

Harpsichord & fortepiano

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New WAAPA collection

The Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) at Edith Cowan University (ECU), Perth, is now the site of an historical keyboard collection. The new Centre for Keyboard Performance and Research will offer opportunities for collaboration in teaching, research, conservation, and maintenance. The collection includes some rare examples, including the First Fleet piano. Over time, WAAPA intends to grow the collection with the support of benefactors.

In 2016, Edith Cowan University received an unprecedented and historic gift – the Stewart Symonds Keyboard Instrument Collection. Painstakingly and intelligently assembled by Australian collector Stewart Symonds, the collection is widely recognised as one of the most significant in the world, and is of immense cultural value. Now preserved for posterity at Edith Cowan University, the Collection comprises 140 instruments – including the First Fleet piano. It offers a wide selection of exceptionally rare – in some instances, unique – stringed keyboard instruments dating from 1736 to 1874, including an English bentside spinet, and breathtaking examples of square, grand and cabinet pianos.



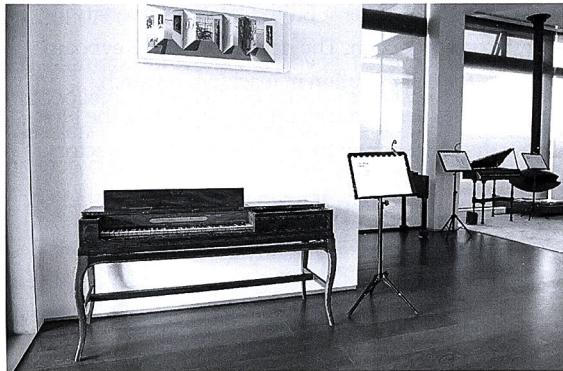
Preparations for an event in the gallery.

The procurement of the Collection was facilitated by WAAPA Professor Geoffrey Lancaster AM after working closely with Dr Stewart Symonds to research his book *The First Fleet Piano: A musician's view*. Dr. Symonds has been collecting historic pianos since the late 1960s. After reaching storage capacity at his home in Ermington, he donated the esteemed collection to ECU/WAAPA to continue his legacy. (See photo on cover of the two).

“They were everywhere, in storage, the garage, sheds, even on the veranda”, Dr Symonds said. Many of the instruments are not in playing order, as Dr Symonds put the Collection together not for performance, but as a collection celebrating the design and innovation of the piano in its progress through time. Dr Symonds has quietly assembled his extraordinary collection over the past 50 years. He is proud of his work and is pleased to facilitate a unique learning opportunity for future generations.

A special example in the collection is the ‘First Fleet’ piano (Frederick Beck, London, 1786). This item is an English square piano that was made in London in 1786. It was brought to Australia by George Worgan aboard the flagship of the First Fleet, the Sirius. Considerably smaller than a

modern piano, its legs can be folded away for storage. Records show that it was used in recital onboard the Sirius as the ship lay at anchor in Rio de Janeiro en route to Australia. Before leaving Sydney Cove, Worgan gave the piano to Elizabeth Macarthur, one of the colony's most distinguished women. In Sydney, Worgan had taught Elizabeth the piano. It was sold on and off until 1838, and that was the last it was heard of until 1965.



The First Fleet Piano, in the gallery.

An eminent antiques dealer, William Bradshaw, purchased it in 1965 and kept it in his private collection for a number of years until Stewart Symonds obtained it. As such, this is not only the first piano in Australia, it is also the first piano upon which piano lessons were given, by the first piano teacher in Australia – the acquisition of the First Fleet piano is a major boon for the cultural and academic life of WAAPA and ECU.

Furley Hawkins bentside spinet (London, 1736), a Mott & Co, Grand piano (London 1820), a Dog Kennel Piano by François Soufléto, Piano (Paris 1838), squares by Hornung & Möller, Pape, Pether, Linke, Heinrich Huni, John Watlen; a Klein Lyraflügel upright, and a John Hicks Barrel piano, as well as pianos by Érard, Clementi, Broadwood & Sons, Steinway.

The collection has commissioned a new harpsichord by Bruce Kennedy.

The collection was launched on 11 April 2018.

For more information visit <https://foundingpianos.com.au/>

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