The Harpsichord

- Mechanically, a hybrid instrument
- Like the organ:
  - chromatic keyboard with one pitch per key
  - well-suited for polyphony and accompaniment
- Like the lute:
  - plucked string instrument
  - must account for quick sound decay by forms of arpeggiation
- Existent by the fifteenth century
- Not widely manufactured until the sixteenth century
The Organ’s Influence

- The early harpsichord style was not distinct from the organ’s
  - Pieces not designated specifically for either keyboard instrument
- Early works were simply transcriptions of vocal or ensemble pieces
  - *Obras de música para tecla, arpa, y vihuela* (Antonio Cabezón, 1510-1566)
    - Vocal transcriptions arranged generally for polyphonic string instruments
    - The broadness of this collection could include the harp, the Spanish vihuela, and the keyboard
      - Suggests that “the stringed keyboard instruments had not developed enough of a basic style to warrant independent compositions of their own”
- Early harpsichord composers were also organists, so idioms of the organ tradition were assumed
The Organ Tradition

- For many centuries, the primary keyboard instrument
- *Robertsbridge Codex* (1320) is first example of newly-composed repertoire but follows vocal tradition closely
- Development of a true organ style
  - Conrad Paumann (1410-1473), Paul Hofhaimer (1459-1537), Andrea Gabrieli (1533-1585)
  - *Fundamentum organisandi*
  - used florid, rhythmically varying upper lines
  - paired such melodic lines with chordal, complete triads
  - introduced lengthy scalar passages as a melody device
Why the Lute?

- The harpsichord’s descent from the organ tradition seems obvious
- Many parallels between the lute and harpsichord traditions
- The lute is neglected in many surveys of harpsichord and early keyboard repertoire
  - Some references to lute in context of continuo playing
  - Influence of the solo lute repertoire is confined to the *style brisé*
  - Extraordinary parallels between the two traditions are not mentioned
The Lute

- All plucked string instruments with a neck and a vaulted body
  - theorbo, archlute, and mandolin

- Origination of the lute
  - Originated in Central Asia (al-‘ud)
  - Deeply rooted in Arab culture as court accompaniment beginning in the seventh century.
  - Immersed in the musical climate of Italy by the mid-fourteenth century
  - Immersed in Burgundy and Germany by the fifteenth century

- The lute in pre-baroque Europe
  - Repertoire was generally confined to song accompaniment and vocal transcriptions
  - Music was not composed specifically for the lute until the fifteenth century
  - For over 200 years, the most popular instrument for secular music in Europe
**Style Brisé: The Development of a “Broken Style”**

- Certain mechanical considerations
  - Pitch of each string is changed by where the performer presses a finger on the fret
  - The number of strings is the maximum number of notes that can be sounding at one time
  - The old Renaissance lute style characterized by three- or four-voice polyphonic transcriptions was difficult on the lute
  - “The particular manner of playing … consists only in arpeggiation or the separation of voices,” Perrine (?-1698)

- The lute’s history of accompaniment
  - Resolution of the chords in a figured bass was left “at the discretion of the performer”
  - Lute duet—one lutenist would pluck melody with a plectrum, while the other lutenist would improvise a polyphony-like accompaniment by finger-plucking
  - Finger-plucking allowed lutenists to efficiently accompany chansons and motets with up to five voices

- Baroque humanism
  - Interest in the lute as a “classical” solo instrument
    - Orpheus on his lyre
**Style Brisé**: Characteristics

- **Considerations**
  - Simple and light due to many strings
  - Rhythmic, forward motion due to quick delay of sound
  - Spaced out the simultaneous sounding of each voice
    - at any moment, successive movement in some voice
    - only suggests counterpoint by using suspensions
    - “pseudo-imitative gestures” imply, but only partially realize, every voice in the texture

- **Defining Characteristics**
  - strong basslines
  - broken textures
  - occasional “melodies that are hard to follow”
  - balance of chordal and florid passages
  - moderate embellishment

*Style brisé* in Fransicque’s “Pavane d’Angle”

D’Anglebert’s keyboard arrangement of “La pleureuse” by E. Gaultier, with original lute tablature
Style *Brisé*: Seventeenth-century French lute style

- Most idiomatic
- Noticeable use of
  - asymmetrical phrases
  - syncopations
  - anticipations
  - delays of the music in all voices
- Different figurations were not used consistently and could change between measures or sections
- Accents (melodic, harmonic, or textural) were spaced out until places of structural significance
- Conformed to French rhythmic patterns
- Antoine Franciscisque (1570-1605), Robert Ballard (1575-1645), René Mesangeau (1567-1638), and the Gaultiers
The Lute’s Influence on the Harpsichord: “Practical Necessity”

- Newly-composed solo repertoire for harpsichord not widely published until sixteenth century
- Little keyboard music was published in France during the sixteenth century compared to Italy
  - due to lute’s prominence in France
  - Seventeenth-century French harpsichordists turned for inspiration to the lute, which was considered to be “the noblest instrument of any”
- Influence by lute was functional necessity
  - Both were softer instruments with quickly decaying sound
  - François Couperin (1668-1733) used the organ technique of finger substitution to sustain an arpeggiated texture
  - In this way, the style brisé was translated quite naturally to the plucked harpsichord
The Lute’s Influence on the Harpsichord:
“Transformed … into an element of taste and style”

- The style brisé has even been called by some to be the “proper genius” of the harpsichord
- In the works of the seventeenth-century harpsichordists, the broken style that was “originally dictated by practical necessity is transformed by the artist into an element of taste and style”
- In many significant ways, the lute was “the true source of the harpsichord art”
- This extends beyond the style brisé into categories as varied as:
  - genre
  - texture
  - form
  - timbre
  - sound effects
  - harmony
  - ornamentation
Genre

- All genres that were not vocally derived show a close historical and musical association with the lute

- Dance Types
  - Standard suite arrangement
  - Organization by diatonic keys
  - Prelude
    - warm-up piece
    - tune the strings
    - unmeasured prelude
  - Courante
    - seen as the “lutenists’ masterpiece” because the ‘running’ nature of the genre

Campanella scale in a lute prelude

Lute trait in an unmeasured keyboard prelude by D’Anglebert
Genre

- Tombeau
  - Johann Jacob Froberger (1616-1667) wrote a “Tombeau” upon the death of French lutenist Blanrocher
    - He typically composed in the German tradition
    - He encountered the genre from the lutenists while on a visit to Paris
    - The tombeau brilliantly uses the French *style brisé*
  - Evokes sadness by the use of
    - chromaticism
    - freer rhythm
    - arpeggiated passages
    - abrupt starts and stops
    - unusual chord progressions
    - embrace of dissonance

- Variations
  - Originated in Spanish lute (*vihuela*) style
  - Brought to England by travelling Spanish musicians
  - English keyboard repertories (Fitzwilliam Virginal Book)
Imitation of Timbre

- Lute stop
  - Later harpsichords had two manuals
    - This corresponded with the increasing importance of the harpsichord in European secular music
    - Two manuals either different pitches or contrasting 'stops'
  - a set of jacks closer to the end of the string
  - created a sound that is extraordinarily similar to the lute

- Lautenwerck
  - Like the harpsichord:
    - keyboard
    - general mechanics
  - Like the lute:
    - gut strings
    - rounded, wooden body
    - specific tunings
  - Convincing enough to “deceive even an experienced lutenist”
Evocative Effects

◦ Imitative Gestures
  ◦ tirer et rabattre
    ◦ suggestive of strumming
    ◦ Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757)

◦ Mood
  ◦ Lute was said to have a “gently melancholy character”

◦ Key Signature
  ◦ Lute was often tuned to D minor

◦ Register
  ◦ sans chanterelle
    ◦ Lute pieces in the French style of the 1630s were often played without the highest string.
    ◦ Harpsichord pieces written in direct imitation of the lute used a rather low register
      ◦ Exploitation of lower register eventually became a hallmark of the harpsichord’s own idiom
      ◦ François Couperin’s “Les baricades mistérieuses” (1717)
Treatment of Dissonance

- Unique treatment of dissonance
  - “In order to not leave the instrument empty”
    - striking dissonances repeatedly in order to sustain the sound
    - emphasizing suspensions
- Harmonic formulas
  - major 7th, suspended 9th, and augmented 5th
- Campanella scale
  - baigné effect
  - used by lutenists like Pierre Gaultier and Germain Pinel
    - lutenist played successive notes of a scale using alternating strings so that each note can be sustained into the next
    - Effect was imitated by harpsichordists by holding and slurring groups of notes
Ornament Style

- Chambonnières’s and D’Anglebert’s ornament tables
- *Port de voix*
  - particular to the French style
  - could be described as a “decorated appoggiatura”
  - Occurred in anticipation of the beat
    - Melody instruments and vocalists used prebeat ornament
    - Five organ treatises of the seventeenth century indicate prebeat ornament
- Harpsichord’s treatment of *port de voix*
  - Showed up in harpsichord ornament tables (1670s) as a onbeat ornament
  - Derivation from the lute style
    - lute played a *port de voix* exactly on the beat
  - Deviation from the lute style
    - developing an inter-measure style – prebeat alongside onbeat

Inter-measure *port de voix* in F. Couperin’s “La covalescente”
The Lute’s Legacy

- Decline in the 18th century:
  - no longer loud enough to be heard in church, opera, or larger ensembles
  - lyrical character could not accommodate new *Sturm und Drang* style
  - rejection of humanism, which had originally prompted great interest in the solo lute repertoire
  - up to fourteen courses to accommodate polyphony, and subsequently very difficult to play
  - gut strings were highly dependent on the weather and required frequent tuning
  - lute tablature notation
    - Keyboard notation conveyed the *style brisé* with even more accuracy and nuance
The Lute’s Legacy:
“The true source of the harpsichord art”

- Rise of the harpsichord
  - Took lute’s place as most popular instrument on secular music scene
  - Owes much of its success to stylistic mechanisms adapted from the lute tradition
    - lute-like improvisatory styles
    - suite organization
    - sound effects
    - harmonic progressions
    - ornamentation symbols
    - broken textures
  - In many significant ways, the lute was “the true source of the harpsichord art”
Questions

For further reading and a complete bibliography: