



Cristiano Holtz

Language

English

Nationality

Brazilian

Country of Residence

Portugal

Year of birth

1972

Website Address

<https://holtzcristiano.wixsite.com/bach>

Year(s) in which you received lessons from Gustav Leonhardt

1992-1996

The lessons were

Within a diploma course at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam (Amsterdamsch Conservatorium, Sweelinck Conservatorium)

As a guest student at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam (Amsterdamsch Conservatorium, Sweelinck Conservatorium)

Individual private lessons

How did you first come into contact with Gustav Leonhardt, and how did you get the opportunity to study with him? Did you have to wait before you could become his student?

I started to study the harpsichord when I was twelve years old, in a small town in Brazil. Soon after that, my father bought me an LP of Mr. Leonhardt playing Bach's Goldberg Variations (his last version). When I heard this recording for the first time, studying with him became my greatest dream. In 1988, when I was fifteen, I went to study with Mr. Jacques Ogg in Amsterdam and later in The Hague. In October of 1989, I finally had the opportunity to hear Mr. Leonhardt play works by the Couperin family and Forqueray at the Concertgebouw. This concert turned my life upside down, I was speechless for three days..... in other words, it was "death-rebirth" to me. About two years after that, I finally had the courage to write to him asking for a private lesson. He very soon answered that he almost never gave any private lessons. Then I wrote him again, asking what I had to do in order to get a lesson from him... and I also called him.... he told me that he had no time...I was devastated. In 1992 I went to study with Mrs. Anneke Uittenbosch at the Sweelinck Conservatorium, and for my first exam there Mr. Leonhardt was going to be in the jury. I was living in The Hague, but one day before that exam I went to Amsterdam and took a letter to Mr. Leonhardt, asking him again if I could become his student, and stating that if not, my life would be meaningless...and so I furtively threw this letter under his door, and ran away. On the day after, during the exam, he kindly told me what he thought about my playing, which was positive, but that he was about to retire so he could not accept any new students. I think the look on my face said more than words, because he immediately added (in Dutch): "But this is not a disaster"...then I replied, "But at least one lesson ?" And so he finally said, "All right, you may come for one lesson". And so the great day arrived. I was so nervous, but he received me very kindly. I was very well prepared, and played Bach's a minor Fantasy BWV 922. After I finished there was a silence, and then he told me that it was excellent, and that I had given form to this bizarre work, wonderful! After that lesson which went very well, I asked him for another one, and he replied, "One more, but the last one".... so I had two continuous years of private "last lessons" until 1994-95, when he unexpectedly wrote me a letter stating that, exceptionally, he would accept me as his official student for the year 1995-96. That was one of the greatest honors of my life !

Briefly describe your level of musical education when you started lessons with Gustav Leonhardt. How many years had you studied an early keyboard instrument? What academic qualifications did you have, if any?

I did not have any academic qualifications. I had studied the harpsichord for about eight years when the lessons with him started. At that time I had already been in the Netherlands for about five years, studying harpsichord, basso continuo, chamber music etc..

What repertoire did you study with Gustav Leonhardt? You may answer along general lines or give a list.

Always Bach: Fantasias, Capriccio, Toccatas, Preludes, Fugues, Suites, Partitas. Several other German composers: Froberger, Buxtehude, Fischer, C.Ph.E.Bach. Many Préludes non mesurés, especially by Louis Couperin, and French music from L.Couperin to Balbastre: Marchand, Forqueray, Royer, Rameau, Duphly, etc. Many sonatas by Scarlatti, and early Italian repertoire: Valente and Frescobaldi, especially the Toccatas. Virginal music, especially by Byrd; other English composers as well, such as Purcell and Croft.

Did you present each piece of music only once, or more often? Was this your own choice?

I only presented a very few pieces to him more than once. I played the Bach a minor Fantasia in my first and in one of my last lessons (in a very different manner). The first time he told me, "that strange work could not have been written by Bach", but the second time he said, "nobody but Bach would dare to write such a piece". Once I played Emanuel Bach's first Württemberg Sonata, then asked if I could play it again because the first time I played my hand was injured, and he agreed. I also played the sixth Partita twice, the second time because I played it on an exam as well. The first time he did not say much and praised my performance, saying that I had played this great work very accurately. He remarked that I should keep a steady tactus in the Sarabande even if I could be flexible with its immense ornamentation, and that I could be more flexible in the Gigue after the exposition of the themes, but certainly not less precise. The second time I played it he said that even in slow pieces, and even playing them delicately, one should think "big", particularly in those great works. Finally, when preparing to participate in the Eldorado Music Competition in Brazil, I twice played Bach's Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue and the B flat major Capriccio, and a sonata by Scarlatti. Except for the Capriccio, I played those pieces and others in this long competition. It was indeed very interesting to hear his second opinion on those pieces, especially because he sometimes contradicted himself, which is for me a doorway to flexibility and wisdom.

Please describe a typical lesson or various types of lessons you received. For example: the frequency, length and location of the lessons, the specific instruments used, the number of pieces you typically presented, how much discussion there was, how much Leonhardt played and at what point during the lesson, etc.

When I was studying with him privately I had a lesson every two months during two years, but after I became his official student the lessons were every week. We were together for about two hours, always at his home, and we always used his Mietke copy (by Dowd-Kennedy). When I had

a long piece such as an English Suite I would take another short piece along, such as a Toccata by Frescobaldi for example, but if the pieces were shorter I would take about three or four. In one of the lessons I played the long F major Prélude by Louis Couperin and the sixth English Suite by Bach. About the Bach work, although much longer, he did not have many things to say. He liked it, and especially praised my playing in the Fugue of the Prélude and in the Sarabande. On the Couperin piece we worked very much in detail. He told me that it was important to play the first notes piano because they were an upbeat to the F major chord, so I played that beginning about seven times until it was soft enough for him. Then he told me it was very important to give proper timing to the harmonic resolutions with their proper dynamic effect (in this case a diminuendo), otherwise it becomes tiring. He added, "Most of the time one hears the sound of the harpsichord uninterrupted, which is indeed very tiring". We worked in a similar way with the beginning of the Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue. After spending a long time at the beginning, he did not have so much to say about the rest of the piece. Nevertheless, he told me I had a very beautiful and "clean" sound in the Fantasy, and that in the Fugue I could be more flexible, especially during those passages which were less chromatically intricate. Mr. Leonhardt always played a lot during the lessons. There was always much more playing than discussion, as he never separated theory from practice.

Did Gustav Leonhardt discuss and/or demonstrate keyboard technique, fingerings, hand and arm position, etc.? If so, did he relate these aspects to different periods, traditions and/or national styles of early keyboard music?

Mr. Leonhardt worked very minutely, he always thought dynamically about every single phrase and ornament. He would say, "One should not try to play rubato, one simply thinks dynamically, but if within that dynamic playing a sort of rubato or a tempo fluctuation occurs, it will be natural, not superficial or forced in any way." In order to achieve this dynamic nuance he employed the most refined touch: from overlegato to staccato in all degrees and colors, articulations, accentuations, "aspirations" etc. For example, all harmonic resolutions in all parts of the composition needed to have a clear diminuendo. Also a diminuendo is needed before an important phrase or a theme of a Fugue, to make it stand out more clearly. All the ornaments had to have a clear dynamic shape, accentuation and de-emphasis. About "toucher", he quite often praised my sound, saying that it was cantabile, precise and clear. About fingering, once when I played a Gagliarda by Frescobaldi, he suggested that I use the same fingering in all of the voice-imitations in order to make each of the themes clearer. When I played Frescobaldi's second Toccata from the second book, he told me that there my playing was too dreamlike. In such a piece one has to be very alert, in order to bring out all of its contrasts and nuances (*affetti*). Then he played it for me, and I was very impressed to hear so much *chiaroscuro*. Indeed, to listen to his interpretation was very exciting from the first to the last chord! We did similar work with pieces by Froberger. I imagined playing Froberger's *allemandes* in a meditative, dreamlike manner, but he again told me to be careful to bring out all of the "*affetti*". When he played the dances of Louis Couperin, especially the *courantes* with their many contrasts, he again insisted on the "*affetti*" and said, "One can almost sightread such a piece, but the most important is to reveal all of its different and several moods, feelings, etc." A similar thing happened when I brought him the e minor Toccata

by Bach. There I played the Adagio quite freely, but he said," it should indeed sound free for the audience , but we play it quite strictly". He used technique as a tool, a means to an end. That end was to reveal the true content of the composition. He often told me,"Men moet willen, One must want it!" He used to say that, if a player had a clear idea and sound in mind, the body and the instrument would make it come through naturally without interference from the intellect. But for that to happen, that idea-sound had to be greater in our mind then in our fingers!

Did he discuss historical? ? performance practice or different types of historic instruments, refer to musicological research, performance treatises, ornament tables, etc.? If so, in what particular situations and musical contexts?

He occasionally quoted Emanuel Bach's Essay, and I found that he himself worked very much in the same direction. Although he thought that the way Quantz demonstrated the treatment of Adagios in his Essay (performing them in an extreme dynamic detail) was a bit exaggerated, nevertheless, as I stated earlier, he worked very minutely as well but perhaps in a wider perspective. He sometimes pointed out the difficulty of how to approach ornaments in seventeenth century German music, for example in the keyboard works of Kerll, Weckmann or Froberger, who were familiar with the Italian -and in the case of Froberger- the French ornamentation as well. More then once he told me that I was too concerned with harmonic rules among other stylistic factors, therefore I had the impression that he wanted to cultivate more of my intuitive music making. All theory had to serve an immediate practical purpose.

Did you notice that he commented at greater length or with more enthusiasm on particular pieces, composers, or types of repertoire? If so, which ones?

Not really. Nonetheless, I learned especially a lot when I brought him pieces by Forqueray, Froberger and Frescobaldi. He played even more than usual during those lessons, and his playing was indescribable, so wonderful! I had the impression then that his playing indeed went beyond the physical limitations of the instrument, and even of his own person. But he was always concerned with the particular piece we were playing at any given moment, trying as much as he could to deeply understand and to reveal the composer's most intimate intentions.

How did he engage with the works you presented? For example, did he offer stylistic considerations or make a formal analysis? Did he place the pieces within a larger context, musical or other? Did he use metaphors or make analogies when talking about the music?

Once I played the first Suite in d minor by Forqueray, and he told me that it was very important to know the viola da gamba and continuo parts of the original version as well, with all their nuances and articulations, and all the effects that the gamba could produce. In fact, when he played it for me I could hear the gamba there, as he had such a strong imagination and will power! But normally he kept things simple. Once he said, "greatness lives in simplicity". He also told me,"While practicing one analyzes, reflects, reads and so on, but during the performance one

should forget about everything! But it is true that, in order to forget, one has to have something to forget." According to Mr. Leonhardt, when the time comes to present the piece we have worked on so diligently there must be no mental interference at all, but only the natural flow of the music. It should sound like perfect sight reading (Forqueray), or like a beautiful improvisation. During certain moments after I played, he would say, "Stop listening". I believe that by this he meant, "Let it flow".

Did he ask you to defend your interpretive choices? More generally, did he approach questions of personal autonomy and individuality as a performer during your studies? In what way?

Sometimes, when I played certain pieces by Bach and some French pieces as well, he asked me whether I had heard the piece played by him before because it was surprisingly similar to his own approach. Sometimes I had, sometimes I had not. I told him I was neither trying to imitate him nor trying to be different, but was just being myself. He replied, "In that case, we have a similar understanding of that particular piece". Once I selected many pieces by Fischer and assembled them into a large suite lasting about 20 minutes. We were particularly inspired by that lesson, and after I finished playing I could see that he was quite moved. He started showing me a few details and then he said, "That was so beautiful, we must have a glass of wine". We happily enjoyed this moment together.

What did you hope or expect to achieve from your lessons with Gustav Leonhardt?

Apart from wanting to share his understanding of the music and learn his incomparable style of playing the harpsichord, there were three of his concerts that especially struck me, not only musically but also as transcendental and mystical experiences. He had played works by the Couperin family, d'Anglebert, Frescobaldi, Weckmann and Forqueray. There, I could sense other realms. I wanted very much to understand and learn how one could achieve that level of greatness...Nowadays I realize that it was also Mr. Leonhardt's devotion, selflessness and respect for the music that allowed this state.

After your period of study, did you have further contacts with Gustav Leonhardt that contributed to your development as a musician?

Yes. In 1997, together with "Teatro Cultura Artística", we arranged for Mr. Leonhardt to play a few concerts in Brazil. These went very well and he was very happy about it. In 1998, he very kindly gave me his written recommendation before I came to work in Portugal. We saw each other almost every year, either in Portugal or in the Netherlands. I called him sometimes and we exchanged letters. Especially when I had a new recording, I sent it to him and he used to send me back his precious comments.

Did his approach to teaching influence the approach you have taken with your own students? If so, how?

Very much so! For example, being attentive to details, having devotion and respect for the music and works of art in general (these for Mr. Leonhardt were deeply interconnected), trying to capture the true content of a composition in all its nuances, playing with an alert mind, always approaching the harpsichord dynamically, etc. Mr. Leonhardt was always utterly straightforward, sincere and yet positive towards me, so I try to be that way also with my own students.

Has your perspective on your lessons with Gustav Leonhardt changed over the years? In what way?

It has not changed, but it has matured. When I studied with him I only played harpsichord, but since the years 2004-2005 I have become very dedicated to the clavichord as well. Currently I am doing some research on Bach's touch, and on keyboard technique in general. Soon I would like to devote myself more to the organ. Mr. Leonhardt was not only a great teacher, but above all a master in the sense that his teachings connected me to the natural flow of life which one also finds in the teachings of the Tao and the practice of Aikido, for example. Nowadays my musicality is deeply connected with other interests that I pursue, such as Aikido and other spiritual practices. In fact, they are one and the same.

What are the most important things Gustav Leonhardt taught you, or the ways he most influenced you as a musician?

1- Love, devotion, dedication and respect for the music. 2 -To try to understand what the composer felt when he was conceiving his work. 3 - It must be all about the music, not about our egos, vanities and so forth. 4 -To serve a higher purpose through the music. 5 -To prepare the works that we plan to perform as diligently as we can, but in the actual moment of performance to forget about everything in order to permit the music to flow naturally.

In this area, you can describe your lessons with Gustav Leonhardt in any way you wish.

"Het gaat om de muziek" It is about the music, he used to tell me. Also, that we are like cooks, "We may enjoy our cooking, but our goal is to serve others". Due to our profound yet goodnatured relationship I sometimes asked him very personal questions, such as: How can you captivate, sometimes even hypnotize, an entire audience like that? What is your secret ? Answer: "There is no secret, it is just the same as what we are doing here in the lessons. But indeed when we play, everything (all time-space) must stop, all attention (mindfulness) goes toward the music, even the air (atmosphere) becomes sound." As a person, how do you deal with eventual nervousness or an improper disposition before or during concerts? Answer:" If one is so nervous, it means one is busy with oneself instead of with the music". And my last question to him during our lessons was: What would be your final word to me? Answer:"Keep playing well! The harpsichord is only an

instrument, there are presently many good harpsichord players, but only a few use it to achieve something higher and infinite".

Curriculum Vitae

Cristiano Holtz began his harpsichord studies when he was twelve years old, with Pedro Persone. At fifteen, following an invitation from Jacques Ogg, he moved to the Netherlands in order to pursue musical studies with him. He stayed there for ten years, working with various teachers such as Anneke Uittenbosch and Menno van Delft. From a very young age his strongest influence had been Gustav Leonhardt, who exceptionally accepted him as one of his last official students. It was also very important for him to have worked privately with Pierre Hantaï, Marco Mencoboni and Miklós Spányi. This last later invited him play and record pieces for two harpsichords by C.Ph.E.Bach. In 1998, at the invitation of several music schools and Conservatories such as the Instituto Gregoriano de Lisboa and the National Conservatory of Music, he came to work in Portugal as a professor of harpsichord, clavichord and chamber music .Cristiano Holtz is often invited to give master classes at international venues such as Harvard University, Liszt Ferenc academy (Budapest) and ESMAE (Porto). He performs mostly as a soloist on harpsichord, clavichord and occasionally on historical organs in various countries in Europe, Asia, South America and the United States, including appearances in prestigious international festivals. He enjoys joining friends such as Miklós Spányi, Concerto Armonico Budapest, Aapo Häkkinen, Helsinki Baroque Orquestra and Antonio Carrilho to play chamber music. His recitals and recordings (for Ramée, Bis, Aeolus, Editions Hortus, Edition Hera) have been highly acclaimed in the press and have obtained several international awards: Eldorado Competition (Brazil), Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik (Germany), 5 Stars Goldberg Magazine (Britain, Spain), Record Geijutsu Award (Japan), Fanfare Magazine (USA), 5 Stars Publico Newspaper (Portugal), and twice, "excellent disque" in Classica Magazine (France). From an early age, Cristiano Holtz has placed Bach at the center of his musical work.

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