

## Michael Johnson harpsichord, 2005

Flemish single manual, compass GG–D<sup>3</sup>, 8-foot plus 4-foot choirs and buff stop. Numbered 'R18' to the lowest keyshaft, the case is painted in green with black lining. There are papers to the nameboard and keywell, with a recreation of tempera painting to the soundboard and Latin mottoes to both parts of the lid. Sitting on a fumed oak tripod with matching oak stool, the harpsichord is 218.5cm long, 86.5cm wide at the keyboard and 29cm deep. R18 was commissioned by Keith Howard from Michael Johnson of St Andrew's Studio, Bedchester, Fontmell Magna, Dorset, and incorporates work by Johnson's assistant, Charles Geller. It was presented and played in concert at the London International Festival of Early Music, Greenwich, in September 2005. The nameboard reads: 'Michael Johnson Fecit Fontmell Magna MMV.' The tempera painting, surrounding a gilt-plated rose on the soundboard and including birds, butterflies and plants was undertaken by M. G. Turner, while the Latin mottoes chosen at the time of commissioning read: 'CONCORDIA MUSIS AMICA' (harmony is a friend to the muses) and 'MUSICA MAGNORUM EST SOLAMEN DULCE LABORUM' (music is the sweet solace of great labours).

Michael Johnson's instruments are closely based on the scaling and plucking points of the 1637 Andreas Ruckers harpsichord in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg (inventory no. MIR1073). That harpsichord is one of the few Ruckers instruments which survives almost unaltered. However, Johnson extended the compass from C/E–c<sup>3</sup> to GG–d<sup>3</sup>, and in order to keep as close as possible to the original's case dimensions introduced a narrower octave span of 161mm. The Ruckers registration is preserved, although for some commissioned instruments Johnson substituted a second 8-foot for the 4-foot choir. The keyboard shafts are of lime, the naturals are covered with casein simulated ivory and the sharps are of bog oak – the material used by the Ruckers workshop. Jack blanks are beech, with traditional holly tongues and hog bristle springs, quilled with Delrin. The instrument is strung using Malcolm Rose iron and brass wire. Johnson's design incorporates block at the ends of the keyboard that when removed allows the instrument to transpose in both directions, down or up a semitone from the a<sup>2</sup>=415Hz tuning (i.e., to a<sup>2</sup>=392Hz or 440Hz, with a loss of the endnote at the bottom or the top).

Michael Johnson (b.1934) was apprenticed to Broadwood when 19. When he left Broadwood, he set up as a tuner and technician until, having restored a grand piano for the lutenist Julian Bream he was introduced to luthier David Rubio. He moved into Rubio's shop when the latter vacated it (Rubio moved to Duns Tew, Oxfordshire). From 1969 onwards, Johnson concentrated on building harpsichords, focussing on the Ruckers design but, as 'a product of John Broadwood and Sons knowledge ... working from the past but looking always at the present and the future' (at <http://dominiceckersley.me/2015/03/17/a-dynastys-autumn-michael-johnson-the-last-of-the-ruckers/>). YouTube contains a 2016 discussion between Johnson and Timothy Roberts about two of his final instruments, R32 and R33 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSGXEC4A2Nw>).



