

The Western Early Keyboard Association Presents

*The Silbermann Piano*

*Music by Sebastian Bach, Emanuel Bach, and Domenico Scarlatti*

*Carol lei Breckenridge, Fortepiano*

Saturday, September 16, 2023, 2pm

St. John the Baptist Chapel at the Oregon Episcopal School, Portland, OR

Saturday, October 7, 2023 at 12:00 Noon: video recital premiere and

Zoom reception with Carol lei Breckenridge and Kerstin Schwarz

[www.youtube.com/@westernearlykeyboardassoc](http://www.youtube.com/@westernearlykeyboardassoc)

*Program*

Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue in D Minor  
BWV 903 (1720)

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Fantasia in F# Minor (1787)

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788)

Rondo in A Major, W. 58  
from *Für Kenner und Liebhaber, Vol. IV* (pub. 1783)

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach

*Intermission*

Sonatas from the *Essercizi* (pub. 1738)

Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757)

K. 1 in D Minor

K. 4 in G Minor

K. 8 in G Minor

K. 9 in D Minor

K. 11 in C Minor

K. 12 in G Minor

K. 18 in D Minor

K. 19 in F Minor

K. 27 in B Minor

K. 30 in G Minor - "Cat's Fugue"

*The piano used for this program is a copy of the 1749 Silbermann piano in Nuremberg, and was completed in 2022 by Kerstin Schwarz in Zerbst, Germany. Its 5 octaves (FF-f3) are double-strung in Stephen Birkett's historical wire (brass and iron), and it features hand-raising damper stops, una corda, and a pantalon register.*

**Carol lei Breckenridge** specializes in eighteenth-century music on clavichord and fortepiano. She has given numerous recitals and workshops, introducing students and audiences to early keyboards, including for The International Clavichord Symposium in Magnano, Italy, Cornell University, The Dutch Clavichord Society, the Historical Keyboard Society of North America, the Iowa City Early Keyboard Society, the Western Early Keyboard Association, the National Music Museum in Vermillion, South Dakota,, and many universities. Carol lei Breckenridge was the 2022 recipient of *Early Music America's* Joan Benson Clavichord Award. She and some colleagues -- Karen Hudson-Brown, Paul Irvin, and Philippe Litzler-- subsequently made a video about the clavichord, which can be found on WEKA's YouTube channel.

With early study and degrees in modern piano, in the 1980's she began to acquire historic keyboard copies of clavichord, harpsichord, and fortepiano, in order to discover how they illuminate repertoire of their time. Degrees in piano performance (B.M., M.M., D.M.A.) have been augmented with a 1997-98 Fellowship at Cornell University, studying fortepiano with Malcolm Bilson, as well as studies on harpsichord with Edward Parmentier and Joan Benson on clavichord. *Professor Emerita* from Central College in Pella, Iowa, Dr. Breckenridge now lives in the Portland area.

In November 2022, she welcomed her newly completed **Silbermann piano by Kerstin Schwarz** of Zerst, Germany, copied from the 1749 Silbermann in Nuremberg. This piano is ideal for the music of Sebastian and Emanuel Bach, as well as Iberian composers such as Domenico Scarlatti. A WEKA YouTube video introduces the instrument with Carol lei playing some repertoire, and its builder, Kerstin Schwarz, providing further information about construction.

### **Brief History of the Piano**

Around 1700, the first piano was invented in Florence, Italy, by the brilliant curator for the Medici, **Bartolomeo Cristofori**, who called it *gravicembalo col piano e forte* (harpsichord with soft and loud), having hammers that enabled dynamics by touch. Later, in the 1730's in Germany, **Gottfried Silbermann**, Saxon builder of organs, harpsichords, and clavichords, began experimenting with building pianos. Apparently, in the 1740's he obtained access to a Cristofori piano, and, realizing its action's superiority, adopted it in exact detail. However, he placed Cristofori's action in a larger case, increased the distance from hammer to string, used iron strings except for the bass, and hand stops for damper-raising, *una corda*, and a pantalon register. All these changes resulted in a more powerful tone, and arguably, the first true piano.

**Emanuel Bach** played Silbermann pianos when he was employed as accompanist and chamber musician at the court of Frederick the Great in Berlin. His father, **Sebastian Bach**, also knew Silbermann pianos, and in 1749 was an agent for the sale of one. When Sebastian visited his son in 1747 at the court in Potsdam, the King had him immediately brought to the music room and the new Silbermann piano. He was asked to improvise on a theme given by the King, which later became the basis for Bach's *The Musical Offering*.

**Domenico Scarlatti** had access to Cristofori pianos at the Spanish court, as at the time of her death in 1758, Queen Maria Barbara owned four Florentine (Cristofori) pianos, and another probably by an Iberian maker.

**The basic tone quality of Cristofori and Silbermann pianos** is very similar, particularly since they both have hammers made of rolled paper with a thin layer of leather on top. This strong, yet somewhat springy hammer, produces a tone quite different from later "Viennese" pianos. As with the far older clavichord (with a history dating back into the Middle Ages), the nuanced dynamics possible on Cristofori and Silbermann's new invention afford a natural expressivity similar to that of the human voice, a quality of *cantabile* that became more and more the ideal in the eighteenth century.

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### **Upcoming Events**

November 11, 2023 – JS Bach's Inventions & Sinfonias with Barbara Baird, Harpsichord

March 2, 2024 – The Leonhardt Legacy with Douglas Amrine, Harpsichord

April 20, 2024 – Five Centuries of English Clavichord Music with Marcia Hadjimarkos

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