Foreword

Whoever would have imagined that the chance meeting of a 19-year-old student and a venerable Sydney antiques dealer and keyboard instrument enthusiast in 1974 would lead nearly 40 years later to the writing of this book, undoubtedly destined to become the classic of its kind? And who better to produce this than a performer/scholar whose writing, particularly in the extensive Introduction, conveys the same passionate eloquence that illuminates his playing? The author has established an international reputation as a leading fortepianist, his playing informed by a deep knowledge of musical style—particularly that of the baroque and classical periods—and, as will be seen from the many pages of this book, by an extraordinary knowledge of keyboard construction. There is no doubt that this book represents a kind of homage to William Bradshaw, who, perhaps unwittingly, pointed the young student, Geoffrey Lancaster, in the direction of what was to become a brilliant career.

While the focus of the book is on the earliest pianos brought to Australia—and the influence these had on shaping our colonial musical culture—his account traces those ripples from seventeenth-century Europe that touched many shores and led to the creation of a high craft that shaped musical performance in almost all cultured societies. It was one of the civilising influences brought to a largely uncivilised colony in Australia. This book, richly illustrated with photographs, references and documentation, leads us into a world once alive with the construction of pianos along original lines, some more lasting than others, and which penetrated domestic music making as few other kinds of instruments could. The best of these are not simply ancient artefacts, but also truly beautiful musical instruments that should be heard today.

Many hundreds of them arrived in Australia during the nineteenth century and it is a matter of concern that most of the pianos that contributed to our early musical culture are fast disappearing as wealthy collectors from overseas snatch them up. If—as it seems—we cannot retain them, Geoffrey Lancaster’s brilliant book will at least furnish a precious record of what Australia once possessed.

David Tunley
Emeritus Professor of Music
The University of Western Australia