Descriptive Conventions

The Term ‘Piano’

During the eighteenth century, there was no commonly used term for the piano. Stewart Pollens identifies 20 different eighteenth-century titles for the piano:

Gravicembalo col piano e forte (Maffei, 1711), Arpicembalo col piano e forte (Medici inventory, 1700), gravecembalo à martelli (Italian dictionary, second half of the eighteenth century), Cimbal di piano e forte di martelletti (Giustini, 1732), cembalo à martellino (testament of Farinelli, 1782), clavecin à maillets (Marius, 1716), clavecin à marteau (F. E. Blanchet’s inventory), Pantalone (Schröter, 1717), Cymbal-Clavir (Ficker, 1731), Fortbien and Bienfort (Friederici, ca. 1745), cravo de martelos (Antunes, 1760), clavicordio de piano (testament of Maria Barbara of Braganza, 1753), clave piano (Madrid newspaper, 1777), Pantalon, Hämmer-pantalone, Hämmerwerke, Pandoret, and Claveçin Roial (the last five terms by Daniel Gottlob Türk, 1789), Banlony (J. C. Jeckel and C. Jeckel, Worms, ca. 1790).

Moreover, in 1770, Franz Jacob Spath (Späth) (1714–86) named his new invention ‘Clavecin d’Amour’. In 1774 in New York, Johann Sheybli offered a ‘hammer spinet’ for sale ‘by which he … meant a … piano’. A contemporaneous title page for piano music composed by Joseph Antonin Steffan (1726–97) indicates

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3 In his day, Spath’s surname was usually written without an umlaut. It is probable, however, that ‘both ‘Spath’ and ‘Späth’ were used during the eighteenth century’. G. P. di Stefano, ‘The Tangentenflügel and Other Pianos with Non-Pivoting Hammers’, in The Galpin Society Journal, Vol. 61 (April) (London: The Galpin Society, 2008), p. 80, fn. 5. For the purposes of this study, ‘Spath’ will be used.


‘Clavi Cembalo d’espressione’. Furthermore, ‘Johann Andreas Stein [1728–92] always described himself as a faiseur de clavecins, [maker of harpsichords] … whether he placed his signature label on a harpsichord or piano’. During the 1700s, the words ‘piano’ and ‘forte’ (and their variants) were quite interchangeable, and subject to many permutations. For example, the periodical L’Avant-coureur (The Forerunner), dated Monday, 6 April 1761, refers to the ‘clavessins a piano e forte’ of Gottfried Silbermann (1683–1753); Silbermann called his pianos ‘piano fort’ and ‘piano et forte’. In Strasbourg, Johann Heinrich Silbermann called his pianos ‘forté-piano’. In Zürich, Jean Caspar Maag (1744–1822) referred to his pianos as ‘forte piano’. Jacob Adlung (1699–1762), in his Musica Mechanica Organoeedi, uses the term ‘piano forte’. Johann Adam Hiller (1728–1804), in his Wöchentliche Nachrichten und Anmerkungen die Musik betreffend (Weekly News and Notes on Music), uses the terms ‘fortepiano’ and ‘pianoforte’ interchangeably on the same page when describing the pianos of Gottfried Silbermann and Johann Andreas Stein respectively. Certain solo keyboard works and concerti composed by Joseph Anton Steffan indicate on their title page ‘forte piano’, ‘forte e piano’ or ‘Cembalo di Forte Piano’. Sometime before 1774, a ‘cembalo a piano e forte’ made by the Neapolitan priest and organ maker Donato del Piano (fl. 1720–85) was sent as a gift to the Queen of Naples. ‘Spanish piano owners in 1780 refer to their “fuerte-piano”’. In Madrid, Francisco Fernández (1766–1852) and Francisco Flórez (d. 1824) called their instruments ‘fortes pianos’.

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13 See Brown, Joseph Haydn’s Keyboard Music, p. 143.
14 See di Stefano, ‘The Tangentenflügel and Other Pianos with Non-Pivoting Hammers’, p. 92.
16 See Clinkscale, Makers of the Piano 1700–1820, p. 398.
17 See Footnote 15 in ‘Introduction’, this volume.
type of hammer mechanism) a ‘forte piano’. Making pianos that were identical to those of Backers, the Scottish-born Robert Stodart (1748–1831) described his instruments as ‘piano forte’. In an advertisement published in the *New-York Gazette and Weekly Mercury* of Monday, 10 October 1774, Johann Sheybli claimed to make ‘fortepianoes’. An extant tuner’s notebook from the 1770s uses the terms ‘forte piano’ and ‘piano forte’ on successive pages when referring to the same instrument, and a few pages later adopts the shorter form ‘piano’. In 1780, Johann Christoph Zumpe (1726–90) described his epoch-making invention as a ‘piano-forte’. Among the major Viennese builders, Joseph Dohnal [1759–1829] in c. 1795, and Conrad Graf [1782–1851] in c. 1820 referred to themselves as makers of the *Fortepiano*.

For the purposes of this study, the terms ‘fortepiano’ and ‘piano’ are used interchangeably to denote the eighteenth to early nineteenth-century wooden-framed touch-sensitive stringed keyboard instrument whose strings are sounded by pivoted hammers. The instrument’s frame may include gap spacers and/or iron tension bars.

The term ‘modern piano’ denotes the type of ‘grand’ or ‘upright’ instrument whose design, touch and sound characteristics were fundamentally established during the late 1880s (and have remained basically unchanged since), now commonly encountered in conservatoria, concert halls and homes.

Differences in the sound, touch and design of the piano’s many incarnations not only prove that the instrument’s history is not that ‘of the single-minded pursuit of an ideal form’, but also that ‘every piano is historical … no piano embodies the history of the instrument … [and] there is no such thing as the modern piano any more than there is such a thing as the early piano’.

23 Ibid., p. 325.
Note Names

Note names are identified in the following way:24

![Note Names Diagram]


Textual Conventions

In order to avoid use of the mannerism ‘sic’ within the context of quotations, misspellings, errors and eighteenth-century typographical idiosyncrasies remain intact (despite the possibility for the emergence of an alluring air of quaintness); insertions are signalled with square brackets.

When a nameboard inscription appears in the text as the conclusion of a sentence, the final full stop may not reflect the actual presence of a full stop in the original inscription.

Online References

In footnotes, links are provided in order to allow the viewing of source material online. Because the permanency of links cannot be ensured, this study contains sufficient bibliographic data to enable future readers to find a referenced source.

Material is repeated when there is benefit to be gained through reinforcement, reminder or by viewing it from a different perspective.

When needed, the reader may wish to consult the glossary (Appendix Q) at the end of the book.

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