

# Harpsichord & *fortepiano*

Vol. 26, No. 2 Spring, 2022

© Peacock Press.

Licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

You are free to share and adapt the content for non-commercial purposes, provided you give appropriate credit to Peacock Press and indicate if changes were made. Commercial use, redistribution for profit, or uses beyond this license require prior written permission from Peacock Press.

Musical Instrument Research Catalog  
(MIRCAt)

# Harpsichords in Bach's Germany – an overview

Leonard Schick

The general landscape of harpsichords in Germany during the 18th century is very much unknown even to most professionals today. The existing academic articles are of limited help: many focus on individual instruments, while others describe special features such as the 16' stop or pedal harpsichords. A significant lacuna in the scholarship, however, is any publication examining the following questions:

- ▶ Which builders were well known (including outside of their own home town)?
- ▶ Which manual ranges were common?
- ▶ Which dispositions were common?

The last question has surprisingly never been broadly considered: only the individual aspect of the 16' stop itself has been greatly discussed. It has been observed in no fewer than ten publications that the 16' stop was indeed very common in Germany in 18th century.<sup>1</sup> Recently, however, new sources have been identified which will help to answer these questions in a more precise way. Many sources describe the situation in Leipzig, Berlin and Hamburg, three important cities in Bach's lifetime; I will focus on those locations.

My research in historical newspapers consists of using newspaper advertisements which have already been published<sup>2</sup> and in looking in digitized newspapers. For instance, the *Leipziger Intelligenzblatt* can be found almost completely digitalized and freely accessible on the internet. Furthermore I have looked at old dictionaries; these are very useful but surprisingly not often mentioned in modern publications.

## Well known builders

In 1773 one text gave a good overview about the leading makers:

*In Deutschland werden dermalen in Sachsen, die von Silbermann, Friederici, Hildebrandt, Gräbner &c. [=etcetera] verfertigten Flügel, und zu Berlin die Midick [=Mietke] und*

*Oesterleinschen &c. vorzüglich geschätzt. Zu Regensburg sind die Fortepianos und pianissimo, auch Pantaleon Claveßin (mit Flöten= und Violoncello=Zügen) von Franz Jacob Spat berühmt.*

In Germany, especially in Saxony, the harpsichords by Silbermann, Friederici, Hildebrandt, Gräbner etc, and in Berlin the ones by Mietke and Oesterlein etc, are favoured. In Regensburg the *Fortepianos* and *pianissimo*, also *Pantaleon Claveßin* [=another instrument with hammers] (with flute stops) [=claviorganum] and Violoncello stops [=bowed keyboard?] from Franz Jacob Spat[h] are well known.<sup>3</sup>

This situation is confirmed by many historical newspaper advertisements: the instruments by Mietke were especially important in Berlin, and notably less so in the rest of Germany. This text being from 1773, it is worth mentioning that Gottfried Silbermann, Zacharias Hildebrandt and Michael Mietke were already dead. Nevertheless their instruments (especially their harpsichords) were still highly appraised. Unfortunately, no confidently attributable harpsichords have survived from Silbermann, Friederici and Hildebrandt—probably the greatest German builders of the time. It should be further noted that instruments from Hamburg were of no great importance in central and southern Germany, a fact confirmed by newspaper advertisements, as we shall see.

## The German harpsichord, general descriptions

Surprisingly, no modern scholarly publication deals with general descriptions of German harpsichords, as found predominately in (mostly musical) historical dictionaries. Entries in such dictionaries are the most likely sources to give a complete picture of the situation (Table 1).



<i>Author, place, year</i>	<i>Number of stops</i>	<i>Normal trends</i>	<i>Disposition</i>
Praetorius, Wolfenbüttel (1619)	2–4 choirs		including one with a fifth stop
Mattheson, Hamburg (1713)	‘with 3. to 4. stops’		
Adlung, Erfurt (1726)	1–3 choirs	seldom single strung ( <i>einbörigt</i> )	8’, 8’ 8’, 8’ 8’ 4’, 16’ 8’ 4’
Stößel/Barnickel, Chemnitz (1737)	2–4 choirs	‘Often’ 2–4 choirs	
Adlung, Erfurt (1758)	1–4 choirs	‘seldom 1 or 4 choirs, mostly 2 or 3 choirs’	8’, 8’ 8’, 8’ 8’ 4’, 16’ 8’ 4’, 8’ 8’ 4’ 4’, 16’ 8’ 8’ 4’
Halle, Berlin (1764)	2–3 choirs		8’ 8’, 8’ 8’ 4’
Sprengel, Berlin (1773)	2–3 choirs		
Halle, Berlin (1789)	2–4 choirs	‘normally two or three choirs’	8’ 8’, 8’ 8’ 4’, 8’ 8’ 4’, 16’ 8’ 8’ 4’
Koch, Rudolstadt (1802)	3–4 choirs	‘mostly three or four choirs’	‘including a four foot’
Busch, Arnstadt (1805)	2–4 choirs		
Thon, Sondershausen (1817)	3–4 choirs		
Koch, 1865 (Neuaufgabe) 1865	2–4 choirs		8’ 8’, 8’ 8’ 4’, 16’ 8’ 8’ 4’

Table 1 Harpischord dispositions in German sources

In historical sources, the terms ‘choirs’ (*Chor*) [=set of strings] and ‘stops’ (*Register*, *Veränderungen*, *Züge*) [=maybe sometimes set of jacks] are typically used. As these words do not necessarily describe the same thing, it would be recommended that future publications take into account this possible difference. Based on the fact that descriptions from Saxony could include four choirs but five or six stops, it is safe to assume that a row of jacks was considered a *stop* in that region. Therefore a Saxon harpischord with four stops could have had only three choirs (8’ 8’ 4’) and a *nasal* (lute stop). The *nasal* (historically often *Spinett*) was indeed considered a stop in Central Germany, but it seems not in Hamburg. The buff stop was sometimes mentioned additionally to the stops themselves (in Saxony and Hamburg), so it evidently was not counted among the ‘stops’. It is worth mentioning that all Northern German and Saxon sources (Praetorius, Mattheson and Barnickel) mention harpischords with four choirs, and since Mattheson authors even considered them normal. The situation in Berlin (Halle and Sprengel) and Thuringia (Adlung, Koch, Busch, Thon) initially seems more unclear or more variable; but it can be explained. Indeed Busch tells that the greatest harpischords are those by Zacharias Hildebrandt and Friederici, two pupils of Gottfried Silbermann. So it would appear safe to assume that between Adlung’s first (1726) and second (1758) description, the Saxon harpischord-building school had developed in Thuringia as well, contributing to

the popularity of four-choir harpischords also there. Those big harpischords were even more common in Thuringia at the beginning of 19th century than double strung ones. In Berlin, however, such large harpischords were never as fashionable; note that Halle’s second text (1789) is mostly a copy of Adlung (1758), and therefore it is impossible to consider it a primary source faithfully representing contemporary practices in Berlin. According to Halle’s first text (1764), single manuals were double-strung (had two sets of strings), and double manuals were triple-strung. The disposition 8’ 8’ 4’ 4’ appears only in one individual source: Adlung. It seems likely that this disposition was less common in Saxony. We can deduce the following:

- ▶ The norm greatly differed between Saxony, Thuringia, Berlin and Hamburg.
- ▶ In Berlin, double-strung (8’ 8’) and triple-strung (8’ 8’ 4’) harpischords were the norm.
- ▶ In Saxony 8’ 8’, 8’ 8’ 4’, 16’ 8’ 8’ 4’ and probably 16’ 8’ 4’ were normal. A relationship between the number of stops and manuals is not described there.

### Sources from Leipzig

No harpischord from Leipzig is known to have survived; however many were advertised in the newspapers. It has been possible to consult all advertisements printed

in the *Leipziger Intelligenzblatt* between 1763 (the first appearance of the newspaper) and 1793, as well as a partial selection of advertisements in the *Leipziger*

*Postzeitung*, which later became the *Leipziger Zeitungen* (Table 2).<sup>4</sup>

<i>Maker</i>	<i>Owner, Place</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Manuals</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Choirs</i>	<i>Stops</i>	<i>Disposition</i>
Anonymous	?	1742	2 + 1	?	4	[4]	[16' 8' 8' 4'] + Pantalon
Anonymous	?	1763	2 + Ped	?	?	?	?+16' in Ped.
Anonymous	?	1763	3	?	?	?	? lute hpd (gut strings)
Hildebrandt	?	1763	2	?	?	?	?
Zacharias Hildebrandt	Instrument maker, Granert	1764	[1?]	?	?	?	?
Zacharias Hildebrandt	Instrument maker, Granert	1765	[1?]	?	3	[3]	[8' 8' 4']
Anonymous	?	1765	1	C-?	?	?	?
Anonymous	Barbier Pörner	1765	?	?	?	?	?
Zacharias Hildebrandt	?	1766	1	?	?	?	?
Anonymous	Master carpenter, Becker	1766	?	?	?	?	?
Anonymous	Organist Vogler, Weimar	1766	2 + Ped	CC-c4	3 4	3 4	8' 8' 4' 32' 16' 8' 8'
Anonymous	?	1767	?	?	?	?	?
Hildebrandt	Tax collector, Johann Peter Weickhar[d]t	1767	2	CC-f3	4	[4]	[16' 8' 8' 4']
Anonymous	clock maker, Steinbach	1770	2	FF-f3	?	?	?
Zacharias Hildebrandt	Cafetier Enoch Richter	1770/1775	2 + Ped	FF-f3 AA-d1	4+ 4	5+ 5	16' 8' 8'* 4' 16' 16' 8' 8**
Christian Ernst Friederici	?	1770	2	?	?	?	?
Zacharias Hildebrandt	?	1770	?	?	?	?	?
Anonymous (made in Merseburg)	?	1770	2	FF-f3	?	?	?
Zacharias Hildebrandt	?	1770	2	FF-f3	[4?]	4	large [maybe 16' 8' 8' 4?]
[Johann Gottfried Kranerd]	instrument maker Kranerd	1770	2	FF-?	[3]	[3]	[8' 8' 4']
Christian Ernst Friederici	?	1771	[2?]	?	?	[2+2?]	?
Johann Christian Immanuel Schweinefleisch	?	1772	2	C-f3	?	?	?
Anonymous	?	1772	2	?	[3]	3	[8' 8' 4']



Anonymous	?	1773	2	?	[3]	3	[8' 8' 4']
Hildebrandt	?	1775	?	?	?	?	?
Zacharias Hildebrandt	?	1775	1	C-f3	2	[2]	[8' 8']
Hildebrandt	?	1776	?	?	?	?	?
Johann Christian Immanuel Schweinefleisch	?	1779	?	FF-f3	3	[3]	[8' 8' 4']
Zacharias Hildebrandt	?	1779	2	FF-f3	3	[3]	[8' 8' 4']
Gottfried Silberman	?	1782	2	FF-d3	?	4 + buff stop	?
Christian Ernst Friederici	?	1783	2	FF-f3	?	4 [2+2]	?
Zacharias Hildebrandt	?	1785	[2?]	?	[3 or 4?]	?	?
Gottfried Silberman	'A good musician' [?]	1788	2	FF-f3	3	[3]	8' 8' 4'
Christian Ernst Friederici	?	1789	2	?	[4?]	6	[16' 8' 8' 4']
Hildebrandt	?	1790	?	?	?	?	?
Anonymous	?	1790	2	?	?	?	?
Zacharias Hildebrandt	?	1791	2	FF-f3	?	4	?
Silberman	in Dresden	1792	2	CC-f3	?	?	?
Silberman	?	1793	2	?	[4?]	4	large [maybe 16' 8' 8' 4?]
Silberman	Hotel de Baviere.	1799	2	CC-?	3	[3]	[8' 8' 4']
Silberman	Freyburg a.d. Unstrut.	1799	2	?	?	4	? +4'
Silberman	?	1802	2	?	[4?]	5	[16' 8' 8' 4']

Table 2 Harpsichords in Leipzig newspapers (1763-1793)

Here I use numbers like 8' to describe choirs (sets of strings). Stops related to an additional row of jacks (English lute stops) are noted by an asterisk (\*). Some few harpsichords in the list were not actually in Leipzig, but were nevertheless advertised there. Information in brackets are my own deductions based on what I have observed above, or based on an unclear formulation in the advertisement.

This table contains mostly used instruments and certainly represents well the situation in Bach's Leipzig. Zacharias Hildebrandt lived in Leipzig from the end of the 1720s to 1750, and died in Dresden in 1757. His son Johann Gottfried moved to Hamburg afterwards. Due to the fact that the list contains only Saxon builder names (except Friederici, who was active in Gera in Thuringia,

but almost on the border to Saxony. He was trained by Silberman, so he was probably belonging to the Saxon school) it is likely that most (or almost all) Hildebrandt harpsichords were built by Zacharias himself. Hildebrandt's activities as a harpsichord builder are particularly relevant to Bach: Johann Friedrich Agricola describes a lute-harpsichord which Johann Sebastian Bach had designed and which Zacharias Hildebrandt built. This instrument was presented around 1740.<sup>5</sup> Advertisements referencing 'the old Silberman' likely indicate Gottfried Silberman. 'Silberman' may instead refer to another family member such as Johann Daniel Silberman.

In summary, there are 42 harpsichords included in the above list (Table 3):

<i>Manuals</i>	<i>Clearly formulated</i>	<i>Suspected because of formulation</i>
Single manual harpsichords	3	2
Double manuals	26	2
Triple manuals	2 (no regular hpd)	0
Pedals	3	0
Unknown	7	

Table 3 Summary of harpsichords in Leipzig newspapers

A Silbermann harpsichord advertised in 1788 had five octaves, two manuals and three choirs, yet it was nevertheless called 'not especially large' in its advertisement.<sup>6</sup> On that basis, I suspect that all four-stop harpsichords with an FF-basis compass which were considered explicitly *large* must have had four choirs,

including a 16' stop (Table 4). There is indeed no clear mention of a 'large harpsichord' in Leipzig on FF-basis with unmistakably less than four choirs. The quadruple-strung Hildebrandt harpsichords from 1767 and 1770 both were identified as 'Large' in their advertisements.

<i>Choirs (not including pedal boards)</i>	<i>Clearly formulated</i>	<i>Suspected because of formulation</i>
Two choirs	1	0
Three choirs	7	3
Four choirs	3	4
Unknown	24	

Table 4 Number of choirs

In the complete list of 42 instruments, no fewer than 11 harpsichords had four or more stops. The harpsichord with six stops by Friederici here seems unique at first glance; in fact there is evidence about Friederici harpsichords with six 'main stops' (=rows of jacks?) and some 'additional stops' (buff stops and arpichord/harp stops?) in two other locations.<sup>7</sup> At least ten harpsichords had FF as lowest note (Table 5). The four harpsichords with ranges extending to CC are certainly very important to note. One of those was praised as an 'orchestra harpsichord' and the other one was considered 'strong enough for accompaniment'. It becomes quite clear that these low notes were considered useful for continuo, perhaps as an alternative—or sometimes even a

complement—to the 16' stop. Based on this observation, one might wonder how acceptable for public music-making might have been considered a harpsichord without a CC bass or a 16' stop.

While many advertisements focus on the strength and beauty of the sound, a few describe elaborate decorative elements. Numerous harpsichords are described as being varnished in walnut wood, others were made of oak or other woods. Two are reported to be painted; a harpsichord by Silbermann which was lacquered in red with flowers,<sup>8</sup> and a blue single-manual harpsichord.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the 33 harpsichords of the *Leipziger Intelligenzblatt*, between 1763 and 1793 the periodical contains mention of two spinets (both by Hildebrandt), at least ten clavichords (mostly Hildebrandt, one by Donat, one by Schweinefleisch, one by Scheibe, though interestingly none by Silbermann or Friederici), and many other *Claviere*. Some of the latter might have been new, as addition to advertisements which contain other keyboard instruments (typically, beautiful fortepianos and other *Claviere*),<sup>10</sup> these are uncountable, but bring the total number of clavichords to at least 18 instruments. *Clavier* was the word to advertise clavichords, however if an advertisement announces several *Claviere* for sale, the possibility cannot be excluded that the word was

<i>Manual ranges</i>	<i>Number of instruments</i>
C-?	1
C-f3	2
FF-d3	1
FF-f3	9
CC-?	1
CC-f3	2
CC-c4	1
Unknown	24

Table 5 Keyboard compass



used to describe a large assortment of various keyboard instruments. This newspaper also includes fortepianos, at least of which ten were clearly second-hand and appeared for sale as early as 1764. Most of these were by Silbermann. A total of 13 house organs were advertised as well. Christian Ahrens has done a lot of research about instruments in newspaper advertisements. He found 417 advertisements for harpsichords, about 230 advertisements for clavichords and 140 fortepianos in Danzig; it seems the proportions between those was probably similar in Leipzig.<sup>11</sup>

### Sources from Berlin

Only one source from Berlin clearly mentions a harpsichord with four choirs. According to the advertisement this 'beautiful harpsichord' was suitable to be used in a 'strong concert' (that is, a large ensemble) next to a double bass expressly *because* of its four choirs.<sup>12</sup> As the reference to the double bass suggests, it may have included a 16' stop. Another advertisement indeed leads us to believe that the 16' stop was not considered normal in Berlin:

*16füßiger Flügel mit 2 Clavieren dergleichen von diesem Meister nur zwei existieren.*

a 16 foot harpsichord with two manuals [by Mietke] as only two of that master exist.<sup>13</sup>

It is unclear if the author of that advertisement was well informed about all exported harpsichords by Mietke, who may have built some additional larger harpsichords for clients in other towns. Nevertheless, it becomes clear that the author did not consider these instruments to be typical. Dieter Krickeberg has likewise collected advertisements from Berlin.<sup>14</sup> These contain 29 harpsichords, including the two described above. None of the other 27 is reported to have grander features like more than three stops or a manual range down to CC. In total, 11 harpsichords are reported to be by Mietke, two by Rost and one by Oesterlein; the rest are anonymous. If we suppose that all triple-strung harpsichords were double manuals, there are at least eight double manuals in that list and three double-strung harpsichords which were single manuals. This suggests a higher percentage of single-manual harpsichords in Berlin than in Saxony. One harpsichord is reported to have a range starting at C, one was FF-e3 and one FF-f3. However, the decoration of those instruments was much more elaborate than in Saxony. This often included gold, even on instruments owned by musicians or doctors, as it was the case on oboist Jacobi's three-choir Mietke harpsichord advertised in 1754.<sup>15</sup> No harpsichord from Berlin, except the very late surviving harpsichord by Oesterlein,<sup>16</sup> is reported to have been unpainted. In fact, most advertisements actually mention the colour of the instrument. Musical properties were rarely praised in advertisements from Berlin.

<i>Maker</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Manuals</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Choirs</i>	<i>Stops</i>	<i>Disposition</i>
Johann Christoph Fleischer	1710	1	GG-c3	2	3	8* 4'
Carl Conrad Fleischer	1716	1	C-c3	3	3	8' 8' 4'
Carl Conrad Fleischer	1716	1	C-c3	3	3	8' 8' 4'
Carl Conrad Fleischer	1720	1	GG-c3	3	3	8' 8' 4'
Hieronymus Albrecht Hass	1721	2	FF-d3	5	5	16' 8' 8' 4' 4'
Hieronymus Albrecht Hass	1723	2	FF-c3	4	4	8' 8' 8' 4'
Hieronymus Albrecht Hass	1726	1	FF-d3	2	2	8' 4'
Christian Zell	1728	2	FF-d3	3	3	8' 8' 4'
Hieronymus Albrecht Hass	1732	1	C-d3	3	3	8' 8' 4'
Hieronymus Albrecht Hass	1734	2	GG-d3	4	5	16' 8' 8* 4'
Christian Zell	1737	1	C-d3	3	3	8' 8' 4'
Hieronymus Albrecht Hass	1740	3	FF, GG-f3	5	7	16' 8' 8* 4' 2'
Christian Zell	1741	1	C-d3	3	3	8' 8' 4'
Johann Adolph Hass	1760?	2	FF-f3	5	6	16' 8' 8' 4' 2*
Johann Adolph Hass	1764	1	FF-f3	3	3	8' 8' 4'

Table 6 Surviving Hamburg harpsichords

### Sources from Hamburg

Since most German harpsichords that survive today were built in Hamburg, it is worth listing those (Table 6).

Three harpsichords in this list include more than four choirs, so we must conclude that the usual maximum of only four choirs did not apply to Hamburg. The number of stops in the list above applies to the number of rows of jacks: it is based on the Central German understanding of the word *Register*. In that list the nine single manuals clearly outnumber the larger instruments. Only one double manual has three choirs; and the bigger instruments are very varied in their dispositions. All harpsichords, even the two double-strung ones, have at least one 4'. Four harpsichords have a 16', representing more than a quarter of the list. It also seems that more fully disposed instruments tended to have wider manual ranges and that the full five-octave range appeared quite late in Hamburg. These conclusions can be verified in historical advertisements (Table 7).

An amazing number of advertisements from Hamburg name the exact number and pitch of stops. This is certainly due to the great variety of dispositions there, which might have left readers unsure if such details had not appeared in the advertisement. Astonishingly enough, no advertisement from Hamburg known to me uses the word *Chor* (choir). However, the precise lists of stops (always designated as *Register* in the advertisements) provided include nothing that would suggest that one of those stops mentioned was only a row of jacks without its own strings; no stop list there includes more than two sets of 8' strings. In fact, despite the great number of choirs mentioned the number of registers mentioned seems astonishingly small in comparison to Saxon texts. This leads me to the conclusion that the word *Register* in Hamburg indeed referred to the number of choirs. A harpsichord by Johann Adolph Hass described in a private collection in 1892 was said to have six 'sets of strings', including two of 2'. This might seem incredible, however in a newspaper from Hamburg a harpsichord

<i>Maker</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Manuals</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Choirs</i>	<i>Stops</i>	<i>Disposition</i>
Anonymous, French	1717	?	?	?	?	?
Anonymous, from Berlin	1717	?	?	?	?	Useful for 'strong concerts'
Johann Christoph Fleischer	1718	[1]	C-c3	?	2	8' 8' lute harpsichord (gut strings)
Johann Christoph Fleischer	1718	?	C-c3	?	3	16' 8' 4' lute harpsichord (gut)
Anonymous	1728	2 or 3? + Ped	FF-?	?	4 + buff	?
Anonymous	1741	3	CC-f3	[5]	5	[16' 8' 8' 4' 2']
Anonymous	1741	1	C-d3	[3]	3	[8' 8' 4']
Anonymous	1742	2	?	[4]	4	16' 8' 8' 4'
Anonymous	1742	2	?	[4]	4	16' 8' 8' 4'
Anonymous	1742	2	FF-f4 [sic, probably FF-f3]	[4]	4	16' 16' 8' 4' [sic], probably 16' 8' 8' 4'
Anonymous	1743	2	?	[4]	4	?
Hass	1749	2	?	[5]	5	[16' 8' 8' 4' 2']
Anonymous	1750	2	?	[4]	4	?
Anonymous	1754	2	FF-f3	[3]	3	[8' 8' 4']
Johann Christoph Fleischer	1754	3 (2+1)	FF-c3	?	?	[16' + ?] One 'corpus' above another
Anonymous	1755	3	CC-f3	[5]	5	16' 8' 8' 4' 2'
Anonymous	1758	2	?	[4]	4	? with transposition
Johann Adolph Hass	1781	2	FF-f3	[6]	6	16' 8' 8' 4' 2' 2'
Johann Adolph Hass	'1892'	2	FF-f3	6	6	16' 8' 8' 4' 2' 2'

Table 7 Hamburg harpsichords in advertisements



by the same maker with the same six *Registers* was advertised. The two descriptions only differ with respect to the buff and harp stops. We might expect this to be the most extreme disposition in existence on the market in 18th-century Hamburg. The five-choir triple manual which survived was indeed not an exception but just one model. Others could have five and a half octaves (CC-f3) as was already the case in a second-hand instrument in 1741.

By organizing the written sources and surviving instruments together by disposition the following picture emerges (lute harpsichords represented a special case, and are therefore omitted) (Table 8).

<i>Disposition (Choirs)</i>	<i>Clearly formulated</i>	<i>Suspected because of formulation</i>
8' 4'	2	0
8' 8' 4'	8	2
8' 8' 8' 4'	1	0
16' 8' 8' 4'	3	1
4 unnamed stops (16' 8' 8' 4'?)	4	0
16' 8' 8' 4' 4'	1	0
16' 8' 8' 4' 2'	3	2
16' 8' 8' 4' 2' 2'	2	0

Table 8 Hamburg harpsichords, surviving and documented

It is not worthwhile to list the unnamed dispositions since this list is much more incomplete than the equivalent one from Leipzig. However, it is worth mentioning that only three instruments – the surviving harpsichords by Hass from 1721 (16' 8' 8' 4' 4') and 1723 (8' 8' 8' 4') and the Fleischer harpsichord advertised in 1754 (three manuals in two *corpora*) – seem really unique from the point of view of the disposition. One should not forget, however, that an absence of evidence for more such disposed instruments is not evidence for absence.

The harpsichords from Hamburg are highly decorated, often including tortoiseshell on the keyboards.

### Further thoughts

One might wonder when harpsichords with five-octave range first appeared. The earliest evidence can be found in an instrument by Johann Heinrich Harrass, built around 1690 in Großbreitenbach, Thuringia (FF-f3).<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of the 18th century, however, there exists more evidence for FF being the lowest note than f3 being the highest. In fact the range FF-d3 is reported

quite often. The Friedrich Ring harpsichord, built in 1700 in Strasburg,<sup>18</sup> features this range, for instance. The earliest known harpsichord with six full octaves (CC-c4) is reported to have been owned by Stölzel in Breslau (Wrocław) around 1709.<sup>19</sup> Manual ranges down to CC were sometimes described in Germany. To my knowledge, in Danzig between 1783 and 1799 a total of six CC-f3 harpsichords by Werner Woge were advertised.<sup>20</sup> Despite of these enormous manual ranges the small C-c3 range was an option for a long time as well. The clavichord maker Barthold Fritz in Braunschweig built C-c3 and FF-f3 ranges between 1721 and 1757. In 1743 he added a FF-a3 model to his production.<sup>21</sup>

One might also wonder about the origin of the German 16' stop. Clear evidence for it appears in several places in Germany just before 1720. For instance, in 1722 a cantor by the name of Düve in Braunschweig mentioned his beautifully painted harpsichord with a range starting at FF with 16', which he had purchased some years before.<sup>22</sup> We must assume that it was well established at the latest by 1720.

It must be pointed out that these particularly large harpsichords were often called *Orchesterflügel* or *Concertflügel*, which clearly indicates their use as instruments for public performances.<sup>23</sup> These could have a 16' stop or a manual range down to CC. Large instruments of this kind were owned by concert organizers, for instance by Enoch Richter from the Coffeehaus am Markt in Leipzig or by the Hotel de Baviere, also in Leipzig. Other such large instruments were owned by professional musicians, including Johann Caspar Vogler in Weimar,<sup>24</sup> Stölzel in Breslau and Düve in Braunschweig. Interestingly enough, these large harpsichords were quite common in Hamburg and Leipzig, two cities without courts which owed their wealth to trade. Berlin, a city significant due to the resident Prussian court, was not such a place to find large harpsichords.

One might wonder how reliable these advertisements may be – indeed, I have encountered obvious mistakes. The advertisement in the *Leipziger Intelligenzblatt* from 4 October 1775 mentions a range of FF-f3. However, the same text was copied on 14 October 1775 with the range incorrectly printed as EE-e3. A similar discrepancy appears between two sources referring to the same harpsichord, which probably could not be sold at an auction and was offered later in the *Leipziger Zeitungen*.<sup>25</sup> The first given range was GG-f3, later it was corrected to FF-f3. Such little details can go wrong during the printing process. The accuracy of the content of such



an advertisement can often be deduced by comparison to other advertisements, even if one can never be sure about every detail. Another issue encountered in advertisements is the fact that the same instrument might have been advertised several times. In this case one could mistake one special instrument for several ones. Another issue is that many advertisements do not describe the instrument in detail. One might assume that these less well described instruments tended to be small, simple and by unknown builders; however this is only a hypothesis.

### The potential for Bach harpsichord performance today

Johann Sebastian Bach lived in Leipzig (and therefore in Saxony) from 1723 to 1750. In this time numerous important works directly for harpsichord were composed and published: his *Italian Concerto*, the *French Overture*, *Goldberg Variations*, and various concertos for one to four harpsichords and string orchestra. Two beautiful harpsichords known to me are a harpsichord attributed to Gottfried Silbermann,<sup>26</sup> and a harpsichord by Johann Heinrich Gräbner from 1739, both in the castle of Pillnitz (close to Dresden).<sup>27</sup> Both are stylistically probably the closest one can approach today to Bach's instruments.

The Silbermann is 2.64m long, with two manuals, a range of FF-f3, and three choirs, 8' 8' 4'. I recommend its use as basis for all kinds of variants influenced on the newspapers of the time. One could, for instance, reduce the manual range to FF-d3 or widen it to CC-f3. One could add a second buff stop.<sup>28</sup> One could also add a *nasal* stop/English lute stop, which in Central Germany would have been called a *Spinett*.<sup>29</sup> It is certainly also recommended to add a 16' stop, however one should

care about the potential for inaccuracies.<sup>30</sup> For example, the construction with a separate soundboard part for the 16' bridge was clearly a stylistic feature of Hamburg, and therefore not suitable in Leipzig. One should instead consider a construction with three bridges on the same soundboard, like in the 1786 Swänen harpsichord,<sup>31</sup> as Adlung likewise describes.<sup>32</sup> In the case of the presence of a 16', the 4' could go to the upper manual to create the so-called 'Bach disposition'.<sup>33</sup> It should be mentioned that having such stops and making colourful registrations was indeed part of the aesthetics of Bach's generation, and that an astonishing number of organ registrations included 16' manuals stops in all imaginable combinations.<sup>34</sup> Optically the harpsichord could resemble the Silbermann instrument, varnished in walnut, or in massive oak or another wood. Painting should not be categorically excluded. The legs may be square like that model, cabriole-shaped or round as on the surviving Silbermann pianos. The keyboards could also be white with black accidentals.<sup>35</sup> Likely unsuitable would be GG-d3 and FF-g3 ranges.

To conclude, it is my wish that future harpsichord making will be increasingly inspired by written sources. Such documentation contains many fascinating descriptions of instruments to be reconstructed, and it is important in allowing harpsichordists to become familiar with the sounds that were familiar to Bach. This would certainly also include a great variety of instruments.

*Leonard Schick studied harpsichord at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis and is now studying the organ there. He improvises and composes a lot in historical styles, being mainly inspired by Johann Sebastian Bach. He is also researching about the most accurate instruments for Bach's music.*

### Notes

- 1 The list of publications can be found in Leonard Schick, *Cembalobauformen und -dispositionen bei Jacob Adlung*, Masterarbeit, Schola Cantorum Basiliensis (Basel, 2020), p.9, n.3-5.
- 2 Mainly in Christian Ahrens (ed), *Das deutsche Cembalo, Symposium im Rahmen der 24. Tage Alter Musik in Herne 1999* (München-Salzburg, 2000) and Christian Ahrens, 'Der Ton ist so prompt und stark, daß er sich zum Accompagnement ganz vorzüglich qualificirt - Zur Existenz spezieller Cembali für das Generalbaßspiel', in Christian Ahrens and Gregor Klinke (eds), *Con cembalo e l'organo: das Cembalo als Generalbassinstrument*, Symposium im Rahmen der 29. Tage Alter Musik in Herne (München-Salzburg, 2004), pp.111-129.
- 3 *Nutzbares, galantes und ciürieuses Frauenzimmer-Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1773), p.749.
- 4 I should mention that since writing this article in Summer 2021 I was able to access the complete *Leipziger Zeitungen* and few other prints from Leipzig: however, I decided not to print them here for reasons of length. Due to that decision I am forced to ignore here some very interesting advertisements, which will be published in my forthcoming Master's thesis (Leonard Schick, *Gravität und Vielfalt-Bachs Flügel*, Masterarbeit, Schola Cantorum Basiliensis (Basel, 2022)). The general picture however does not change much despite that discovery; it only gets confirmed and completed. In order to get an idea about that finding I have now evidence for 86 advertised harpsichords in Leipzig instead of the 42 named here.
- 5 Johann Friedrich Agricola, in Jacob Adlung, *Musica Mechanica Organoedi*, tome 2, p.138.



- 6 *Von Hagensche Kupferstich-Sammlung...worunter ein sehr wohlerhaltener Silbermannsche Flügel*, auction catalogue, 25 February 1788 (Leipzig, 1788).
- 7 *Frankfurter Frag- und Anzeigungsnachrichten* (21 April 1767) and *Kaiserlich privilegirter Reichs-Anzeiger* (16 December 1797).
- 8 *Leipziger Intelligenzblatt* (4 May 1782).
- 9 *Leipziger Intelligenzblatt* (16 March 1765).
- 10 For instance *Leipziger Intelligenzblatt* (31 December 1790).
- 11 Ahrens (2004), p.123.
- 12 *Berliner Intelligenzblatt* (6 January 1755).
- 13 *Berlinische Intelligenz-Zettel* (22 April 1778).
- 14 Dieter Krickeberg, 'Einige Nachrichten über Musikinstrumente und Instrumentenbauer aus den Berliner Intelligenzblättern der Jahre 1729 und 1786', in Gerhard Allroggen and Detlef Altenburg (eds), *Festschrift Arno Forchert zum 60. Geburtstag* (Basel, London, New York, 1986), pp.123–126.
- 15 *Wöchentliche Berlinische Frag- und Anzeigenachrichten* (8 April 1754).
- 16 MIM Berlin.
- 17 The building date is unknown, but reconstructable thanks to dendrology. Wolfgang Wenke, 'Zwei Cembali aus Thüringen', in Monika Lustig (ed), *Das mitteldeutsche Cembalo, Referate im Rahmen des Cembalo-Marathons Johann Sebastian Bach und das mitteldeutsche Cembalo*, Michaelstein, 08. Bis 10. Oktober 1999 (Michaelstein, 2003), pp.87 and 91.
- 18 See Schick (2020), p.26.
- 19 Johann Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte woran der Tüchtigsten Capellmeister, Componisten, Musikgelehrten, Tonkünstler etc. Leben, Werke, Verdienste etc. erscheinen sollen* (Hamburg, 1740), p.409. I am grateful to Christian Ahrens for this reference.
- 20 Benjamin Vogel, 'Johann Werner Woge – harpsichord builder of Danzig (Gdańsk)', in *Muzyka Fortepianowa* XII (2007), pp.541–552.
- 21 Andrew Talle, *Beyond Bach, Music and Everyday Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Champaign, IL, 2017), Plate 2.
- 22 Hans Schröder, *Verzeichnis der Sammlung alter Musikinstrumente im Städtischen Museum Braunschweig*, (Braunschweig, 1928), p.40.
- 23 See also Ahrens (2004), pp.111–129.
- 24 See *Leipziger Intelligenzblatt* (19 April 1766).
- 25 *Von Hagensche Kupferstich-Sammlung ... worunter ein sehr wohlerhaltener Silbermannsche Flügel*, auction catalogue, 25 February 1788 (Leipzig, 1788) and *Leipziger Zeitungen* (7 August 1788).
- 26 *Dresden Kunstgewerbemuseum Schloss Pillnitz*, Inv.-Nr.37413.
- 27 *Dresden Kunstgewerbemuseum Schloss Pillnitz*, Inv.-Nr.37414.
- 28 One 8' 8' 4' Silbermann was advertised with two buff stops. *Leipziger Zeitungen* (7 August 1788).
- 29 See Schick (2020), p.49.
- 30 See Schick (2020), pp.16–19.
- 31 *Conservatoire des arts et métiers*, Paris, Inv.-Nr. 6615.
- 32 Jacob Adlung, *Anleitung zu der Musicalischen Gelahrtheit*, (Erfurt, 1758), pp.553–554, §246. See Schick (2020), p.42.
- 33 See *Leipziger Intelligenzblatt* (4 October 1775).
- 34 Quentin Faulkner, *Die Registrierung der Orgelwerke J. S. Bachs* (Lincoln, 1995), p.7.
- 35 For instance the two instruments in the *Leipziger Intelligenzblatt* (9 July 1763).





# The Galpin Society



For the publication of original research into  
the history, construction, development, and use  
of musical instruments

*The Galpin Society Journal* is published annually in March  
containing articles and reviews by contributors worldwide  
about all types of musical instruments.

Contact Dr Lance Whitehead at: [editor@galpinsociety.org](mailto:editor@galpinsociety.org)

*For membership, please contact:*

Christopher Goodwin, Administrator of the Galpin Society  
53 Mill Road, Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire, MK44 1NP

[admin@galpinsociety.org](mailto:admin@galpinsociety.org)

[www.galpinsociety.org](http://www.galpinsociety.org)



## Clavichord for sale

This unfretted clavichord, a close copy of the 1787 original by Carl Lemme, Leipzig no. 18, was built in 1926 in Stuttgart by Otto Marx. Range FF – a3. The condition of the clavichord is almost as new, and it was restrung and overhauled in 2015.

Price €16'000.-o.n.o.



Further information and photos from:

Paul Simmonds

Weststrasse 13

CH 4800 Zofingen

Tel.: +41 62 751 29 60

[info@paulsimmonds.com](mailto:info@paulsimmonds.com)