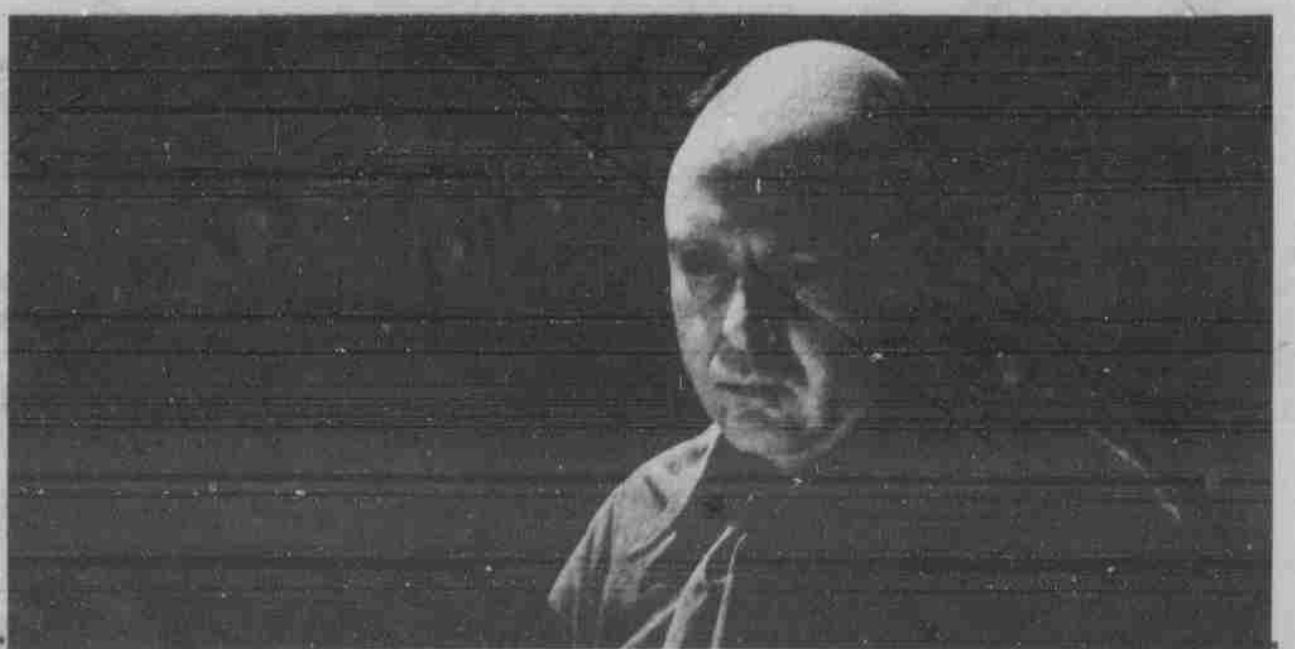
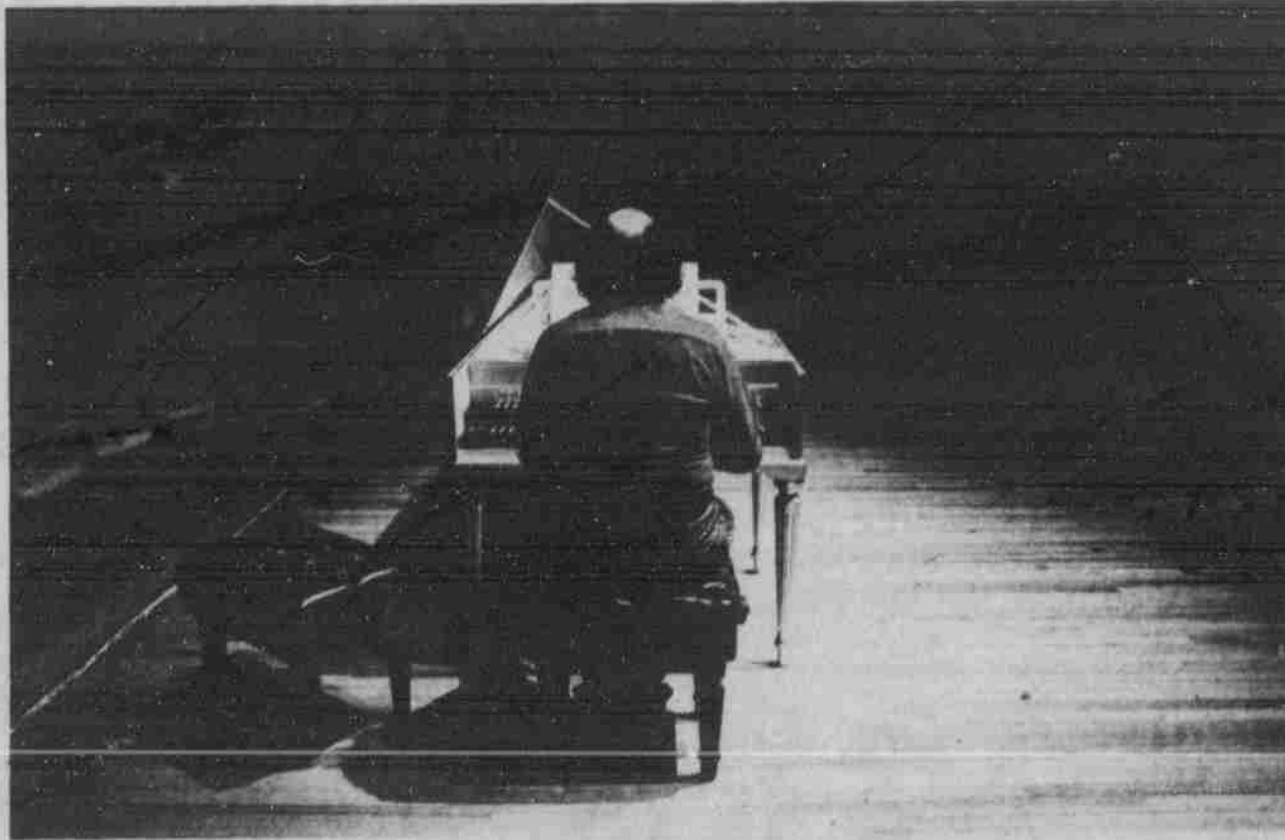


Story By Susan Edwards
Photos By Ted Kirk

Harpischord metamorphosis



When Igor Kipnis sat down to play his 10-foot long gold and red harpsichord, he metamorphosed the Abel-Sandoz cafeteria into an Elizabethan drawing room.

His fingers almost seemed too big for the two delicate keyboards with their black, ebony keys and ivory flats. With fluent pater, Renaissance dances and Bach fugues, he charmed the more than 60 students crowded into the cafeteria corner.

Kipnis demonstrated the pedals and gadgets on his \$10,000 Rutkowski and Robinette harpsichord which control four sets of strings, a damper, a coupler and the two sets of plectra.

The plectra, Kipnis explained, pluck the strings in an upward motion, creating the distinct harpsichord sound. Once made with a raven's or crow's quill or leather, the plectra are usually plastic today.

His harpsichord, Kipnis said, has a set of plastic plectra for a sharp, clear sound and a set of leather for a richer, deeper tone.

Because a harpsichord has no dynamics, no sustaining or soft pedals, Kipnis said the different plectra and registers must be used in combinations to create similar effects.

He played a variety of pieces including an 18th century-work by the Bohemian Ussek—the first man, Kipnis said, to put his instrument sideways on stage so the audience could see his profile.

The "Mysterious Barricades" by Couperin was full of "twiddles and ornamentation" while the Bach Preludes and Fugues used the rich sounds of the registers.

All the action on the harpsichord, Kipnis said, is in the fingers—classical music from the 19th century simply does not work.

Music for the harpsichord, which reached a peak in the 18th century, then took a nosedive to the piano. Its popularity changes in fashion like a woman's skirt, Kipnis said.

The instrument re-emerged from virtual obscurity at the turn of this century. However, when he gave up picking hits for a top-40 radio station and began playing the harpsichord in 1959, Kipnis said it was still considered pretty exotic.

The Beatles helped establish the use of harpsichord, he said, and now it is used regularly on programs from Lawrence Welk to Kung Fu.

The sight and sounds of a harpsichord though still seemed a novelty to the many people who crowded around the instrument at intermission during his Saturday concert in Kimball Recital Hall.

Whenever he feels too smug Kipnis said, he recalls the deflating question a rock musician asked him once in Ontario: "Is that all the noise it makes?"

If he ever writes an autobiography, Kipnis said, that will be the title.