



## Douglas Amrine

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### Language

English

### Nationality

British

### Country of Residence

Brazil

### Year of birth

1958

### Website Address

<https://www.youtube.com/user/dsa10/videos>

<https://soundcloud.com/douglas-amrine>

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeU7kjYo\\_oP\\_nHZE45N2l4A](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeU7kjYo_oP_nHZE45N2l4A)

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

1981-82

### The lessons were

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

In public masterclasses as a player (participant)

In public masterclasses as a listener (auditor)

**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 went to Holland in 1977 to study organ at the Sweelinck Conservatorium, where my professor was Klaas Bolt. I also had harpsichord lessons with Kees Rosenhart, who had been a Leonhardt student. Although Klaas Bolt was a fine musician and a very kind man, I became frustrated with the musical content of my lessons and approached Leonhardt for organ lessons. We had a very long lesson in the Waalse Kerk in early 1978. This opened my eyes to many things I had never considered about organ playing and about Baroque repertoire. At the end of the lesson, Leonhardt announced that he was not employed to teach organ at the Conservatorium, but that I could be his harpsichord student in 1981-82. Of course I accepted the offer, but I was very nervous because in fact I was just a beginner on the harpsichord at that time. So, in the three years I had to wait, I completed a double major in organ and harpsichord at Oberlin Conservatory in the USA. When I returned to Amsterdam in 1981, Leonhardt said to me "oh yes - I remember that you play the organ as well. Whenever you want an organ lesson, just let me know and we will meet in the Waalse Kerk instead of at my home on the Herengracht."

**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 had been playing the organ for around nine years, and had just completed a Bachelors of Music (double major of harpsichord and organ) at Oberlin College Conservatory in Ohio, USA. I had also studied music theory, music history and organ for a couple of semesters at Stanford University in California. And I had already studied for a year in Amsterdam, so I had been introduced to playing historic organs. At Oberlin I restricted myself to music written before 1750, and I was familiar with much of the repertoire of the Baroque period.

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

Lessons with Leonhardt lessons were weekly (or more frequently, when lessons had to be made up for weeks when he had been touring abroad). Because I never played the same piece for Leonhardt twice, I had to prepare an enormous number of pieces. Of course they all had to be presented in polished form for Leonhardt; stumbling through something would have been a waste of my

precious time with him. I was prepared for this way of working, having been told by previous Leonhardt students (particularly my Amsterdam friend, Rhona Freeman) what to expect.

Harpsichord: an emphasis on German music (Bach, Pachelbel, Fux, Froberger), on French music (Louis Couperin, d'Anglebert, François Couperin, Forqueray, Rameau), and on English music (Byrd, Gibbons, Morley, Purcell etc). I played a lot of Bach, including some of the Inventions, the g minor English Suite, the b minor and G Major French Suites, the D Major Partita, the Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, and some of the Art of Fugue. I didn't play much Italian music, apart from some Frescobaldi, Storace and Guistini. Organ: Bach (Preludes and Fugues in a minor and b minor, various chorale preludes and chorale partite, Fantasy and Fugue in g minor, Passacaglia, Concerto in a minor after Vivaldi), Buxtehude, François Couperin, Sweelinck, Cornet, CPE Bach, Boëly etc Boëly was an unusual composer to bring to Leonhardt, as he was born in 1785 and clearly out of Leonhardt's preferred period. However, I needed to play one of his pieces (a prelude and fugue) in a competition. Leonhardt seemed to be pleasantly surprised to hear it (he didn't know any Boëly), and as ever gave me some useful tips.

**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.**

Harpsichord lessons were always in Leonhardt's house on the Herengracht. The interior of this house had made, on my first visit, a very strong impression on me. It was full of fine instruments and paintings, and antique furniture, silver, porcelain and glass of sumptuous quality. From the window you saw a small formal garden, designed by Alan Curtis, one of Leonhardt's first students. The artistic conception of the Leonhardts' home had a powerful integrity; somehow I not only felt that it was possible to live as in the 18th century, but that when you were inside the house, and heard no exterior noise apart from the bells of the Westerkerk, the 20th century ceased to exist. Sometimes I think that Leonhardt's domestic environment had contributed to his intuitive and deeply nuanced understanding of 17th and 18th-century music. He lived and breathed the period. (The house did have central heating, but even in winter this was kept on a very low setting, so that also evoked former times.) Leonhardt was generous in allowing access to all the keyboard instruments in his home. His normal teaching instrument, at that time, was a Taskin made by William Dowd (Paris), on which he had recorded the Goldberg Variations in the 1970s. Next to it was the Skowronek Dulcken from 1962 (whose twin I now own), which was a much finer instrument but had heavily weighted keys which I found difficult to play. There was a very beautiful Skowronek virginal in the room as well, which I once used during a lesson though it was terribly out of tune. Upstairs in the house was an original Walther fortepiano, and a Skowronek Vaudry copy, which was ravishing. Elsewhere there was a small Skowronek Italian, and a Skowronek clavichord. Organ lessons were given on the Langlez-Müller organ of the Waalse Kerk, which was a 10-minute walk away. It was always a treat to play that instrument, and I was lucky enough to be allowed to practise there in between my lessons. I normally brought 30-40 minutes of music to each lesson, which would generally last more than an hour. I would play each piece first. In harpsichord lessons, the lid would only be opened a fraction, and Leonhardt

would sit at some distance. (He didn't like to turn pages on the harpsichord, which was rather unnerving, though he would pull stops and turn pages on the organ - after all, I frequently did the same for him in his organ recitals!) After each piece or group of pieces, Leonhardt would play, although for some movements he would simply say 'fine' and move to the next one. His starting point was that we were colleagues and our ideas were of equal merit; of course, I didn't feel that way at all, as his understanding of music was so much richer and deeper than my own. But he did listen carefully to his students and respected their artistic decisions if he felt that they were sincere. For example, after I played a chorale partita by Bach, he went through each variation with me. At one point he said, "I believe that your tempo was this . . . " and then framed his comments around the tempo I had chosen. One very important aspect of the lessons was that Leonhardt would play differently than on his recordings. In his home, he would play with much greater freedom, daring and expressiveness. Years later he explained to me that he believed that recordings were 'documents' that needed to bear repeated listening, whereas in live performance one could (and should) take risks and make use of the inspiration of the moment. In particular, he believed that we needed to respond to the particular qualities of the instrument we were playing, and the acoustics of each hall or church.

**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?**

Leonhardt almost always preferred to discuss the content and style of the pieces, rather than technique. He expected his students not to have any significant technical issues. However, in our first harpsichord lessons, he did talk in some detail about how to produce a warmer sound on the instrument, and also how to create a decrescendo by releasing inner voices or by arpeggiated release (which he liked to call "sfumato", a term he borrowed from art history). Although I sensed that he did not wish me to try these techniques out at that very moment, I asked to do so and repeated some measures until I had begun to understand the necessary hand and finger movements. He also suggested some exercises of different keyboard techniques, which developed the ability to make dynamic contrasts on the harpsichord. It was obvious that Leonhardt was familiar with many historical treatises from different countries and periods, but he rarely referred to these. I felt that he had ingested their content and used that knowledge to form his own musical identity. Certainly when you heard him play, there were very clear differences between, for example, his approach to the virginalists and to the French harpsichord repertoire. With regards to fingerings, Leonhardt said "we can get some ideas from treatises, but we don't necessarily know what the best players did". His own fingerings were idiosyncratic, and were chosen to make the particular musical effect he wanted, rather than to be slavish to any particular historical source.

**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?**

One of the most interesting pieces I brought was Bach's youthful and rather short Prelude and

Fugue in e minor, BWV 533, which Leonhardt often performed in organ recitals. But I actually brought 533a, which is a manualiter version, and I played it on the harpsichord. To my knowledge, Leonhardt never performed this version, and I wasn't sure whether he would be very interested in it. However what he had to say was fascinating - he focused on the differences in approach between organ and harpsichord playing, showing where I needed to use different articulations, where arpeggiation might be effective, and how to exploit the sound of the harpsichord most effectively. The content on the harpsichord and organ would essentially be the same, but would be expressed differently on the two instruments. I remembered what he said years later, when I acquired a pedal harpsichord and decided that I wanted to play some of the organ repertoire as if it had been written for harpsichord; what Leonhardt had said changed everything.

**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?**

Clearly there was repertoire which Leonhardt found particularly interesting to discuss. These were not necessarily the most virtuosic or complex pieces. For example, he loved Bach's Inventions (which were originally intended as teaching pieces) and was able to discuss each of them in an astonishing degree of detail. And for something like the Musette in Bach's g minor English Suite, Leonhardt would find ways of making simple music sound even more naive and bucolic. It is well known that Leonhardt had a particular affinity for Froberger. In his suites, in particular, he could discuss every note on the page, how it fit into a broader gesture, and when it should be attacked and released with a remarkable degree of precision. Although Leonhardt was, like all serious musicians, in awe of Bach, he appreciated quality wherever it might be found - including anonymous pieces and works by little-known composers. He recorded a great deal of these, especially on the organ, and was also very generous in allowing students to make copies of music in his library, often written out in his own hand.

**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?**

Context was everything. Once my lesson ran a bit long and the next student arrived as I finished playing a sonata by Fux. This is repertoire which one almost never hears and which most players don't know. Leonhardt asked the other student: "What composer is this? Oh, that really is too difficult. Just tell me in which decade it was written." Leonhardt knew how music written in the 1710s was different from music written in the 1720s, and expected us to develop this knowledge as well. Similarly, he understood exactly how, for example, a particular fugue subject was different from other fugue subjects. He wanted his students to appreciate what the meaning or emotion was of being on the beat or before the beat, and of different rhythmic patterns, as well as the more commonly considered analysis of melody and harmony. For example, Bach's organ Passacaglia is, on the face of it, yet another North German ciaccona, though of course much grander and more complex than those of, for example, Buxtehude. But Leonhardt pointed out that, in the first variation, the upper voices arrive on the weakest sub-beat of the measure; he believed

that this was an expression of profound sadness, where one is simply exhausted and doesn't even have the energy to 'speak' on a strong beat. Therefore he was strongly against the current fashion for playing the first variation with an 'organo pleno', and recommended a very weak registration such as 8' and 4' flutes. Another example: Leonhardt liked to point out when composers were being 'witty'. But a typically witty figuration (such as the lively countersubject of Bach's 'Chromatic' Fugue BWV 903) was NOT witty when used by Sweelinck in his setting of the Dowland Lachrymae, where instead it was expressing tearful sadness. This changed the articulation entirely, and might even affect the tempo chosen. Witty was just one of the adjectives which Leonhardt used evocatively. Others included: noble, sweet, regretful . . . and the amazing thing is that he could apply these human emotions to a whole movement or even to just a single gesture within a measure, and translate these into the movement of his fingers and the sound he was creating. I don't think I've ever heard another player who could do this so precisely and consistently. His knowledge of the visual arts and architecture of the Renaissance and Baroque was vast, and he sometimes made comparisons between these disciplines and music.

**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?**

Leonhardt had one rule above all else: a performer should be convincing. Whatever interpretative decisions his students took, we needed to do so with enough conviction (and, needless to say, the technical skill) to convince our audience.

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

When I discovered music in my teens, and in particular Baroque music, I was fascinated by it, and sometimes moved by it. At university I studied music theory and music history. And yet I didn't feel that I understood the music I played or listened to in a communicative way. What was the music saying to me, and what messages would I try to convey to my audience? My hope was that Leonhardt would help me to understand why each piece of music was written in the way it was, and how we as performers can use that understanding in our own performances.

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

While I was still living in Amsterdam (I stayed there for another two years after my lessons with Leonhardt ended), he often asked me to pull stops and turn pages for organ recitals. Just being that close to him during a performance, and having an opportunity to discuss registrations, was both inspiring and a kind of lesson. During the nearly three decades which followed, I was fortunate to stay in contact with the Leonhardts from time to time. He was very generous in responding to letters I wrote, and made thoughtful and supportive comments on my first CD (which was on the pedal harpsichord) and on my harpsichord transcription of Bach's violin Ciaccona. I always felt

that if I had a particular question to discuss regarding early keyboard repertoire, that Leonhardt was happy to respond. I feel that he realized that in today's world, there are not too many people who are seriously interested in this type of music and these instruments, and he always enjoyed meeting a kindred soul, at whatever level of ability they might have been. As I lived in the UK for 25 years, I was fortunate to see and hear Leonhardt often, when he visited for recitals. On two occasions he came to my flat in the Barbican, a complex noted for its Brutalist style, and was politely critical of its style; but he was flabbergasted when I told him that the Barbican had been given listed building status. As my 50th birthday approached in 2008, I wrote to him and said that I would be very grateful if he could arrange for me to play some Dutch organs again. He wrote back enthusiastically, and arranged a day full of instruments. He personally demonstrated the small organ of the Nieuwe Kerk (which I had never heard), and the two organs of the Laurenskerk in Alkmaar (with kind permission of the organist, Pieter van Dijk). It was a truly unforgettable day.

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

Yes, certainly. First of all I try to respect my students and to listen to their own ideas about music and early keyboard instruments. Also, in addition to wanting to help my students develop their keyboard technique, I want them to discover how different keyboard techniques should be applied in different styles of music. Above all, I want them to make an emotional connection with the music, by understanding what the composer was trying to communicate in each piece.

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

A year of lessons with Leonhardt was very intense. It was impossible for me to absorb all the things he said, and the examples of his own playing that I had heard, much less to be able to translate all of this to my fingers. Over the years, more and more of what he said has become clear to me, particularly when I play the composers whose music I brought to my lessons. Leonhardt made one prediction which was completely accurate. I had just played a Sarabande, which I interpreted as being very 'grave' or sombre, and had therefore chosen a rather turgid tempo. He said: "In twenty years, you will play Sarabandes more quickly." Years later, I began to understand that not every Sarabande is 'grave', and that even among the 'Sarabandes graves', not all of them are desperately sad. If we look carefully at how each piece is written, we can judge the precise emotional 'temperature' which the composer may have been trying to communicate.

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

Although it is important to read treatises, and enlightening to play historic keyboard instruments and excellent copies, the greatest insight into the interpretation of a piece comes from carefully looking at the notes on the page. We need to understand what makes each melody distinct, where

counterpoint is obvious or implied, how composers use texture, whether harmonic rhythm is stable or accelerating or slowing down . . . there is a wealth of information in the score itself and that should be our primary focus. Extensive knowledge of the repertoire of the period (and not just the keyboard repertoire) also deepens our understanding. In terms of keyboard technique on the harpsichord, Leonhardt showed me that as the harpsichord is limited in its expressive tools, we should use them to their full advantage. In particular, he believed in a very wide range of articulations, from the wettest of over-legatos to the driest of short notes. How we vary our articulations, and which articulations we choose in every beat of every measure, makes an enormous difference to the musical messages we send to our audience.

## **Curriculum Vitae**

Harpsichordist and organist Douglas Amrine attended Stanford University and Oberlin College Conservatory, and did his post-graduate studies at the Sweelinck Conservatorium Amsterdam, where he studied with Gustav Leonhardt. He was a prizewinner at the Albert Schweitzer International Organ Competition in 1982. His first CD, *Pro Cembalo Pleno*, features organ works by Bach played on the pedal harpsichord, and was released on Priory Records. His second CD, *Ciaccona*, includes his own harpsichord transcription of the violin Ciaccona BWV 1004. Amrine has appeared as soloist in many European countries, as well as the United States, Singapore, India and Brazil. At Gustav Leonhardt's invitation, he gave organ recitals on the historic organ of the Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam. He has also taught harpsichord at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory in Singapore. In 2014, Douglas Amrine moved to Brazil, where he co-founded the chamber ensemble, *Música Barroca Curitiba*. He is also a co-founder of the Gustav Leonhardt Pedagogy Archive.

## **Files / Docs**

[Notes from first lesson-5e4ef9c3d002c.pdf](#)

[Sempe, Tucker, Amrine \(Amsterdam, 1982\)-5e4ef9c67dd51.jpg](#)

[GL letter about Ciaccona-5e4ef9c67e90e.pdf](#)

[reaction to Wentz article on Leonhardt-5e4ef9c680e94.pdf](#)

[Wentz %22Protestant Roots of GL%22-5ed6671a9cc7a.pdf](#)