



Lenora McCroskey

Language

English

Nationality

American

Country of Residence

United States

Year of birth

1943

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

1968-1969; Haarlem Organ Academy, summer, 1964

The lessons were

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

In summer courses as a player

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?

My organ professor at Stetson University in DeLand, Florida, Paul Jenkins, returned from the

Haarlem Summer Organ Academy in 1963 and insisted that we three rising seniors and a junior come with him the next summer. He had to get permission from the Academy to bring undergraduates since enrollment was limited to professional organists at that time, I guess. We spent ten glorious weeks touring organs in Europe culminating at the Academy for two weeks. I took the harpsichord class with Leonhardt (and Heilers' class) and was entranced with his playing and with his knowledge. I had never played a harpsichord. We put thumb tacks in the hammers of a junk piano at Stetson to try to imitate the sound. Obviously we didn't know a thing! The next year, my senior year, Leonhardt came to Stetson to play a recital on the brand new Beckerath organ there. I don't remember the recital, but I remember Paul piling all of the organ majors in a van to go to the Ringling Museum in Sarasota, FL, because Leonhardt wanted to see the Claude Jacquet, 1652, harpsichord there--once thought to be the oldest double surviving. I remember he measured it and examined it thoroughly and I was surprised that anyone would do that, especially since it wasn't playable! I was a naive child, remember! I also remember that he bought Slinkys for his daughters. After Stetson, I went to Harvard University in Cambridge, MA, and got my masters degree in musicology--thinking it was the study of performance practices. Ha! But having watched the Beckerath go into Stetson my freshman year, I was delighted to watch the Fisk go in at Memorial Church, where John Ferris urged me to stay at Harvard. Performance practice was still my primary study goal. After my Stetson colleague and dear friend, Marion Anderson, went to Amsterdam to study organ with Leonhardt, I decided I wanted to study with him as well. One of my Harvard choir colleagues, Lisa Crawford, had just returned from studying with him and raved about the experience. I wrote to him and asked to study with him. I also learned that he was recovering from a heart attack, so wasn't sure if he was taking students. But I had a letter back saying that he was only taking very serious students, so I wrote saying I was very serious! He knew that I had never had any harpsichord study, but he took me. Some of the other students in the class that year were David Boe (on sabbatical that fall from Oberlin), Ton Koopman, and Chris Farr. Dale Carr was an organ student at the same time and we became fast friends.

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?

I was an organ major at Stetson and also got a BA because I thought it would help with my goal of understanding the historical context of the Baroque music I was coming to love, thanks to the Beckerath and my organ teacher, Paul Jenkins, and the Fisk at Harvard. I had no experience with an early keyboard instrument except the two weeks in the harpsichord class at the Haarlem Summer Organ Academy. Academic qualifications were just BM and BA from Stetson and an MM from Harvard.

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

Leonhardt suggested music almost every week, and I would dash out to Saul Groen's music store across from the Heineken brewery and get it. I studied the "canon:" Frescobaldi, Couperin,

Froberger, the English virginalists, lots of Bach. All music I didn't know at all. I bought everything I could!

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

I would play a piece once or twice. Often he would make suggestions and then I'd bring the piece back the next week to see if I "got it." Since he asked almost every week if I knew such and such, I'd try to bring it in the next week.

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 had a lesson once a week at the Conservatory and it lasted about an hour. I'd play one piece a week as I recall. Then he would comment on particular points, often it was about articulation, but there were comments about timing, dynamics, and ornamentation. Often he would play the piece or parts of it to demonstrate what he was discussing. I hung onto every word and to his playing. As an organist, I was accustomed to methods of expression on it, and I recognized that there were certainly comparisons, but I was finding the harpsichord was so much more expressive. Sometimes I was blown away by his expressiveness and intensity.

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?

There was not much discussion of technique, fingerings, hand position, etc. I already had a good organ technique. He did sometimes remind me not to "play like an organist," by which he meant don't strike the keys so hard, and don't be so rhythmically stiff, I think.

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?

Oh, yes, there was much discussion of performance practice, although not of particular instruments or research. He did mention treatises and certainly ornament tables. Since I was playing such a variety of composers from various nationalities, he would talk about the appropriate styles of each of those composers.

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?

Almost all the discussion of a particular work was about stylistic considerations. I don't remember other particular topics.

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?

My sense was that he took what I was trying to do or say with a piece and work with that. I have a wonderful memory about that very approach. It happened that another student and I were working on the same Frescobaldi toccata. We compared Leonhardt's suggestions and they were very different. Hmm, I thought, he's wanting me to say what I think. I'll never forget that incident and tried to incorporate that approach in my own teaching. Memorable.

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

I wanted to play like him! I wanted performance practice information and ways to express the music and myself on the instrument. And I wanted to learn how to teach music more effectively. I got all that and more. I learned so much music that year and came home excited to impart that information to others. I certainly never achieved playing like him, but I loved trying and I cherish his marks on my music still.

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

I saw him often after that. I worked at Harvard from 1971 to 1979 and then went to Eastman School of Music, Rochester, NY, as a student and teaching fellow in harpsichord, from 1979-1982. Leonhardt came to both schools while I was there. Then I came to the University of North Texas, Denton, TX, in 1982 and retired in 2009. Leonhardt came to UNT several times with Anner Bylsma, Frans Bruggen, and Jaap Schröder, and also as a solo performer. I visited him in Amsterdam about 2004. I also heard him play in France in the early 2000s. Each time was a wonderful revisiting of his incredible musicianship.

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

Since his approach to me was so effective, I tried to model his approach to my students. Probably the most important way was to help each student find his/her own voice. I encouraged each student to do the research and performance practice on a particular style, but then find his/her own way of expressing the music within the historical context. He definitely influenced my teaching.

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

I'm remembering other things he said now that I've thought about that year more. This is not an exact quote, but: "The harpsichord is an instrument of illusion. If you know what you want to hear, what you want to have your listeners hear, your fingers will produce it."

Curriculum Vitae

Dr. Lenora McCroskey is professor emeritus of music in the College of Music at the University of North Texas, Denton, TX. In addition to teaching organ and harpsichord, she was the assistant director of Early Music Studies, teaching Baroque performance practice, continuo, and coaching Baroque chamber ensembles. She was responsible in 2001 for instigating the Handel project at UNT with Maestro Graeme Jenkins of the Dallas Opera conducting professionals and pre-professionals in performances of Handel oratorios. Her keyboard students consistently won prizes in regional, national, and international competitions, including the first Dallas International Organ Competition. Critically acclaimed as an "elegant keyboardist, performing with vibrant energy," she has performed extensively on many concert series including recitals at Harvard; Yale; the University of California, Berkeley; Notre Dame, South Bend, ID; Methuen Recital Hall, Methuen, MA; Old West Church in Boston; Piccolo Spoleto in Charleston, SC; and recitals and workshops at national and regional conventions of the American Guild of Organists, the Organ Historical Society, the Midwest Historical Keyboard Society, and the Southeast Historical Keyboard Society. International appearances include solo organ recitals at l'Eglise du Val-de-Grâce in Paris; continuo for the ensemble Musica Poetica at the Dresden Festival; and five concerts as artistic director of Fort Worth Early Music with countertenor Ryland Angel in Paris, and the Brantôme Festival in France. She was founder or cofounder of Baroque ensembles in Cambridge, Rochester, and Fort Worth. She performed regularly with several historical instrument ensembles in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, including the Orchestra of New Spain, the Dallas Bach Society, Houston's Ars Lyrical, Dallas' Orpheus Ensemble, and the Denton Bach Society. She has appeared as continuoist with the Dallas Opera playing Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* and Handel's *Ariodante*. Dr. McCroskey was a frequent lecturer on various aspects of Baroque literature, speaking to regional and national conventions of numerous keyboard associations, and has a particular interest in French Classic liturgy. She is a Member of the Society of Fellows of the Mary Ingraham Bunting Institute of Radcliffe College (now the Radcliffe Institute), where she held an appointment in the spring of 1991. Active in the Dallas Chapter of the AGO, she has served as Dean of the Chapter, director of various committees, and as district convener for North Texas. Prior to her appointment at UNT, Dr. McCroskey was on the faculties of Stetson University, the Longy School in Cambridge, and the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester, and was the Associate Organist/Choirmaster in the Memorial Church at Harvard. She holds the BA and BM degrees from Stetson, where her organ study was with Paul Jenkins; an MA from Harvard in musicology; and the DMA from the Eastman School of Music, where her organ study was with Russell Saunders. She studied harpsichord with Gustav Leonhardt and continuo with Veronika Hampe at the Amsterdam Conservatory in the Netherlands. She has won numerous grants for study in France, including a John Anson Kittredge Foundation grant, and was awarded

the Paul Riedo Award by the Dallas Bach Society for service to early music in North Texas. She now is Director of Music at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Denton, and working on the publication of vocal music for the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century alternatim French liturgy to be published by Wayne Leupold Editions.

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