

Glass Music World

WINTER 2008

Bill Meikle; as Ben Franklin, he found a future in our past



Bill Meikle at Old South Meeting House on December 5, 2006

By Bryan Marquard, Globe Staff | December 29, 2006

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Bill Meikle so inhabited the character of Benjamin Franklin that even when he wasn't in costume, strangers would look at his bald pate, wispy white hair, and wire-rimmed glasses and see history made flesh.

"We'd be on the T and someone would say, 'Don't I know you from somewhere?' Finally, when he had studied Franklin and became Franklin we realized that what people had been seeing all those years was their history book image," said Mr. Meikle's wife, Barbara.

And when Mr. Meikle made impersonating Franklin his life's work, he looked the part strolling down the street

in Bermuda shorts, before he had time to change into colonial-style breeches and meet with a tour group.

"He would be walking from the Park Street T stop to Old South Meeting House and construction workers on scaffolding would call down, 'Yo, Ben!' And this was when he was dressed as himself," his wife said. "People just saw Ben Franklin in him."

Mr. Meikle, who won two New England Emmy Awards for his portrayal of Franklin, died of liver cancer

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Marianne Davies, The Glass Harmonica And Nerve Derangement

By Kenneth R. Piotrowski

Reprinted from the Glass Music International Journal 1988

Among the plethora of exotic musical instruments invented during the Age of Sensitivity, only one rose to prominence: the glass harmonica. So complete was its fame that it not only subjugated all of the 'exotic' favorites of that age, but shared a rivalry enjoyed exclusively by the harp, flute and piano-forte, principally in the then Germanic-speaking countries. Its creation and meteoric rise over a twenty year period was succeeded by an all too brief florescence lasting for some thirty years and followed (in most locations) by a rapid demise. However, during those lamentably few years of life, it attracted poets and writers to laud its name and countless virtuosi to perform on it with formidable techniques; hundreds of composers wrote vast numbers of works especially for it, many of whom stand out as moguls of eighteenth and nineteenth century composition: C.Ph.E. Bach, J.G. Naumann, J.F. Reichardt, A. Reicha, W.A. Mozart, L. van Beethoven and J.A. Hasse, to mention but a few.

The glass harmonica, not to be confused with its precursive form, the musical glasses, was invented by American statesman Benjamin Franklin while in England in 1761. It consists of a series of hollow, hemispheric glass bowls or bells, each with a hollow neck in its center. The largest bowl, which corresponds to the lowest tone, is mounted horizontally onto an iron spindle at the extreme left by means of cork fitted into its neck. Each succeeding bowl, ascending in semi-tones and diminishing by graduated sizes, is placed evenly inside the former with only half an inch of rim exposed upon which to play. The spin-

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PRESIDENTIAL NOTES



This issue features an article on Bill Meikle, which appeared in the Boston Globe. Bill passed away on December 19, 2006 from liver cancer. He had an exciting and fulfilling final year in 2006 with all the gigs related to Ben Franklin's 300th birthday celebration. Two weeks before his death, he was honored at a luncheon in Old South Meeting House in Boston for "his work to promote greater awareness and understanding of Benjamin Franklin in Boston." That day, he and Barbara visited with many friends who had helped them along the way in Bill's 26 year career as Franklin. I know those of us who attended the 1997 GMI Festival in Boston and/or accompanied him on his tours of Boston as Franklin have many fond memories of him. All who got to know him were very fortunate indeed.

We have also included a reprint of an article written by Ken Piotrowski entitled "Marianne Davies, The Glass Harmonica and Nerve Derangement," which originally appeared in the 1988 GMI Journal. There have been many requests for the reprinting of this article due to its very interesting subject matter.

The next issue will feature another article from the Boston Globe. This one entitled, "For Pure Sound, A Clear Choice - Local Firm Crafts Glass Harmonicas," appeared in the Globe on August 26, 2007. It is an excellent article about G. Finkenbeiner, Inc. at the present time. Along with

this article, we will include a reprint of the article, "The Glass Harmonica: A Return From Obscurity," written by Gerhard Finkenbeiner with Vera Meyer, which also originally appeared in the 1988 GMI Journal.

This is the first issue we have been able to get out in some time. There are two reasons for this. I have had to focus primarily on family affairs for some time now, and, also, I did not receive any articles from members for a long period of time and did not have the time to pursue them. I would greatly appreciate any material or ideas for future articles. Also, any ideas or proposals for a future glass music festival would be greatly appreciated as well.

During October, June and I traveled through North Carolina and Virginia visiting family members. We took advantage of the trip to get together with Ann Stuart, John Moore, and Jonathan Stuart-Moore at their lakeside home in Chapel Hill, NC and then spent two weeks in Williamsburg, Va. While in Williamsburg we were able to spend some time with Dean and Valerie Shostak and their three girls and also attended some of Dean's concerts. I will cover Dean's concerts in some detail in a future issue. In May of 2006, we traveled to Europe, and while we were there, we were able to visit with GMI members Ingeborg Stein, Liselotte and Peter Behrendt, Ingeborg Emge, and Clemens Hofinger.

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Members should be aware that a glassmusic egroup exists at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/glassmusic/>.

GMI Happenings

By Liz Mears

I take a break from the snow and ice of this now wintry season to share with you the various happenings from our members over the past several months. I, myself, am in the last throes of preparing pieces for three exhibitions: Denver, St. Louis, and Washington DC. Who would have thought that February would be such a demanding month for glass art?

Speaking of glass, the GLASS DUO, **Anna and Arkadiusz Szafraniec**, from Gdansk, Poland, shared their glass music with fans in Bulgaria and Rumania during September. Even though the weather and the roads were difficult, they were warmed by the reception they received for their concerts. They remembered especially the wonderful atmosphere in the Aleksander Newsky temple in Sofia. It was a "fantastic space filled up with people and incredible, old icons hanging on the walls...Really moving...Ideal place for glass music..." They finished up their trip in Germany and are now at home thinking about the next glass harp they want to build. They also performed at a Mozart Festival in Gdansk and had the opportunity to meet other glass musicians there and play their Armonica and Verrophone.

Frederic Bousquet has a new website www.structuresonore.com. He traveled from France to Williamsburg, VA, to work on **Dean Shostak's** new Cristal Baschet and while there, played in Dean's concerts.

The Independence Park Institute, in Philadelphia, PA, according to Park Ranger, **Tom Degnan**, now has two glass Armonicas, having purchased another Finkenbeiner instrument for the IPI Learning Lab in the Park's Living History Center. He also informs us that last summer the rangers at Franklin Court welcomed **Carolinn Skyler** for two performances on the glass Armonica, which were very well attended.

Carolinn writes that she enjoyed her fifth summer playing 14 weeks of programming in Philadelphia. The performances took place six days a week at the wonderful little Free Quaker Meeting House, a lovely little church structure at 5th and Arch where the visitors poured in, and, in September, she appeared with the Pittsburgh Symphony Chamber Orchestra performing the Mozart Adagio and Rondo.

From Yokohama, Japan, we learn **Mikio Kozuka** has recovered very well after severe surgery a year ago but so far has been unable to perform with his Armonica. There is another glass music enthusiast, however, performing in Japan; he is Hidekatsu Onishi, who is a pianist, organist, and composer and now includes the glass armonica in his repertoire.

From **Mikio** we also learn that **Liz Brunelli's** grandson won third place in the 100M free style race at the World Swimming Championship in Chiba, Japan on the 22nd of August.

In September **Thomas Block** played the Ondes Martenot solo in Messiaen's Turangalila Symphonie in two performances in Seattle, WA.

The Cristal was featured in the performances of **Cathy Tardieu**, in France: September 15th in Pons, October 26th in Toulouse, and December 1st in Concouronnes. She will continue in 2008 with performances: January 11th in Quimper, February 12th & 13th in Perpignan and in March in



Anna and Arkadiusz Szafraniec Perform

Tarbes. She and her students continue performance with the Cristal Baschet in Albi all through the year.

From **Jean Claude Chapuis**, in Paris, France, we learn that he performed on the glass Armonica in January in a tribute to Benjamin Franklin at the Musee Carnavalet and he will have future performances in the spring and summer.

Cecilia Brauer has had a full year of performances as well. The highlights were in January when she played the Armonica in the ballet Othello with the American Ballet Theatre at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC. It was repeated at the Metropolitan Opera House in May. In June, she gave a program for the American Musical Instrument Society's Convention at Yale University. However, the "biggie" was the September 24th opening night of the Metropolitan Opera, when she and her Armonica made history in the opera Lucia di Lammermor, which was televised live for thousands at the Lincoln Center Plaza and Times Square. New York Times' music critic, Anthony Tommasini, in an article entitled Resonance Is a Glass Act for a Heroine on the Edge praised the sounds of the Armonica.

Peter Bennett took his usual "hurricane pre-evacuation tour" in '07; this time he stayed east of the Mississippi, playing a number of venues as he made his way north. Just before he left New Orleans on the sojourn, he rebuilt his instrument; however, he could not give up his own chromatic arrangement for the more standard one. His old instrument lasted for twenty years; he figures this one should go for another forty. He has corresponded with a youngster who discovered his website on a list of "interesting sites for home-schooled students" and who was delighted to receive a personal response from Peter.

The Cristal Trio of **Catherine Brisset** (the trio consists of Cristal, Violin, and Cello) performed in many different venues in France. June, in Dijon, the premier of a work called Le Vaisseau de Verre, toured in Alsace and Massif Central, and in the fall, they gave concerts in Paris and the garden and castle of Verderonne.

Alisa Nakashian-Holsberg has released her first CD entitled Reflections in Glass and also performed a very successful concert in Los Angeles at the end of October.

— **BILL MEIKLE** from page 1 —

on Dec. 19 in Lahey Clinic Medical Center in Burlington. The Arlington resident was 71.

As Franklin, he delighted everyone from schoolchildren to adults on walking tours through historic Boston for nearly a quarter century. Like many performers, Mr. Meikle was able to shed parts of himself when he donned the cloak of his character, and that was fine by him.

“When I was a kid and had to do an oral report, I wished the bus would run over me,” he told the *Globe* in 1995. “Look what I do now. In a sense, Ben Franklin is my whole body puppet.”

William M. Meikle was born in Cambridge. He grew up in Medford and graduated from Medford High School. Initially called to ministry, he went to Maine and studied at the Bangor Theological Seminary.

“He said, ‘Well, after two years I flunked loaves and fishes,’” his wife said.

Three years in the Army followed, including a stint in South Korea. Attracted by a co-op approach that would allow him to work his way through school, he attended Antioch College in Ohio. Among his co-op assignments was Frontier College in Canada, which sent him to work in gold mines during the day and teach English and Canadian civics to miners in the evening.

At Antioch he met Barbara Abrams in a basic theater course. They were assigned to a small group that worked together for the semester.

“He was so creative and kind, and just such an interesting person because he had had so many experiences different than mine, growing up in a New York suburb,” she said. Older than most students, his hair already graying, Mr. Meikle felt welcome in the theater, filling character roles in nearly 60 productions. To him, performance became a calling to replace the one he left behind in seminary.

“He always called the theater his secular ministry,” his wife said. “He said he was communicating with people in a similar way -- a way of reaching out to people.”

After graduating from Antioch, he moved to New York City and performed with an Off Broadway company until he had the chance to work in community theater management. Before moving to Midland, Texas, in 1963, he and Abrams married.

Five years later, they moved north and Mr. Meikle finished everything but a dissertation for his doctorate at the University of Kansas. In 1974, the Meikles moved to Arlington to be closer to his family and still be near a city with a strong theater community.

A few years later, he played Franklin for the first time in a film on the history of fire prevention.

“They pulled open their fat, bald guy drawer and I was the only one in it,” he told the *Globe* in 1989.

Seeing his image in the film on screen was a revelation.

“He said, ‘Oh my God, is that an annuity or is that an annuity?’” his wife said.

In the *Globe* interview, he recalled thinking: “There’s the rest of my life.”

And so it was. Mr. Meikle immersed himself in Franklin, reading his letters, his papers, his autobiography. In the process, their identities occasionally blended.

“Franklin said he never had an enemy, and that’s had an effect on me,” Mr. Meikle told the *Globe* in 1985. “I’m not as volatile as I used to be. Actually, Franklin’s the kind of guy I would have loved to have met in a colonial tavern and drank

yards of ale with.”

As his audiences grew, Mr. Meikle and his wife created a company to work with other performers who impersonated historical characters. He kept performing as Franklin through this year, helping the Town of Franklin mark Benjamin Franklin’s 300th birthday.

“For me, the best part was Bill’s humor,” his wife said. “Every morning we read the paper at breakfast. He would find something that would touch his fancy and I would get a belly laugh -- every morning.”

Mr. Meikle often said he hoped to live as long as Franklin, who died at 83, and wanted to be performing in character when his time came. Two years ago he was diagnosed with cancer.

“In nature, things are not wasted. I’ll be back,” he told a group of students in 1988 while performing as Franklin. “If I do come back, I hope it’s thin.”

After pausing for their laughter, he added: “I shouldn’t mind a lifetime of being handsome, but I’ve been useful. That’s just as good.”

In addition to his wife, Mr. Meikle leaves a daughter, Alizon of Shirley; a sister, Janet Marzilli of Marstons Mills; and four granddaughters.

A service will be announced.

— **DAVIES** from page 1 —

dle and the bells are then set into a spinning motion and the tones drawn forth by means of thoroughly cleansed and wetted hands.

By 1780 the glass harmonica, through the gifts of several traveling virtuosi and the many compositions written for it, had established itself as one of the most celebrated musical instruments. Due to the demanding technique of the glass harmonica, numerous attempts were made at this time to apply a keyboard apparatus, thereby yielding greater ease in playing. Fortunately for the instrument, all attempts failed to elicit the ethereal and disembodied tones as produced by the performer’s ‘living flesh.’ Those who did produce and play these keyboard glass harmonicas (Tastensharmonika) openly stated that theirs were the only **safe** glass harmonicas, since the vibrations entering the player’s body via the fingers on the ringing bells caused nervous disorders. Despite the sporadic appearance of Tastensharmonikas, the original form of the glass harmonica continued to grow in popularity and culminated in the artistry of the blind Marianne Kirchgessner (1700-1808), who for her 17 year career reigned supreme on the instrument until her death in Schaffhausen, Switzerland from pneumonia. Had she lived slightly longer, she would have first witnessed the decline of the glass harmonica and then seen her own position challenged by Carl Schneider (mid 1810s-mid 1820s), whose technical brilliance eclipsed her own. Then within a few short years the glass harmonica was all but forgotten.

Franklin had at least two glass harmonicas built, presenting one (in all probability the second and superior instrument) to the daughter of Richard Davies, Miss Marianne Davies (ca. 1740-ca. 1813), who had gained some fame as a singer, flutist and especially as a harpsichordist. In early January 1762 Marianne Davies performed in Bristol, followed by appearances in Bath, London, Spring Gardens and Dublin. Though Marianne Davies garnered considerable acclaim on this new instrument in the early 1760s, it was not until her sister, Cecilia, some ten years her junior, began singing while Marianne accompanied her, that their fame and in particular that of the

glass harmonica crescendoed into a musical force.

Prior to their lengthy Continental tour, the sisters, accompanied by their parents, visited Paris in the summer of 1766 and performed in the Hotel d'Angleterre. This looks to have been a trial performance since by 1767 the family was once again in London, as Cecilia was scheduled to sing several operatic arias in that city in August of that year.

Shortly after this date both sisters, again with their parents, embarked for the Continent. While the exact route of their travels is unknown, it appears from various short articles in several journals of the time and from a large collection of letters housed in the Dorset County Archive Office at Dorchester, that the family again visited Paris before proceeding to numerous German towns, finally reaching Vienna where they were to enjoy their greatest success.

There is however little doubt (though no proof) that Marianne Davies performed prior to 1769 in the German city of Baden Baden, since the court organist, Josef Frick, shortly thereafter built a glass harmonica of his own and himself embarked on a remarkably successful concert tour thereby establishing himself as the first German virtuoso on the instrument. This poses a most curious item: Frick undoubtedly learned the construction of the glass bells and the treadle system directly from Marianne Davies. This assumption is greatly strengthened by the article 'Nachricht von einem neuen musikalischen Instrumente, Harmonica genannt' in A.L.F. Meister's *Wochentliche Nachrichten* of 1766. The author of this article describes in great detail the range of the glass bells, the bells themselves, and the hidden driving mechanism which spun the bells. Obviously he too had access to her instrument. While this in itself is unremarkable, the fact that a letter posted from Mary Ann Davies [sic] to Franklin in the year 1783, indicates that by this late date she had no wish for others to learn how the instrument was built nor played and begs Franklin not to divulge its secrets. The revealing ramification of this letter will be discussed below in greater detail.

It is unknown exactly when the Davies family arrived in Vienna, but it had to be, based again on the letters of the Dorset Collection, sometime after August 1768, since the family was in Stuttgart at this time, their last known halt in a German city before continuing on to Vienna. In essence then, it is further conjectured that, allowing for travel, their date of arrival in Vienna can be fixed tentatively in late 1768 or early 1769.

Of all the letters of introduction from the above cited collection, it was the one to Gluck which enabled not only the sisters to rise to fame, but also raised the glass harmonica to a height which would otherwise have never come to fruition. It was through this letter of introduction that the two sisters came to be employed by Empress Maria Theresia at the court in Vienna.

While in Vienna both sisters became acquainted with Johann Adolph Hasse, who instructed Cecilia in singing. On June 27, 1769 Cecilia sang Hasse's cantata "L'Armonica" accompanied by chamber orchestra, whose principal solo instrument was the glass harmonica played by Marianne. This cantata was commissioned expressly for the Imperial wedding of the 'Infante Duca di Parma con l'archeduchessa d'Austria.' Further, the words were set by none other than Pietro Metastasio.

This cantata is more than a mere curiosity. Several salient facts can be gleaned from it and its words. The part of the glass harmonica is a tour de force and bears witness to the fact that Hasse had mastered the possibilities and limitations of this instrument and those of its performer. Secondly, the words by Metastasio are of equal import. They are as follows:

First Aria

Ah, Philomena (the nightingale), why can't I too weave chains for spirits with my sweet song as you do? If today lips cast rough accents to the breezes, they are too daring. But if they are silent on such a great day, they are no less guilty.

Recitative

Have courage, sister; put your expert hand to your light, crystal resonances, and waken in them rare, seductive harmony. I, also, with song will try to imitate its loving accent. Now that Parma and the star of Amalia and Ferinando re-echo with applause and wishes at the sacred marriage, why should I be silent? Nor should you make uncertain the slow, subtle, sad sound of your new harmonic instrument. Let Mars have loud trumpets as his messengers of anger; a sweet harmony, exciting not scorn by tender accents, is more suitable to love. (It) accompanies better that which from the beautiful spirit transforms itself on the face of the royal bride into calm light: a loving manner, sweet majesty. Though modest, the style of our accents will be pleasing to her; for humble sound is neither mistake nor defect; and respect always speaks in humble sound.

Second Aria

In the season of flowers and new loves, the soft breath of a light breeze is pleasing. Oh sigh in the branches, oh slowly ruffle the waves; the breeze is on every hand companion of pleasure.

In the recitative reference is made that not only were the two solo parts intended for the sisters, but that Cecilia was to a certain degree able to imitate the sounds of the glass harmonica. This is clearly corroborated by the music as composed by Hasse. He repeatedly uses highly ornamented vocal lines while the glass harmonica accompanies the voice with a simpler form. He frequently gives the glass harmonica the identical line as the singer a sixth higher. Cecilia's ability in shading her voice into that of her sister's instrument is likewise verified by Metastasio himself in a letter dated January 16, 1772, which states that it was impossible to distinguish the glass harmonica from Cecilia's singing.

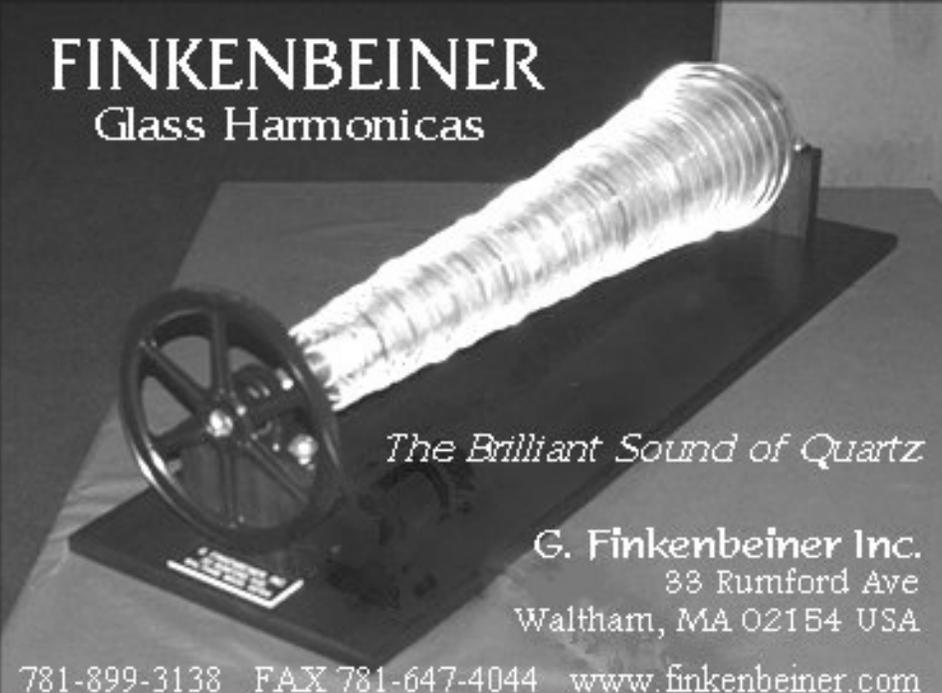
This work also imports to us that both composer and librettist intended from the start to utilize both sisters as principal soloists. But more significantly, in regard to the sisters' concert performances in Vienna, they had already been heard. It is however quite unknown if the performance(s) was public, private, or at court. One reasonable supposition is that Hasse heard the glass harmonica as a result of his association with Cecilia as her vocal teacher.

Regardless, both composer and librettist had previously heard the two of them perform and knew that Cecilia could in fact match the timbre of the glass harmonica, or more probably the glass harmonica's tones affected those of the singer, thereby giving the illusion of being one instrument.

It is moreover relevant to note that while in Vienna, the Davies made the acquaintance of Anton Mesmer, who also built a glass harmonica that according to Leopold Mozart was a finer instrument than Marianne's. It is unknown at present, and most probably will never be fully uncovered just how much information Marianne Davies gave Mesmer in regard to the instrument, either in its construction or in mastering the instrument, which according to the elder Mozart, he played very well.

The reference to Mesmer is not given merely as trivia since it was he more than anyone else who was responsible,

continued on the next page



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though indirectly, for the rumors of nerve derangement being associated with playing the glass harmonica. This will be discussed in detail below.

In 1770 when the Davies at length departed from Vienna, they bore with them at least one letter of introduction from none other than the Empress Maria Theresia to the Comte de Firma at Milan. The outcome of any concerts Marianne may have given on the glass harmonica in Milan, possibly Naples, Florence, Romae and Venice between the years of 1770-1772 are unknown. By late 1772 it appears that the Davies returned to Vienna, then by summer the following year were again to Italy.

The Davies family had planned to return to England in 1773 since Cecilia had accepted a position singing at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket. Since the engagement was indeed performed on November 20 it is not unreasonable to state unequivocally that the family had returned prior to this date. Additional performances for Cecilia followed in January and April of 1774, as well as July, October and November of the same year. Between 1776-1777 Cecilia was again in London. Of Marianne's performances, as in Italy, nothing has to date been found.

Subsequent to this time however the sisters allegedly returned to Italy; whether their mother travelled with them is unverifiable. However, Richard Davies appears to have died somewhere in December 1773. Of the following several years, nothing has been gleaned anent either sister. The next scrap of evidence comes in 1786, an agreement drawn up between the sisters and Niccola Martini for their return from Florence to Calais. According to the Earl of Mount Edgecumbe in his *Musical Reminiscences*, 1834, the Davies sisters while in Florence had fallen on hard times. Both were unengaged and impecunious. However, he states, "The English there subscribed for private concert, at which both sisters performed."

Other than the above, only one additional reference to the Davies has been found for these years. In the complete collection of letters written to and from Benjamin Franklin, there is a letter, written in approximately 1782 by Madam Brillon, a close friend of Franklin's, to the effect that the Davies were in Passy, France, waiting for Franklin who had promised to visit them there on a Sunday evening.

This letter poses the interesting speculation as to whether or not the Davies sisters had embarked on a second concert tour of the Continent or merely went to Paris to visit their old friend, Franklin.

Upon returning to England, Cecilia partook in only a few public concerts. Again, unhappily, nothing is known of Marianne's career at this point. But by the year 1797, it appears that both sisters were now reduced to giving music lessons. In the Dorset Collection exists a letter dated June 19, 1797 which states that Miss Davies was instructing one Dorothea in music.

By 1813 Marianne was in poor health, as can be seen in a letter dated and signed by both sisters on September 4, 1813. In the August issue of the *Harmonicon* of 1832, an article states: "Some fourteen years ago, on the death of her sister, Miss Davies had a serious illness,..." this would suggest a date of approximately 1818 for the death of Marianne Davies, not the date 1792 frequently cited by many scholars.

The earliest rumor of the glass harmonica causing nerve derangement among its players seems to have made its appearance only after the date of 1778 when Anton Mesmer was forced to leave Vienna. So abrupt was his departure that he took his glass harmonica, but left his wife behind. The actual cause which led to this association appears to have been over his treatment of Marie Therese von Paradies, one of the

leading pianists of the time period. By the early 1770s, Mesmer had acquired a remarkable reputation for medical cures through 'animal magnetism.' It is stated that he not only used a primitive type of electrical shock treatment on his patients, but also played to them on the glass harmonica to better enable them to be in a receptive state of mind for his cures which display a resemblance to modern hypnotism.

Marie Paradies' medical affliction was blindness. Through his treatment, he did in fact restore her eyesight at least for a time. Since this is true, she ostensibly suffered from some form of hysterical blindness. Once able to see and no longer in her world of darkness, her career was ruined as were her nerves. To those who do in fact have sight, this may at first seem odd, but imagine a pianist who has always relied on eyesight, blindfold him, and tell him to play one of Mozart's piano concerti. The results would undoubtedly be disastrous. Of course, the pianist only has to remove the blindfold to be once again able to play. But what of a pianist who suddenly does go blind? Not only would he not be able to play, but in all probability, his nerves and temperament would undergo numerous flights of anger, depression, and anxiety, not to mention, frustration. The reverse may certainly also be seen to be true. Here was a pianist who had mastered her craft in darkness; her eyesight was restored and suddenly she was inundated by visual stimulations she had never experienced in playing her instrument. Small wonder her career was disrupted.

After Mermer's hasty departure she one again lost her eyesight. Interestingly enough, one cannot help but speculate that this rapid flight, and Vienna's temporary antipathy towards the glass harmonica, might in actuality be due to the fact that Marie Paradies was the goddaughter of Empress Maria Theresia.

After 1778 the rumors of nerve derangement continued until the mid 1780s, during which time various enterprising musicians endeavored to apply a keyboard application to the instrument, the most notable being Karl Leopold Rollig, who openly stated that playing the glass harmonica with the sensitive fingers led to nerve derangement since the vibrating glass bells irritated the nerves. Curiously, this did not stop Rollig from designing his Tastenharmonika so that not only could he play it with the keyboard, but also with his fingers. It is also conceivable that he, and several of the others, e.g. Bartl, may have been unwilling to master the exacting technique demanded by the instrument without the keyboard.

The already highly praised tones of the glass harmonica which could so easily bring contemplative emotions to the listeners had, through Mesmer's use of it and in particular with the Paradies, in one fell stroke changed it from famous to infamous. Although this scandal was detrimental on the one hand to the glass harmonica, it did cause its fame to spread all the more rapidly on the other.

It is also of interest to note that several other performers of the glass harmonica are said to have either had nerve derangement, thereby retiring from their careers, or to have died prematurely from playing that instrument.

Marianne Kirchgessner (1770-1808) is often one of the leading examples cited by scholars, stating she retired from her career due to nervous disorders. This poses a most glaring error, oversight, even carelessness on behalf of those scholars, since she died of pneumonia at Schaffhausen while in the middle of a concert tour. The famous necrology found in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* by Heinrich Bossler, her long time friend and traveling companion, bears witness to

this as do the surviving concert programs, notably her Tubingen concert which occurred only a few weeks before she died.

Johann Gottlieb Naumann (1741-1801), prolific composer of glass harmonica music, among which are twelve sonatas, duet for harmonica and lute, and three quartets, again is cited by those scholars as having suffered the same fate as Kichgessner. Once more the available information indicates just the opposite – that he continued playing brilliantly on the glass harmonica, but because of his obligations as Oberkapellmeister was always limited in his public appearances, as well as the publication of his second set of six sonatas in 1800 only one year before he suffered from a fatal stroke in October 1801.

Kapellmeister Joseph Aloys Schmittbaur (1718-1809) is another prime example, though not as often cited by scholars as falling prey to the ravages of the glass harmonica. While the exact cause of his death is unknown, it should be assumed that since he played the glass harmonica from at least 1777 if not earlier, until his death, as did his daughter and his other pupil Marianne Kirchgessner, that, being ninety-one, he merely died of old age.

Finally, the player of the glass harmonica most often cited as suffering nervous disorders is Marianne Davies. As has been previously stated, Marianne Davies may have retired from her career in the vicinity of 1786, but by no means did she stop playing, since she continued teaching other pupils how to play the glass harmonica. A career of twenty six years in a time when traveling was difficult, performing on a difficult to maintain and fragile instrument is a very respectable length career. Nor as the evidence points out, did she die prematurely. Living to the age of seventy-eight is by today's standards quite normal, but by those of the eighteenth centuries, was nothing short of remarkable.

Of her personality, little is known except what may be ascertained from the vast collection of both letters of introduction and private letters. In all, her personality seems to have been a congenial one, a remarkably loyal confidant and companion to her younger sister, as what little information exists would indicate. However, her friendliness to others in reference to the glass harmonica seems to have undergone a shift to complete obstinance. Early in her career, she allowed others to inspect her instrument quite thoroughly; however in the letter addressed to Benjamin Franklin in 1783, she, as already

stated, pleads with him not to reveal to anyone how it is made, nor how to play it, claiming that she was the first and only successful performer on it. From the historical information we possess, it is quite obvious that she knew just the opposite. She could hardly have missed the numerous reviews of Frick in the 1760s-1770s. Nor could she have not heard of Mesmer's remarkable skill as a player of the glass harmonica, as verified by none other than Leopold Mozart. Of equal importance she again could not possibly have missed the tremendous success of both Schmittbaur and his daughter in the 1770s-1780s, nor Rollig.

She seems to have gone to great lengths to promote her career starting in the early 1770s by frequently referring to both Franklin and electric when referring to her glass harmonica.

It would seem then that Marianne was beginning to seriously fear not only the rising of the instrument which she had made famous, but also the ever rising competition, finally, out of necessity, retiring.

The subject of nerve derangement in reference to the glass harmonica has always been a popular one, an excuse to explain the alleged obscurity of the instrument. Its demise was more in response to its inability to keep pace in volume with the ever-increasing orchestras of the nineteenth century than any other cause.

That such unsubstantiated claims of nerve damage have been allowed to persist to the present without challenge is nothing short of absurd. A careful review of all the facts has revealed no substantial evidence that the glass harmonica has ever been injurious to anyone's health.

1. Hansell, S. *The solo cantatas, Motets, and antiphons of Johann Adolf Hasse*. Ph.D. dissertation. University of Illinois, 1966. p. 135.
2. Anderson, Emily, ed. *The letters of Mozart and his family*. London: Macmillan and Co. 1938. July 21, 1773, pp. 341-342. August 12, 1773, pp. 342-343.

Glass Music International, Inc.

11277 N. Garfield Ave.

Loveland, CO 80537

