



Australian harpsichord maker Carey Beebe tuning the Challis harpsichord at Spalding House in July.

## Harpsichord strikes warm notes

On view in *Now Hear This* at Spalding House is a harpsichord featuring a mural by Jean Charlot on the interior of the lid. Museum staff have been struck by how many people are familiar with this instrument and have fond memories of it and its original owner—professional musician and composer Gertrud Künzel Roberts.

About three years ago, Lynne Johnson, then chairman of the museum's board of trustees, asked Roberts's daughter Marcia Morse—who is an artist and museum volunteer—about the harpsichord. When Morse told her that she had the instrument, Johnson asked her, "How about donating it to the museum?" recalls Morse. And so began a museum project.

Roberts arrived in Hawai'i with her husband in 1947 and brought with her a small German-made harpsichord. "She was interested in acquiring a larger instrument that would be suitable for concerts," says Morse. So in the 1950s, Roberts contacted John Challis, the first American harpsichord maker. The craftsman modernized harpsichord construction by using metal framing—which would stand up to the islands' humidity better than traditional materials. Roberts performed on the Challis harpsichord locally—including at the museum—as well as on the mainland



## Docent donation funds new lockers

The docent room is outfitted with shiny new lockers thanks to docent Shelley Buechel. Buechel was in Hawai'i with her husband, who worked on the city's rapid transit project. When they returned to the mainland this past summer, as a parting gift Buechel donated \$500 to purchase the lockers.

and in South American. She gave piano lessons to Charlot's children. "My mother commissioned Charlot to do the mural and composed the *Charlot Suite* for the harpsichord," says Morse, who is also an accomplished musician. "The musical vignettes are portraits of all the Charlot family, including their mynah bird."

When Morse's parents passed away, "I had the responsibility of the instrument," she says, "but could not provide the care it needed." So she welcomed Johnson's invitation to donate the harpsichord, which had fallen into disrepair.

"That's how the conservation started. It needs care, and Lynne raised funds for restoration of the instrument." The restoration of the instrument was made possible by Mr. and Mrs. Ian McLean Cooke, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Eu, and The Jean Charlot Foundation.

Starting in June 2012, Morse worked with Honolulu piano technician Steve Premo and Australian harpsichord maker and tuner Carey Beebe. "It was a testimony to Challis's ingenuity that most of the instrument was in amazing tune and spot on A440 pitch despite not being tuned in probably 15 years," says Beebe.

Experienced harpsichordists are welcome to play the instrument. To schedule a session, contact Aaron Padilla at 237-5217 or [apadilla@honolulumuseum.org](mailto:apadilla@honolulumuseum.org).