

Harpsichord Policy

Revised September 2008

The School of Music currently owns two harpsichords. There is a two manual “Hubbard” type harpsichord and a small spinet model made from a Zuckermann kit. The spinet is currently in the choral rehearsal room. The larger instrument lives in room 118 and is used by harpsichord students for class and for practicing. It is also used by the early music ensemble, directed by Janet Hathaway.

The Hubbard type harpsichord has two manuals and three registers of strings. It is tuned at A=415, Valotti/Young temperament (mildly unequal). If needed, it can be changed to A=440, however changing the pitch involves taking sections of the instrument apart and shifting the keyboard upward by one note. This takes time to do and is somewhat hard on the instrument.

N.I.U. made a significant investment in overhauling the Hubbard instrument in the summer of 2008. The work was done by the esteemed Chicago harpsichord builder, Paul Irvin. Therefore, to protect our investment it is very important that the harpsichord policy be followed.

Since the Hubbard harpsichord is used for teaching and practice every week, it will primarily live in Room 118 where it is needed for instructional purposes.

All requests for use of either of the harpsichords must be approved by James R. Brown. Generally speaking, the Hubbard instrument will not be available except for very select performances. The smaller Zuckermann instrument, which is much easier to move and can be tuned to A=440 readily, will be the usual choice for those requiring a minor use of a harpsichord in performance.

As harpsichords require a different keyboard technique than a piano to avoid damage, the Hubbard may only be played by a student who has studied harpsichord (or any faculty member). (Students who have not studied harpsichord do not have permission to use this instrument.) Three people are needed to move the large Hubbard instrument, so relocating it requires some pre-planning. Either harpsichord will need to be tuned in the place where it will be played. Tuning takes about an hour. If the harpsichord is used in the recital or concert hall, or other location, appropriate time for tuning the day of the concert must also be scheduled in that room. Harpsichords do not stay in tune by themselves. They need to be tuned for each performance.

David Graham is in charge of harpsichord tuning and maintenance. He is also in charge of moving the instruments, and supervision of student workers who might assist him.

The harpsichord request form is attached.

Thank you,
James Russell Brown
Assistant Professor of Organ & Harpsichord

Harpsichord Request Form

Please make harpsichord requests at least 2 weeks in advance. Late requests may result in non-availability of instrument or lack of tuning.

Name of person requesting _____

Title of person requesting if not faculty _____

Name of person performing on the harpsichord _____

Type of musical program _____

Date instrument is needed _____ Location _____

Day/time of dress rehearsal _____ Day/time of performance _____

Time reserved in the room for tuning before performance (obligatory) _____

Special tuning needs: i.e. A=440, meantone, etc. _____

Normally the Hubbard harpsichord is at A=415 Hz. and Valotti/Young temperament.

Please return a copy of this form to James R. Brown at least 2 weeks prior to the event.
Thank you.