

Press Release (May 4, 2009)

**Physiology of the Piano:  
A MPIWG concert and lecture series  
examining musical tuning  
from Galileo to Planck**

*In concerts and lectures, the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science is exploring for a third year in a row connections between the piano, the human body, and musical tone. In the first of two special events, renowned musicologists, composers, and pianists will address the historicity and mutability of musical tuning in the sciences and in performance practice.*

The tuning of a piano appears to us today as self-evident, based as it is on the idea of playing all intervals between notes at equal length. This approach to tuning is now omnipresent, due to the fact it has been adopted for electronic instruments as well. At our May 13<sup>th</sup> event (7pm), Swiss composer Edu Haubensak will call into question our tuning paradigm: Haubensak's new tuning compositions transform the piano into a new instrument altogether. Two of Haubensak's compositions will be performed by Tomas Bächli, with each piece featuring a new approach to piano tuning.

The quest for melodious, practical, and musically productive tuning systems has occupied scientific minds during the course of history. Researchers such as Galileo and Kepler, as well as Hermann von Helmholtz and Max Planck, considered the question of correct tuning. A lecture by Wolfgang Auhagen, Professor of Systematic Musicology at the University of Halle, will canvass the history of tuning systems for keyboard instruments.

Since 2006, historians of science, artists, and musicologists at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science have analyzed how and why piano playing has become a paradigm for the investigation of human behavior. A second event will take place on June 10<sup>th</sup> (7pm) and will feature pianist Ragna Schirmer and neuroscientist Hans-Christian Jabusch.

"The Physiology of the Piano – Keystroke Experiments During the 1920s," is currently featured on our Institute's website: [www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de](http://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de).

For more information:

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