

NEW COLLEGE NEWS RELEASE

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FURMAN C. ARTHUR — INFORMATION

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Harpsichord building may be thought to be an art that died out several centuries ago but a New College student has just completed one and it will be used by musicians in the upcoming Summer Music Festival.

Harpsichord music has had a resurgence in recent years and listening to a recording a few years ago led to the spurring of interest in the instrument for William D. Patterson, a first year science student from Barberton, Ohio.

Not even a musician, Patterson decided on the project for his second independent study project after talking with his faculty advisor, Christopher von Bseyer, tutor in music.

Patterson found, after some correspondence, that one of the leading harpsichord builders in the country also sells kits which amateurs can build.

With an agreement from the college to purchase the kit in return for the finished instrument, Patterson sent away and began his assembly just four weeks ago.

The harpsichord came completely disassembled, down to the tiny plectrums which pluck the strings to produce the unusual tone of the instrument.

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Now with more than 100 man hours invested in the construction, Patterson feels that he is about done. Along with the actual mechanical work, though, he had to do a detailed research paper on the history of keyboard stringed instruments, as part of his requirement for academic approval of the entire project.

The reticent Ohioan is reluctant to converse much about his project. Patterson admits that he cannot even play it when the instrument is completed and describes its sound as that of "a mechanical banjo", but it's evident he has grown attached to his harpsichord.

Von Baeyer, though, is anxious for its completion. He and Dr. Arthur R. Borden Jr., Chairman of the Division of Humanities, and the man who authorized the purchase of the kit, see its use by the college in the annual festival featuring chamber music, and by various students and faculty studying music during the year.

Von Baeyer emphasizes that although built from a kit, the instrument is no toy.

"It's ideal for accompanying chamber groups or voices in the performance of Baroque music," he said. "The harpsichord also will be charming in performing early French, English and German music and adequate for works by Couperin, Scarlatti and Bach."

Von Baeyer said that to purchase the instrument would cost up to four times the investment the college has made in the kit purchase.

Patterson's harpsichord has 57 keys and produces music by driving a jack, in which the plectrum is embedded, across the metal strings. A special string arrangement permits the plectrum to slide back across the strings on return without producing a sound.

All of the construction work was done in an empty room in the residence halls. Patterson said he was able to round up all of the tools, clamps and materials he needed without any difficulty.

Soon the new instrument will be placed in its own special case in College Hall, and its most difficult opening test will be when it is used in chamber concerts which are a part of the third annual Summer Music Festival beginning June 11.