

Alice Baldwin's DM Harpsichord Recital #3

Duncan Burnett (fl. 1614-1652)

Not too much is known about the life of Duncan Burnett, but he is one of very few Scottish composers of the Renaissance and early Baroque for whom we have extant music. All of his surviving music exists in a single manuscript, probably created by the composer himself around 1615, which is now frequently referred to as "Duncan Burnett's Book," though it also includes works of at least four other composers (William Kinloch, William Byrd, John Black, and Andrew Kemp). The *Pavan* on my program (which is not given a title in the manuscript) is one of three extant pavans by Burnett, none of which has an accompanying galliard, making them slightly unusual since that was a common dance pairing of the day.

Hugh Aston (c. 1485-1558)

Though considered to be musically innovative, the list of Hugh Aston's extant works is short and he has become an almost completely forgotten English composer. He graduated from Oxford with a Bachelor's degree in music in 1510, but moved around England after that time, holding various church and college jobs and eventually ending up in Leicester. There are around a dozen of his vocal works, including some Mass settings, still in existence, but only one work for keyboard that is graced by his name – *A Hornpype*. Another piece on my program – *My Lady Carey's Dompe* – is found in the same manuscript (Lbl Roy.App.58) and has been attributed to him based on stylistic grounds (which is additionally true for the piece *Lady Wynkfeld's Rownde*, also found in Lbl Roy.App.58). Both pieces I've chosen to play exhibit unusual chromatic alterations for keyboard music of the time and *A Hornpype* also includes very idiomatic writing for the keyboard, especially in regard to its incredibly large and rather humorous leaping sequences.

Hans Kotter (c. 1485-1541)

Hans Kotter is another composer who has fallen into obscurity. His greatest contribution to music is perhaps his involvement in the creation and copying of the three keyboard tablatures known as the "Ammerbach Tablatures," which contain some of his music, rather than his compositions

themselves. His *Kochersperger Spanieler*, however, is a wildly interesting piece which not only includes parallel fourths and fifths, but is essentially based entirely on them!

Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643)

Girolamo Frescobaldi was, without a doubt, one of the most famous Italian musicians of his era. He was considered to be a child prodigy and studied with Luzzasco Luzzachi in Ferrara, Italy (where Frescobaldi was born), before moving to Rome. In 1608 he became the organist at St. Peter's Basilica. Unlike many other composers of his time, his main focus was on instrumental, rather than vocal, music; eight collections of keyboard music alone were published during his lifetime, with more of his keyboard music being published posthumously. His *Fiori Musicali*, from which the *Bergamesca* on this program is drawn, is considered to be one of his most important works. The *Fiori Musicali*, which was first published in 1635, was one of Frescobaldi's last keyboard publications and contains music that is considered by many to have been strictly intended for use as service music (and, therefore, organ music) as part of the Mass. A number of pieces from the end of this collection work equally well on the harpsichord, however, including the *Bergamesca* on my program. The *bergamesca* itself is a type of dance and dance music was a genre less associated with the church than perhaps any of the other composition types found in the *Fiori Musicali*. Another tidbit worth mentioning is the line of text that is printed in the original edition at the head of the piece: *Chi questa Bergamasca sonara non pocho Imparera*, which translates approximately to "Whoever plays this Bergamasca will have learned not a little." This rather cheeky bit of text is not without precedent, however – Frescobaldi included a similar phrase at the end of one of the most complicated toccatas in his second book: *Non senza fatica si giunge al fine*, or "Not without fatigue will you get to the end."

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621)

One of the most important and influential musicians ever to hail from the Netherlands, Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck composed and published a great deal of music during his lifetime, including a large number of keyboard works. Unlike many musicians of his era, he lived the entirety of his life in one city – Amsterdam – and did not even travel to a great extent, holding the same job for forty-four years as the organist at the Oude Kerk (a position which had been previously held by his father, Pieter Swybbertszoon, and which Jan Pieterszoon passed on to his son, Dirck Janszoon Sweelinck). Despite

never leaving Amsterdam, he became widely renowned as a teacher and is considered the founder of the north German organ school, with pupils that included Jacob Praetorius, Heinrich Scheidemann, Melchoir Schildt, and Samuel Scheidt (among a myriad of others). During his lifetime his music also traveled much further than he did, with, for example, some of his compositions showing up in the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book* (from which I have drawn both pieces by him on my recital), which was created in England sometime during the decade leading up to 1620. The *Praeludium Toccata* on my program is characteristic of his toccata writing in its dominance of structure over free-form improvisation (unlike many toccatas from other countries, such as Italy), making extensive use of imitative figures. His *Ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la* fantasia also makes great use of imitation, but is a much more contrapuntally complex work, weaving the thematic material of the hexachord amongst other motives which are also treated imitatively. For a comparison of this *Ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la* setting to the other hexachord fantasia on my program, see the information below under William Byrd.

Bernardo Storace (fl. 1664)

There is only one surviving collection of Bernardo Storace's music: *Selva di varie compositioni d'intavolatura per cimbalo ed organo*. This collection is also the only source of information we have on the composer himself; it was published in Venice in 1664 and the title page lists him as the "vice maestro di cappella" to the senate of Messina, Sicily. Most of the compositions contained within the collection are variation sets, two of which you will hear on this program, both based on ostinato (i.e., repeating) bass lines – the Passacaglia and the Ciaccona. These two works are similar to each other in that the bass line patterns on which they are based are quite short in length, unlike the longer patterns used in the majority of Storace's other variation sets.

William Byrd (1540 or 1543-1623)

William Byrd is perhaps one of the greatest composers to ever come out of England and his works were generally viewed with as much reverence at the time of their composition as they are now. He was born in London and most likely was Thomas Tallis's student and, later, assistant at the Chapel Royal. Byrd's works are many and diverse and his keyboard compositions show the influence of old idioms infused with the spark of new genius. This is certainly the case for the work on tonight's program – one of his fantasias on "Ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la." The basic thematic material for this piece is, as its name

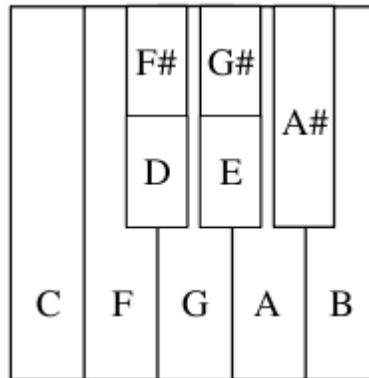
suggests, the hexachord (which is essentially equivalent to the first six notes of our modern scale). The hexachord appears in various guises throughout the work, but is almost always present in one form or another and serves as the basis for most all the composition's musical material, even in lines not strictly quoting the step-wise presentation of all six notes. In this way it differs from the Sweelinck fantasia on the same theme (the following piece on the program), which introduces motives, including the one presented at the very opening of the piece, not based on the "ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la" thematic material.

The Italian Harpsichord, the Split-Octave, and Quarter-Comma Meantone

A bit of information needs to be given about the harpsichord I'm using for this recital. It is modelled after an Italian instrument from around the time of Frescobaldi (the early to mid-17th century). Easily noticeable characteristics of Italian harpsichords that make them unique from harpsichords of other countries include that they are strung with brass (giving them a brighter, more strident sound than harpsichords strung with different wire), and they frequently have no lids and undecorated cases. One of the most intriguing (and useful) features of this harpsichord is its split-octave, which is common on Italian instruments from this period, but is not unique to Italy. The split-octave can be somewhat difficult to comprehend if you are unfamiliar with harpsichord, but it is something that can physically be seen on the keyboard, and so you are welcome to come look at the harpsichord after the recital if you would like.

A harpsichord with a split-octave has keys in its lower register that are actually split in half, with the front half playing a different note than the back half. On this instrument, the notes that are split are the bottom "F#" and "G#" so that the front half of the "F#" plays a "D" (and the back half plays an "F#") and the front half of the "G#" plays an "E" (and the back half plays a "G#"). Also, the note that looks like "E" is tuned to a "C" so that there is a full octave, even though the physical distance is shorter than a normal octave. (See the diagram on the next page.) This allows for two main advantages – (1) notes that are more frequently used in that low register are more easily accessible (on the front part of the accidentals), and (2) it allows for the easy playing of 10ths using those notes since playing a 10th using one of the split keys is only the physical distance of a Major 7th elsewhere on the keyboard. Many compositions from the era in which short-octave instruments were in fashion were written with use of the short octave in mind (making the compositions more difficult or even requiring changes on instruments without a short-octave), and the Storace pieces on my program serve as good examples of

this, making use of 10ths in the low register that would be impossible to play as written without the split-octave.



(from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Short_octave)

The other matter that must be mentioned is the tuning of this harpsichord, or its “temperament.” As musicians living in the 21st century, we often forget that equal-temperament (i.e., the temperament in which a piano is tuned) has not at all been the most commonly used tuning system throughout the history of music. Equal-temperament as a “standard” for tuning doesn’t exist consistently in any century prior to the 20th century, even though the knowledge of how to tune in equal temperament is several hundred years older; it appears to have not been used standardly earlier because it was deemed inferior to other tuning systems.

The most important thing to realize when we leave equal-temperament is that enharmonics no longer exist. In other words, on a piano an Eb is a D# – that black key between D and E functions equally well (or equally poorly) as both Eb and D#. This is because in equal temperament the acoustical space between half-steps has been evened out so that all the half-steps are proportionally equal to each other within an octave. This, however, is only true in equal temperament; in any other tuning system the distance between one half-step is not the same as the distance between every other half step. The short version of what this reality means for tuning is that in any temperament that is not equal, an accidental can be either a flat or a sharp, but not both. And since there is still only one key on the keyboard between D and E, for example, (or on this keyboard, at least. . . another issue for another day), that accidental can only be an Eb or a D#, but not both! This means that a decision about each accidental has to be made and what intervals will tune pure with that note when it’s played must be decided (i.e., how high or low a flat or a sharp is going to be). There are countless individuals in the annals of music history that have done just that, working out endless tuning systems for what they think sounds “nice,” or “spicy,” or “crunchy,” or whatever aesthetic they were looking for at the moment. Out

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Saturday, March 29, 2014

of this temperament jungle came some standard tuning systems, one of which is quarter-comma meantone (the temperament in which the harpsichord I'm using on this recital is tuned).

Quarter-comma meantone is constructed around the premise that C Major should sound the most in tune, and the farther away you go from C Major in regard to the number of accidentals in your key, the more out of tune it sounds. For example, G Major and F Major each have one more accidental than C Major, and so they sound *less* in tune than C Major, but *more* in tune than the keys with two accidentals: D Major and Bb Major. Composers who wrote for tuning systems such as quarter-comma meantone were very aware of these properties; none of the music on my recital, for example, centers around a key with more than three accidentals in it. This, by logical deduction, means that we can already determine what four of the accidentals on my recital harpsichord are tuned to: C#, Eb, F#, and Bb. The only accidental that is up for negotiation is the note between G and A; this is because by the time we've gotten to the Major keys with three accidentals – A Major and Eb Major – there is an overlap between the keys, and each wants to claim the note between G and A, with A Major needing a G# and Eb Major needing an Ab. The standard solution in quarter-comma meantone works out such that the key that more commonly appears – A Major – determines the accidental. So, indeed, that note is tuned to a G# on my recital harpsichord. However, this note is the most perilous one in this tuning system because it is the note most likely to be needed (based on what the composer has written) to be the accidental it is not, and, indeed, there is one single place in my program where I need an Ab and don't have one. It is in the piece by Byrd, and I absolutely guarantee that you will hear it in my recital – it is completely unmistakable!

So, if you made it this far in the program notes, first of all congrats on reading this tome, and secondly, let me know at some point in the future if you have any questions about all this tuning "stuff" (such as what is a "comma" anyways and what makes this temperament so quartery?). I hope you enjoy my recital!