Introduction

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The Cambridge companion to the piano brings together in a single volume a collection of essays which covers the history of the instrument, the history of its performance and a study of its repertory. Each chapter is written by a specialist with access to the most recent research on his or her topic, but all the authors have written accessibly, with the student of the instrument, or an enthusiastic amateur, in mind.

Chapters 1–3 bring together as much up-to-date piano history as is possible in the space available. In recent years, some extremely important work has been published on the early history of the piano. Stewart Pollens's *The early pianoforte* and Michael Cole's *The pianoforte in the Classical era* between them provide a comprehensive survey of the technical developments which took place in the eighteenth century. These developments are summarised in chapters 1 and 2 along with information about the specific kinds of instrument played by the early pianists. Necessary technical terms are explained in the glossary at the end of the volume. The equivalent history of the piano in the first half of the nineteenth century is much less well documented and a new, detailed history of the piano in the nineteenth century is urgently needed. It is remarkable that Rosamond Harding's book *The piano-forte*, first published as long ago as 1933, remains the standard text for this period. Nevertheless, new work is emerging in this field by scholars, curators and restorers and it has been possible to draw on much of this material for the brief history of the piano found in the remainder of chapter 2 and in chapter 3. Cyril Ehrlich's *The piano: a history* continues to be a major source of information for the piano industry in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries

Many issues in the early performance history of the piano are intimately associated with the nature of the instruments themselves. It is not possible, for example, to assess whether Mozart composed some of his earlier music for the piano, or for the harpsichord or clavichord, without a knowledge of the general availability of pianos in Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century. Likewise, an understanding of the differences between English and 'Viennese' pianos is crucial to an understanding of some of the performance issues associated with the music of Beethoven and his contemporaries. For reasons such as these, the study of piano performance to *c.*1825 will be found alongside the history of the

instrument in chapters 1 and 2. The way in which later pianists played is investigated in two chapters. Chapter 4 assesses those pianists whose playing styles can be studied only through written sources – concert reviews, memoirs, letters and so on. Chapter 5 studies those pianists who belong to the recording era.

Part 1 of this volume, which deals only with instruments and performers, concludes with an examination of the precise way in which sound is generated in a modern grand piano, and how that sound is transmitted to an audience.

Part 2 concerns the repertory of the piano. Rather than devote single chapters to studies of the sonata, the concerto and so on, authors have written about the music in the wider context of its performance setting and stylistic development. The discussion begins in chapter 7 with an examination of the emergence of a 'standard' repertory in the nineteenth century (which continues to form the basis of the repertory for most modern pianists). Even by the early years of the century, an enormous volume of music had been written for the piano; yet only a small proportion of what was written came to be played by subsequent generations, and an even smaller proportion of it has come to be considered 'canonic' or 'exemplary'. Chapter 7 explores how and why this was so.

Chapters 8–10 examine the piano music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in some detail. The way in which composers wrote for the instrument at the time was shaped by a variety of factors. For early pianists such as Mozart the sonata was the most common vehicle for solo expression; yet within a generation, sonatas were no longer in widespread fashion and composers were beginning to concentrate their energies on shorter, 'character' or dance pieces. At least part of the reason for this change lay in the rapidly increasing public demand for shorter works, many of which were written for the burgeoning amateur market catered for by a growing publishing industry. At the same time, a distinctive piano style emerged which displaced a keyboard style capable of realisation on the harpsichord and clavichord as well as on the piano. Virtuosos of the piano emerged who achieved celebrity status in their public performances. These pianists wrote difficult concert études and concertos for themselves to play in public; but they also wrote more intimately for the salons in which they performed and for the amateur, domestic market (chapter 9). Within the concert and salon repertory towards the middle of the nineteenth century there was a strong interest in musical elements of eastern Europe (such as the Polish ingredients in Chopin's music, or those from Hungary in Liszt's). These and other nationalistic elements from, for example, Russia and Scandinavia, are reviewed in chapter 10. The twentieth century has seen many new developments in piano writing.

Many novel techniques emerged during the first half of the century (chapter 11) and there has been an increasing appreciation of the 'popular' styles of ragtime, blues and jazz (chapter 12). Many classically trained pianists now play music in these styles and the cross-over of 'art' music and 'popular' music styles can be seen in integrated works by composers such as Gershwin.

This volume, in common with all of the others in the *Cambridge companion* series, cannot claim to be comprehensive. Nevertheless, it will give the reader a breadth of information on the subject rarely found elsewhere, written by specialists who have made their own thorough studies.

PART ONE

Pianos and pianists

1 The piano to *c.*1770

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Italy and the Iberian peninsula

Bartolomeo Cristofori (1655–1732) is generally credited with the invention of the piano in Florence at the end of the seventeenth century. Although some earlier accounts of keyboard actions survive, it is only from Cristofori that a continuous line of development can be drawn.[1]

Cristofori entered the service of Prince Ferdinando de' Medici in 1688 as curator and instrument maker. In this capacity he maintained harpsichords, spinets and organs and made a variety of keyboard (and possibly stringed) instruments.[2] His work on the piano may have begun as early as 1698, certainly by 1700,[3] and in 1709 or 1710 Scipione Maffei noted that Cristofori had 'made three so far, two sold in Florence, one to Cardinal Ottoboni'.[4] In 1711 Maffei published a detailed description of Cristofori's pianos, including a diagram of the action (Fig. 1.1).[5]

The action in Maffei's diagram works in the following way: as the key (C) is depressed one end of the intermediate lever (E) – which pivots around the pin (F) – is raised. This causes the escapement (G) to push the hammer (O) towards the string (A). The escapement then 'escapes' from contact with the hammer and allows it to fall back to its resting position, on a silk thread (P). When the key is released, the escapement, which is hinged and attached to a spring (L), slides back into its resting position and the damper (R) – which had been lowered when the key was depressed – comes back into contact with the string in order to damp the sound.

Many aspects of piano design evidently continued to occupy Cristofori, since the three surviving pianos by him, dated 1720, 1722 and 1726, as well as a keyboard and action of *c.*1725, differ from each other and from Maffei's description in certain aspects of their mechanism and construction. Nevertheless, all of the existing instruments share certain characteristics: they are lightly constructed, compared with later pianos, and have small hammers (in two of the pianos, made only of rolled and glued parchment covered with leather). The instruments produce a gentle sound and their keyboard compass is just four octaves (1722, *c.*1725 and 1726) or four and a half octaves (1720) – considerably smaller than the five octaves or so of the biggest harpsichords of the time.

Cristofori's work was continued by his pupils, the most important of

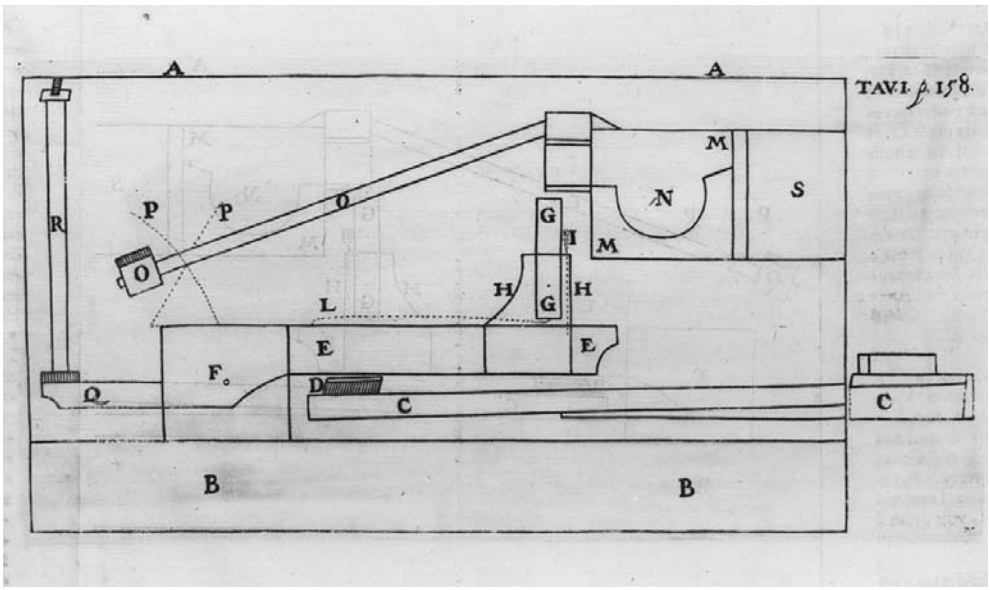

Figure 1.1 Maffei's diagram of Cristofori's piano action from the *Giornale de'letterati d'Italia*, 5 (1711).

whom was probably Giovanni Ferrini (*fl.*1699(?)–1758) who, like his teacher, made harpsichords as well as pianos in Florence.[6] Indeed, his only surviving instrument with piano action is a combination harpsichord/piano, with an upper and lower manual operating the piano and harpsichord respectively. Such combination instruments continued to be popular throughout the period during which the relative merits of the two types of keyboard instrument were debated – until at least the 1780s. In the meantime, the fame of the Florentine makers spread to the Iberian peninsula, where other makers began to construct instruments based on Cristofori's design.[7]

Who used these early pianos, and for what purpose? Very little evidence has survived but it is likely that a number of well-known musicians encountered pianos in southern Europe during the early decades of the century. George Frederic Handel (1685–1759) may have seen Cristofori's instruments in Florence and Rome. Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757) almost certainly played a number of Florentine pianos: he stayed in Florence for several months in 1702 and he taught Don Antonio of Portugal, the dedicatee of the first music known to be published for the piano – twelve sonatas by Lodovico Giustini (1685–1743), which appeared in Florence in 1732. He was also employed at the court of Maria Barbara of Spain, who owned five Florentine pianos, according to an inventory made in the year following Scarlatti's death.[8] Farinelli, the

Figure 1.2 Piano by Cristofori, 1720.

famous castrato and Scarlatti's colleague in Spain for twenty-two years, also owned a piano dated 1730, according to Burney.[9]

From the start, the piano seems to have been regarded as a solo instrument. Maffei wrote that 'its principal intention' was 'to be heard alone, like the lute, the harp, the six-stringed viol, and other most sweet instruments'.[10] Giustini's sonatas were written for solo piano, and Farinelli played solos on his piano when Burney visited him in 1770. It has also been suggested that a significant proportion of Scarlatti's sonatas were written for the piano, though the evidence cannot be regarded as conclusive.[11] Nevertheless, early pianos had certain shortcomings as solo instruments and Maffei was the first to voice a common complaint of the eighteenth century: 'this instrument does not have a powerful tone, and is not quite so loud' as the harpsichord.[12] Perhaps it was this problem that caused Maria Barbara to convert two of her Florentine pianos into harpsichords.[13] Whatever the extent of the piano's use for solo performances, it also had some success in accompanying one or more other instruments

in chamber music: Maffei and several other eighteenth-century writers recommended its use in this way.

Germany and Austria

The history of the piano in German-speaking lands is complex. Christoph Gottlieb Schröter (1699–1782) claimed to have invented a keyboard action in 1717 for an instrument in which the strings were struck by hammers.[14] The inspiration for Schröter's invention was Pantaleon Hebenstreit's (1669–1750) performance on the 'pantalon'. Hebenstreit's pantalon was an enlarged dulcimer measuring about nine feet in length which had one set of metal strings and one of gut. It was played with wooden beaters held in the hands, and had no dampers. The pantalon was reputed to be extremely difficult to play and expensive to maintain, but its sound was much admired and a small, elite group of performers toured Europe throughout much of the eighteenth century.[15] By designing a hammer action operated from a keyboard Schröter no doubt wished to capture the sound of the pantalon while avoiding the strenuous efforts required of a performer. He presented his solution in the form of two hammer-action models – one striking the strings from below, the other from above – to the Elector of Saxony in Dresden in 1721. However, no complete instrument ever seems to have been made, and Schröter's contribution to the development of the hammer-action instruments with keyboard was probably confined to some articles in eighteenth-century German journals. The idea of the keyed pantalon lived on, however. A number of instruments survive with bare wooden hammers which are called 'pantalon' in the literature of the time. The term *pantalonzug* ('pantalon stop') is also commonly found to describe the stop or lever which removed the dampers from the strings (equivalent to the right pedal on a modern piano), in imitation of the undamped sound of the pantalon.[16]

Early piano making in Germany seems to have been concentrated in the area just south of Leipzig. Gottfried Silbermann (1683–1753) worked in Freiberg and Christian Ernst Friederici (1709–80), reputedly Silbermann's pupil, worked about sixty miles to the west, in Gera. Silbermann was making pianos in the early 1730s.[17] No details of these instruments survive, but it is possible that they followed Cristofori's design, published by Maffei in 1711 and subsequently in German translation in Mattheson's *Critica musica* (Hamburg, 1725). One of Silbermann's early instruments evidently failed to satisfy Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) who, according to his pupil Johann Friedrich Agricola, had 'praised, indeed admired, its tone; but he had complained

that it was too weak in the high register, and was too hard to play'. Agricola goes on to describe how Silbermann was angered at Bach's reaction, but decided nevertheless

> not to deliver any more of these instruments, but instead to think all the harder about how to eliminate the faults Mr. J. S. Bach had observed. He worked for many years on this. And that this was the real cause of the postponement I have the less doubt since I myself heard it frankly acknowledged by Mr. Silbermann. Finally, when Mr. Silbermann had really achieved many improvements, notably in respect to the action, he sold one again to the Court of the prince of Rudolstadt. Shortly thereafter His Majesty the King of Prussia had one of these instruments ordered, and, when it met with His Majesty's Most Gracious approval, he had several more ordered from Mr. Silbermann.[18]

In fact, according to Forkel,[19] the King ordered a total of fifteen pianos from Silbermann, and prior to the second world war three of these instruments still existed. Now only two of the King's pianos survive, one of them dated 1746. In addition, however, there is another grand piano by Silbermann dated 1749 in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nürnberg.[20]

The actions of the surviving Silbermann pianos resemble the extant Cristofori instruments extremely closely and suggest that Silbermann copied one of Cristofori's later pianos. The instruments by the two makers differ in some respects, however. Not surprisingly, the appearance of the case of Silbermann's pianos resembles that of contemporary German harpsichords, as does the range of the instruments – just under five octaves with FF as the lowest note. The devices to modify the sound of the instrument are also different. Cristofori included just one on his instruments – a pair of stop knobs to shift the keyboard laterally, thereby causing the hammer to hit only one string, the precursor of the modern *una corda* and probably a legacy from Italian harpsichords which often had two registers operated by means of stops. Silbermann included two tone-modifying devices, neither of which was the *una corda*. One was a stop knob which operated a mechanism to introduce small pieces of ivory between the hammers and the strings, producing a harpsichord-like sound. The other was a stop which was used to raise the dampers from the strings – the precursor of the modern damper or sustaining pedal.

According to Agricola, Silbermann's later pianos were approved by J. S. Bach, whose visit to Frederick the Great's court in 1747 was also reported in a contemporary newspaper. The King evidently

> went at Bach's entrance to the so-called forte and piano, condescending also to play, in person and without any preparation, a theme to be executed by

> Capellmeister Bach in a fugue. This was done so happily by the aforementioned Capellmeister that not only His Majesty was pleased to show his satisfaction thereat, but also all those present were seized with astonishment.[21]

Further evidence of Bach's approval is his signature on a voucher for the sale of one of Silbermann's pianos to Count Branitzky of Poland dated 9 May 1749.[22] Despite Bach's fascination with the piano, however, the instrument cannot have been of any significance for his keyboard music written before the 1740s – Silbermann's improved pianos were not made before then.

By the middle of the eighteenth century German pianos were being made in forms other than the conventional grand. The upright grand came to be associated with northern European makers, especially Christian Ernst Friederici, although a similar instrument by the southern European maker Domenico del Mela (1683–*c.*1760?), of 1739, survives. In 1745 Friederici published an engraving of one of his upright grands and at least one, possibly more, of his is still in existence.[23] Friederici is also credited with the invention of the square piano, which was being made in Germany around the middle of the eighteenth century.[24] Square pianos were much smaller and cheaper than either the conventional or upright grand, and were ultimately to become extremely popular in the home, but in mid-eighteenth-century Germany they had a formidable rival in the clavichord, which keyboard players continued to use until at least the end of the century.

Much of what happened to the development of the piano in German-speaking lands in the third quarter of the eighteenth century is shrouded in uncertainty. One of the most important makers during this time was evidently Johann Heinrich Silbermann (1727–99; Gottfried's nephew) in Strasbourg, some of whose pianos from the 1770s survive.[25] His instruments share many features of those made by his uncle, Gottfried Silbermann: pianos by both makers have transposing devices which are operated by moving the keyboard laterally and the actions of both makers are similar, even to the extent of having hammers made from rolled parchment covered with leather (rather than wood and leather), as on two of Cristofori's pianos. But apart from these instruments, the absence of other grands as well as the lack of detail in contemporary literature, make it impossible to describe how, when and indeed if any developments took place. One thing at least is clear, however, the piano did not immediately take the place of either the clavichord or the harpsichord in the affections of keyboard players. On the contrary, the piano seems to have been regarded as just one possibility among others. Many sources could be quoted to illustrate this point. One of the earliest, and probably the best known, is Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714–88), who wrote in 1753: