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G. HENLE VERLAG MÜNCHEN

JOAN BENSON, Eugene, Oregon

## THE EFFECT OF CLAVICHORD TECHNIQUE ON THE FORTEPIANO

Today, when amplified sound is in fashion and quiet privacy is difficult even for a queen, it is not surprising that the clavichord is often looked upon as a precious toy or an antidote for reality.

In the latter half of the 18th century in Austria, however, it was accepted as a minor member of the keyboard family. Although its muted sounds were not included in public performances, within the home it could serve music well. Its ability to combine dynamic shading with articulation, and to imitate the singing qualities of voice and violin were important in the long period of the shift from harpsichord to fortepiano. In fact, the trend from clavichords through fortepianos to the modern piano formed an exciting crescendo which, looking backward, becomes a mirror – *diminuendo*.

Clearly, any clavichord of Haydn's youth period was smaller, and less capable of broad dynamic contrasts than the Bohak clavichord he is said to have owned in his old age. When Bohak built this 5-octave instrument in 1794, the already popular fortepiano was probably part of its inspiration.

Four decades earlier, Emanuel Bach, who influenced young Haydn, recommended that the clavichord be used for the study of good performance. He had in mind the performer of both the harpsichord and the fortepiano. Actually, the clavichord can be useful to the technical and musical development of any keyboard student playing Haydn. In my own student years, for example, the late Viola Thern in Vienna pointed out to me – at the piano – the wealth of delicate detail in Haydn's *f* minor Variations Hob. XVII:6. Soon I began exploring this spectrum through the clavichord until the subtle nuances that at first were so difficult to master became a basic part of my approach to music. For it is in the precision and variation of these very details – of color, voicing, phrasing, and rhythmic punctuation – that the clavichord itself becomes the ultimate life-time teacher.

The clavichord has less mechanism and softer dynamic possibilities than other keyboard instruments. Minute differences in the give and take of finger pressure control the full length of each tone, its quality, timing, pitch, and softness. Consequently, this instrument encourages, and almost requires, the following:

1. Acute and constant listening, since the slightest loss of focus can destroy all musical intention.
2. The gradual and natural development in strength and independence of particularly the first two joints of each finger.
3. Keen sensitivity of finger tips to key tops and to the entire keyboard action.
4. The minimizing of any unnecessary motion or tension in the playing apparatus, since awkwardness is magnified on this delicate instrument.
5. Control of individual voices and their combined balance.
6. The freedom to be spontaneous and to reveal one's emotions, since the clavichord quickly responds to inflections beyond all conscious planning.

In an age that thrives on high speed and noise, it is difficult to realize what quiet hours alone with the clavichord could have meant to a musician like Haydn.