

## Harpichord News

by Larry Palmer



Chris DeBlasio

### Chris DeBlasio: *Dances for Clavichord*

I have been thinking about art and loss in the time of AIDS this winter, especially since my fellow Oberlin Conservatory student and friend Calvin Hampton's 70th birth anniversary occurred on the final day of 2008. Calvin's younger colleague, the New York-based composer Chris DeBlasio, would have reached the age of fifty on February 22, 2009, had his life, too, not been cut short in 1993 by AIDS-related illness. The recent publication of this set of five short pieces for clavichord (suitable for the harpsichord, as well) by Wayne Leupold Editions (WL610010) represents a worthy calling card for a lamentably short-lived composer.

It joins the poignant and moving *God Is Our Righteousness* for guitar and organ and a *Serenade* for violin and organ as DeBlasio's published instrumental legacy, and is the only solo keyboard work, thus far. In her comprehensive catalog of 20th-century works for harpsichord and clavichord, Frances Bedford noted two separate sets of pieces: *Three Dances* (1986) and *[Five] Dances* (1988), each first performed by Andrew deMasi. When I contacted DeBlasio's estate executor Harry Huff to ask whether these were all the same pieces, he responded:

... I'm quite certain that the set of five that Wayne [Leupold] has published is complete. I suspect that Chris simply added two dances in 1988 to the three already premiered in 1986.

I recommend all of these attractive dances, although I am most excited by number one [*Vivo*—an exhilarating study of alternating right and left hand triads presented in rapidly changing asymmetric meters (4/8, 5/8, 3/8, 2/8); number two [*Moderato Assai*]—a lyrical three-page aria; and the energetic concluding fifth [*Allegro Vivace*], with its propelling rhythm and frequent hemiolas. These three movements are all appropriately textured to sound well on early keyboard instruments.

The middle two pieces [*Andantino* and *Adagio*] seem slightly less satisfying to my hands and ears. Without access to a manuscript source I am unable to determine whether these might be the added pieces. Nor am I able to confirm the lack of several accidentals that seem to be missing, but I suggest that surely the soprano D in the last measure of page 5 should be a D-sharp mimicking the previous statement of the figure four measures earlier; and I suspect that the soprano A in the last measure of page 8 should similarly be an A-sharp, in keeping with the following statement of the same motive, which includes repeated G-sharps.

John Corigliano, one of DeBlasio's teachers at the Manhattan School of Music, mourned his former student as "a composer who embodied that rarest of all things—a truly original lyric voice." Acquire these lovely pieces, play them, and do your part to keep alive the legacy of a talented composer whose distinctive music deserves to be heard.

For those of our readers not averse to gritty and graphic words about sexuality or illness, the book *Loss Within Loss: Artists in the Age of AIDS* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001) provides 22 essays edited by Edmund White, produced in cooperation with the Estate Project for Artists with AIDS. Poet Maya Angelou contributed a short appreciation of this project, and William Berger, currently a producer of the Metropolitan Opera Radio Broadcasts, provided an illuminating, caring chronicle of DeBlasio's final years (pages 153–167).

[Also worthy of further exploration, *Calvin Hampton's organ and choral works* are published by Wayne Leupold Editions.]

### Short listings of recent harpsichord recordings (and a score)

**Antonio Soler Sonatas.** Kathleen McIntosh plays her 1994 John Phillips harpsichord after Dumont (1707).

Recorded at Maricam Studio, Santa Fe, New Mexico (2007). A large help-

ing of Soler played with panache by Ms. McIntosh, and available from her at <kathleenmcintosh@juno.com>.

**Soler and Scarlatti in London: A Selection of Blended Sonatas.** Luisa Morales plays a harpsichord by Joseph Kirckman (1798). FIMTE, Apdo.212 Garrucha, 04630 Almeria, Spain, <www.fimte.org>.

Recorded on a splendid harpsichord from the collection of the National Music Museum in Vermillion, South Dakota, with sound realistically captured by recording engineer Peter Nothnagle. Thrilling explorations of sixteen Iberian sonatas played on a large English instrument similar to several that were exported to Spain in the late 18th century. A must-have disc!

**Le Clavecin Français: Music from the Borel Manuscript.** Davitt Moroney plays the original Nicholas Dumont harpsichord (1707) and a Joannes Ruckers instrument (Antwerp, 1635) from the collection of Karen Flint. Plectra Music PL20801 (2 CDs), <www.plectra.org>.

A splendid opportunity to compare the sound of Phillips's harpsichord with its original inspiration. Music by d'Anglebert, Thomelin, La Barre, Brocard, la Comtesse de Bieule, Louis Couperin, Chambonnières, Dumont, Bouat, La Pierre, Vincent, De Lorency, Richard, and Rossi from a mid-17th century manuscript now in the University of California, Berkeley Hargrove Music Library.

**Jean-Baptiste Lully: Divertissements.** David Chung plays a 2001 harpsichord by Bruce Kennedy (after Michael Mietke, Berlin, ca. 1704). Musique sans frontières MSF 73967, <dchung@hkbu.edu.hk>.

Twenty-three keyboard transcriptions from the Lully operas *Atys*, *Isis*, *Phaëton*, and *Armide*. A one-man musical entrepreneur, Dr. Chung has also edited the scores, available in: *Jean-Baptiste Lully: 27 Opera Pieces Transcribed for Keyboard in the 17th and 18th Century*. Ut Orpheus Edizioni (Bologna), 2004, <www.utorpheus.com>.

Comments or news items for these pages are always welcome. Please address them to Dr. Larry Palmer, Division of Music, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX 75275; <lpalmer@smu.edu>.

## In the wind . . .

by John Bishop

### A matter of perception

In the March 2009 issue of THE DIAPASON, I wrote:

Busy organists might be playing on dozens of instruments each year, but there are also many examples of lifelong relationships between players and their "home base" organs. Marcel Dupré played hundreds of recitals all over the world, but he was Organiste Titulaire at Saint-Sulpice in Paris from 1934 until 1971. He succeeded Charles-Marie Widor, who had held the position since 1870. So for more than a century that great Cavaillé-Coll organ was played principally by two brilliant musicians. What a glorious heritage. Daniel Roth has been on that same well-worn bench since 1985. I first attended worship in that church in 1998 and vividly remember noticing elder-



John Bishop

ly members of the congregation who would remember the days when Dupré was their parish organist. I suppose there still may be a few. I wonder if any of them cornered Dupré after church to complain that the organ was too loud!

Ladislav Pfeifer of the Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel in Springfield, Massachusetts wrote,

Dear Mr. Bishop,

In your most recent DIAPASON article, you wondered if any of Marcel Dupré's parishioners ever thought that he played too loud. That made me immediately recall a story that Robert Rayfield (organ dept. at IU—long time ago) enjoyed telling. He attended Mass at Dupré's parish with some friends and Dupré was improvising the postlude in a manner worthy of The Church. Rayfield and his companions were ecstatic and then they noticed a woman kneeling in prayer trembling with her hands over her ears. The postlude ended and her hands came down. One of Rayfield's companions approached the woman and asked why she covered her ears. She made a dramatic gesture, shook her head and said, "C'est épouvantable et c'est comme ça toutes les semaines." "It's terrible and it's like this every week!"

I thought I was joking when I wondered if parishioners thought Dupré played too loud. What one thinks is sublime and inspiring, the other thinks is horrible—an imposition.

Marcel Dupré's improvised postludes were instantly created, never to be heard again, brilliant art works. I imagine that they were sometimes furious, sometimes joyful, always complex, and yes, often very loud. The Cavaillé-Coll organ in St. Sulpice is a mighty instrument. Those visiting organists, schooled in the bewildering languages of musical expression, were transfixed and thrilled. The above-mentioned woman felt assaulted.

Architect Frank Gehry has created some fascinating designs—buildings rife with curved lines and wavy spaces. The Experience Music Project is an interactive museum in Seattle, Washington, commissioned by Paul Allen and dedicated to Jimi Hendrix. You can find a fine photo gallery at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/heritagefutures/sets/72157604116603161/>. I visited the EMP several years ago and found the building to be daring, unique, challenging, and complicated—I loved it. A colleague who lives in Seattle shared the local comment that it looks as though the Space Needle (next door) got undressed and threw her clothes in a heap, a sentiment that reminds me of the nickname given to another of Gehry's controversial de-

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