

# JUBILEE SYMPOSIUM OF HET NEDERLANDS CLAVICHORD GENOOTSCHAP IN LEIDEN, 28 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2012

by Dorothea Demel

**T**HE Nederlands Clavichord Genootschap (NCG) offered an international symposium in the historical center of Leiden from 28 to 30 September 2012 on occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary. Under the title “Extraordinary Clavichord Sounds—Amazing Variations in Clavichord Building and Playing,” about fifty participants experienced a choice of exceptional highlights, including workshops, clavichord concerts, talks, the presentation of more than twenty clavichords made by renowned instrument makers, a dinner, and a city walk through the picturesque old

university town Leiden. Here Rembrandt van Rijn was born and lived. Gerrit Dou, who is known for his painting “A Young Lady Playing a Clavichord,” also called Leiden home.

## Friday 28 September

During the “Praeludium,” a workshop held by Pieter van Dijk and Erik van Bruggen, seven active participants had the choice of three (!) pedal clavichords for their performances; two by Dick Verwolf (Leiden; Netherlands) one by Sander Ruys (Netherlands). The instrument in meantone tuning



*Pieter van Dijk and Erik van Bruggen teaching a student at a pedal clavichord by Dick Verwolf.*



*Der prallende Doppelschlag in concert.*

had two manuals (each after Leipzig No. 16) and was of the seventeenth-century type; the pedalboard was after an organ by Arp Schnitger, Groningen, 1697 (with the D played by the C-sharp key). There was also a one-manual pedal clavichord after Johann David Gerstenberg, Geringswalde (Leipzig No.23), tuned in Werckmeister III temperament. The pedal clavichord by Sander Ruys had a manual after Adam Gottfried Oehme, Freiberg, about 1760, and a pull-down pedal keyboard after Gerstenberg. It was tuned in Silbermann temperament. The participants learned a lot from Pieter van Dijk (The Netherlands) and Erik van Bruggen (The Netherlands) about how to produce good tone, about body alignment and anticipated pedal-playing, the use of both manuals mostly in trio sonatas and choral playing.

In his words of welcome, the president of NCG, Barend Kraal, outlined the history of the Nederlands Clavichord Genootshap as the first clavichord society in Europe. Others, such as the BCS and the DCS, followed. He reminded us of the honorary members of NCG, including Nelly van Ree, one of the founders of the NCG, who died in 2010, and Gustav Leonhardt, who died in January of this year. Kraal said that the title of the “Extraordinary Clavichord Sounds–Amazing Variations in Clavichord Building and Playing” explains itself.

He invited the participants of the symposium to experience the exceptional highlights with eyes, ears, fingers and feet.

The concerts took place in the Lokhorstkerk, and the other activities, including coffee and tea breaks, in the nearby *Ars Aemula Naturae* (a painter society). Both buildings date from the seventeenth century.

In the opening concert, the famous duo “Der prallende Doppelschlag” (named after an ornament by C.P.E. Bach) Menno van Delft (The Netherlands) and Siebe Henstra (The Netherlands) played in perfect coordination on two unfretted clavichords made by Geert Karman (Portugal) after C.G. Friederici, Gera, 1765 (Leipzig No. 30). At the beginning and the end of the concert, Duettos (in C and E-flat) by Johann Gottfried Mützel (1728–1788) were played. The precise and expressive playing of the duo made the listener forget how difficult to perform these almost “mad” pieces are. The second part of the concert, dedicated to keyboard music from 1460–1620, started with pieces from the *Buxheimer Orgelbuch* performed by Siebe Henstra on a triple-fretted, seventeenth-century type clavichord made by Geert Karman. Then Menno van Delft joined again with a double-fretted clavichord after Leipzig No. 9 made by Andreas Hermert (Berlin), and the duo played several arrangements followed

by the solo piece by J.P. Sweelinck (1562–1621) “Soll es sein“ (Polish allemande) played by Menno van Delft. The duo also performed an arrangement of “Caecilia Motette” by Cornelis Schuyt (Leiden, 1603), an organist from Leiden. The public thanked the performers with standing ovations. The encore, a Rondo, the second movement of a duo in A Major by Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach, was written in a completely different style.

The concert was followed by the presentation of the jubilee anthology of sheet music compiled by Kees Rosenhart (The Netherlands), one of the founding members of NCG. It contains nine eighteenth-century pieces by different composers from South and Mid-Germany and the Iberian Peninsula (S. Schmiedt, G.P. Telemann, C. Seixas, A. Soler, F. Jacinto, D. Scarlatti; J. Th. Cramer, B. Holzapfel, J.W. Hässler).

A reception with drinks and finger food followed to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of NCG.

### Saturday 29 September

On Saturday morning, Pierre Verbeek (Belgium) presented a fascinating paper about his investigation of the clavichord in the “Urbino intarsia” (c. 1479) in the *studiolo* of the Ducal Palace in Urbino. The small *studiolo* is decorated with intarsia that seem to be three-dimensional. To understand the construction principle, Verbeek studied the writings on perspective by Leon Battista Alberti (*Della Pittura*, 1435–1436). With these findings he was able to take precise measurements of the intarsia and to produce from them a technical drawing of the instrument reflecting the exterior and interior dimensions of the clavichord, including the keyboard, bridge, strings, tangents in form of staples, fretting scheme, and tuning (Pythagorean temperament). Verbeek made a fine replica instrument, and Jos van der Giessen delighted the public by playing on it the piece “Constantia” by an anonymous composer.

Luk Vaes (Belgium) started his paper titled “Extended Techniques in Clavichord Playing” by talking about techniques already used in the eighteenth century on the

clavichord, such as tone clusters and glissandos, which are often used in war pieces (such as the harpsichord pieces by Dandrieu “Les caractères de la guerre,” 1724), Pierre Claude Fouquet (ca. 1750), Claude Balbastre (“La cannonade,” 1777) or Christoph Moyreau (“Appolon vient les exterminer,” ca. 1753). Vaes explained the different techniques Rust used in his G Major “Sonata per il clavicordo all’ imitazione de Timpani, del Salterio e del Liuto, comp. da F.W. Rust 8 ber 1792.” Rust noted that this sonata could be played in this manner only on a simple clavichord. Rust also explained in his introduction to the sonata the following techniques: timpani, muted timpani, psalterium, pizzicato (plucking of the strings as on a lute or guitar), lute tone or harmonique tone (in which the index finger of the right hand dampens the strings, while the left hand plays the appropriate notes, producing a fine lute-like sound an octave higher in pitch). No other pieces for clavichord from the period using such techniques are known. It was a great fun to listen Vaes perform Rust’s sonata using all of these new techniques, playing a clavichord after Johann Heinrich Silbermann, Strasbourg 1775, made by Stefan Claessens (Belgium).

More than twenty clavichords in the exhibition were presented, including instruments by Ton Amir (The Netherlands), Gregor Bergmann (Germany), Stefan Claessens (Belgium), Andreas Hermert (Germany), the Hohner Co. (Germany), Geert Karmann (Portugal), Martin Kather (Germany), Eckehart Merzdorf (Germany), Susanne Merzdorf (Germany), Sander Ruys (The Netherlands), Pierre Verbeek (Belgium), Koen Vermeij (The Netherlands) and Dick Verwolf (The Netherlands). The program booklet featured exemplary descriptions of the clavichords which, under the guidance of Koen Vermeij (yes, you are right, he wrote the *Hubert Clavichord Data* book), were presented in two sessions. The first was dedicated to pedal clavichords, the small clavichords already played in the opening recital, and the Cembal d’Amour. Erik van Bruggen played improvisations on two of the previously mentioned pedal clavichords (by Dick Verwolf and Sander Ruys). Making a pedal clavichord is a



Clavichord after the Urbino intarsia by Pierre Verbeek.



*Luk Vaes demonstrating extended techniques.*

new project of Martin Kather, who had finished the two manual clavichords by the time of this meeting. The upper instrument was modeled after Hubert, and the lower after Horn. “Der prallende Doppelschlag” played on them a trio sonata by Johann Ludwig Krebs. Susanne Merzdorf, at present chief instrument maker and owner of the Merzdorf workshop, presented the Cembal d’Amour made by her father, Eckehart, in 2003. The Cembal d’Amour is a fret-free clavichord with two soundboards and double string length. The tangents divide the strings in the middle. It was invented by Gottfried Silbermann, Freiburg, in 1721. Merzdorf’s Cembal d’Amour has a greater keyboard range than Silbermann’s, so Merzdorf had to find a compromise between string length and size of the instrument. Thus, the strings are relatively short and thick. Almost all makers of the Cembal d’Amour have struggled against unexpected sound-effects caused by the conflicting vibrations of the two string halves as divided by the tangent.

The second part of the instrument presentation was dedicated to the three Hubert instruments and the three instruments after Johann Heinrich Silbermann, Strassbourg. It was not possible to find common features in the sound of the Hubert clavichords, and even when one of the instruments was played by different players its sound was completely different.

Gregory Crowell’s (USA) talk, entitled “Exceptional Clavichord Building outside Europe,” featured the development of (mostly) American clavichord culture in four parts: exceptions of history, decoration, construction, and use. Three old Moravian clavichords are still preserved. Laurence Libin found in one of them the signature of David Tannenber; previous to this discovery, only two drawings of a clavichord by Tannenber were known. Another flourishing clavichord culture was in Mexico, e.g., the clavichord in the National Museum of the Viceregal Period in Tepotzotlán. Arnold Dolmetsch’s clavichords were played by Ralph Kirckpatrick as well as his student Elisabeth Bishop, who wrote a poem probably inspired by the instruments of Arnold Dolmetsch. Under Dolmetsch’s influence, American instrument makers such as John Challis, William Dowd and Frank Hubbard started to make clavichords. Crowell played a recording made by him and Larry Palmer on a 1906 Dolmetsch clavichord in a duet with a louder, brighter-sounding clavichord from 1939 by Dolmetsch’s student, John Challis. To overcome problems with the American climate, Challis experimented with soundboard materials, including even aluminum. Crowell presented the poem “Tune for an Ill-Tempered Clavichord” by the American humorist poet Ogden Nash to show the popularity the clavichord had gained in America by the 1950s. Crowell showed

photographs of exceptionally decorated clavichords made by Peter Owen and Rutkowski and Robinette. Gary Blaise made a keyboard with black naturals and sharps, as well as a completely green clavichord. As an example of a clavichord made with South American wood, Crowell showed a clavichord after Tosi that he made together with Bruce Bush. The fate of the clavichord made by Franciolini from the collection of the Metropolitan Museum to its present home in the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, was described. Crowell explained the construction principle of the Cembal d'Amour made by Lyndon Taylor. There is still a rumor of a recording of it by one of the "world's finest players," which will be released soon. The first attempts of the electric amplification of clavichord sound in America were made by David Way and Lyndon Taylor. Edelan has made an entirely aluminum clavichord. Oscar Peterson, Keith Jarrett, and Charlie McGary have produced recordings featuring exceptional clavichord sounds.

The owner of the Merzdorf Cembal d'Amour, Christian Brembeck, fell ill, so Miklós Spányi played the Saturday night concert on the Cembal d'Amour. He made us feel that this instrument belongs really to the group of instruments described with the word *amour*. The sound was sometimes really silvery, as it was described for the original "Cimbal

d'Amour" made by Gottfried Silbermann. He played the "Suite auf das Lautenwerk" (BWV 995) and the Aria variata in A minor (BWV 989) by J.S. Bach, and an early sonata by C.P.E. Bach. The works were cleverly chosen by Spányi; the disadvantage of the instrument's producing unexpected sounds, especially in the bass region, was minimized.

The late evening concert was played by Jan Raas (The Netherlands), one of the founders of NCG. The first piece—a tribute to John Cage (1912–1992), master of silence—was the Prelude 2'16.5": silence interrupted by four clavichord tones. Somehow, after this piece one could better listen to the following pieces from Karlheinz Stockhausen's "Tierkreis 12 Melodien der Sternzeichen." Then Raas played an interlude, an "Improvised Exploration of a Clavichord with Extended Techniques," followed by "The Well Fretted Clavichord," a composition in appreciation of Koen Vermeij, and for the new clavichord he made for Raas in 1985 (a five-octave instrument in equal temperament). With fine articulation he played some pieces from *Mikroskosmos V* by Béla Bartók. Lothar Bemmman proposed for the "Improvisation on a Theme Given by the Audience" all playable letters from the names Barend and Martha [Kraal]. The audience was pleased by this very nice improvisation. The evening was finished with the song "Lang zal hij leven." The audience was asked to



Menno van Delft demonstrates the Cembal d'Amour by Eckehart Merzdorf.

sing, but not as loudly as the clavichord. This was an evening with really extraordinary clavichord sounds.

### Sunday 30 September

The paper by Huw Rees (Great Britain), “The Funky Clavinet: An Electrical Clavichord,” described a very exceptional clavichord. Rees gave an historical overview, followed by technical aspects and musical examples of the clavinet. In about 1955, in the famous Hohner musical instrument factory in Trossingen, Germany, the engineer and musician Ernst Zacharias invented the cembralet, the pianet and, finally, the clavinet. These were intended as cheap keyboard instruments, and were all made to perform Classical and folk music. The clavinet has a genuine clavichord mechanism: The tangents, with tips of rubber, hit the strings, which are pressed to a metal surface. The vibration of the strings is turned into an electric current by electro-magnetic pickups. When the key is released, a yarn dampens the string. The instrument has tuning pins for its sixty strings. The instrument requires electrical amplification. A number of different models were released, among them Clavinet L, N, D6 and the Clavinet Duo, a combination of a Clavinet L with a Pinanet L. The clavinet sound became very famous from 1956 to 1968, though not for Classical music, but for pop and rock music. There were numerous clavinet recordings, one of the most famous was Stevie Wonder’s song “Superstition.”

The clavinet was often used for layering and is not so well suited for melodic playing.

The final concert on Sunday afternoon was played on the three pedal clavichords already described. The first section, with music by Georg Böhm and Dietrich Buxtehude, was played on the double-manual, seventeenth-century type pedal clavichord. Pieter van Dijk (The Netherlands) played Böhm’s chorale prelude “Vater unser im Himmelreich” with great tenderness and very clear articulation in manuals and pedal. It sounded really heavenly. He then played only on the manual clavichord of Sander Ruy’s Oehme copy a Partita and the Chaconne in G by Böhm. On the Gerstenberg pedal clavichord he performed J. S. Bach’s “Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten” (BWV 691) and, in a fascinating manner, the Passacaglia in C Minor (BWV 582).

After the final concert Barend Kraal invited the participants to the “Fuga,” with coffee and tea in the front room of the church. In the “Postludium,” organ lovers took part in an organ-playing workshop held by Leo van Doeselaar (The Netherlands) in the Pieterskerk.

Extraordinary sounds, fine clavichords, extraordinary talks and much more—thank you, NCG, for organizing this wonderful weekend to celebrate your twenty-fifth anniversary.

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Clavichord after C. G. Hubert, Ansbach, 1789, by Gregor Bergmann.