CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

GRADUATE RECITAL IN HARPSICHORD PERFORMANCE

An abstract submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music, Music Performance

by

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ABSTRACT

GRADUATE RECITAL IN HARPSICHORD PERFORMANCE

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The harpsichord and its literature covers nearly three hundred years of musical composition and development. This ended around 1810 when the increasingly popular piano completely replaced the harpsichord as the standard keyboard medium. The harpsichord was brought out of antiquity during the mid-1930s in answer to a growing desire by musicians to perform baroque music on original instruments. These musicians found that this antique instrument did not play much like a piano but was something entirely different, leading a number of patient keyboard pioneers to try to recreate the technique and style of playing the harpsichord following limited and often conflicting accounts of historical witnesses and theorists. In what had begun as almost blind obedience to the score, harpsichordists were beginning to interpret the manuscript as a guideline for elaborate improvisation. Melodic, rhythmic, and even harmonic digression were becoming standard practice when performing early music.

I organized this program so that each piece on the first half of the concert was in some way connected with a piece by a different composer on the second half. Cabezón and Frescobaldi both preserved the Renaissance polyphonic style of writing; Philips and Jacquet de la Guerre both drowned their compositions in droves of Italian innuendos; Rorem and Rameau explored the instrument’s technical capabilities; and the two Bachs, father and son, both explored dynamic possibilities on harpsichords with two manuals. This was no longer just a concert of selected works by a few random composers but a collection of different approaches to the instrument from a variety of classical and modern perspectives.

The opening piece on the program is a capriccio by Girolamo Frescobaldi. Both he and Cabezón used Spanish folk song elements in their music while retaining a four-
voice imitative polyphonic texture. The *Capriccio sopra la Spagnoletta* is divided into a variety of sections, each containing new thematic material. In each case, some of the new material is related to the opening rhythmic motive of a popular Spanish dance rhythm, *La Spagnoletta*, and some seems completely foreign. Frescobaldi is not always willing to point out exactly where the theme occurs, sometimes choosing to hide it in a rhythmically augmented form disguised by intricate passagework in other voices. Adding to this ambiguity is the inconsistent nature of the form, where separate sections do not always appear to be related to each other. Frescobaldi's ability to retain musical coherence amidst structural obscurity made him an exceptional harpsichord composer of the time. His use of the *Spagnoletta* motive as a theme is similar to Cabezón's use of a popular Spanish folk song, *Guardame las vacas*, in his *Diferencias sobre las vacas*. Cabezón, blind from birth, became the most influential keyboardist and composer to ever emerge from Spain. As chief organist to Queen Isabella, and later Charles V, his music, with its dance rhythms and long florid improvisations, helped define the Spanish keyboard tradition. Cabezón's participation in the wedding of Mary Tudor at Winchester Cathedral brought his polyphonic keyboard style to England, where such virginalists as William Byrd and Thomas Tomkins incorporated it in developing their "English" style. 

*Diferencias sobre las vacas* is Cabezón's best-known work. The theme is more of a harmonic, rather than a melodic one, followed by a set of *diferencias* or variations. Each of these *diferencias* retains the harmonic theme and four-voice polyphonic movement, and also adds a certain Spanish rhythmic flavor to the mix.

Peter Philips and Elisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre both became enamored with the Italian keyboard tradition, and incorporated it into their own national styles. Peter Philips was born in England, but due to religious persecution permanently relocated to the Spanish Netherlands, where he became one of the leading figures in Flemish keyboard music. The *Passamezzo Pavan and Galliard* is essentially an English pavan and galliard in the Italian passamezzo form, a particular chord progression which Philips followed precisely. Philips' love of Italian music developed after spending several years studying in Rome, and his keyboard works include many transcriptions of Italian polyphonic vocal pieces by such composers as Orlando di Lasso and Giulio Caccini. Nearly all of Philips' works, including the *Passamezzo Pavan and Galliard*, are filled
with improvisatory passages, augmentation and diminution, and free ornamentation, all
of which are elements of the Italian keyboard tradition. Elisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la
Guerre’s love of Italian music also comes through in her compositions. She was the first
French woman to publish a collection of harpsichord pieces. Her talent both as a
composer and performer led Louis XIV to relax his convention of preventing women
instrumentalists from performing at court and in public. She used Italian formal
structures, such as the cantata and sonata forms, as templates for her music. The pieces
on this program are from her 1689 publication and although they are written as a series of
dance movements, they more closely resemble the sonatas of Scarlatti.

Ned Rorem and Jean-Philippe Rameau were separated by about two hundred and
fifty years, however both composers identified the technical capabilities of the
harpsichord, then composed music which successfully melded these techniques into
musical caricatures. In Les Cyclopes, Rameau chose to portray a mythical creature after
seeing one of these one-eyed giants in Lully’s opera Persée; Rorem portrays a hoard of
eight-legged critters in Spiders, probably after being overwhelmed by them in his
apartment during a scorching New York City summer heat wave. Both pieces require a
fast, detached, and extremely delicate touch at the keyboard. These pieces demonstrate
that when playing the harpsichord, the focus should be on the surface of the key rather
than the key-well, such as on a piano.

The Sonata in F Major is one of C.P.E. Bach’s early keyboard works, utilizing the
dynamic possibilities of a two-manual instrument. Although no dynamic markings
appear in the outer movements, the alternating piano and forte indications in the adagio
suggest an alteration between upper and lower 8' register manuals. This is the same
principle which governs the Italian Concerto by his father. Concluding the program is a
concerto J.S. Bach wrote specifically for two harpsichords, which is thought to have
originally been a two harpsichord, unaccompanied sequel to the Italian Concerto. The
orchestra was added for harmonic color, and does not play a major role in performing this
piece. At any one time, either one or both of the two harpsichords is playing, and the
orchestra comes in only on major sections and cadences.
PROGRAM

Capriccio sopra la Spagnoletta ......................... Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583–1643)

Passamezzo Pavan and Galliard ......................... Peter Philips (1561–1628)

Sonata in F Major H.48 (W.65/18) .................. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714–1788)

Allegro di molto
Andante
Presto

Les Cyclopes ........................................ Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764)

Pièces de Clavessin in G minor (1687) ................ Elisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre (1666–1729)

Prelude
Courante
Sarabande
2nd Gigue
Minuet and Double

Spiders for Harpsichord ................................ Ned Rorem (b.1923)

Differencias sobre las Vacas ....................... Antonio de Cabezón (1510–1566)

Concerto for 2 Harpsichords in C Major (BWV 1061) .................. Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Allegro
Larghetto
Fuga

Timothy Howard, harpsichord     Brian Onderdonk, conductor
Israel Heller, violin            Petros Boyadzhyan, violin
Edgar Sandoval, violin          Melissa Joseph, violin
Rebecca Dulatre, viola          Matt Keating, cello
Serena Vaquilar, bass