Appendix J

Grand Piano by Clementi & Co. (London, ca 1806–10, Serial Number 526)

This instrument is the only extant Clementi ‘Russian model’ grand piano (Plate 404). It was owned by the British ambassador to St Petersburg, a diplomat of Irish origin who, just prior to the Napoleonic invasion of 1812, took the instrument (along with a Russian sleigh)¹ out of Russia to his residence in Ireland. The piano remained in Ireland, where it was purchased at auction by William Bradshaw.² The instrument is currently part of the Ralph Schureck Collection, Berowra Heights, Sydney.

The piano was restored a few years ago by Bernhard Balas, Mährstraße 103, A-1150, Vienna.

The serial number, 526, is handwritten, in ink, on the wrest-plank, at the bass end near the spine (Plate 405).

The instrument has metal-strengthened corners—deemed necessary during the early nineteenth century because of the expansion and contraction resulting from overheated Russian salons (Plates 406–8). In the palaces and great houses of England, large rooms were usually heated by an open fireplace that was fed by a strong updraft, which catalysed the movement of air throughout the room. In the palaces and great houses of Russia, however, rooms were usually heated by a large tile-covered closed stove that stood out from the wall. The stove had only a metal flue, which meant that although the temperature of the room could be raised rapidly, there was nothing to catalyse a constant circulation of air throughout. As a result, the air in Russian salons was often oppressively still and overheated—a lethal combination for pianos.

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¹ The sleigh was complete with its fur coverings and hanging light. During the twentieth century, the sleigh fetched a princely sum and was taken back to Russia as a rare, perfect and complete example of an early nineteenth-century sleigh. This information is derived from a conversation held on Sunday, 3 June 2012 between the author and Stewart Symonds.

² It is not known exactly when William Bradshaw purchased the piano at auction in Ireland. Ralph Schureck purchased the piano shortly after Bradshaw had acquired it. This information is derived from a conversation held on Sunday, 3 June 2012 between the author and Stewart Symonds.

Source: Ralph Schureck Collection, Sydney. Photo by the author.

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Source: Ralph Schureck Collection, Sydney. Photo by the author.
The instrument has a 68-note (5.5 octaves) compass (FF–c⁴).

The fortepiano is triple-strung throughout. The three strings of each note have identical sounding lengths.

A divided (‘split’) bridge (Plate 409) breaks in the bass between the last brass string (G♯) and the first steel string (A). As a result, the highest brass (G♯) strings are considerably shorter than the adjacent iron (A) strings (the next note above). Consequently, the brass strings have a lower tension, which prevents drawing them too near their breaking point, whilst the iron strings have a higher tension, which improves their tone. Dividing the bridge so that the highest brass strings are shorter than the adjacent iron strings makes the transition between the brass and iron strings less aurally noticeable, and produces a richer, more sonorous tenor octave.³ Clementi copied the split-bridge concept from John Broadwood, who invented it.


Source: Ralph Schureck Collection, Sydney. Photo by the author.

A plain veneered mahogany case with cross-banded edges and an inlaid yellow boxwood or maple(?) line (Plate 406) creates the effect of a series of outlined panels along the sides of the instrument. This decorative device is derived from the harpsichords of Hermann Tabel (d. 1738), and is a distinctive feature of late eighteenth-century English grand pianos.

The golden satinwood nameboard has a border of stained fruitwood stringing (Plate 410). The nameplate, in English, painted in gold against a black background, is contained in a painted oval cartouche, with a decorative border depicting a string of pearls (Plate 411). The inscription reads: *Muzio Clementi & Co - / Cheapside, London*.

The nameboard is embellished with exquisitely painted polychrome swags on either side of the central inscription (Plates 410 and 412–15). The identity of the artist is a mystery.5

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Source: Ralph Schureck Collection, Sydney. Photo by the author.


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The keyboard has ivory naturals (Plate 416); the heads and tail plates are made from separate pieces of ivory. The sharps are solid ebony. The key fronts are finished with a varnished sycamore⁶ ovolo moulding with a protruding front lip placed in the upper half (Plate 416).

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Source: Ralph Schureck Collection, Sydney. Photo by the author.

The instrument sits on a separate, solid mahogany trestle stand with four plain tapered legs, each leg terminating in a castor. The bolt head holding the stand together at the centre of the front cross-member is concealed by a brass patera.

Two mahogany pedals are suspended from the centre of the front cross-member of the trestle stand (Plate 417). Actuating rods are concealed inside the woodwork. The configuration of the pedals is: damper lift (right pedal) and una corda (left pedal). Normally, the hammer for any given note strikes that note’s three unison strings. When the una corda pedal is depressed, the keyboard (and therefore the action) is laterally realigned. The extent of the pedal’s depression allows the player to choose between having the hammer strike only one or two of each note’s three strings.

Source: Ralph Schureck Collection, Sydney. Photo by the author.

Typically for Clementi’s pianos, and commonly for the grand piano as an instrumental type, the instrument has up-striking hammers.⁷

Each note throughout the 5.5-octave compass has an individual damper. Each damper comprises a thin wooden slip (jack) guided in harpsichord-style register (Plate 418); four layers of white woven cloth, stitched together, hang from the underside of a wooden block (damper compartment) on the side of each damper jack (Plate 419). The dampers of late eighteenth-century English fortepianos are purposely inefficient, resting relatively lightly on the strings (Plate 420). Depending on the dynamic level and register, the inefficient dampers result in a ‘glow’ of overtones around each note, which late eighteenth-century English pianists found desirable, and equated with resonance.

⁷ See ‘Up-Striking Hammers’, in Appendix Q, this volume.
**Left:** Plate 418 Grand piano by Muzio Clementi & Co. (London, ca 1806–10, serial number 526): damper jack.

**Right:** Plate 419 Grand piano by Muzio Clementi & Co. (London, ca 1806–10, serial number 526): damper c³ (detail)—damper compartment.

Source: Ralph Schureck Collection, Sydney. Photos by the author.
Plate 420 Grand piano by Muzio Clementi & Co. (London, ca 1806–10, serial number 526): middle dampers (detail)—the dampers rest relatively lightly on the strings.

Source: Ralph Schureck Collection, Sydney. Photo by the author.

There are four iron gap spacers (Plate 421). The space between the wrest-plank and the soundboard—through which the hammers rise to strike the strings—is an inherently weak point in a grand piano. In order to compensate for this weakness, makers incorporated iron brackets between the edge of the wrest-plank and the belly rail (Plate 422). These iron brackets (gap spacers) look like arches that rise up and over between the strings.


Source: Ralph Schureck Collection, Sydney. Photo by the author.

Source: Ralph Schureck Collection, Sydney. Photo by the author.

By the mid-twentieth century, the only other extant Clementi ‘Russian model’ grand piano had belonged to the composer Mikhail Glinka (1804–57); Glinka’s piano was destroyed by the SS during World War II.8

Clementi judged the Russians somewhat harshly. In a letter dated Wednesday, 17 August 1803, Clementi, whilst on tour in Dresden, wrote to his business partner Frederick William Collard (1772–1860): ‘Remember once for all that the Russians in general possess good ears for sound tho’ they have none for sense and style.’9

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8 This information is derived from a conversation held between the author and Ralph Schureck. See ‘Protective Measures for Pianos’, in Chapter 7, Volume 1 of this publication.
9 Letter from Muzio Clementi to Frederick William Collard, Wednesday, 17 August 1803. Quoted in Burnett, Company of Pianos, p. 72.