

# The Lute Harpsichord

Notes by Kim Heindel

A hybrid keyboard instrument with origins in the Renaissance and Baroque Periods, the *Lautenwerk* (lute-harpsichord) is strung with gut, and is designed to resemble the tonal characteristics of the lute. J.S Bach is known to have taken a particular interest in the *Lautenwerk*. In fact, in the late 1730's, the noted builder Zacharius Hildebrandt constructed one according to Bach's own specifications. There were two such instruments listed in Bach's estate at the time of his death, and certain of his compositions which do not fit comfortably into either the lute or harpsichord repertoire, may have been written with the *Lautenwerk* in mind.

The *Lautenwerk* has been largely neglected in recent decades, despite the tremendous interest in performance on period instruments. This is largely due to the fact that, although several important eighteenth-century harpsichord makers are known to have produced instruments of this type (Fleischer, Hildebrandt, and Johann Nikolaus Bach among others), none are known to be extant. For this reason, the design of Willard Martin's instruments, the first of their kind to be built in North America, relies heavily upon written descriptions dating from that period, such as that found in Adlung's *Musica mechanica organoedi* (Berlin, 1768).

Although the greatest interest in gut-strung harpsichords seems to have been exhibited by eighteenth-century German builders, numerous references dating from the early years of the sixteenth century through the final years of the eighteenth century tell us that these instruments were also known in England, France, Italy and the Low Countries. In the inventory of the musical instruments owned by the Duke of Chandos in 1720, one finds "a harpsichord with gut string, made by Mr. Longfellow, of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge." In Diderot's *Encyclopédie* of 1778 we learn that "Two hundred years ago...the strings were of gut and consequently the tone was sweet and soft...One still finds a few of these old harpsichords in Paris and in the large cities of the Low Countries and Germany." According to the *Encyclopédie méthodique, Musique* (Paris, 1791), the Italian harpsichord builder Farini "mounted some of his harpsichords with gut strings. There are still some of them in several Italian cities which attest to the advantage of these strings over those of iron or copper for the quality of tone."