

**Oberlin Baroque Performance Institute:
Week One, Day Four (Thursday, June 22)**

by Daniel Hathaway



Rhythm is right up there with harmony as a pillar of Baroque music. So it's curious that French composers like Louis Couperin, Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre and Jean-Henri D'Anglebert invented the concept of "unmeasured preludes" and notated them as shown here.

The calligraphy is beautiful on the page, but how do you rhythmicize those notes at the keyboard? Mitzi Meyerson devoted much of Thursday morning's harpsichord master class to that topic, beginning as always with student performances.

The secret in Louis Couperin's d-minor Prelude, she said, is to seek out the harmony — determining the essential chord progressions by playing them in *basso continuo* style. Then you can add the other notes and structure the music to express whatever emotion you're feeling at the moment of performance ("My dog died," or "My lover left me" — with happier emotions possible in major keys).

Meyerson ended the class by drawing a second harpsichord up to the first, cheek to cheek, and queuing students up in double lines to play a communally improvised piece. Each player took up from where the previous one left off. Fun!



This year being the 275th anniversary of Georg Philipp Telemann's death, BPI marked the occasion with a 2:00 pm concert of the composers' unaccompanied fantasies. Fifteen students played tag-team performances of solo works for viol, violin, viola, flute, harpsichord, oboe, and voice flute (a recorder pitched between the normal alto and tenor instruments). That mini-marathon recital was perhaps a logistical warm-up for Saturday's student recital, a performance by 22 different ensembles who have been coached every afternoon this week at 3 pm.

Three of those ensembles, like mine, featured organ continuo, which complicated rehearsing. Not that Oberlin has any dearth of organs, but its continuo instrument was stuck on the third floor of Bibbins, the main Conservatory building, designated a hard-hat zone due to the second major construction project in two years. Organ curator David Casimir donned a helmet and liberated the instrument (similar to the one below) just in time for Thursday's coaching session.



Then we squeezed Peter Maddigan the oboist, Luka Stefanović the cellist, Bob Brooks and Florence Peacock the singers, Lucas Harris the coach, me and the continuo organ into a practice room already occupied by a larger organ, a clavichord and a stack of dollies. Arias by Graupner and Telemann continued to get polished under the sensitive ear of coach Harris, with a little intermission to find something for the organist to stand on. Situated on a dolly and lacking the platform in the photo, the instrument is too tall to play comfortably — you have to stand on tiptoe to get your hands in a good position. That search went on into Friday!

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