

Mechanical Musical Instruments and Historical Performance Conference 7 and 8 July 2013.

Musicologists are very concerned about performing music from earlier times in the twenty first century as nearly as possible as the composer would have liked to have heard it. Consequently academic papers are produced using the manuscripts and conducting scores with annotations, to try to understand the composers intentions. Yet we all know that what appears on paper is only the outline of an instruction to a musician who would have been thoroughly trained to turn the squiggles on paper into a musical performance. Today's musicians, however "authentic" the instruments used, (I don't speak here of singers as this is another whole subject) cannot be certain that they are reproducing the performance practice of past times.

Fortunately there still exist devices that would have played music from the 16th century up to the 19th, before the invention of acoustic or electronic recording devices, where it is possible to hear music with embellishments and tempi as the composers would possibly have heard them and from which we are able to inform ourselves to be able to perform early music appropriately.

In 1983 *Early Music* (Volume 11 No. 2) devoted a substantial part of an issue to papers on the subject. There were four significant papers by Arthur W A G Ord-Hume, David Fuller, Rachel Cowgill and William Malloch and two items of correspondence. Since 20 years had elapsed it was thought that there was enough interest to revisit the subject.

With the help of Guildhall Research Works, the research area of Guildhall School and Music and Drama a conference of 12 papers plus two keynote addresses was put together in the Lecture Recital Room.

Owing to indisposition of the curator of the Colt Collection participants where a visit had been planned delegates were invited to the British Museum where Mr Cooke, Curator of Clocks provided an excellent demonstration of some very interesting examples of musical clocks, some dating to the 16th century. The visit started with the a demonstration of several fine clocks on public display and then the visiting scholars were shown the musical clocks and music boxes in the storage area where the Curator has his office. Mr Cooke explained that the policy of the BM was not to restore Clocks and other devices but to ensure that as far as possible no further deterioration took place. One of the most impressive exhibits was a very large music box which although not in tip top condition, played an arrangement of *Casta Diva* as Bellini would have been able to hear it.

This was further enhanced by participation of the Music Box Society of Great Britain which provided an excellent collection of demonstrations of some historic objects in their collection.

The Keynote speakers, Mr Arthur W.A.G Ord-Hume and Dr Peter Holman provided two contrasting Keynote addresses. The first gave an historical background to the subject and the second a scholarly description of the literature and research sources for further study.

The papers were very wide ranging, from 17th century carillons where Dr van Eyndhoven and his colleague produced the "pinning scores" and sound clips from music from the time of Lassus and beyond with implications for other more conventional keyboard instruments to Mr Rex Lawson, an

impassioned champion of the pianola, now very much out of fashion, but a valuable record of music from the early 20th century. This was to some extent supplemented by Inja Davidovic studying the work of Vladimir de Paschmann (1848-1933) from piano rolls and early acoustic recordings.

Rebecca Wolf from The German Museum in Berlin described a digitisation project converting paper rolls into notation. This included descriptions of a machine dating from 1790 built by Joseph Merlin from London.

Some papers were very practical, for example John Norrback and Prof Jan Ling from Sweden described a restoration project of a magnificent 18th century flute clock where the external parts were in good condition but the mechanical parts had been removed. Others moved to the exotic. Dr Jon Banks from Anglia Ruskin University described Turkish tunes on English clocks from the 18th century.

Odile Jutten from The University of Evry concentrated on analysing Handel's Organ Concerto in F, Op 4 No. 5 from the Holland barrel organ in the Colt collection. It had originally been intended to pay a visit to this collection in Bethersden, Kent but sadly through indisposition of the curator this had to be cancelled.

Participants were asked to pay a small fee and funding was provided by the Institute of Musical Research and The Handel Institute. The Guildhall School of Music and Drama were very generous in providing the well equipped venue and doing publicity and conference packs and also lunch and tea at minimal cost. With some assistance from NEMA all costs were covered.

The Conference was very much enhanced with a display of fascinating instruments in the foyer put on by The Musical Box Society of Great Britain curated by Alison Biden. Their Web Site www.mbsgb.org.uk is very much worth a look.

In due course the papers will be available on the Web Site of the National Early Music Association www.earlymusic.info

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