

Contextualizing the Baroque: Designing a Harpsichord Curriculum for Keyboardists

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Why Study Harpsichord?

- Learn repertoire outside the 18th century
- Repertoire from the 17th century helps us understand the music of Bach and his contemporaries better
- Historical improvisation helps keyboardists to understand structure and harmonic language of Baroque music
- Figured bass study allows for a greater variety of duo and ensemble repertoire
- Principles of harpsichord technique can be applied to technique at the modern piano
- Period instruments are diverse and fascinating to play!

Curriculum Objectives

1. To learn and perform music from multiple different composers and styles, including composers of the 17th century.
2. To develop basic fluency with figured bass accompaniment.
3. To identify and contextualize elements of influential treatises in figured bass, harpsichord technique, and musical interpretation.
4. To develop, through historical improvisation, a basic understanding of Baroque compositional elements and harmonic language.
5. To understand and identify elements of harpsichord development throughout the Baroque period.
6. To encourage an appreciation for Baroque music and the harpsichord.

Elements of the Curriculum

- Historic Contextualization/Listening Activities
 - Expose students to historic treatises:
 - Diruta, Frescobaldi, Caccini, Saint Lambert, Gasparini, Couperin, Rameau, and Quantz
 - Give students listening assignments to introduce solo and ensemble works of composers throughout the Baroque period
 - Compare recordings on modern instruments vs. period instruments
 - Broaden understanding of the Baroque period

- Repertoire
 - Composers to Explore:
 - Girolamo Frescobaldi, Giovanni Picchi, Dario Castello, Johann Jakob Froberger, William Byrd, Orlando Gibbons, Dr. John Bull, Peter Philips, Thomas Morley, Giles Farnaby, Thomas Tomkins, Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, Louis Couperin, Jacques Champion de Chambonnières, Jean-Henri d'Anglebert, Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre, Georg Muffat, Johann Casper Ferdinand Fischer, Heinrich Johann Franz von Biber
 - RCM/ABRSM Harpsichord Syllabi
 - Leveled repertoire necessary for newcomers to the instrument
- Figured Bass Study
 - Monsieur de Saint-Lambert: *A New Treatise on Accompaniment with the Harpsichord, the Organ, and with Other Instruments* (1707)
 - Francesco Gasparini: *The Practical Harmonist at the Harpsichord* (1722)
 - Jean-François Dandrieu: *Principles of Accompaniment* (1718)
- Technique
 - Developing fluency with paired fingering
 - English Fingering: favored fingers 1/3
 - Italian Fingering: favored fingers 2/4
 - Devise exercises to practice these patterns
 - Creating a beautiful sound
 - Learning to relax into the key, dropping weight, and plucking with the fingertips
 - Rolling chords to create a lush sound
 - Ornaments
 - Explore options suggested by Jean-Henri d'Anglebert's table from *Pièces de clavecin* (1689)
 - Have students learn with all different types of fingering
 - Give them challenging melodic lines from the French repertoire with numerous ornaments to test recognition and fluency
 - 18th Century Textures
 - Composers such as Bach, Scarlatti, and Rameau provide ample virtuosic passages to explore as excerpts
- Improvisation
 - Begin with Ground Basses
 - Descending Tetrachord/Lament Bass
 - Romanesca
 - Passamezzo Moderno
 - Unmeasured Preludes
 - Ornamentation
 - Add on repeats
 - Measured Preludes
 - Dance Suite Movements
 - Partimento