
*Berichte von DCS-Mitgliedern über die 39. Clavichordtage der DCS
vom 02.–05. Oktober 2014 in Bad Krozingen.*



A Clavichord Conference in Germany
by Dick Reichman

Dick Reichman aus Anchorage/Alaska hat uns seinen Bericht, der in der November-Ausgabe von „Tangents“ (Boston Clavichord Society) erschien, dankenswerterweise zur Verfügung gestellt. Weil durch eine Übersetzung wahrscheinlich viel vom Charme des Originals verloren gehen würde, haben wir uns entschlossen, den Text so veröffentlichen, wie er uns erreichte.

The conference of the German Clavichord Society in October in Bad Krozingen this year was an eye opener for me. I am a sixty-nine year old piano tuner and harpsichord technician from Alaska who has been out of touch with the clavichord world for many years. In Boston in the early 1970s I built a couple of clavichords and subsequently acquired a couple more. Then I moved out West and finally to Alaska where I believe the only four clavichords in the state are in my house. So when I heard about the conference I jumped at the opportunity to go to Europe and catch up. My instruments are from the days when we used zither pins, lead weights in the keys and white listing felt stuffed between the string pairs. I saw no such unhistorical practices in Bad Krozingen where I learned much I had not known about period instruments and the features that made them more useful and musical. The conference was held in a small castle which houses the instrument collection of the late harpsichordist Fritz Neumeyer.

The collection is remarkable in that all the instruments are kept in playing condition and all are gorgeous sounding. Conference attendees could not keep their hands off them. We went from instrument to instrument playing the scraps of music in our fingers while trying to hear over the din of everyone else playing. Memorable for me were a robust sounding fretted clavichord from 1787 by Spaeth and Schmahl, a John Koster harpsichord after Zell with a golden treble, a delicate 1801



◆ *Mathieu Dupouy*

tangent piano by Schmahl, and most of all, four big clavichords after Friederici with lots of bass and long sustain. Two were by Martin Kather (surprisingly different from each other) and one each by Thomas Steiner and Benedikt Claas. I wanted to steal them all and take them home to Alaska.

Lectures and concerts continued throughout the long weekend. Since I am not a German speaker the lectures were mostly lost on me. But Germans, it seems, all speak English and there was no shortage of friendly people to tell me what was said. Given the quiet nature of clavichords, it was surprising that the concerts could be heard so well. They were easily heard and enjoyed with as many as fifty people in the audience. Not only were the instruments often quite loud, but the acoustics of the performance hall were bright and clear, only occasionally blurred by the sound of distant church-bells in the town outside.

Two concerts were played by the wonderful Mathieu Dupouy. He brought poetry and power to the music of Emanuel Bach and his contemporaries, reminding us of the easy-to-forget fact that they were avant-garde composers in their time. Reading from tablature, Michel Bignens played music of the 15th and 16th centuries, music that was new to me. His performance was intimate and touching. His instrument, after Pisarenensis by Sander Ruys, was very small. It had a discontinuous bridge (in three segments) and sounded glorious despite the fact it looked so primitive. I was later amazed to learn that it was fretted in such a way that it could be tuned entirely in octaves. Maria Bayley took us back to the Renaissance with a heartfelt concert on the same clavichord. She also played a pretty-sounding clavictherium (an upright harpsichord). Enno Kastens gave a masterful performance on the tangent piano. The tangent piano sounds like a harpsichord but can play loud and soft. If only Landowska had known about it! Jermaine Sprosse played C. P. E. and W. F. Bach with Lisztian velocity. It was exciting but unclear. He played faster than his clavichord could speak the notes.

Special thanks to the builder Martin Kather who took time to answer my many questions about tuning, voicing, damping, key-weighting, and the general maintenance of clavichords. When I returned to Alaska I made a number of improvements to my own clavichords based on tips he gave me. He brought his young son with him to the conference and told me he was training the boy to be an instrument builder too. But first he would teach him to cook, an art which he regarded as fundamentally similar. Thanks also to Freiburg harpsichordist Julia Theis who befriended us and translated much of the goings on. When the conference was over she took us on an auto tour of the hauntingly beautiful nearby Black Forest. And thanks to Swiss clavichordist Paul Simmonds, one of whose recordings I had known for years. He lent his knowledge and enthusiasm to everyone at the event. I bought more of his recordings, all wonderfully played unusual music on beautiful clavichords.

The German Clavichord Society, or the DCS, holds these events on a regular basis. Their president, Thomas Bregenzer in Berlin, made us feel most welcome and is the man to contact if you want information about future meetings. I hope to go again someday (after learning a little German) and spend more time with these lovely people who share my enthusiasm for old keyboard instruments..

(Fotos: Thomas Pfeiffer)



◆ *Maria Bayley*



◆ *Stefan Müller*



◆ *Michel Bignens*



◆ *Jermaine Sprosse*



◆ *Enno Kastens*



◆ *Paul Simmonds*

