

Videocall-Interview with Julius Hartung

Julius Hartung (16 years old) in conversation with Suzana Mendes and Martin Kather.

Suzana: (...) Please tell us a little bit about yourself!

Julius: I live near Copenhagen and I am 16 years old. Music is the main thing I do, specially clavichord playing, but also harpsichord and a bit of composition. Right now I'm starting with the organ as well.

S.: What else do you like to do?

J.: In my free time, I mostly do music stuff! Apart from that I'm also doing normal things like spending time with my family and friends.

Martin: We learned that you're going to do a concert in September in Copenhagen. Will you play piano too, or rather the old instruments?

J.: I never really play the piano. It's not anything that I practice on in my free time. I don't play the repertoire from the 19th century, like Beethoven or Chopin. I only play Baroque music, so it's music that is mostly related to harpsichord and clavichord, definitely. Once in a while I play piano at family activities, like to accompany some people singing, or stuff like that. My main focus is definitely on the old instruments.

S.: When and how did you come across clavichord the first time?

J.: It was about 2 years ago, perhaps 3. I was looking at some music stuff, as I usually do, in the internet. I found a video by Wim Winters and his YouTube channel, where he played the Bach Inventions and the Well-Tempered Clavier. That was sort of like the first time I came in contact with clavichord and clavichord playing. Then, about half a year later, there was a short course for young people who wanted to play the organ, where I told one of the teachers about my interest in these old instruments. She then took me to the Conservatory in Copenhagen where they had some harpsichords and clavichords, that I played the first time. So yeah, that was really the first time.

M.: So, you were like 13 or 14 years old ...

J.: Yeah, maybe I was 12. I don't know for sure.

S.: And then you were excited about the sound ...?

J.: Yes, the sound and the authenticity of the instruments, and the puzzling idea that people don't know that those instruments were played at all, in earlier times! Knowing most people believe the Well-Tempered Clavier was written for piano or some sort of instrument like that. It was absolutely the historical aspect which also caught my interest.

M.: *What were you playing at that time? Were you playing piano?*

J.: Yes, by that time I had piano and composition lessons. And then I thought I should maybe move on to that. Shortly after that I went to a clavichord concert that my mother saw in the local church, where I live, played by Mads Damlund. I know he also played at your society. I think that must have been the first time that I heard it played by a professional, live. After the concert I talked to him, and he asked me what instrument I had at home. I didn't have any clavichord at that time, and he put me in contact with another guy that had an instrument that I could lend.

M.: *So, what was then your first clavichord at home?*

J.: It was a copy of a Hubert, C to F, and quite soft. I had that instrument for about a year. At that time I didn't take any lessons in clavichord playing, so I didn't really know what I was doing. I just tried to make a good sound, and discovered some things by myself. When I now listen to recordings from that period, it's kind of harsh for me to listen to ...

S.: *But you had fun... otherwise you wouldn't have continued ...?*

J.: Yeah, definitely. Definitely.

S.: *And do you have a teacher now?*

J.: Yes, my teacher now is Mads Damlund. Until recently mainly on clavichord, but we're also beginning to do some organ. I wanted to do that, so that I can make some money on church services, also. Normally, people think that I got from the organ to the harpsichord or clavichord. But that's not actually the case. I went exactly the other way around, which is a bit unusual, I know that.

S.: *May I still ask you, the time you were practicing alone, what could you mention you discovered by yourself on the clavichord, that you wouldn't discover on the piano, for example?*

J.: Yeah, I got to be more aware about the sound. I began to listen more, but I didn't really know how to adjust to the instrument at first. I realized how precise you have to be. That instrument, being fretted, challenged me with precision in a special way, and forced me to rethink my fingering altogether. I noticed using paired fingerings works extremely well, and I definitely love it! That was some of the things that I learned from playing that instrument. And still, when I visited you Martin, back in Hamburg, it was a difficult thing to play it. But the more you do it, the more you get used to it, of course.
[In Martin's workshop (where he stayed for a couple of nights), Julius met the DCS Zander Leipzig Nr. 10 and Martin's copy of the Praetorius, both small clavichords with multiple fretting, 2 – 5 ...]

M.: *Which other clavichords do you know in Denmark? Do you go to the Conservatory, to the museum? Do you know other people who have clavichords?*

J.: They have quite a big collection of instruments at the National Music Museum, but I haven't seen them and I don't know if they're playable. I saw only one of them in the actual museum. [*Dänisches Musikhistorisches Museum & Carl Claudius' Sammlung, DK*]
I remember when I went there, and got, of course, very excited about this instrument. Unfortunately I wasn't allowed to play it.
Mads, my teacher has a quite big collection of instruments, that I play quite often, when I have lessons at his place. But I usually don't go to other people's houses, and play and stuff like that. It's not that common for me. I mostly play at home.
(...) I find the clavichord is a very underrated instrument.

M.: *Why is that?*

J.: Well, it's so beautiful, when you get to listen to it! At first, it seems a bit weird, the sound that you might not expect from a keyboard instrument, when you come from a piano. But then you discover so many possibilities and sound, that you can't really do on other instruments. And the intimacy, which is absolutely fantastic, absolutely wonderful! To have a small concert with a few people listening, I love that intimacy. Also the historical significance. I mean, the clavichord was part of the musical tradition in the Northern Germany and Scandinavia, and most people today don't know about it. So yeah, the fact that it was so significant at the time where it was played, is also something that I think you should notice.

S.: *Lovely! I would like to know what repertoire or pieces you most like to play.*

J.: I like the music by Buxtehude, very much. Also Bach and some other German composers, Pachelbel and people like that. These are the composers that I know the best. Although, I would like to play more of the late repertoire, but I don't have an instrument for that. I only have 4 octaves on my instrument, so that makes it impossible to play a lot of music. I would like to be able to play stuff by Mozart, Haydn, and maybe some Beethoven as well. But that's really difficult when you only have 4 octaves on the instrument. I still have a lot to learn from the old composers.

S.: *And what or which pieces challenge you the most?*

J.: The first thing is actually just getting a decent sound out of the instrument, and not making it snap. Second, playing the big contrapuntal works, like Four-part Fugue is still difficult to do justice to all the voices. That's something that I'm still working on.

M.: *So, it's not really the composers that challenge you, but more the technique, and the way how to play clavichord, how to get the sound?*

J.: Yeah, in the beginning, it was, in that way, but it's starting to feel more and more natural. So, I don't have to think about it that much. Now I've had lessons for about two years with Mads, so it's becoming a lot easier. After one year, I could make a decent sound throughout the instrument, the big Potvlieghe instrument, the 5 octaves that he had. But yeah, only one 5 octave instrument, I know of, in Denmark, where at the moment that I play. I would like one myself, actually. It would be a great help to explore the later composers.

S.: *How does a typical day look like for you?*

J.: In the morning, I wake up, have a shower, eat some breakfast and go to school. I don't play my clavichord in the morning because I don't have time for that, even though I would love to! After school I maybe have a lesson with Mads or with my continuo teacher. Then, I get home, practice, and do my school homework, if I have that.

S.: *So, you first practice then you do school?*

J.: Oh, yeah! Maybe I shouldn't... I think my parents would prefer the other way around ...!

M.: *Do you have brothers and sisters?*

J.: Yes, I have 2 step siblings, one older brother and an older sister, and I also have two half-brothers. They play music as well. One of them is very much into electronical composition, and he also plays guitar. The other one is also playing some guitar, drums, and other things, and he has been in a band for some years. I wonder where my musical interests came from, because my parents don't play any instruments. My dad is a priest. He likes to sing lithurgy.

S.: *What do your friends say about your passion for the clavichord?*

J.: I don't really think they know what it's all about. I think it's kind of abstract for them to understand what it's about. But I don't go around and tell them about clavichord, it's not the kind of thing I would do. So maybe that's why. But my parents are very supportive, which I'm very happy about. It means a lot to me!

M.: *I remember that your father came with you to my workshop, and he was very interested too.*

J.: Yeah, definitely. He's very supportive, and he also loved these historical things, love to see churches around. And we often speak about people in the 17th century. He also gave me a Cantata text to write on. We kind of share the passion for Baroque arts, Baroque culture, and stuff like that. So yeah, that fits quite well with the clavichord.

S.: *Well, would you tell us about your dreams? What would you like to see happening in 20 years from now?*

J.: Oh, yeah, I think about that all the time!!! Hopefully... well, I know that I'm still playing the clavichord at that time. I hope to have my own studio, and perhaps have some pupils. I would love that: to pass on the knowledge! I also hope to make some money with organ playing. Hopefully, also do a lot of concerts on clavichord. So that's where I see myself, yeah!

S.: *And in 2 years from now?*

J.: Oh, in two years I'm going to be kind of busy, since I'm beginning with college. So, I hope to have enough time for clavichord playing as well. I hope to do a lot of concerts as well, and still take lessons and just get better and better.

M.: *Do you know the German Clavichord Society?*

J.: Yes I've been on your website quite a lot, looking at pictures and reading articles about the events. And I would like to participate in some of the 'Clavichord-Tage' that you organize. I knew about it, even before Mads told me about it.

S.: *What do you wish from organizations like the DCS?*

J.: One thing I would like, which I also think is an important part of maintaining an association like DCS, is to get new members, to get younger people into it. I myself first got hooked on clavichord playing via Wim Winters' YouTube channel and have subsequently come into contact with Mads Damlund after a concert.

I think DCS could do it with the following points:

Focus on relevance: Explain to young people how the clavichord is part of their musical heritage and how it influences today's music.

Make it fun: Create an interactive and engaging learning experience by using games and activities to introduce young people to the clavichord.

Use modern technology: Explore the music using digital resources such as YouTube videos, interactive apps or online libraries of clavichord music.

Organize concerts: Hold clavichord concerts where young people can experience the music live and meet the musicians who play it.

Create Collaborative Projects between young musicians and experienced clavichord players where they can learn from each other and collaborate on performing clavichord music.

M.: *Can you tell us about your instrument?*

J.: Sure! It's a Dick Verwolf, built for me in 2020. I feel very lucky to have it! I made a deal with my parents, that my father would pay 1/4 of the costs of the instrument. And my stepdad, my mother, and I would pay 1/4 of the price also. So, I had to do a piano concert, and ask people for donations, and help, and stuff like that.

This instrument is really my passion. It comes before harpsichord, it comes before piano, it is really something that I'm fond of!

Suzana & Martin:

Thank you so much and good luck!

