

Harpsichord & fortepiano

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MOZART AND THE CLAVIER - A SUPPLEMENT

by Neil Coleman

This article is an attempt to update and supplement the article on Mozart's keyboard instruments published in the previous issue of Harpsichord & Fortepiano Magazine. It seemed appropriate to put together some of the information gleaned, much of it inspired by the questioning, guidance and kindness of others to whom I am greatly indebted. In order to make cross-referencing easier, I have maintained the division of "Mozart and the Clavier" by category of instrument with the addition of one for "square pianos".

Harpsichords¹

At the Imperial Court in Vienna, Mozart would have encountered, amongst other instruments, a harpsichord by J. D. Dulcken of Antwerp. It was probably the instrument he played at his court audiences in 1762, 1773 and 1781, and certainly by the time of his appointment as composer of dance music to the court from 1787 to 1791. He could also have played an anonymous broken-octave harpsichord, which has two 8' registers, with lute and buff stops all from a single set of strings dating from the previous century; and also the court virginals by Celestinus of Venice, which are now part of the Beurmann collection, Hamburg. From the time of his visit to Vienna in 1773, Mozart could have encountered a harpsichord there by the Swiss maker Schudi of London, sent by Frederick the Great to Empress Maria Theresa; it was not the instrument that Schudi fitted with the newly-invented machine pedal for Frederick the Great's residence in Breslau, which Mozart had inaugurated in London. The Mozart family's visit to Vienna in 1767 brought them into contact with the Viennese banker and industrialist, Count von Fries, who may have ordered a double-manual harpsichord from Stein during his visit to the capital ten years later. A combined harpsichord and fortepiano by Stein, now in the Naples conservatoire, was reputedly presented to Emperor Joseph II of Austria in 1784.

Although no harpsichord by Christian Ernst Friederici, such as the one the Mozart family in Salzburg owned (see "Mozart and the Clavier"), survives, Rampe follows Kinsky in believing that the della Croce family portrait shows this very instrument. This is on the grounds that the instrument's dimensions, including the depth of the case, are commensurate with those of a

double-manual harpsichord rather than those of a fortepiano.

The double-manual harpsichord by J. H. Gräbner (the elder) now in Villa Bertramka, Prague, on which Mozart is said to have played, has mistakenly been associated with a performance of the "Coronation" concerto, K.537; Whereas Mozart does seem to have played the instrument at his opera performances during 1787, the myth that he played concertos on the same instrument stems from a conflation of reports from the years 1787 and 1789. The performance of the work in question was in fact given in Dresden during the spring of 1789, for which Mozart used a fortepiano. In one of the two contemporary accounts, the instrument is mistakenly referred to as a "Flügel", i.e. "harpsichord" at this date (incidentally mistranslated in the English version of the Mozart-Dokumente as "pianoforte"). The possibility of there having been two separate performances, one on harpsichord, the other on fortepiano, is less than likely, and there is no mention of an instrument by Gräbner, although the family's workshop was located in the city². Mozart's patron, the Russian ambassador Galatzin, kept a combination harpsichord-pianoforte by J. J. Merlin of London, now housed in the Bavarian National Museum in Munich. The mechanisms for the harpsichord and pianoforte actions can be played separately or in combination, and the disposition of the harpsichord includes a register at 16' pitch.

In Italy, the only extant indigenous harpsichord which Mozart could have played (and on which he reputedly composed *Mitridate, re di Ponto*, K.87, in 1770) is the lavishly decorated single-manual instrument by Scotti of

Milan, owned by the Hapsburg Count Firmian (now part of the Gallini collection); and there is no evidence that it was "given to Mozart"³. In France there were instruments Mozart could well have played by Vater, Taskin and Blanchet, several of which are extant. During his visit to the Duc de Noailles, one of the foremost musical patrons in France, in 1778, Mozart would have encountered the Ruckers double-manual harpsichord in Saint-Germain, subsequently confiscated in the course of the French Revolution.

Square pianos

J.C. Bach, who was visiting Saint Germain-en-Laye from London, may have enabled Mozart's visit there in August 1778. Bach was quite possibly aware that his old friend Mozart had recently lost his mother, and the postulated invitation does chime with the kindness of Bach's nature. It is also possible that Bach had brought the "Zumpe & Buntebart" square piano⁴, now in the Cobbe Collection, Surrey, with him from London. The soundboard is signed by him and the instrument is dated 1777-8; he is known to have received requests for instruments both from the philosopher Diderot in 1774 (for his daughter "whose knowledge of harmony surpassed her years") and from a pupil, Mme. Brillon (whose playing in Paris famously had the dampers put on it, quite literally, by Dr. Burney); in both instances, Bach supplied instruments by Zumpe. As usual, Mozart himself is the most informative source; his letter written at St. Germain towards the end of August 1778⁵ is the source for J.C. Bach's visit to France. There is no mention of the instrument in the letter, but Mozart does mention his delight at meeting Bach again, and also the soprano castrato, Tenducci; he mentions that he is writing a *scena* for Tenducci accompanied by pianoforte, oboe, horn and bassoon to be played by German musicians in the employ of the duke. Mozart was living at this point at the house of the Baron von Grimm, who also had an English square in his possession, by J. Pohlmann of London. According to the Cobbe Collection catalogue, the Zumpe and Buntebart square "may well have rendered the first performance of ... [Mozart's] great sonata K.310 in A Minor"⁶.

The Maréchal de Noailles was evidently on good terms with the town, which helped the instrument survive, as during the revolution his house was not sacked but "merely confiscated and immediately leased back to him on terms from which his sons could benefit after him", a point worth making for humanity's sake. The

piano survived in a nearby village and was restored and bought for the Cobbe Collection in the 1990s. According to the catalogue, it "shows considerable advance in size and quality of sound on the earlier instrument by Zumpe".⁷ The *scena* for Tenducci, however, has apparently not survived, although it seems to have reached England, for Burney commented on it enthusiastically; we must hope that it might still be found⁸.

It can be assumed that this instrument was better than others in France. Mozart's mother had reported earlier that her son had to go to the house of the tenor Le Gros to use a clavier for composition⁹; Mozart reports in a letter of 18 July 1778 that "...at Le Gros' the chopping-board is good" in contrast to the tenor Raaff's "miserable clavier". On the first of May, the composer had left off playing his "Fischer Variations", K.179 on the Duchesse de Chabot's "miserable wretched "pian forte" as he felt "unable to do himself justice on it". Archbishop Colloredo's Baumann square must have been a better instrument, as on 31 August 1782 he wrote to his father, "I now have a request to make. Baroness Waldstätten is leaving here [Vienna] and would like to have a good small pianoforte ['ein gutes kleines Pianoforte']. As I have forgotten the name of the keyboard instrument maker ['Claviermacher'] at Zweibrücken, I should like to ask you to order one from him. It must, however, be ready within a month or six weeks at the latest and the price should be the same as that of the Archbishop's." Mozart would have known the Baroness's instrument in Vienna from 1782, and the Archbishop's from 1775 until his departure in 1780; this is almost certainly the instrument now in the Carolino Augusteum Museum, Salzburg¹⁰.

Leopold Mozart wrote concerning Christian Gottlob Friederic (nephew of the great Carl Ernst and reputedly as great a builder), who was seeking to renew business associations, and was "astonished that [I] had quite forgotten the name Friederic and their work, and is offering two instruments for me to try, which he wishes to send me on commission."¹¹. It may well have been the case that one of these instruments was a *Fort bien*, the name C.E. Friederic and his school used for their square pianos. C.P.E. Bach, who was the agent for Friederic's instruments in Hamburg, owned an example, which was indeed "very fine" according to Gerber.

In "Mozart and the Clavier", I mentioned that the last known clavichord by Carl Ernst Friderici was the instrument with a compass of CC-f, formerly the property of Franz Liszt, later

housed in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna and lost in World War II. However, an investigation of a reference by Rampe led to a photograph of an anonymous square piano owned by Mozart, and subsequently by Liszt¹². Incidentally, there is a report by Robert Schumann of Liszt playing a Silbermann "Clavier" in a concert during the winter of 1839-40 in Leipzig. This probably refers to a clavichord, which remained in fairly widespread use in the German-speaking lands well into the nineteenth century and was apparently still called simply "Clavier". Flade was not aware of this antiquated use of the term, which explains his confusion over Mozart, "the great master of the fortepiano" offering a good price to Doles in Leipzig for his Silbermann *Klavier*, which in this case was certainly a clavichord¹³.

Clavichords

As noted previously, the large five-octave clavichord that Wolfgang and Marianne Mozart had "frequently played duets on" during their childhood, was sent by Leopold to his daughter in St. Gilgen in 1785 when her Schmid fortepiano was in a state of disrepair. Leopold was "greatly dismayed"¹⁴ that this was the case, but had to concede that the local builder R. I. Egedacher, who was seriously ill and unable to make the trip, was unlikely to find an apprentice; he had supplied the Salzburg court with instruments, including a clavichord. Later the same year, Leopold successfully championed Schmid as Egedacher's successor, although he was unable to leave his workshop in the Black Forest until the following year¹⁵.

For six months, Marianne Mozart remained without the use of her piano. As we have seen, it was still with her at the end of her life; when the Novello's called on her in 1829, she was unable to play it following a stroke, but her nephew Wolfgang did so with relish, and in his improvisation for the English visitors revealed a wealth of musicianship¹⁶. There is no mention of the maker of this instrument, although Leopold or his son did buy a clavichord by Friederici in 1772, perhaps with the compass CC-f¹.

For Nannerl, her brother and Josef Haydn, the clavichord was the instrument with which these musicians can be associated throughout their lives, and in all cases for the playing or composition of vocal music that would be their "swan song": the last piece Mozart had completed was the Masonic cantata "Laut *Verkiunde uns're Freude*, after K.623, to a text by Schikaneder, composed on the five-octave clavichord now in the house of his birth. Only a

few weeks after the Novello's visit, Mozart's widow was overjoyed when her younger son returned this instrument to her after many years:

I cannot describe how very pleased I am to have received my lovely clavichord ['Clavier'], which Mozart played so much and on which he composed the Magic Flute, *la Clemenza di Tito*, the Requiem and a new Masonic cantata within a period of five months. Mozart was so fond of this instrument and for this reason I am doubly fond of it.¹⁷

This, together with the clavichord's absence from the inventory of Mozart's estate, led Kinsky to suggest that the instrument may have been Constanze's property, and may have come from the Weber household to the Mozarts' only in the summer of 1791.¹⁸

Leopold Mozart shows great delight in the letter of 16 October 1762, when his son charmed the customs officer at Vienna. The clavichord he mentions here must have been a small travelling instrument that was to be replaced the following year with the little one by Stein. This later instrument is extant in Budapest and deserves to be more widely copied. It is fretted and the temperament, as might be expected, is set in a modified meantone.

In a letter to the Leipzig publishers Breitkopf & Härtel written in 1792, Mozart's sister recalled that

from his childhood on, he [Wolfgang] preferred to compose at night and at daybreak. If he sat down at the clavier at nine o'clock at night, it was impossible to get him away from the clavier before midnight ... I know nothing at all of him practising the clavier after he was seven years old, as his practice consisted of his having to hear everything that was put in front of him to play off at sight, and this was his practice.¹⁹

Presumably the clavier in use so late at night was one of the family's clavichords.

Fortepianos

Among several opportunities the Mozart family may have had to try fortepianos in the cities they visited while on tour, Leopold and

Wolfgang could have encountered an early example with escapement in Italy when they visited Farinelli in Bologna in 1770, just a few months prior to Burney's encounter with the retired castrato. Included in Farinelli's collection of keyboard instruments was a fortepiano by the Cristofori pupil Giovanni Ferrini, dated 1730. Robert Levin²⁰ has questioned whether the detailed dynamics found in the triple concerto K.242, impossible or even hazardous on harpsichords for players and instruments alike, could really point to Countess Lodron's ownership of three pianos in Salzburg in 1774; perhaps the markings were only added when Mozart played the piece with Demmler and Stein in Augsburg on three fortepianos.

The Imperial Court at Vienna had a fortepiano by the local maker I. Kober of about 1785 that Mozart may have played, but in 1781 it was from Stein in Augsburg that he ordered a fortepiano. This was for the wife of Count Czernin von Chudenitz, a nephew of the Archbishop of Salzburg. Count von Thun-Hohenstein, in common with his stepdaughter Countess Thun, made his fortepiano by Stein available to Mozart on more than one occasion, first at his residence in Linz during the autumn of 1783, and again in 1787 at his palace in Prague; it is probable that the sonata in Bb Major, K.333 was composed at this instrument.²¹

Though what became of the pedal instrument that Mozart had made for his Walther fortepiano is not known, there is a fortepiano with pedal-pulldowns by Johann

Schmid[t], Salzburg, c.1785 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. However, there is also an account of "Forte pianos with Pedals" from a musical journal of 1806: "...the pedal is built like the fortepiano, with the same hammers and dampers etc., except that the keys [i.e. pedals] are very much enlarged and otherwise so arranged that they can be played with the feet.

It can be placed under any fortepiano so that the player ... can make use of both instruments comfortably. Its compass, incidentally, extends only to about two octaves ... from great C to c', but at so-called sixteen-foot pitch, i.e. one octave below our keyboard instruments ... That a skilful player is able to achieve much with the help of the pedal is quite plain ..."; the author goes on to explain how a lot of music is adaptable for such an instrument.²²

According to Rampe, it was during the earlier part of 1782 that Mozart bought his Walther fortepiano, now in his birthplace in Salzburg; certainly, it was about this time that the term first appears in his autograph scores. Mozart's son, Carl Thomas, later recalled that his father was so attached to this instrument that it was the only one on which he would give concerts.²³ The instrument has an unusually wide dynamic and tonal range, is unusually loud, particularly in the treble, and has an exceptionally long sustain.²⁴ It would be a great service to musicians and audiences alike if instruments of this quality were more widely available.

34 Mozart and the Clavier - A Supplement

- 1 For these references, and others, I am indebted to Siegbert Rampe's comprehensive guide: *Mozarts Claviermusik – Klangwelt und Aufführungspraxis, Ein Handbuch*, (2nd ed., Kassel, 2006). Much of the remaining material on this subject was published in Nathan Broder's essay, "Mozart and the 'Clavier'" in *The Creative Mind of Mozart*, ed. Paul Henry Lang (New York, 1963) 76ff; it was written in 1941. Similarly, Georg Kinsky's article "Mozart-Instrumente", in *Acta Musicologica*, vol. 12, 1940 still provides much useful information on this subject.
- 2 See ed. O.E. Deutsch, *Mozart: Die Dokumente seines Lebens*, ed. O.E. Deutsch [Mozart-Dokumente] (Kassel, 1961), no. 297 and 304.
- 3 ed. Andrea Gatti, *Museo degli strumenti*, (Milan, 1997), p.332. Many thanks to Dr. Grant O'Brien for this reference.
- 4 Thanks to Peter Thresh and John Dulaney of the Yahoo! fortepiano list for alerting me to this instruments whereabouts; also to Alison Hoskyns of the Cobbe collection for supplying further details.
- 5 Letter from Mozart to his father, Saint Germain, 27 August 1778 in transl. Emily Anderson, *The Letters of Mozart and His Family...* 3rd edition rev. S. Sadie and F. Smart, (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).
- 6 Alec Cobbe, *Composer Instruments - A Catalogue of the Cobbe Collection of Keyboard Instruments with Composer Associations*, (The Cobbe Collection Trust, 2000), p.16.
- 7 The instrument can be heard played by David Owen Norris with *Sonnerie*, on a CD entitled "The World's First Piano Concertos 1769-1780", on the AVIE label (AV 0014).
- 8 See James Barrington "Miscellanies", p.289 and C. F. Pohl, "Mozart and Haydn in London", 1: 121 and C. B. Oldham, Mozart's Scena for Tenducci', *Music and Letters*, January 1961.
- 9 Letter dated 24 March 1778 from Anna Maria Mozart to her husband.
- 10 A square piano by the same maker, with cork-tipped hammers is among the instruments played by Pierre Goy on the recording "Claviers Mozartiens", Lyrix 'Instrumenti' LYR2251; the combination instrument by Stein mentioned above is also featured. Thanks to Christopher Clarke for drawing attention to this recording.
- 11 Letter of 16 November 1785. In ed. O.E. Deutsch and B.Paumgartner, *Leopold Mozarts Briefe an seine Tochter*, Salzburg, 1936.
- 12 See Siegbert Rampe op.cit. p.47; also Richard Maunder, "Mozart's Keyboard Instruments", *Early Music* 20/2 (May 1992). For the photograph see Hirt, *Meisterwerke des Klavierbaus*, (1955, 2nd edition 1981), p.36; also in Hirt, *Early Keyboard Instruments*, 1981.
- 13 Ernst Flade, *Der Orgelbauer Gottfried Silbermann. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen Orgelbaus im Zeitalter Bachs*, Veröffentlichungen des Fürstlichen Institutes für musikwissenschaftliche Forschung zu Bückeburg. 2nd edition, (Leipzig, 1952), Series 5, vol. 3,): 241, 263-4.
- 14 Letter of 21 February 1785 quoted in Kinsky op.cit. and Rampe, op. cit.
- 15 Siegbert Rampe, "Zur Sozialgeschichte des Claviers und Clavierspiels in Mozarts Zeit," *Concerto* (December 1995):104.
- 16 Mary Cowden Clark, *The life and labours of Vincent Novello. By his daughter Mary Cowden Clarke*, (London: Novello & Co., 1864), 26ff.
- 17 Konstanze Nissens Tagebuch aus den Jahren 1824-1837, (H. Abert, n.d.); also Constanze Nissen-Mozart, *TageBuch meines BriefWechsels in Betref der Mozartischen Biographie* (1828-1837), Salzburg, 1999.
- 18 Kinsky, op.cit., 9.
- 19 Bauer-Deutsch IV, no.1213, p.201 quoted in Rampe op cit., p.89.
- 20 Robert D.Levin, "Mozart and the Keyboard Culture of his Time", conference address at Cornell University, 2003; also at <http://www.biu.ac.il/hu/mu/min-ad04/LevinMOZART.pdf>. For the cadenzas see, W.A. Mozart, *Cadenzas and Lead-ins to the Piano Concertos* ed. Faye Ferguson and Wolfgang Rehm, (Bärenreiter, revised edition 2004).
- 21 Rampe, op.cit. 57
- 22 *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* 8 (Leipzig 1806), 565ff, quoted in Kinsky, op.cit. The instrument by Schmid[t] is illustrated in *Eighteenth Century Keyboard Music*, 2nd ed. Robert J. Marshall, (New York & London 2003), 23.
- 23 Rampe, op.cit. 44.
- 24 Mozart's fortepiano can be heard on CD 8 of the series played by Robert Levin (with Malcolm Frager on a second Walther instrument). This is a private release in conjunction with the Salzburg Mozart Museum ISM 90/1 (1990). The instrument was recorded on LP ISM 002 (1979) by Paul Badura-Skoda.