

St Cecilia's Hall

UNIQUE MUSICAL VENTURE

A unique recording venture is being mounted at Edinburgh University's St. Cecilia's Hall which it is hoped will promote a growing world-wide interest in early keyboard instruments and their music. Sponsored by the Society of the *Friends of St. Cecilia's Hall*, two LP records of 17th and 18th century music played on suitable instruments from the famous Russell Collection of Harpsichords are being released very soon. This will give the general public an opportunity to possess recordings of these outstanding instruments.

The two records are devoted to music for harpsichord and virginals (Pavanes and other dances) by John Bull and music for harpsichord or chamber organ (Chorale-preludes) by J. S. Bach.

Played by Peter Williams, the instruments featured on the records are a Ruckers harpsichord (Flemish, 1637) and a Keene virginals (English, 1668)—music by Bull; a Hass harpsichord (German, 1764) and an English chamber organ (c.1690)—music by Bach. All have been newly restored since being in Edinburgh and all present a unique sound of beauty and historic value.

Another, and rather more specialised project in connection with the Russell Collection has already been launched last month. Over the past couple of years it has become evident that there is a demand both at home and abroad for details of the measurements of instruments in the Collection and the materials used in their construction. The *Friends Society* is therefore publishing technical drawings of some of these instruments, which will aid both amateur enthusiasts and experts to assemble for themselves replicas of these fine instruments.

At present there are full-size plans of three instruments available:—

No. 1 Taskin harpsichord 1769, drawn by Grant O'Brien:

No. 2 Hass clavichord 1763, drawn by Richard Loucks:

No. 3 German clavichord c.1700, drawn by Richard Loucks.

The drawings are printed in paper and polyester film forms, accompanied by photographs and technical

data. It is hoped to add to this list in the future.

St. Cecilia's Hall has a varied history. The Musical Society of Edinburgh, founded in 1728, had become prosperous enough by 1762 to build its own Hall. Designed by Robert Mylne, this comprised a first floor concert hall, built to a unique oval plan, with a "Laigh Room" below. These premises were used regularly by the Society for about a quarter of a century. However, social and other changes caused the Society to disband and the Hall was sold to the Baptist Church and then in 1809 to the Masons, who in 1812 built the room which is now used to house some of the instruments. The Masons' ownership of the Hall ceased in 1844 and it then became the school of Bell, founder of the Madras system of education.

by Anne M. Inglis

After successive use as a book-binding works and a dance hall, the opportunity came late in 1959 for the University of Edinburgh to acquire the St. Cecilia's Hall buildings for complete restoration and conversion to provide a Department of Early Keyboard Instruments. Now a department within the Music Faculty, St. Cecilia's Hall is the home of the Russell Collection of Harpsichords, presented to the University in 1964 by Mrs Gilbert Russell in memory of her son, Raymond (an authority on harpsichords). The Collection affords, together with other instruments gathered by the University before and since, a small but exceptionally well-selected survey of keyboard history. This building is unique in British Universities.

There are altogether nearly 40 instruments, both in the original Russell Collection and since acquired by purchase (4), and loan (5); many are unique. The Collection is housed in two specially prepared museum galleries (one of which is the old Freemasons Hall) and is open weekly to visitors, who can hear the instruments demonstrated.

Since the restored Hall was opened in June 1968, it has taken an

unusual place in the musical life of Edinburgh and has come to be highly valued in the international world of musical instrument collections. It is in order to further its work as a "live museum" and to encourage maximum use of it by people interested in instruments that The Society of *Friends of St Cecilia's Hall and the Russell Collection of Harpsichords* was formed in March 1971 with the intention both of acquiring instruments and period furniture and of encouraging further activities for its members, such as concerts and lectures. Proceeds from the sales of both records and drawings will be used by the *Friends Society* to pursue its aims and continue these new ventures.

Records and drawings may be ordered from The Secretary, Friends of St Cecilia's Hall, Alison House, 12 Nicolson Square, Edinburgh EH8 9BH. The stereo records are contained in a specially designed and illustrated double sleeve. The notes incorporate some original research work not available elsewhere. The price of the records is £2.80 (£5.00 the pair) plus 30p postage and packing.

The technical drawings are priced as follows:—

Taskin harpsichord—paper copy £11, polyester film copy £22.50, each with 9 photographs and 2 data sheets;

Hass clavichord—paper copies (2 drawings) £11, polyester film copies £22.50, each with 5 photographs and 2 data sheets;

German clavichord—paper copy £5, polyester film copy £11, each with 5 photographs and 2 data sheets.

● Anne Inglis is Secretary of The Friends of St. Cecilia's Hall.