

Harpsichord & *fortepiano*

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Keyboard Instruments in Haydn's Vienna

by Richard Maunder

Haydn's music was written in a period of rapid change of fashion in keyboard instruments: during the second half of the 18th century, the status of the piano changed from that of an exotic rarity to that of the standard keyboard instrument for all purposes, while harpsichords and clavichords declined in popularity, to the point of extinction (or at least, that's the generally accepted belief). So it can be difficult to tell just which instrument was intended for a particular piece of music, assuming, of course, that the composer *did* intend a specific instrument - though there is no reason to suppose that composers like Haydn and Mozart were indifferent to such matters.¹

To make informed decisions, we obviously need as much accurate information as we can muster about just which instruments were available when, to the composer and also to his intended public or his patron. We don't, unfortunately, know as much as we would like about Haydn's own instruments or those of his employer Prince Eszterházy, but much can be learned about instruments in Vienna, and it would be reasonable to assume that Eszterháza followed the fashions of the capital.

There has, surprisingly, been little serious research in the past into Viennese keyboard instruments, and so facts are harder to come by than guesses and myths. Three of the most common assumptions about Vienna are:

Myth 1: Harpsichords were obsolescent by about 1770; before that, they were mostly imported from Italy.

Myth 2: Pianos were well established by 1770 or even 1760; all of them were of the type nowadays known as the 'Viennese fortepiano', as made by Stein of Augsburg and Walter of Vienna (which was quite different from the English grand of the time, made by Backers, Broadwood and others).

Myth 3: By the middle of the 18th century, the clavichord was mostly confined to North Germany; it was rarely used in South Germany and Austria, where the piano reigned supreme.

There are, of course, certain consequences of these myths. For example, it's often argued that any Haydn sonata that has dynamic markings must be for piano, since the harpsichord is obviously ruled out and the clavichord is very unlikely, whereas the piano was readily available throughout Haydn's career.

I hope to convince you that each of the three myths is wrong. This is a somewhat sweeping claim, so how can it be justified? The answer is: by careful examination of as many primary sources of information as possible (a powerful research tool, though all too often overlooked!). The main sources are:

(i) **Existing instruments**, including some recent discoveries; also a re-examination of some well-known ones, such as Mozart's own Walter fortepiano.

(ii) **Newspaper advertisements**: the chief Vienna paper, the *Wienerisches Diarium* (renamed the *Wiener Zeitung* in 1780), was published twice a week throughout the 18th century, starting in 1703. It has disappointingly little coverage of concerts, but the 'small ads' are a rich source of information, many keyboard instruments being offered for sale each year (especially in the second half of the century), by makers, dealers, shops and private individuals, and also in auction sales. During the 18th century well over a thousand keyboard instruments were advertised, often with detailed descriptions. (Transcripts of all of these advertisements are given in my book *Keyboard Instruments in Eighteenth-Century Vienna*, to be published by OUP in 1998.)

¹ This article was delivered as a lecture to the *British Clavichord Society* in Cambridge on 6 April 1997

(iii) **Other documentary evidence:** for example the Mozart family letters and the Eszterháza archives.

We need to know, of course, about imported instruments as well as those made in Vienna, though it's worth noting at the outset that the newspaper advertisements show that imports were very rare before the 1770s (so most harpsichords were locally made, not Italian as *Myth 1* would have it), though they became more common later. I will deal with each of the three types of instrument in turn.

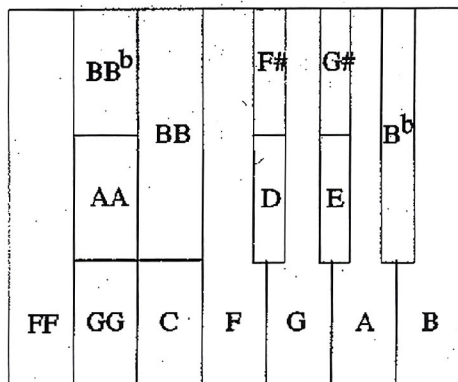
Harpsichords

Viennese harpsichords are not mentioned at all in Hubbard's book *Three Centuries of Harpsichord Making*; there was only one in the second edition of Boalch's *Makers of the Harpsichord and Clavichord 1440-1840*, and even the recent third edition lists a mere four (partly because unsigned instruments are automatically excluded). However, several have been discovered recently, and enough are now known to show that there was a distinctive local school of harpsichord making, well established by 1700, and which continued with very little change in design until at least the mid 1780s (this stagnation can be explained by the strong guild system, whose strict rules were designed to eliminate competition by stifling all innovation). A typical one, made by Johann Leydecker in 1755, is shown in Illus. 1. It has all the defining



1. Harpsichord by Johann Leydecker, Vienna 1755
(Steiermärkisches Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz)

Viennese characteristics: a walnut case, plain except for a little veneer decoration round the keywell, sloping cheeks, only one manual, and just two 8' ranks (there is no 4'). It has no hand stop accessible to the player, and you have to reach inside to move the registers; on some instruments only one is movable and the other is fixed. Most striking of all is the keyboard layout: what you see at the bass end is not mere decoration, but is an arrangement of split keys (naturals as well as sharps) to provide a short octave down to bottom FF: see Illus.2. (It looks pretty daft at first sight, but the idea was presumably to extend the old C/E short octave



2. The 'Viennese' short octave

with split sharps for D/F# and E/G# - by squeezing in extra bass notes in as little extra space as possible.) This form of short octave was absolutely standard in Vienna, from before 1700 to at least the 1770s, on clavichords and spinets as well as harpsichords. Indeed, the earliest known Viennese harpsichord with a fully chromatic bass was made by Mathias Blum in 1778; newspaper advertisements do not begin to mention 'long octaves' until 1780, and also show that instruments with the 'Viennese' short octave were still being made as late as 1785.

Imported harpsichords, as already noted, were very rare before the 1770s, though Frederick the Great gave Empress Maria Theresa a 2-manual Shudi and Broadwood in 1773 (it still exists); Haydn is said to have ordered one from the

same firm in 1775, but if so it's most unlikely to be the instrument claimed to be his which is now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. English harpsichords obviously had a 'snob value' amongst those rich enough to afford them: the music publisher and dealer Artaria, for example, advertised on 24 November 1784:

English Harpsichords and Fortepianos. Artaria & Co. has imported genuine English instruments, namely 2 large harpsichords, made with every possible refinement and luxury ... One is by Kirkman, the other by Longman & Broderip ...

The advertisement gives fairly full descriptions, and then goes on to list the pianos, which were three squares (not grands, it should be noted), but it's worth emphasizing that, even as late as 1784 and in the leading Viennese music shop, it was the harpsichords that were regarded as the more important instruments.

There is plenty of evidence that harpsichords continued to be used in Vienna until the end of the century, although not so much for solo work as for orchestral continuo (incidentally it's another popular myth, with no foundation in fact, that the fortepiano was ever used for this purpose - as seems to have become fashionable in many Mozart opera performances).

Pianos

The most important point to stress is that no pianos were made in Vienna before about 1780. I know this assertion doesn't square with accepted orthodoxy, but the evidence is plain enough. There are certainly no surviving instruments that were made before the 1780s, and the newspaper advertisements tell a very clear story: no pianos at all were for sale before 1777, with only three imported ones in 1777-79, of which two were combined with harpsichords; that is, only one 'straight' piano (a small square, probably German) was advertised before 1780. There was just one in 1780, and another one in 1781 (both squares); the first grand (by Späth of Regensburg) was advertised in 1782, and pianos did not overtake harpsichords in number until 1786. Of course, the fact that there are no surviving instruments doesn't necessarily mean that none ever existed. Eva Badura-Skoda has argued, on the face of it not unreasonably, that the well-developed Viennese fortepiano of the 1780s could not have sprung into existence without predecessors stretching back at least 20 years; but we can now see that these

predecessors were harpsichords, not pianos, and in fact the 1780s were years of rapid development in piano design. There are, admittedly, three reports of pianos in Vienna (or the surrounding area) from before 1780, which are frequently cited as supporting evidence for *Myth 2*:

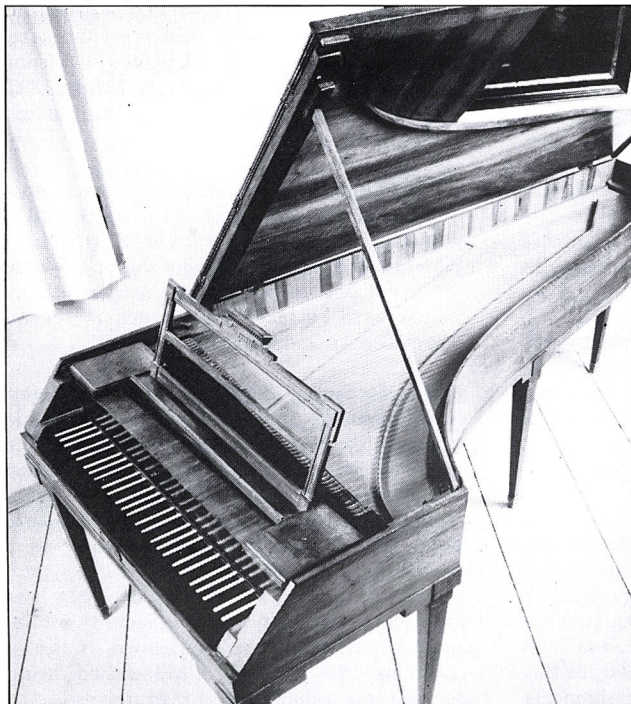
(i) One J.B. Schmid performed a concerto on 6 March 1763 on a 'Piano et forte' (the description suggests it might have been a grand by Silbermann of Strasbourg). But this was a 'one-off' event, and certainly didn't start a fashion, as seems to be taken for granted in several current books and articles.

(ii) Charles Burney, describing his visit to Vienna in 1772, in his *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces*, reports seeing and hearing harpsichords almost everywhere, but on just one occasion he heard 'a child of eight or nine' playing 'a small, and not good Piano forte' (presumably therefore a square, and probably German - interestingly, when its owner (Dr Laugier) died two years later in 1774, at the sale of his effects the chief instrument was 'a harpsichord in good condition', the piano, if it still existed, being lumped into 'other musical instruments').

(iii) (This one is a favourite among some Haydn scholars, although it refers to Eszterháza, not Vienna.) One G.F. von Rotenstein, in an article about Eszterháza for a travel magazine published in 1783, said that he had heard 'a musician playing a Piano-forte' there in 1773. But how reliable is a non-musician, writing ten years after the event? (And he doesn't even mention Haydn!)

However, there's no doubt that pianos *were* made in Vienna during the 1780s. One of the best known examples is Mozart's, which he had from the maker Anton Walter in about 1783: see Illus.3. It is strikingly similar in appearance to the Leydecker harpsichord (note the plain walnut case and sloping cheeks). There is in fact no way of distinguishing Viennese harpsichords from fortepianos without looking inside at the action. This is worth stressing, for there is a tendency to identify any such instrument in a picture as a piano. For example, a well-known portrait of Emperor Joseph II and his sisters, reproduced in Robbins Landon's *Mozart: The Golden Years*, shows him seated at a keyboard instrument which Robbins Landon takes for granted is a piano, though in fact it

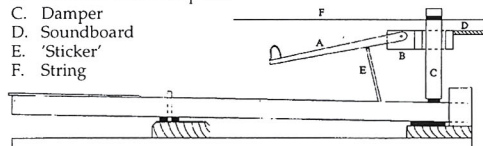
could equally well be a harpsichord.



3. Mozart's fortepiano, by Anton Walter
(Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum, Salzburg)

This visual resemblance is a clue to the origin of the Viennese piano, which (like its English counterpart) evolved by fitting a piano action into the standard local harpsichord design. What must be one of the very first (a recent discovery now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, who have not yet released a photograph) is obviously conceived as the simplest possible adaptation of a harpsichord, and closely resembles the Blum of 1778 I've already mentioned (which helps to date it to c.1780). All that the maker did (see Illus.4 for a diagram of the action) was to mount the hammers on what looks like the front jack-register, and to use the rear register for the dampers (which is why the hammers face forwards). It's pretty primitive - the 'sticker'

- A. Hammer
- B. Hammer rail with pivot
- C. Damper
- D. Soundboard
- E. 'Sticker'
- F. String



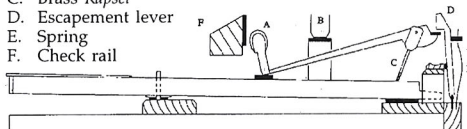
4. The action of a fortepiano of c.1780, probably Viennese

fixed to the back end of the key just kicks the hammer towards the string, and there is no escapement to allow the hammer to fall back after striking it (this is nothing like what is now known as 'Viennese action', though it somewhat resembles the action of the earliest English squares but with the hammers turned back to front).

The next logical step would be to fit this action with escapement. This was done by Ignaz Kober of Vienna, in about 1785, and Kober's escapement action continued to be made there until well into the 19th century (for example on a piano made by Stein's grandson J.B. Streicher in 1841). It is usually known nowadays as 'Anglo-German action': very misleadingly, since it has nothing whatever to do with England or Germany (if any action really deserved to be called 'Viennese' it is this one).

However, we are stuck with the term 'Viennese action' for the different action invented by Stein of Augsburg, similar to that shown in Illus.5. There has been much debate about the date of its invention, most accounts putting it at around 1770 or a little earlier; but it is now known that many Stein labels have had their dates tampered with or are outright forgeries, and none of his instruments with this action can be reliably dated earlier than 1781. Apparently one of the first Viennese-made instruments with Stein's action is Mozart's Walter: see Illus.5. (The essential difference in this action is that the hammers are mounted not on a fixed rail, but individually on the keylevers, in brass forks or

- A. Hammer
- B. Damper
- C. Brass Kapsel
- D. Escapement lever
- E. Spring
- F. Check rail



5. The (present) action of Mozart's Walter

Kapsels.) I say 'apparently' because recent further examination has revealed that the current action on this instrument is not the original one (see Michael Latham's article in the August 1997 *Early Music* for some details). Various pieces of

evidence show that Walter almost certainly made it with an action similar to the primitive one shown in Illus.4, and later altered it (in 1783, at Mozart's request?). In fact the action has been altered more than once, and part of what's there now, although still made by Walter, must date from after Mozart's death.

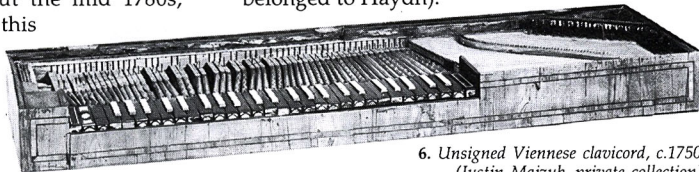
Nonetheless Stein's action was certainly being made in Vienna from about the mid 1780s, though I stress again that this was not the only model available, for Kober's action continued to be an alternative. In the last two decades of the 18th century there were also increasing numbers of imported instruments, including several by Stein himself, and even, by the 1790s, a few English grands: the first recorded one belonged to Hummel (yes, Hummel!) who played it in public on 12 March 1794. Haydn had one as well, which he brought back with him from London.

I must also say a word or two about square pianos. To start with all were imported, including some English ones from the early 1780s (well before English grands reached Vienna), for example the three in the Artaria advertisement of 1784. The first datable Viennese-made square is by Ignaz Kober, 1788: it looks quite like an English instrument, with a mahogany case, though has (of course!) Kober's action, which remained standard on Viennese squares until about 1795 (after which some began to have 'Viennese action'). In 1788 Haydn bought what he described as 'a new fortepiano' (possibly the first he ever possessed) from the maker Wenzel Schanz; the price he paid is less than half the usual minimum for a new grand, so even allowing for a possible trade discount it must have been a square. In 1788 it would have had Kober's action, which is worth stressing because Haydn praised Schanz's instruments for their 'quite special lightness and agreeable touch'; if his comments were based on his own instrument he was therefore *not* talking about what we would call 'Viennese action'.

Clavichords

At least seven Viennese clavichords from 1750 to 1800 are known (some of them are unsigned or recently discovered, so are not listed by Boalch); there are also documentary references to a number of local makers, besides those

represented by signed instruments. A particularly interesting instrument dates from around 1750, and has the standard 'Viennese' short octave: see Illus.6, and note the identical decoration of the keys to those of the Leydecker harpsichord. It is double strung, and fretted. Unfretted models, with 'long' octave, were made by the 1780s (for example Mozart's, and an instrument by Johann Bohak, 1794, said to have belonged to Haydn).



6. Unsigned Viennese clavichord, c.1750
(Justin Majzub, private collection)

In the 1790s, but apparently not before, the 'Hass' type with an additional 4' rank in the bass was made by Ferdinand Hofmann. There is also a single strung (unfretted) clavichord by Engelbert Klinger, probably dating from the late 1790s, similar to a single-strung Stein in The Hague.

Several other Viennese makers advertised clavichords: for example Gottfried Hülme in 1786 (both fretted and unfretted models) and his former pupil Georg Halbig in 1797. Stein's daughter Nannette still described herself as a 'Clavier - und Forte piano-Macher' [clavichord and fortepiano maker] in 1798. Many secondhand instruments were advertised for sale, right up to the end of the century.

As for Viennese keyboard music specifically for clavichord, in 1772 Burney called on Vanhal, who played, on 'a little clavichord... six lessons which he had just made for that instrument'. J. A. Steffan, a pupil of Wagenseil, freely used dynamic markings in his sonatas of 1763, many of which imply a touch-sensitive instrument: see for example Illus.7. The sonatas were published, and hence intended for the general public, so



7. Steffan, Op.3 Part 1, No.1, first movement, bars 13-14

despite J.B. Schmid's pioneering performance on the piano that year they must be for clavichord.

It's a pity that Viennese clavichords are rarely copied, for it would be very interesting to hear, say, these Steffan sonatas on the c.1750 instrument (they omit exactly those bass notes missing from the 'Viennese' short octave).

Implications for Haydn's keyboard music

To identify the intended instrument(s) for a given work, we first need to know its approximate date. In particular, if it was written before 1780 it is highly unlikely to have been conceived for piano; and even in a clavichord sonata Haydn can hardly have expected a 4' rank before 1790. The next step is to look for characteristics such as the range used, especially in the bass where there may be evidence for the 'Viennese' short octave, and the existence or otherwise of dynamics. I'll end with three examples, which will give some idea of what can be deduced: it's not always possible to give a definite answer but at least one can usually limit the possibilities.

Example 1 Sonata in c minor, Hob. XVI/20, published in 1780 but whose incomplete autograph is dated 1771. At least in 1771, the choices were harpsichord or clavichord, and on the face of it the extensive dynamic markings (even in the autograph fragment: see Illus.8 for a sample) rule out the former: hence this must be a clavichord work. But this example is intended partly as a cautionary tale, for in fact there's nothing that's impossible on the 2-manual harpsichord, rare though such things were in Vienna. Even the much-discussed alternating *f* and *p* in Illus. 8 can be managed, for the left hand has nothing to do (intentionally?), so could play the *forte* notes on the lower manual while



8. Haydn, Hob. XVI/20, first movement, bars 13-15

the right hand plays the *pianos* on the upper (yes, I know this seems a bit far-fetched, but I simply want to point out that the existence of dynamics here does not after all *prove* that the work is for clavichord: in fact there are no pre-1780 Haydn sonatas where the existence of dynamics is sufficient by itself to rule out the harpsichord).

Example 2 The 'Acht Sauschneider' variations (Hob. XVII/1), whose autograph is dated 1765. There are impossible-looking chords in the left hand, at the end: see Illus.9 (it's not so much the tenths, as the octaves between 5 and 2). But these are perfectly possible on the 'Viennese' short octave, which, remember, was standard at the time (refer to Illus.2: the bottom Gs in Illus.9 are played by the front section of what looks



9. Haydn, Hob. XVII/1, bars 365-368

like the D key). Of course, this observation does not settle whether the piece is for harpsichord or clavichord, but does at least show that a locally made instrument was intended.

Example 3 There are two sonatas of the 1760s that, exceptionally, need a *long* octave down to GG or even FF: Hob. XVI/6 in G (in the 1766 Breitkopf catalogue) and Hob. XVI/19 in D (autograph dated 1767). At this date, this surely implies an imported instrument of some kind; and although there are no dynamic markings it could well have been a clavichord from a German maker (Friederici, perhaps?). (What else could it have been? An English or French harpsichord? There's no evidence for such a thing at Eszterháza in the 1760s, or even in Vienna for that matter.)

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