

Harpsichord & fortepiano

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A Glimpse of the Tagliavini Collection of Musical Instruments

By María Virginia Rolfo

Italian organist, harpsichordist, musicologist, teacher, and composer Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini started to collect musical instruments in his native Bologna more than fifty years ago. Today, the superb collection featuring keyboard instruments—mostly Italian—holds three clavichords, ten harpsichords, 11 spinets, a unique instrument with plectra and hammers, one *Tangentenflügel*, four pipe organs, and different kinds of 18th and 19th-century pianos. In addition, it comprises several wind, stringed, and mechanical instruments.¹ This article will focus on the clavichords, harpsichord family, and pianos.

Tagliavini was born in Bologna in 1929.² He studied organ, piano, and composition at the conservatories of his hometown and Paris. Subsequently, he undertook a doctorate at the University of Padua with a dissertation on the texts of J. S. Bach's sacred cantatas. He held organ teaching positions at the conservatory of Bologna, where he was also in charge of the library, and at those of Parma and Bolzano, taught music history at the University of Bologna and was appointed director of the Institute of Musicology at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, where he taught for 35 years. He is a member of the *Accademia Filarmonica di Bologna* and the *Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia*, one of the oldest and most prestigious musical institutions in the world.

His distinguished career has been recognised with honorary doctorates from the Universities of Edinburgh and Bologna and from the Pontifical Music Institute, Rome, as well as a fellowship from the Royal College of Organists in London, among several other awards. In 1995 and 2000, the *Festschriften Musicus Perfectus* and *Fiori Musicologici* were published for his 65th and 70th birthdays respectively.³ Tagliavini's numerous publications cover various subjects related to the organ as well as performance practice topics on historical keyboard instruments in general.⁴ An active performer and an inspiring teacher, both activities have taken him almost all over the globe.



Fig. 1: Interior of the church of S. Colombano, home of the collection. (Photograph A. Zareba).

The earliest clavichord in the collection is an anonymous Italian instrument probably made in the sixteenth century (Fig. 2).⁵ The clavichord did not meet with great success in the peninsula; therefore this example belongs to a small group of such instruments extant today. The other two clavichords, both German, are also anonymous and were made during the eighteenth century. One of them may have been built in Southern Germany in the first half of the century; the other instrument went through a number of modifications before it arrived at the collection and was probably made in South Tyrol during the second half of the eighteenth century.

The earliest harpsichord in the collection was made in Naples in 1584 by the Venetian Nicolò Albana. However, the instrument went



Fig. 2: Anonymous Italian clavichord, probably sixteenth century. (Photograph M. Berardi).

through several alterations, including a new keyboard with a modified compass and a second set of 8' strings (Originally it was made with one set).⁶ A harpsichord by Giovanni Battista Giusti of Lucca has always been defined by Tagliavini as "the prince of my collection" (Fig. 3). The instrument, made in Ferrara in 1679, has two sets of 8' strings and one set of 4' strings; it was made for the Marquis Ippolito Bentivoglio from Ferrara, where it was purchased from an antique dealer in remarkably good condition.



Fig. 3: Harpsichord by Giovanni Battista Giusti, Ferrara, 1679. (Photograph M. Berardi).

An excellent example of the transitional period from harpsichord to fortepiano is the unique instrument with plectra and hammers made in 1746 by the Florentine Giovanni Ferrini (Fig. 4). It is a double manual instrument with two sets of 8' strings, used by the piano in the upper manual, as well as by the harpsichord jacks, activated by the lower manual. The instrument is the oldest combined harpsichord-forte piano to survive into modern times and the only one known to have been made in the Italian peninsula. It belonged to harpsichordist Corradina Mola, who was deeply involved in the revival of harpsichord playing in Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century (and who died in 1948).



Fig. 4: Harpsichord with plectra and hammers by Giovanni Ferrini, Florence, 1746. (Photograph M. Berardi).

Instruments made in the region of Bologna occupy a privileged position in the collection. Four harpsichords, three square pianos, three pipe organs, and a grand piano were made in or near Tagliavini's town of birth. The harpsichords were built by Fabius de Bononia and Giuseppe Maria Goccini. The highly decorated instrument by Fabius de Bononia, made in 1686, arrived with two sets of 8' strings; it has since been returned to its original disposition of one 8', one 4', and a *sordino* stop. In addition, it was equipped with a pedal board, now missing.⁷ Goccini's instruments are very different in style and decoration. The 1721 harpsichord, Goccini's oldest known surviving instrument, was built in Bologna for an English client.⁸ The instrument has two sets of 8' strings and is very British in style, having a sober mahogany outer case and stand. Goccini's other instrument, made in 1725, has a painted outer case, two sets of 8' strings, and below the keyboard, a knob engaging a bass and treble octave coupler (See Fig. 5, cover, bottom left).⁹ The third harpsichord by Goccini is an interesting octave instrument made between 1730 and 1733. Provided with two sets of 4' strings, it once had a pedal board. Several female names are handwritten in ink on the inside of the lid flap, suggesting that it may have been used in a school or a convent.

The Neapolitan school also has a significant place in the collection. In addition to the harpsichord by Nicolò Albana mentioned above, it is represented by five spinets; one by Alessandro Fabri (1598), another by Onofrio Guerracino (1663), and three anonymous instruments.¹⁰ The spinet by Fabri, a rectangular instrument with a protruding keyboard, represents the earliest one of the

Neapolitan type known today (See Fig. 6, cover, bottom right, Fabri, Naples, 1598.)

The collection also includes other spinets from different periods and varied designs. There are two pentagonal instruments, one attributed to Alessandro Trasuntino (Venice, c.1540), provided with a pedal board of eight notes, and another made by Francesco Poggi, probably Florence, 1588. Not much is known about one of the anonymous bentside spinets made in Italy and dated 1754; however, the inscription on one of the keylevers has a triangle and a cross, similar to the triangles and crosses found on the harpsichord attributed to Mucciardi (1789, cited below) and on that by Albana (1584, with a later keyboard). Bentside spinets with a protruding keyboard were made in Paris under the influence of Girolamo Zenti, who lived there from 1666 to 1668. An example of this practice is an *épinette à l'italienne* made in Paris in 1681 by Louis Denis. As suggested by an inscription under the soundboard, the instrument was made for Denis' daughter (who was married to the composer Louis Marchand). Furthermore, there is an octave spinet made in Rome in 1617 by Silvestro Albana and a 19th-century spinet made in Lombardy. The second, made in about 1820 and provided with a pedal board reconstructed from the original, actually looks more like a piano than a spinet.

Several harpsichords in the collection still retain their original decoration. Cooperation with various art historians, scholars, and restorers has made it possible, in many cases, to attribute the paintings on lid interiors, external case walls, or false "inner-outer" cases to renowned artists, adding a significant art value to the collection. Such is the case for a harpsichord made in Rome in 1685 by Mattia di Gand (or Matthias of Ghent) and painted by his compatriot Jan Frans van Bloemen, known for his distinctive landscapes. Late 18th-century harpsichords are represented by an instrument attributed to Ignazio Mucciardi, probably made in Florence in 1789, and another by the Florentine harpsichord and fortepiano maker Vincenzio Sodi in 1791-1792. This is one of the latest historical Italian harpsichords (i.e. large wing-shaped instruments) to have survived today.¹¹ The collection also holds an anonymous folding harpsichord made in Italy during the first half of the eighteenth century. It has two sets of 8' strings and the keyboard is made in one piece, representing the only Italian 8' instrument of this type to have

survived in its original state (See Fig. 7, cover, large photo).

The collection includes six square pianos. The earliest instruments were made in London by John Geib in 1786 and in Amsterdam by Meincke and Pieter Meyer also in 1786. The instrument by Geib is one of the first ones equipped with the English double action patented by him in 1786. The square piano by the Meyer brothers was constructed and decorated like the instruments made in England. As already mentioned, three of the square pianos were made in Bologna. Two of them were made by Luigi Barbieri in the 1820s; the action and the exterior of the cases show the influence of Viennese and southern German pianos (See one of them in Fig. 8). The third square piano, made at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was attributed to the Bolognese school, based on similarities with the pianos by Barbieri. The latest square piano in the collection is an instrument with Viennese action made by Carlo Marini and Luigi Alovisio in Turin in about 1830.¹²



Fig. 8: Square piano, Luigi Barbieri, op. 183, Bologna, c. 1820. (Photograph A. Zareba).

Among the latest acquisitions is a rare *Tangentenflügel* (tangent piano) made in Milan in 1799 by Baldassare Pastore (See Fig. 9, next page.) and a harp-shaped piano made in about 1780.¹³ This *Tangentenflügel*, described in an article by Elena Ferrari Barassi, went through restoration in the 1980s; however Tagliavini, deeply interested in the restoration of instruments based on historical research, wished for a new restoration, which is being carried out now.¹⁴ The harp-shaped piano is similar to other unsigned instruments often claimed to have been made by Johann Matthäus Schmahl; however, there have



Fig. 9: Tangentenflügel, Baldassare Pastore, Milan, 1799; left to right: Graziano Bandini, Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini, and Liuwe Tamminga in the workshop of the collection. (Photograph by the author).

recently been doubts about the attribution of such instruments to him alone.¹⁵ Among the few instruments which are not playable is a grand piano made in about 1800 attributed to Ferdinand Hofmann of Vienna.

19th-century grand pianos include instruments by Matthäus Andreas (or André) Stein (Vienna, 1833), son of the renowned maker Johann Andreas Stein and brother of Nannette Streicher and by Carl Bechstein (Berlin, 1866). The latest grand piano in the collection is an instrument made in Bologna in 1888 by Vito Dondi, the last Bolognese piano manufacturer. The instrument, unfortunately damaged during World War II, was built for the 1888 International Exposition of Bologna, where it was awarded a bronze medal.¹⁶ The collection also holds a small sewing box piano made c1820 attributed to Joseph Klein, who was active in Vienna during the first half of the nineteenth century. The finely decorated instrument, with Viennese action, has drawers for toiletries and sewing equipment. Furthermore, the collection holds a *piano demi-incliné*, a console piano, made by Michel Eisenmenger in Paris in about 1856–1860. Eisenmenger invented this

type of instrument in 1856, for which he won a prize in 1859. The collection also contains an upright piano by Wenzel Tomaschek, made in Vienna c1890. Because of the position of the dampers, this is the only type of upright piano which can achieve the *una corda* effect.

For many years, instruments were housed in the Tagliavini family home in the centre of Bologna, where they occupied several rooms; and two of them, in his home in Portalban (canton of Fribourg, Switzerland). In 1986, a number of instruments were moved for an exhibition at the Bolognese church of San Giorgio in Poggiale. On that occasion, the first catalogue, coauthored by Tagliavini and John Henry van der Meer, was published, followed by a reissue a year later.¹⁷ In 1996, a CD featuring 11 instruments from the collection was released.¹⁸

In 2006, Tagliavini donated his collection to the *Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio* in Bologna, an institution related to the eponymous Bolognese bank. Recently, the 243-page catalogue, written in Italian, was replaced by a rich three volume work also written by Tagliavini and van der Meer. An eminent figure in the world of musical instruments, van der Meer, who unfortunately passed away in 2008, played an essential role to the development of the collection. The new catalogue includes contributions by Wanda Bergamini and Friedemann Hellwig (who also collaborated on the first catalogue), Maria Cristina Casali, and Denzil Wraight. Volumes one and two, in Italian, total 760 pages and were published in 2008; volume three, containing 127 pages, is a compilation and English translation by Michael Latcham of the first two volumes and was published in 2009.¹⁹ After the latest catalogue was edited, the collection continued to grow and new instruments were added; consequently, a new publication including the later arrivals has already been planned.

At the beginning of 2010, the collection was moved to its present location, a complex of religious buildings known as San Colombano, situated in the city centre (See Fig. 1). San Colombano, with its marvellous frescoes and a relevant history, is a real architectural jewel. In June 2010, the entire collection was presented to the public in its new home with three evening concerts. During the events, the museum was crowded with Tagliavini's colleagues from various countries, members of his family, friends, scholars, experts, and interested members of

the public. The opening, advertised in the local newspapers, was quickly fully booked.

Since then, the museum has received more than 15,000 visitors. The renowned Dutch organist Liuwe Tamminga, now curator of the collection, gives weekly guided tours where he also demonstrates the instruments. Concerts by professional musicians playing various instruments in the collection take place every month. In addition, recitals presented by groups of advanced music students and school programmes are often organized.

On the second floor of the complex is a workshop for the maintenance and restoration of instruments. In addition to restorers Arnaldo Boldrini and Renato Carnevali, who for many years collaborated with Tagliavini, work is now being undertaken by harpsichord maker and restorer Graziano Bandini.

The third floor houses the amazing personal library of Bolognese musicologist Oscar Mischiati, donated by his sister after his unexpected death in 2004. Music librarian at the Conservatory of Bologna for almost 40 years and a faithful collaborator with Tagliavini, he was also an authority on Italian historical organs, which on numerous occasions were saved from neglect and destruction. A series of conferences will take place in the library next season.

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<http://www.genusbononiae.it> (website only in Italian; pdf brochures with general information in other languages are available).
Also visit www.fondazionecarisbo.it

¹ Among the wind and stringed instruments, the collection includes oboes, clarinets, a mandolin, a flageolet, a piccolo, ocarinas, a ciaramella, and a dulcimer. Furthermore, it holds two instruments from the free-reed aerophone family, a Viennese phrysharmonica and an Italian accordion, and keyed idiophones such as a glasschord (*piano à cordes à verre*), a *Dulcitone*, and a keyed glockenspiel. Mechanical instruments include a bird organ, a cylinder organ, a *piano melodico*, a Kalliope music box, and a 1926 upright reproducing piano with Welte-Mignon mechanism, the only instrument with a keyboard dating from the twentieth century.

² Biographical information about Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini can be found in Etienne Darbellay and Teresa M. Gialdroni, "Tagliavini, Luigi Ferdinando," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane L. Root <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed 16 May 2011).

³ *Musicus Perfectus: Studi in onore di Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini*, ed. Pio Pellizzari (Bologna: Patron, 1995) and *Fiori Musicologici: Studi in onore di L.F. Tagliavini nella ricorrenza del suo LXX compleanno*, ed. François Seydoux (Bologna: Patron, 2001).

⁴ A comprehensive list of Tagliavini's publications, reviews, critical editions, compositions, recordings, and awards, can be found in *Musicus Perfectus*, 275-295 and in *Fiori Musicologici*, 632-642.

⁵ For further details on the majority of the instruments cited in the present article, refer to the latest catalogue of the collection (mentioned below), from which most of the information has been taken. Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini and John Henry van der Meer, *Collezione Tagliavini: Catalogo degli strumenti musicali*, vols. 1 and 2 (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2008); Michael Latcham, translator and compiler, *A Concise English Catalogue of the Tagliavini Collection of Musical Instruments*, vol. 3 of *Collezione Tagliavini: Catalogo degli strumenti musicali* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2009). Instruments not included in any of the collection catalogues are indicated in the endnotes.

⁶ The original compass was C/E to c⁴; at present GG/B♭ to f¹.

⁷ The instrument, bought in 2008, has been described in Latcham, *A Concise English Catalogue*, but not in Tagliavini and van der Meer, *Collezione Tagliavini*.

⁸ The instrument was given as a wedding gift to Lady Elisabeth Parker, daughter of the first Earl of Macclesfield, who married Sir William Heathcote of Hursley in 1720.

⁹ The compass of the instrument is from GG, AA to c³; the octave coupler engages a set of intermediate levers connecting the 11 keylevers from g, a to f' to those for GG, AA to F♯ and at the same time the 12 keylevers from c♯ to c² to those for c♯-c³.

¹⁰ The anonymous instruments are two bentside spinets made probably in Naples, one at the end of the seventeenth century and the other dated 1787, and a rectangular spinet of the Neapolitan type made at the sixteenth or seventeenth century. The latter has a false inner outer case and a keyboard decorated with *sgraffito* technique; it has not been included in any of the collection catalogues.

¹¹ On Vincenzo Sodi, see Maria Virginia Rolfo, "Vincenzo Sodi: Life and Work", M.M. Thesis, The University of South Dakota, 2011 (available through UMI-ProQuest, UMI no. 1491253).

¹² The instrument, purchased in 2009, has not been yet before included in any of the Tagliavini Collection catalogues. At present it is not on exhibition due to small repairs.

¹³ None of the instruments have been yet included in any of the Tagliavini Collection catalogues.

¹⁴ Elena Ferrari Barassi, "Un raro esemplare di fortepiano milanese (1799)," in *Restauro, conservazione e recupero di antichi strumenti musicali: Atti del Convegno Internazionale* (Modena, April 2-4, 1982), vol. 40 of *Historiae Musicae Cultores-Biblioteca* (Florence: Leo Olschki, 1986), 111-123.

¹⁵ Sabine K. Klaus, "German Square and Harp-Shaped Pianos with Stossmechanik in American Collections: Distinguishing Characteristics of Regional Types in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society* 27 (2001): 120-182.

¹⁶ The instrument has not been yet included in any of the Tagliavini Collection catalogues.

¹⁷ Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini and John Henry van der Meer, *Clavicembali e spinette dal XVI al XIX secolo: Collezione L. F. Tagliavini*, (Bologna: Grafis, 1986); 2nd ed. (Bologna: Grafis, 1987). After an introduction by Tagliavini, the catalogue includes an article by van der Meer on Italian instruments, an index of technical terms in Italian, English, and German, detailed descriptions of the instruments (including pictures), cross-sections of the moulded parts, x-ray images of most of the instruments, and a bibliography.

¹⁸ *Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini and his collection of harpsichords*, CD ERM 427-2-DDD (Ermitage, 1996).

¹⁹ See note 5. After an introduction by Tagliavini is an index of technical terms in four languages (including French), the description of the instruments organized by family, articles by van der Meer on the history of the clavichord, harpsichord, piano, combined instruments and idiophones, cross-sections of the moulded parts, pictures of the keyfronts, x-ray images of several instruments, a rich bibliography, and an index of names.

