

Illustrated lecture and recital at Andover Methodist Church

PROGRAMME

FIRST OF ALL here is Bach's 1st prelude which I think many of you will know.

GREEN BOOK

1. BACK 1685-1750.
No. 17. Bourree. to let you hear the lower registers.
2. No. 10. Next a piece by WILLIAM BYRD. He was born before Bach and was one of the greatest English musicians of the 16th century. This is called ROWLAND.
5. No. 18. FRANCIS COUPERIN 1668-1755 was a Frenchman and a contemporary of Bach. He was organist of the Royal Chapel in the reign of Louis 14th. He was also a celebrated harpsichordist. I doubt very much if he played this little piece on the Royal Chapel organ. It is called "Les Coucous" - The Cuckoos.

BROWN BOOK

4. Page 26. Now a little dance called Alman or Allemanae. It was written by an anonymous composer but it is Elizabethan.
5. Page 56. Another, also anonymous called "A Toy" - in other words, a small, trivial thing.
6. Page 57. Galliard is another form of dance. This was written by Giles Farnaby who lived before Bach. It is called "His Rest".

SONGS

As I said earlier, the clavichord was used as an aid to singers. I think in the same way it makes for greater sensitivity in the singer as it does to the player. Anyway, I find it a great help, particularly when working on the Lutenist or Elizabethan songs which I'm sure you will have gathered by now is my favourite period of music! These are all 16th century.

First, two by Thomas Campian.

Page 18. 1. "I care not for these ladies"

Page 44. 2. "Break how my heart and die"

Page 85. 3. JOHN DOWLAND "If my complaints could passions move."
One of the greatest Elizabethan poets and song-writers.

Clavichord Lecture / Recital

Your Secretary has asked me to give you a small talk on the clavichord. Those of you who know the instrument and its origins must bear with me while I offer, very humbly, my side of the story. I say humbly, because I speak as one who for a certain period in my youth, thought a clavichord was something to do with the collar-bone. I have since, needless to say, changed my view, but I have also come to realise what an awful lot there is to know about it, and it is difficult to know in fact where to begin.

It's history goes back 500 years and is one of the earliest keyboard instruments. It was very popular and well within the range of many people because of the simplicity and therefore relative cheapness of its construction. It is a percussion instrument like the present-day piano, but unlike the piano, where several bits of ironmongery, wood and other materials in the action come into operation in order to produce a note, the keys of the clavichord come into direct contact with the strings. In other words, at the end of the clavichord keys there is a metal tangent which hits the string when the player depresses the key. The very early clavichords had very short keys and the player of to-day would find the fingering most awkward. The players in the 16th and 17th centuries used the 2nd and 3rd fingers when they ascended and the 1st and 2nd when they went down. The thumb and 4th finger were rarely if ever used. Those of you who play the piano would find this most amusing to try out!

The dampers are down this end in the form of felt wrapped round the strings and the soundboard is to the right of the player. Incidentally, it is rather interesting to note that this modern instrument's soundboard has been specially made to withstand the effects of central-heating. Apparently many clavichords of to-day are exported to America. This model has 4 octaves.

On seeing the keyboard of a clavichord for the first time one is at once aware there is something different about it. It doesn't look quite as it should - not like the piano keyboard at all. And then one realises it is because all the naturals are black and the accidentals white. These keys are made of ebony or holly wood and their fronts of carved box-wood. The accidentals are faced with ivory. Ebony keys went out of fashion at the end of the 18th century. Some early instruments were indeed very highly decorated having beautiful paintings on the inside of the lid and sometimes the keys were inlaid with mother of pearl. The early strings were made of brass. These are phosphorised bronze. Very much earlier strings were made of hessian or gut. This case is of walnut, but-it could also be made in mahogany, rosewood or teak.

Most of us have heard the story of Handel practicing at night in the attic on an ancient clavichord. Most of us have wondered how his family failed to hear him as he played in secret against the wishes of his father. After hearing a clavichord the reason is abundantly clear! Arnold Dolmetsch describes the tone as resembling the humming of bees it is so delicate. And Jakob Adlung, a contemporary of Bach said: "A good clavichord is sweeter and more heart-stirring than any other instrument. It is indispensable for study. Whoever has learned it can easily play the organ and harpsichord". Handel insisted that beginners of keyboard instruments should learn on the clavichord rather than on harpsichord or organ. In the mid-15th century it was very much in use as an aid to the singer, and early references to this instrument are in connection with the voice. The choirmaster of Lincoln Cathedral in 1477 was appointed to teach the boys the clavichord. After the end of the 16th century in England its popularity waned, and its use practically ceased. J.S. Bach "I liked best to play upon the clavichord." His son C.P.E. Bach favoured it thinking the pianoforte far too coarse. The piano is generally believed to have been first invented in 1700 by Cristofori, but Arnold Dolmetsch discovered one early genuine example of 1610.

Organists made use of the clavichords for the purpose of practising organ pieces - a great convenience when churches were unheated and organ blowing depended, in large instruments, on the services of several men. The clavichord accordingly was often fitted with a pedal board attached by trackers to the underside.

Before I play anything for you, I would like to tell you that Ralph Kirkpatrick one of the kings of keyboard instrumentalists referred to the clavichord as "that fiendishly difficult little instrument." Well, if a real expert can say that, you can imagine how I regard it, even though I'm so fond of it.

Incidentally, this evening very nearly didn't happen because a string snapped yesterday when I was tuning up and it was only at the last moment I was able to get a replacement string from Winchester. It isn't quite the right sort of metal, but it will have to stand in until I can get the right thing from London.

Since the clavichord is not an instrument for the concert platform and can only be heard satisfactorily by a small number of people, you will have to sit very still and very nearly stop breathing in order to hear. But the pieces will be short ones, so it won't be too much of a strain!