



Charlotte Mattax Moersch

Language

English

Nationality

American

Country of Residence

United States

Year of birth

1954

Website Address

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Year(s) in which you received lessons from Gustav Leonhardt

1982-1983

The lessons were

As a guest student at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam (Amsterdamsch Conservatorium, Sweelinck Conservatorium)

How did you first come into contact with Gustav Leonhardt, and how did you get the opportunity to study with him? Did you have to wait before you could become his student?

I first met Leonhardt at the Bruges Harpsichord Competition in 1980. As a contestant, I remember being awestruck by the beauty of Bruges and the eminence of the jury, of which Leonhardt was a long-standing member. With his subtle smile and dignified yet calm demeanor, he immediately put me at ease. Three years later, I wrote to him to inquire about lessons, and don't recall a long wait time.

Briefly describe your level of musical education when you started lessons with Gustav Leonhardt. How many years had you studied an early keyboard instrument? What academic qualifications did you have, if any?

By the time I started lessons with Leonhardt, I had studied organ and harpsichord for 15 years, had earned a Bachelor of Arts in Music (Yale University) and a Master of Music degree (Juilliard), and had begun a doctoral degree in early music (Stanford). My first exposure to the harpsichord was at Yale, where I had the good fortune to have lessons on the beautiful instruments in the Belle Skinner Collection. After attending Kenneth Gilbert's wonderful summer course at the Vleeshuis in Antwerp, I went to Juilliard, where I studied with Albert Fuller. I spent a year in Paris studying with Kenneth Gilbert on a Woolley Scholarship, with occasional yet equally inspiring lessons with Bob van Asperen in The Hague, and then matriculated to Stanford University to pursue a DMA. I took a hiatus from that program to study with Leonhardt at the Sweelinck Conservatory in Amsterdam.

What repertoire did you study with Gustav Leonhardt? You may answer along general lines or give a list.

Frescobaldi - Toccatas, partite, capricci
Froberger - Toccatas, suites, ricercars, tombeaux
Sweelinck - Variations, toccatas
Virginalists (Byrd, Tomkins) - Pavanés and galliards, variations
Louis Couperin - Suites, Pavane in f#
Rameau - Pieces in a and e
Balbastre - Selected pieces
J.S. Bach - Toccatas, partitas, French suites, Well-Tempered Clavier I and II, Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue

Did you present each piece of music only once, or more often? Was this your own choice?

I presented each piece once, with the assumption that I would incorporate Leonhardt's suggestions, ideas, etc. into the pieces after the lessons on my own.

Please describe a typical lesson or various types of lessons you received. For example: the frequency, length and location of the lessons, the specific instruments used, the number of pieces you typically presented, how much discussion there was, how much Leonhardt played and at what point during the lesson, etc.

I describe a typical lesson in my article, "Recollections of My Lessons with Leonhardt," originally published in Vox Humana (www.voxhumanajournal.com), ed. Christopher Holman, on December 17, 2017. Reproduced here in PDF format with the kind permission of Vox Humana.

Did Gustav Leonhardt discuss and/or demonstrate keyboard technique, fingerings, hand and arm position, etc.? If so, did he relate these aspects to different periods, traditions and/or national styles of early keyboard music?

He did not discuss keyboard technique per se, but rather harpsichord “techniques” that could be used to make the instrument expressive, such as over-legato, articulation, staggered releases, arpeggiation, etc. Leonhardt invariably distinguished between national schools and time periods: thus, while some of these “techniques” might be universally applied to all styles of harpsichord repertoire, whether and to what extent they might be used varied according to national styles. For example, he warned not to arpeggiate too much in Bach, unlike in Couperin, where more broken chords might be appropriate. Since he taught by demonstration, I observed aspects of his own keyboard technique, notably his rounded, arched hand and strong fingers.

Did he discuss historical? ? performance practice or different types of historic instruments, refer to musicological research, performance treatises, ornament tables, etc.? If so, in what particular situations and musical contexts?

He would refer to specific instruments in various historic collections, not necessarily to be pedantic, but rather out of his own fondness for them and to spark my imagination. Similarly, he would mention a performance treatise, but this was never the focus of the lesson. In a discussion of historical fingerings or temperaments for example, he would cite an historical source, but only as a point of departure. He was not dogmatic, thus he warned against using an early fingering in a passage if it was not convincing musically. The expression of the music was the ultimate goal. His recall of sources was astounding. During my lesson on Froberger’s Capriccio II, he referred to specific rhetorical devices, and no fewer than eight important treatises (Burmeister, Prins, Bernhardt, Vogt's book on Locke, etc.).

Did you notice that he commented at greater length or with more enthusiasm on particular pieces, composers, or types of repertoire? If so, which ones?

He was fully engaged with all of the pieces I brought to him, so the answer to this must necessarily be subjective. Perhaps he had a special fondness for Froberger and Sweelinck.

How did he engage with the works you presented? For example, did he offer stylistic considerations or make a formal analysis? Did he place the pieces within a larger context, musical or other? Did he use metaphors or make analogies when talking about the music?

Among the most impactful and inspirational moments of my lessons with Leonhardt were when he made a reference to painting or architecture to give me insight into the style of a piece. He would then demonstrate how a player could make performance decisions that hewed to that particular style. For example, when I was playing Sweelinck's Est-ce Mars, composed circa 1595, he wanted me to capture the essence of the style, which was not yet "Baroque." This meant no large, sweeping gestures, but more emphasis on smaller units. Ornaments were not yet organic to the whole, as in Frescobaldi, but merely "pulled from a drawer" and applied to the surface. At this point in the lesson, he made an analogy to the Westerkerk, which was built between 1620 and 1631 in Renaissance style and designed by the architect Hendrick de Keyser. Keyser applied detail (decorative elements) to a rather more "square" structure. This means, for Sweelinck, precise articulation, even passing tones, not much rubato or over-legato, and measured trills. With this analogy, Leonhardt gave me a visual image to emulate that was more effective than mere verbal instruction, made all the more exciting by the fact that the church, located on the Prinsengracht, was merely a short walk from the Bartolotti House, Leonhardt's residence on the Herengracht.

Did he ask you to defend your interpretive choices? More generally, did he approach questions of personal autonomy and individuality as a performer during your studies? In what way?

He did not ask me to defend my choices but, rather, was more concerned with developing my personality as a performer. He stressed two things: (1) Captivate the audience with variety, imagination, fire and wit, and take time to enjoy the beautiful moments (*filer le son*) by letting the melody soar over long time spans; (2) Forget about the harpsichord and technique. Think about the music and other instruments; go beyond the harpsichord!

What did you hope or expect to achieve from your lessons with Gustav Leonhardt?

I wanted to learn what he called his professional "secrets" about interpretation and how to make the harpsichord expressive, as well as be inspired. He gave me much more.

After your period of study, did you have further contacts with Gustav Leonhardt that contributed to your development as a musician?

Unfortunately, I regret that I did not have further contact with him other than a few letters. There was so much more I had to learn from him.

Did his approach to teaching influence the approach you have taken with your own students? If so, how?

Absolutely. I often draw on things he said to me regarding timing, use of over-legato, overall style, gestures, and analogies to art and architecture. I mention him frequently in my lessons.

Has your perspective on your lessons with Gustav Leonhardt changed over the years? In what way?

I treasure what I learned from him even more now than at the time I was studying with him. I am still learning from his advice to me regarding the music, its interpretation, my own playing, and performance in general. He was a great inspiration.

What are the most important things Gustav Leonhardt taught you, or the ways he most influenced you as a musician?

Some of this I have alluded to in my previous answers. Some thoughts remain, however, that still govern my playing. A piece may be beautiful, but it must be special or the audience may not appreciate it. If slow, bring out the sweet harmonies, dwell on them and listen for the beautiful notes. Fast passages can be truly wild and uninhibited. Make the audience listen to each note through variety and bringing out the personality of the music.

In this area, you can describe your lessons with Gustav Leonhardt in any way you wish.

Please see my article “Recollections of My Lessons with Gustav Leonhardt”, originally published in Vox Humana Journal and reproduced here with kind permission.

Curriculum Vitae

Harpsichordist Charlotte Mattax Moersch has performed worldwide as a soloist and chamber musician. She holds degrees from Yale University (B.A. in Music, cum laude), the Juilliard School of Music (M.M. in Harpsichord), and Stanford University (D.M.A. in Early Music). She studied harpsichord with Gustav Leonhardt in Amsterdam, where she also worked with Ton and Tini Koopman in master classes; with Bob van Asperen in The Hague; with Kenneth Gilbert in Paris; and with Albert Fuller in New York. She studied organ with William Barnard (Christ Church Cathedral, Houston) and with André Isoir (Église Saint Germain des Prés, Paris). Having begun piano studies with her mother at the age of four, she became enthralled with the harpsichord while an undergraduate at Yale University, going on to capture First and Third Prizes in basso continuo and solo playing, respectively, in the International Harpsichord Competitions in Paris, France and Bruges, Belgium. Called a “nonpareil harpsichordist” by Early Music America, she has received critical acclaim for her playing, at once “dashing yet intelligent” (Classical Times, London), and “fluent and expressive” (Fanfare Magazine). She has appeared in solo recitals in New York, London, Edinburgh, Rome, Geneva, Paris, and Amsterdam, and at historic venues, among them Carnegie Hall, the Royal Albert Hall, the Mozarteum, and the Palazzo della

Cancelleria. As a guest artist, she performed at the Festival of the Associazione Musicale Romana, Festival Estival de Paris, Tage alter musik Regensburg, and the Bethlehem and Boulder Bach Festivals, and has toured Europe with San Francisco's American Baroque and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. As harpsichordist for New York's Grande Bande, she played continuo in a production of Rameau's opera *Platée* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, with Pilobolus dancers and renowned soprano Renée Fleming. She has partnered with other dancers as well, performing a program of French music with Baroque dancer Catherine Turocy of the New York Baroque Dance Company, and J.S. Bach's harpsichord concerti with Paul Taylor's Taylor 2 Dance Company. The recipient of several important awards and prizes, she was honored with a Solo Recitalist Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and a Harriet Hale Woolley Scholarship for study in Paris. She is a specialist in seventeenth-century French music; her book, *Accompaniment on Theorbo and Harpsichord: Denis Delair's Traité of 1690*, is published by Indiana University Press. She has recorded for Koch, Dorian, Newport Classic, Amon Ra, Analekta, and Centaur Records. Her solo harpsichord discography includes J.S. Bach's Goldberg Variations, W.F. Bach's sonatas, and the complete *Pièces de clavecin* of Jean Henry D'Anglebert, Armand-Louis Couperin, Charles Noblet, and Pierre Février. "The Bach Legacy," her most recent recording, features sonatas and polonaises of C.P.E., J.C.F., and W.F. Bach. Currently Professor of Harpsichord and Musicology at the University of Illinois, she directs the period instrument ensemble *Concerto Urbano*, which she founded in 1998. At Illinois' Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, she has directed fully staged period performances of Baroque operas, including Rameau's *Zéphyre*, Purcell's *Fairy Queen*, Monteverdi's *Poppea*, Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, Cavalli's *La Calisto*, and Lully's *Armide*, with Baroque dance choreography by Phillip Johnston.

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