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The Current State of Claviorgan Research

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Introduction

When Stephen Wessel wrote his article on 'The Claviorganum in England' in the *English Harpsichord Magazine* back in 1977, the instrument was still considered to be very much on the fringes of music-making throughout history – a mere novelty that popped up in museums from time to time. Despite this phrase still appearing in the *Grove Dictionary of Music* article on the instrument, it is as myth that has now been well and truly busted, and indeed interest in combination instruments is very much a growing area.

Prior to my own doctoral research on the instrument, Wilson Barry had been preparing a book on the claviorgan and its history (with a number of articles published in distinguished journals); Barry had been in touch with Dr Rodger Mirrey in the 1980s to discuss the surviving 1745 John Crang claviorgan that was in his collection (now in the Musical Instrument Museums, University of Edinburgh). Sadly, this project never seems to have been completed. The article in the *Grove* has changed very little between editions, with only a few updates in linked articles, and very little to acknowledge the leaps that organologists across the world have made in terms of the history of the instrument.

Germany and Austria

John Henry Van der Meer was one of the first organologists to take the claviorgan more seriously, with his article on the Valentin Zeiss combination instruments, three examples of which survive in museums and collections in Austria. Zeiss is one of the only instrument-makers known to have provided a pedalboard for such instruments, which are slightly unusual in their construction, resembling a table (the harpsichord portion having a rectangular soundboard). There is known to have been a wealth of combination instruments throughout Austria, including the larger Zeiss instruments (and similar models known of through inventories of the various Hapsburg castles), but also smaller-scaled combinations of virginal or spinet with organ, such as the surviving 1591 Josua Pock claviorgan in the Salzburg Dommuseum.

Further North in the German-speaking lands, there are a number of surviving instruments from a single Nuremberg maker, Lorenz Hauslaib, who made much smaller creations contained within highly decorated cabinets. Three of these instruments are known of: one in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, dated 1598 (illus 1),[1] a recently-restored instrument in the Barcelona Music Museum and a third instrument in the Glinka Museum in Moscow. It is so rare for three such instruments by a single builder to have survived in any state; the Met instrument is still intact and playable, and the Barcelona instrument has recently had a new spinet built for it, so that it is again a combination instrument (recordings are available on the museum website[2]).

Illus 1 Claviorgan (1598) by Laurentius Hauslaib (photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art/Creative commons)

Terrence Charlston wrote about another Nuremberg instrument in the *RCO Journal*, known only from its elaborate lid painting by Frederik van Valckenborch (1566-1623) – this article, written to celebrate the completion of a copy of the Theewes instrument, discussed many possibilities regarding performance on such an instrument, and gave this painting as an example, as it shows a group of musicians gathered around the instrument (for which it was originally the lid). The claviorgan itself was most likely to have been a wedding present for the family depicted elsewhere in the painting, and there is a huge amount that can be discussed in terms of the symbolism in both the main painting and the vignettes of 16th-century life that decorate the fallboard.

Britain

The English building tradition has had less attention, possibly due to the dearth of surviving instruments. Having said that, the 1579 Lodewyk Theewes claviorgan now in the Victoria and Albert Museum is however probably the most studied claviorgan on the planet – with at least three dedicated articles and honourable mentions in several more. Christopher Nobbs presented

a paper at the 2008 Lausanne *Harmoniques Rencontres Internationales*, including details of the 1740 Burkat Shudi harpsichord in the Royal Collection at Kew Gardens (which was formerly provided with an organ, perhaps by John Snetzler).

Peter Williams wrote a short monograph on another 1740s instrument – the 1748 Jacob Kirkman/Shudi claviorgan built for the Earl of Wemyss, which is still at the family seat in Longniddry outside Edinburgh. My own article on the history of the organ-builder John Crang, and the surviving harpsichord portion of his 1745 claviorgan (unusually for an English instrument, both elements were constructed by the same maker) was published in the 2011 *Festschrift* celebrating the 70th birthday of Christopher Hogwood.

However, there is still much to be discovered about the use of combination instruments at court, in the private home, and later in the theatres around the United Kingdom, and no doubt many more instruments to uncover in inventories. One startling discovery of my research was that when the Music School of the University of Oxford was founded in 1627, the keyboard instrument donated by William Heather was in fact a claviorgan.

Iberia and Italy

Iberian instruments have also been the subject of a number of studies, including the wealth of instruments known to have been constructed by Mahoma Moferriz, 'the Moor of Zaragoza'. Carmen Morte García compiled a detailed history of the life of this interesting Spanish instrument-builder who, despite his religious affiliation, was a favourite of the royal families of both Spain and Portugal.

Beryl Kenyon de Pascual also wrote a number of articles on Spanish instruments, both from the early period and regarding the popularity of the organised square piano in secular and sacred practice in the early 19th century. There appears to be a stronger connection between the claviorgan and the church in Spain than in any other tradition, with the Cathedral in Seville having used first a combination of harpsichord and organ, and later piano and organ, between the 17th and 19th centuries. Their later instrument, an English-built organised-piano by Longman and Broderip, was recently rediscovered and is on display in the Cathedral Musem.

Lately there has also been renewed interest in the history of the claviorgan from Italy: Giuliana Montanari's 2005 article on Florentine Claviorgans in the *Galpin Society Journal* was an astounding survey of evidence relating to combination instruments both in Medici inventories and further afield – a real game changer in establishing the importance of the instrument in Italian court circles. More recently, Patrizio Barbieri's 2016 *Early Music* article highlighted a similarly ground-breaking level of evidence in Rome for claviorgans and table organs, including evidence for their use in the theatre. There is certainly scope for uncovering the history of the instrument elsewhere in Italian court records, to further emphasize how important claviorgans were in court circles – and it is no wonder that such impressive (and expensive) instruments would have found favour during a long period of cultural one-upmanship.

Modern claviorgans

Musicians and instrument builders have also been embracing combination instruments, with a number of historical copies now extant across the world – just a few of these are mentioned below.

In 2005, Malcolm Rose completed a copy of the harpsichord portion on the 1579 Theewes claviorgan for instrument collector Joseph Kung – in the process greatly expanding the organological research into this instrument, its history and its construction. In 2008 this was completed with the addition of a recreation of the organ portion, by Goetze & Gwynne (the registration and photos of the completed claviorgan can be found on the Goetze & Gwynne website[3]). More recently, Professor Kung has donated key instruments from his collection (including the Theewes copy) to the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where they will be available for students and professors of early keyboard technique.

Illus 2 Pinchi/di Maio composite claviorgan
(photo: Franz Silvestri)

In Milan, harpsichordist and organist Franz Silvestri has combined his positive organ by Claudio Pinchi with a single-manual harpsichord by Andrea di Maio to create a non-coupleable claviorgan for both solo and continuo performance (illus 2). This arrangement is becoming more common, especially for ensemble direction.

Magnus Kjellson (director of Göteborg Baroque)[4] recently commissioned a Handelian-style long-movement claviorgan (illus 3), thanks to a grant from the Sten A. Olsson Foundation for Research and Culture. Swedish organ-builder Mats Arvidsson designed and contructed a two-part organ, the first part being a positive organ with pedal board (on which the harpsichord sits) that connects to the upright chamber organ by the long-movement. This allows the potential for some of the instrumentalists to be positioned between the harpsichord and the upright portion of the organ – and for the organ to be able to sound much more effectively for both the audience and players, as it is not purely contained within the confines of the harpsichord case.

Illus 3 Kilström/Arvidsson claviorgan (photo: Jon Liinason)

The current harpsichord used in the claviorgan was built by Andreas Kilström, and is based on an anonymous instrument from Gotland (in the style of Mietke) – however, a new harpsichord has been commissioned to form a permanent part of the claviorgan. Handel is said to have used such instruments to direct performances of his oratorios (and for the organ concertos that complemented them). A long-action instrument was also constructed for the Handel commemoration service at Westminster Abbey in 1784, from which Joah Bates directed the large orchestra and choir. Peter Holman has been conducting further research into how these long-action instruments continued to be used (including later piano-organ combinations) in Georgian England.

I do not know of any other modern copy of such an instrument, so I am looking forward to hearing more about this project from Magnus Kjellson and from Joel Speerstra (University of Göteborg) who has been a driving force behind the design of the instrument. The newly-built instrument, which was premiered in February 2019, will be celebrated as part of this year's Göteborg International Organ Academy, with a series of concerts, masterclasses and a day of lectures on the claviorgan.

Other instrument builders that have constructed claviorgans in recent years include Matthias Griewisch[5] (Germany), Blumenroeder Organs and Harpsichords[6] (France), Orgelbau Felsberg (Switzerland) and Marc Ducornet (France), and Reinhard Hüfken[7] (Germany). Most of these builders have details of the instruments they have constructed on their websites, with recordings of the Felsberg and Ducornet available on YouTube.[8]

Some of these examples mentioned are replicas of surviving instruments, but considering that very few original examples survived in anything close to completeness, there has to be a certain amount of re-imagination based on historical building practices – this is most common in the case of the organ portions of instruments, which as the bulkiest element tends to be the part that is discarded.

When I first began my research into the claviorgan, I knew of about 30 instruments surviving in various states of [dis]repair, and was hoping that I could increase that figure with the inclusion of more information from inventories and documentary sources. The final Appendix of my thesis contains over 350 references (some of which are to multiple instruments), and I now know of over 100 surviving keyboard instruments which are or were once claviorgans. I still continue to expand my database of references, most recently studying the surprising number of instruments built by the Erard Frères during a short-lived fashion for the organised-piano in Paris in the 1790s.

This huge leap forward has been thanks to the combined work of many of the researchers mentioned above, as well as a lot of references in studies of archives (where the combinations were not always recognised). It is more than refreshing to know that interest in the possibilities of combination instruments continues to grow amongst musicians and instruments builders – and I do believe that I will be collecting more references for the rest of my academic career.

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Endnotes

1 https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/501762.

2 http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/museumusica/ca.

3 https://www.goetzegwynn.co.uk/organ/copy-theewes-claviorganum-joseph-kung.

4 https://www.goteborgbaroque.se/claviorganum.

5 http://www.griewisch.com/englisch/instrumente/claviorganum/index.php.

6 http://blumenroeder.fr/pages/creationsclaviorganum.html?idArt=82.

7 https://www.orgelbau-huefken.de/en/claviorganum.html.

8 YouTube https://www.youtube.com, see under user 'domisolfa'.