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Greetings from uphill----

I suppose you are busy packing and deciding what to get rid of and what to keep.

Unseasonable hot weather here, over 80° yesterday and the same promised for today.

The occasion of this epistle is that an important obstacle has been vanquished--how to get the bulky "little" pickup into a very cramped space on the clavichord, which has been holding me up for several months because I could never get around to it with all the interruptions. Now it is done and it works. The muting-feats will be in in a few days.

From one point of view, I should have built a new clavichord from scratch--I could have built two instruments in the time it has taken to undo my mistakes of 31 years ago (I started 1940). But if I had, I never would have had the tapes of my 158-string psalter.

I just finished reading THE HARPSPICHER by Dankermann (the kit-makers in New York City). This fellow went abroad several times and collected superb photos of many harpsichords and clavichords and their makers. Especially Germany, England, and our East Coast--i.e., the Boston area.

What a fortunate thing that I decided on a clavichord instead of a harpsichord! The mechanical problems of making the wooden parts of harpsichord mechanisms function in changing temperature and humidity are formidable. The plastic and metal parts aren't much better--the pivots in particular wear out whether they are quills or leather or nylon or other plastic.

If I had tried to build a quarter-tone harpsichord I wouldn't have had room enough for the unisone and octave stops. And it would have always been out of tune. (Tuneless harpsichords use extremely thin strings and they are loose--my strings are much tighter.)

There is a way out--run it by remote control and put only a few strings, widely-spaced, on each soundingboard. But this possibility (using traditional pipe-organ actions) is never mentioned in the harpsichord books.

So now I understand much better why 12-tone was adopted during the harpsichord era. The mechanical problems alone!

I will have to settle for an electronic organ with percussion effects if I need harpsichord tone in say 12 or another system.

My last thirty years of struggle could have been far worse, if I had chosen the harpsichord as the ideal.

Let's put it another way: Yates' and others' arguments

almost fall to the ground when you see how rough-and-ready the construction of classical harpsichords was. There were only poor, punk tuning-forks, and no stroboscopes or frequency-counters, and no precision reed-organs either. There weren't any Helmholtz books or piano-tuning schools. This makes Yates' fuss over equal- and well-tempered rather will-o-the-wispy. How long would a harpsichord of Bach's time stay in tune? When Zuckermann makes and sells kits and yet is willing to admit how short a time the most famous modern harpsichords stay in tune, it couldn't have been long enough to compare the merits of variations on the temperament theme.

We ~~xxx~~ have been spoilt by the fact that Marjorie's are carefully finish-tuned just before the record albums are made. So are pianos! As a matter of fact, nearly every one of the several hundred pianos I have tuned has had one or two recalcitrant notes that wouldn't settle down no matter what was done to them.

This past 4-5-6 month period on the part of us have been pulling over the past several years. It will take the best precision oscillators to make electronic range finders the non-IT system feasible. For that much will be available. We can go ahead.

That matters is not how well the instrument is in tune the day after tuning, but how well it is in tune a month later when someone offers the proper sounding facilities or that group of irascible skettish demerol on the radio.

By the time you are settled in Berkeley, I will be able to send you some much better photos of instruments that were taken recently, and also the photograph, not just brightening the negatives so I can enlarge them.

2011