinking about its ability to provide musical guidance to an ensemble, due to the central placement of the player and because of its acoustical presence. Were there other things you had in mind when embarking on this project? And, more importantly: did the finished instrument surprise you in any way?

The instrument consists of an organ at the back, a harpsichord two meters in front of that, and a 16-foot pedal reed built into the detached console under the harpsichord. We were curious whether all three of these elements would feel like one instrument. One of the big surprises was that it actually works much more like three continuo instruments distributed evenly through the ensemble, each of them helping a different part of the group, and each of them, of course, completely in sync with one another.

Joel Speerstra and Ulrika Davidsson at the duo clavichord.
Photo: Sven Andersson

Another surprise is only just starting to be unpacked. Edoardo Bellotti played the solo inaugurations, including his own transcription of a Vivaldi concerto (that is available for free download as part of our festschrift for Kerala Snyder, by the way: https://www.goart.gu.se/publications/festschrift_kjs) and after his second concert he stood in front of me with his arms open and said "Joel, I have to come back to this instrument. It makes me want to rethink everything." It wasn't designed as a solo instrument, but it is raising some very interesting questions about 17th-century solo keyboard repertoire.

Let's talk about the second part of your project, the duo clavichord. What is a duo clavichord? What does it do?

Ulrika Davidsson and I had been playing repertoire for two clavichords for many years, and it was always difficult to find a way to position two clavichords so that we could both see and hear each other at the same time! The idea grew out of experimenting with two clavichords without their lids so we could place them with their backs to each other. That seemed to be the best solution. When I started looking at models to build two clavichords in one case, I just got enchanted by the idea that in Silbermann clavichords, the outside edges of the lowest and highest keys are perpendicular to the long side of the case. Most other clavichords have keyboards that crank to the left to make more room for longer strings in the bass and treble. But in a doubled Silbermann the mirrored keyboards across from one another would make a perfect square in the middle of the instrument! Then I had no choice. I had to build it…

Again, this instrument is new in realization but not entirely new in concept. What were your expectations when you made this instrument?

We thought that we were going to continue to work on repertoire for two keyboards. That's why we built it, of course. But the instrument afforded some other things that were a surprise. We were not counting on the attraction of an instrument that looked like it needed two people to play at all times. That led to students and colleagues sitting down and improvising together at a rate that had never happened before around here. A primary affordance of the instrument is that it is physically always holding space for musical dialog to happen…

Together with Ulrika Davidsson, you have performed and recorded on the duo clavichord, gathering new information from this new instrument. In which direction has this experience taken you?

Well, the other major surprise was that we didn't work on any of the repertoire for two keyboards. We did a project with the *Goldberg Variations* because we discovered by accident how satisfying it was to be able to shape the canonic voices in those variations in ways that are really so much harder for an individual musician to do. That's, I think, why we were drawn to working with the *Art of Fugue*. The instrument actually works as a single acoustic entity in some complex ways. I designed the instrument so that there was an opening from the soundboard on the opposite side to an open space with a grill over it on the left side of the keyboard. The design was to maximize being able to hear the opposite player's instrument as clearly as possible. The surprise affordance is that the bass notes sneakily took advantage of the whole case, without asking permission. We only proved this in the recording session that the bass notes of instrument A were actually stronger in the treble of instrument B and vice versa. This multi-hierarchy of balances creates a stronger illusion that you are hearing a kind of clavichord string quartet.

The next project is actually going to be to experiment with some string quartet music!

The third part of your project involves new music for the North German organ. Is this simply about new music for a would-be old instrument or are there other, more technical "new" aspects to this enterprise?

The North German organ is not as new as the other two instruments in this project. It's actually already celebrating its 20th birthday this year. It is a great example, though, of a strict research project into a historical model carried out with scientific rigor: in this case, the pipe work of Arp Schnitger's organ for St. Jacobi, Hamburg, and the case from his organ for the Lübeck Cathedral. Understanding and reconstructing the materiality of those objects and the working processes that created them was the main aim. But from the beginning, this instrument stepped into the realm of extended design because it has split sharps on all manuals, something no Schnitger organ ever had, in order to afford us the opportunity of playing the great concerted church music of Hamburg from the middle of the 17th century. Adding design elements to an instrument in a way that still respects their aesthetic frame… this has always been a complicated concept to explain in words, so much easier to understand when you are exploring the affordances of the object.

Viewing this project—again—in terms of affordances, what are the findings? What has a Baroque organ to offer when used, or modified, in this way?

Hans-Ola Ericsson created a Mass for this instrument when it was inaugurated in 2000, and he has always wanted to come back and compose for the instrument again, because he finds the achievement in sound quality so fascinating. The wind system, with its 12 wedge bellows and trunks that can be reprogrammed into all of the documented Schnitger wind systems, has not previously been explored from an artistic research standpoint. We created a way for him to mechanically control the closing of the main valve, millimeter for millimeter from the console, and also a wind pressure gauge at the console so he could see exactly what pressure the wind system was producing in real time. At all kinds of wind pressures, Hans-Ola found sounds for his new composition that no one has

Detail showing the device we built to allow Ericsson to close the Hauptventil one millimeter at a time.
Photo: Joel Speerstra

ever heard before, and the main reason is that these very high-quality Schnitger-replica pipes afforded that. Those sounds were already there, waiting to be heard.

All three projects are going to be presented in detail in recordings and essays on the "Creative Keyboards" website later this year, and we are looking forward to designing some new projects in the future to go deeper into how the materiality of the old instruments that we love can inspire us to new creativity for the future.

The Organ Historical Society Research Grant

The Grant. In support of its mission to celebrate, preserve, and study the pipe organ in America, the Organ Historical Society invites applications for its 2020 OHS Research Grant. An annual grant of up to $2,000 is authorized by the Society's Board of Directors and administered by the Publications Advisory Committee. The award supports research projects related to the pipe organ in America in all its aspects — the instrument's builders, construction, history, styles, reception, composers, repertories, performers, performing practices, and more. The grant may be used to cover travel, housing, and other research-related expenses.

Eligibility. There are no restrictions on eligibility. The Society encourages all interested persons to apply.

Application requirements. There is no application form. Applications must be in English and should include:

- a cover letter;
- a curriculum vitae;
- a proposal not to exceed 2,000 words containing a description of the proposed project, including a statement of objectives, a plan for conducting the research, a description of phases of the research already completed or in progress, and an estimate of the time required to complete the project;
- a budget showing anticipated expenses associated with the project, including those to be funded by the grant;
- a list of other granting agencies to which the applicant has applied or expects to apply to fund the research, and amounts awarded or requested;
- two letters of recommendation sent directly (under separate cover) to the OHS Publications Advisory Subcommittee, addressing the merits of the proposed project, the suitability of the applicant to carry it out, and the likelihood of its successful completion.

Preference is given to projects which include the rich resources of the OHS Library and Archives (OHSLA) housed primarily at the Stoneleigh estate in Villanova, PA. Applicants who intend to use OHSLA holdings should submit a list of these materials in the proposal. Depending on suitability, the recipient of the Grant will be encouraged to submit her or his work for publication in *The Tracker* or with the OHS Press, and/or to present aspects of the research in a public forum such as the annual convention of the Society.

Submissions and deadlines. Applicants should submit their materials electronically by November 1, 2020, and the Fellowship recipient will be announced on or by December 15, 2020. An OHS Research Fellow should expend the award within eighteen months of its receipt.

Send application materials or inquiries to:
Christopher Anderson, chair, OHS Publications Advisory Committee
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