

## "Clavichord for Beginners" by Joan Benson

Bernard Brauchli

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**Book review: Benson, Joan. *Clavichord for Beginners*.  
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This book is a welcome addition to the world of the clavichord. Interest in this instrument—as well as literature dedicated to it—has increased substantially during the last decades, but no modern study on its performance technique had been published up to now. Clavichord playing differs significantly from that of other keyboard instruments (harpsichord, organ, fortepiano, and modern piano). This very quiet yet extremely expressive instrument should be approached in a totally different way, if one wishes to do it justice.

Joan Benson has had the fortune to study with musicians such as Macario Santiago Kastner, Fritz Neumeyer, Frau Alfred Kreutz, Viola Thern, and Edwin Fischer. She has taught for many years on the faculties of Stanford University, the University of Oregon, and the Aston Magna Academy in Massachusetts. These experiences make her better equipped than anyone else to write a pedagogical treatise for both practitioners and enthusiasts.

After starting with a short description of this instrument, the first chapter underlines why the clavichord was traditionally considered to be the key to all other keyboard instruments. The second chapter covers preparatory exercises for playing the clavichord (including relaxation, touch awareness, finger independence, flexibility of the wrists, position at the keyboard, and an introduction to controlling touch and pitch).

The book centers on twenty-one detailed and progressive lessons dedicated to sound control on the clavichord, which involves almost direct contact between finger and string. Sound control is one of the biggest yet most rewarding challenges of the clavichord, known to be the most precise and subtle of all keyboard instruments.

A short chapter deals with common eighteenth-century ornaments as adapted to the clavichord, including two ornaments specific for this instrument: the *Bebung* and the *Tragen der Töne*. Finally, the beginner is encouraged to start playing music on the clavichord through a selection of eleven, very easy pieces.



An introduction to the clavichord's history from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries includes citations from important published treatises. The next chapter is then dedicated to clavichord playing in eighteenth century Germany followed by final considerations on the instrument's present and future.

An extensive bibliography completes this book, which comes with a CD of Benson's recordings and a DVD of her master classes, forming a useful complement to this excellent work.