

Oberlin Baroque Performance Institute: Week One, Day Three (Wednesday, June 21)

by Daniel Hathaway



Lisa Crawford spent Wednesday's harpsichord master class drilling down into French keyboard practice and technique. I was the first to play, and the piece was Jean-Henri D'Anglebert's arrangement of Lully's *Ouverture to Proserpine*. Here, Crawford concentrated on notes that needed emphasis or de-emphasis though articulation, an effect that could partly be accomplished by fingering.

Broadening the topic to editions of works, she said that the beautiful, digitally engraved score I and most of the class had downloaded from IMSLP — everyone's favorite online source for free music — presented problems. D'Anglebert's arrangement challenges the player with a minefield of *agréments* or ornaments while the original orchestral score calls for almost none, and our copies didn't convey them accurately. (See D'Anglebert's table above for his how-to guide, and a snippet from the misleading edition below for some idea of what the performer is up against.)



Discussion of articulation — especially in the all-important Baroque bass lines — also accompanied performances of movements from a Bach keyboard suite, and movements from another D’Anglebert piece.

You’d think — especially if you’re a pianist — that harpsichordists and organists have no control over the beginning of a note or chord. You press a key and a string gets plucked or a valve gets opened no matter what finger force is used, and that’s that. Not so, said Crawford, and not so, said Joe Gascho later in ensemble coaching and the evening continuo class. Slow attacks, fast attacks, and everything in between are possible, and releases should be controlled the same way.

In variations on that subject, Crawford said that every note on the harpsichord had a beginning, a middle and an end, and talked about working with the “bloom” of a harpsichord note using what she called her mushroom analogy (put those fungi in a pan on the fire with some butter and wine, and eventually they’ll absorb the liquid, only to release it a bit later — cooks will understand and take the point).



Wednesday’s mid-afternoon faculty recital in Kulas Recital Hall featured Mitzi Meyerson and Lisa Crawford’s gorgeous Craig Tomlinson harpsichord in suites by D’Anglebert and Antoine and Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Forqueray. Meyerson’s breathtaking, visceral performances communicated the essence of some of the most striking French Baroque music to the audience — a master class of its own without words.

On Wednesday evening, I looked in on the second rehearsal of the student Baroque Orchestra, when Joe Gascho was drilling the ensemble, which takes all comers from recorders to theorbos in addition to the usual strings and winds — and a trio of

harpsichordists. Wednesday was all about tuning, and the conductor took the texture of the music apart in several different ways and at varying tempos to make chords click. Harmony, harmony, harmony, as Meyerson said earlier.



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