



Right: The Italian town of Montisi

Photo courtesy PADM

Below: Teskin soundboard representative of the type of instrument that will form the PADM's collection

Photo courtesy Bruce Kennedy

In the small town of Montisi, high in the hills of Southern Tuscany, Italy, sits a 13th-century castello that is now home to the Piccola Accademia di Montisi (PADM), a new foundation dedicated to the study of the harpsichord and its music. The

Piccola Accademia is the brainchild of harpsichord maker Bruce Kennedy and is the realisation of a two-decade-old dream to provide the harpsichord community with an outstanding research centre.

'The idea started 25 years ago' explains Kennedy. 'One day as I was playing the music of Louis Couperin on an antique French harpsichord, many aspects of what the composer had written suddenly became



apparent. So I started to think about the characteristics that the instrument had in defining the music that was composed on it. If you imagine Venice at the time of Monteverdi, Versailles during the time of Louis Couperin or Leipzig at the time of Bach, they're completely different worlds – but the harpsichord played a central part in each of these musical cultures while adapting itself to find its local dialect, so to speak.' Kennedy also realised that there was no one institution that brought together examples from every school of harpsichord making under one roof – and where students could actually gain playing access to the instruments. 'There are plenty of people who fulfil a part of that brief, but no-one who has the complete picture,' he says. 'I wanted somewhere where students could play works by harpsichord composers on appropriate instruments and where they could begin to understand the music in the way in which the instrument expressed itself.'

However, such an ambitious plan took some time to come to fruition. 'When I first had the idea I tried to raise the money, but wasn't successful at that point,' recalls Kennedy. 'My original plan was to go on tour with a collection, but that just wasn't practical.' The idea lay dormant until Kennedy found himself working in Amsterdam, a major centre of the modern harpsichord world. 'I thought about setting the collection up there. I was making instruments and in a position to raise finance on the back of that.' But a further move to the idyllic countryside of Tuscany brought an even better solution. 'A friend was selling a castello in a village close to my workshop and I suddenly realised that the collection had a possible home. I quickly put a

business plan together for it.' Businesswoman and harpsichord enthusiast, Laurel Power-Freeling (now Chairman of the PADM's Board), gave Kennedy some guidance on his plan, 'putting it in a language that the financial world would understand'. Power-Freeling's advice worked, and the PADM quickly began to take shape. 'Since then, we've invited more people to be involved and created the Accademia Society for those who want to support our work,' says Kennedy. 'We've had a major donation from a private foundation whose directors also are also enthusiastic harpsichordists. That has enabled us to buy the castello, set up masterclasses and run a festival this year. There's a lot of enthusiasm and we're really gaining ground now.'

The PADM is developing an initial collection of ten instruments to fulfil its goal of representing the important models and schools of harpsichord making. As well as providing a good geographic spread, the size of the collection has been determined by practical considerations:

'Ten is the number of instruments that we can realistically maintain,' says Kennedy, who will be responsible for much of the upkeep himself. 'We sit somewhere between conservation work and being a museum. The collection will be antiques, plus copies. We are bringing together the best in new harpsichords from French, German, English and American makers and we will also gather antique instruments where appropriate. The modern instruments will be decorated by some of Italy's finest artisans, using original techniques and materials, to create a world-class collection.' The PADM's website shows pictures representing the types of instrument that the organisation hopes to collect and create over the next few years.

In identifying this selection of instruments, Kennedy approached a variety of big names in the harpsichord world for their opinions on

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