

## John Challis Harpsichord #51-125, 1951

### **Descriptive notes for players of the instrument in Honolulu Museum of Art**

61 notes: FF–f''' reverse keyboards with gilded front mouldings, bushed mahogany keylevers, front guiderail for lower manual. Aluminium soundboard and bridges, strung in yellow brass and steel with overspun strings to bottom half of 16' register, A440. Jacks in black vulcanized rubber with white Delrin tongues and Delrin plectra for all choirs, working in machined brass registers. Jack height adjustment endpins, front-facing tongue advancement screws, separate damper jacks (except for 16' choir and extreme treble of 4' choir).

Mahogany casework with beveled cheeks, keyed corner joints and gilded bottom moulding. Mural on lid interior by Jean Charlot (1989–1979). Simple demountable square leg stand with casters, the front assembly containing the mechanism to operate the registration by seven pedals.

There is no manual coupler: The front 8' choir has two sets of jacks, the front-most working from the upper keyboard and a second plucking the same set of strings further back, playable from the lower.

There is a single buff batten which originally could operate on either the front 8' or back 8' set of strings. <sup>1</sup>

The Challis has seven registers, from front to back:

1. Upper manual front 8' ←
2. Dogleg damper jack for both 8' choirs ←→
3. Lower manual front 8' ←
4. Lower manual 16' →
5. Lower manual 4' →
6. Lower manual back 8' →
7. Shared damper jack for 4' choir with secondary damping of back 8' → [up to note #50 from where 4' dampers are attached to the back 8' jacks]

There are no handstops: The registration is controlled by seven pedals, from left to right:

1. Lower manual 16´
2. Lower manual back 8´
3. Lower manual 4´
4. Buff to lower manual back 8´ <sup>1</sup>
5. Buff to upper manual front 8´
6. Lower manual front 8´
7. Upper manual front 8´ *piano & forte* <sup>2</sup>

Pictures and further information on the history of this instrument and its restoration can be found at <http://www.hpschd.nu/rst/challis.html>

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<sup>1</sup> The single buff batten was originally intended to service either the front 8´ choir (playable from either keyboard) or the back 8´ register (lower keyboard only). From the grooves worn in the bass side of the original buff pads and some odd thin leathers glued there, it appears that the buff stop was greatly used on the front 8´ strings, and the pedal trapwork adjusted accordingly over the years to provide sufficient and even buffing only on that set of strings as the pads wore. There is insufficient adjustment available in the trapwork to allow the other side of the existing original red felt buff pads to work against the back 8´ strings. This is only a minor limitation as the front 8´ strings can be played from either manual, and the buffed front 8´ choir played from the upper keyboard can be dialoged against the other choirs on the lower. Access to the buff batten is limited and the original pads were probably fitted before the 16´ choir was strung. Therefore, pedal 4 is not operational at this time.

<sup>2</sup> From the geometry of the instrument, it is apparent that the upper manual front 8´ pedal OFF position provided a *piano* substitute to the normal fully ON position: The front register cannot be retracted sufficiently without interfering with other strings and as there is no other register on that keyboard, there is no real musical requirement to turn it completely OFF. The difference between *piano & forte* would have been more remarkable with the leather plectra the harpsichord was probably delivered with.