

assessment of this builder's work. Other topics covered included the work of David Way, and the early revival of the fortepiano.

The presence and participation of Philip Belt at the meeting was especially heart warming for all present. The MHKS made a special presentation to him in recognition of his pioneering work on the revival of the fortepiano. Belt had brought along a newly built piano (quite beautiful, and skillfully played by Michael Tsalka), as well as a separate pedal piano—something he intends to make his specialty now.

Another exciting event at this meeting was the participation of the first recipient of the Ben Bechtel Award. This award allows a young scholar or performer to attend the meeting cost-free, and honours the contributions to the MHKS of longtime member and Treasurer Ben Bechtel. Performer and scholar David Kim, a student of Malcolm Bilson, gave a fascinating talk on articulation markings in Schumann, followed by an exciting and seasoned performance of *Papillons* on a piano by Rodney Regier after Conrad Graf.

An important part of these meetings is the mingling of performers, scholars, and builders in a way that really is not possible at larger meetings, such as BEMFE. The exchange of ideas happens over the course of three days, during which time we are not only treated to great music and ideas, but to excellent food and fellowship, as well. Next year's meeting takes place 21 to 24 May in Iowa City, Iowa, and will focus on the music of Buxtehude and Scarlatti. Scheduled performers include Pieter-Jan Belder, Delbert Disselhorst, and Craig Cramer. www.mhks.org

Two views of The Boston Early Music Festival 2007

A View From the Fringe of the Fringe by Grant Colburn

The Boston Early Music Festival 2007 was for me a head first dive into a brave new early music world. As one living in Green Bay, Wisconsin—a *mecca* for football, beer and bratwurst but hardly early music—it was my first exposure directly with the heart of the beast. I was asked to the festival by Gavin Black, director of the Princeton Early Keyboard Center to play some short recitals of my harpsichord works.

I arrived in Boston on Monday, and on Tuesday met my first room mate, Frans Muller, recently arrived from Holland. Frans is the author (along with his wife Julia) of the essays "Completing the Picture: The Importance of Reconstructing Early Opera," which appeared in

Early Music, and Purcell's *Dioclesian* on the Dorset Garden Stage. After some friendly conversation I headed to the expo center only to find that the exhibition didn't actually open until Wednesday. So I headed bravely out with my fringe concert schedule and site map in hand. The first concert I attended was "Dances and Doubles" by the leaders of the baroque Chamber Orchestra of Colorado with Cynthia Miller Freivogel (violin) and Frank Nowell (harpsichord). It included the works of Bach, Buxtehude (for the 300 anniversary of his death) and Heinrich Biber, particularly his works in alternate tunings known as *scordatura*. The performances were brilliant and fiery though warm humid day and broken air conditioning in the hall may have contributed just a bit. The one thing that Boston definitely has going for it is beautiful locations for concerts. This one was in the main room of the Goethe Institute.

The next recital I was the favourite of mine for the entire festival, "Restoration: The Music of Henry Purcell's England." The songs were preformed by Kathryn Aaron (soprano) and accompanied by David Walker (archlute) and Joshua Lee (viola da gamba). A particular standout was the anonymous 16th-century *a capella* song, "The Death of Queen Jane," a sadly moving performance. In that dark church the outside modern world seemed fade away for just a few moments. By now it was time to meet up with my host Gavin Black and join in some harpsichord moving. I also met John Burkhalter III of the *Practitioners of Musick* ensemble. John and I in particular hit it off immediately due to his love of the music of colonial America and the English baroque. With my own obsession for the English baroque needless to say we had much to talk about!

After delivering Mr. Black's prized 17th-century anonymous Italian harpsichord and 1785 Longman and Broderip spinet to their new temporary home, I was off to see some of the historic sights of Boston. The next day brought about the official opening day for the exhibition. It was then that I could finally see all the work that had been put in by everyone involved. The harpsichords were dominated by the presence of Zuckermann and the Harpsichord Clearing House rooms, which were filled with harpsichords, clavichords, and even lute harpsichords, but sadly no fortepianos to be seen. David Black also noted the lack of baroque cellos finding only one 5-string in a sea of viola da gambas (including electric gambas complete with headphone jacks for private practicing).

My listening experiences for the day were mostly short recitals performed in the Princeton

Early Keyboard Center's room. Mr. Burkhalter and the brothers Black performed many recorder solo sonatas and pieces of England and colonial America, as well as other small ensembles throughout the day. I also learned, with Princeton's room being on the ninth floor, the meaning of patience as the four elevators seemed to reach our floor about once every 20 minutes and by then almost filled to overflowing. Oddly enough the stairs were out of the question, due to their being kept locked except for going to the ground level for fire purposes.

My own performance was to be a rather unique and ironic thing for an early music festival: newly written baroque and renaissance music being played on instruments two to three hundred years old! But the audience was appreciative and supportive, and for me it was a revelation to hear music I'd written in mean tone and other non-equal temperaments.

Thursday morning I played another short recital, then attended a talk by John Burkhalter on the recently discovered Neff Manuscript, the largest known repository of keyboard music in early Federalist Period America. The intimate lecture also included musical examples played by Gavin Black. We were able to examine the hand written volume close up.

My final fringe concert was *Cartoline d'Italia* (Postcards from Italy) a concert by *Ensemble La Strada* which included Arlene Travis (voice) Marie Dalby (viola da gamba) Grant Herried (theorbo, lute and voice) and Alexandra Snyder (harpsichord). Set in a beautifully gilded and white marbled room at the Boston Center for Adult Education, the concert featured music from 17th-century Italy including Allesandro Stradella, Francesco Rognoni, and Barbara Strozzi. It was the female composer that I found the most interesting, and the programme notes described "her ability to shift from measured to unmeasured sections and triple to duple meters; often melismatic treatment, and the poetry being the most important aspect." Also on the programme was a harpsichord sonata by Domenico Scarlatti played by Ms. Snyder. Though the piece was admirably performed, one did get the feeling that it was thrown into the programme at the last minute from Ms. Snyder's previous repertoire.

Throughout the festival the talk centred around this year's big excursion into baroque opera, *Psyché* by Jean Baptiste Lully. Unfortunately, I had to make a decision because also on Thursday was a performance by the Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra & Chorus of *The Judgement of Paris*, an ode by John Eccles. As I mentioned before, I have a strong attraction to

music of the English baroque so Britannia won out. Stephen Stubbs and Paul O'Dette (also the directors of the opera) led an energetic and at times humorous performance of Eccles' piece. Originally one of four odes written to the same text, *The Judgement of Paris* was part of a competition put on in 1700 for which composers Daniel Purcell, Gottfried Finger and the young John Weldon (a student of Purcell's) each submitted a work. Weldon won the prize with Eccles' setting taking second. Today many wonder about the results though the general consensus is that while Eccles' Ode is highly admired today, it may have been considered somewhat old fashioned at the time. The second half of the concert featured incidental music from various operas by Rameau. This music, though pleasant, couldn't help but seem a bit of a letdown after the dramatic solos and choruses of the first half.

As Friday morning arrived I had time for one further excursion, a symposium led by Messrs. Stubbs and O'Dette on the challenges of mounting Lully's opera *Psyché*. I stayed for two of the allotted four hours and was amazed at the difficulty involved in such a production, beginning with the fact that there were several wildly varying versions of the opera. I had known from previous discussions with Mr. Muller that his felt that for all its attention to period instrumentation, costumes and machinery, the opera lacked what for him was the primary ingredient for accurate period opera: moveable and changeable scenery. So I knew what was coming. One could sense almost a moment of dread as Frans asked his question. Surprisingly enough the directors of the opera had to admit that Frans was correct; that due to there still being few modern concert stages deep enough for scenery changes, it was the one element where they had to break with history.

From the perspective of one being on the fringe of the fringe concerts, I found my experience to be one of wonder at the diversity and variety of people and music available at the Boston Early Music Festival. One couldn't help but hear from many of the "good old days" of the festival when previously there were over 20 harpsichord builders attending rather than the nine of this season. Many blamed the high cost of participating along with the transport of such large instruments over land and sea. The conspicuous absence of Hubbard harpsichords was remarked about in particular, especially considering their location so close to Boston.

As with most things today, profit invariably seems to drive the existence of such an event. This is perhaps unavoidable but one would hope to

perhaps create a balance between profit and providing a well rounded experience to the festival goer. The cost to the festival participants is significant, though to go to the exposition for a day costs only \$5. I for one would be willing to pay a higher entrance fee to see a bit more of the actual history of music provided with displays of period instruments, first edition books, original manuscripts and the like. It would be a nice addition to the festival to draw museums and collectors to share their items with an interested and enthusiastic public, perhaps with the possibility to donate towards the upkeep and preservation of such a valuable part of our musical history.

But this is a trifling quibble to what was a grand and memorable experience for me. One must admire the organisation and expertise it must take to assemble all the various parts into a complete week long package of music, craftsmanship and art. And though the two years between festivals may seem like a long time for those of us impatient to return, I am sure for those directly involved in the planning, the clock is already away ticking fast.

A view from an Exhibitor at BEMF *by Gavin Black*

I have had what I think is a somewhat unusual relationship to the Boston Early Music Festival. I have been to every Festival since 1989, always, until this past one, as a visitor. But I have actually never gone to any concert, recital, lecture or other event there of which I was not myself a part. This does not mean that I don't think well of those events: I have always heard remarkably good things about the opera, and many of the other goings-on look really enticing. The problem is that I can never tear myself away from the Exhibition. I am sort of an Exhibition groupie. The instruments, the books, the music, and, especially, the chance to bump into people I know whom I don't see very often, are all irresistible. (In 2005 I came the closest to actually attending a recital. It was in a harpsichord builder's room, and it was something fascinating, but I had only half an hour until I had to leave, and there were some rooms I hadn't visited yet!).

At this past Festival, I found myself present as an exhibitor, having decided to take a room on the ninth floor on behalf of the Princeton Early Keyboard Center, where I teach. The plan for this room was twofold. We brought two very interesting antique harpsichords – one unsigned and undated but clearly from Italy circa 1700 and the other a Thomas Culliford-built Longman &

Broderip spinet from 1785 – with a view to letting visitors inspect and play those instruments. We also scheduled many short recitals and lecture/demonstrations in the room, going for as much variety as we could muster. We ended up with lute songs, solo lute, all sorts of chamber music, renaissance consort music, solo harpsichord, clavichord, and organ, music for the Chinese instrument known as the *qin*, modern harpsichord music played by the composer, and more. There were seventeen events in all, and each was about half an hour long.

For me this was tremendous fun. I got to do some playing and a lot of listening, and I had the pleasure of meeting and talking to many people who visited. There was modest, steady traffic through the room, less modest and more steady on Friday and Saturday than earlier in the week. Our events on those two days were all "standing room only", whereas the ones earlier in the week drew smallish crowds. (There were rumours that the slowness of the elevators prevented some people from deciding to visit the ninth floor at all.

I believe that the organisers are mindful of this problem as they plan for next time). There were, unfortunately, two sides to the heavy scheduling that we had done in our room. I can't think of anything we did there that I would have wanted to cut: far from it. However, visitors who wanted to play our instruments had less time to do so than they or I would have wished. We kept having to interrupt informal interaction for scheduled concerts, rehearsals, tuning, or warming up. I will have to muse in the coming months about how I can juggle these things more effectively another time.

Of course, I discovered that my role as the proprietor of an exhibit did what the enticement of many concerts had never been able to do: it prevented me from seeing very much of the Exhibition. (Several harpsichord builders whom I saw there had made the opposite transition from mine. They had decided not to exhibit, but to come as visitors, in part so that they *could* see things outside their own rooms! There was apparently a bit of an overall reduction in the number of exhibitors as compared to earlier years. This is also something that I gather the organisers are aware of and planning to work on for next time). I could only sneak away for a few minutes at a time, so I saw very little. Mostly I soaked up the hectic and joyous feeling created by hundreds of people who love early music going to and fro hoping – and expecting, with good reason – to bump into something exciting around each corner that they turn!