

Zeitschrift: Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis : eine Veröffentlichung der Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, Lehr- und Forschungsinstitut für Alte Musik an der Musik-Akademie der Stadt Basel

Herausgeber: Schola Cantorum Basiliensis

Band: 34 (2010)

Artikel: The harpsichord or the piano - a question for today

Autor: Latcham, Michael

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-868904>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 17.04.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

THE HARPSICHORD OR THE PIANO – A QUESTION FOR TODAY

by MICHAEL LATCHAM

In London the piano was practically unknown before the mid 1760s and in Vienna pianos only started to emerge in the late 1770s.¹ But from the 1780s onwards, in both cities, the success of the piano increased while the popularity of the harpsichord decreased.² By about 1795, the harpsichord was a thing of the past, an inexpressive instrument suitable only for *continuo* use, for instance at the opera.

The late appearance of the piano in London and Vienna seems to have provoked the modern idea that the piano evolved everywhere in the same way, that is, that it emerged towards the end of the 18th century and gradually took over from the harpsichord. But while this evolutionary theory may apply to the emergence of the piano as a generally popular instrument, the piano and the harpsichord were appreciated alongside each other, without rivalry, throughout the 18th century in other, more select surroundings.

The *gravecembalo col piano e forte*, or harpsichord with loud and soft, was invented by Bartolomeo Cristofori (1655–1731) in Florence around 1700. His pianos or direct derivatives from them – some made in Florence by his pupil Giovanni Ferrini (*fl.* 1730–1755) and some in Germany by Gottfried Silbermann (1683–1753) – were particularly valued in some of the most musical courts of Europe. These included the court of the Medici in Florence in about 1700, the court of Cardinal Ottoboni (1667–1740) in Rome by 1705, the court of the King João V (1689–1750) in Lisbon by about 1720, the Spanish court of the first Bourbon King of Spain, Felipe V (1683–1746) by about 1730, and the court of King Frederick the Great (1712–1786) by about 1745. Now consider the following: Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713) lived at Cardinal Ottoboni's palace from

¹ See Michael Latcham, „Pianos and Harpsichords for Their Majesties“, *EM* 36/3 (2008), 359–396. The present essay is a shortened and amended version of that article.

² Schönfeld's 1796 description of the takeover in Vienna reads: „Der Flügel [*cembalo*] dienet hauptsächlich zum Accompagniren beim Gesang, zur Zusammenhaltung und Führung einer ganzen Musik, besonders bei Opern, und das eigentliche Tempo zu bestimmen. Vormalis war sein Gebrauch mannigfaltiger und ausgedehnter; allein seit der Erfindung des Fortepiano, ist es in obige Schranken versetzt worden. In Konzerten läßt sich durchaus nicht mehr damit auftreten, und seine Abschaffung hat eine Art von Revolution in der Klaviermusik hervorgebracht.“ („The harpsichord serves mainly to accompany singing, to lead and keep together an orchestra, in particular at the opera, and to maintain the proper tempo. Formerly its use was more diverse and extended, but since the invention of the *Fortepiano* it has become restricted to the functions mentioned above. Generally speaking, one no longer uses it for concert performance and its dismissal has caused something of a revolution in keyboard music.“) Johann Ferdinand von Schönfeld, *Jahrbuch der Tonkunst in Wien und Prag*, Vienna 1796, facs. Munich and Salzburg: Katzbichler, 1976, 184. The takeover in Vienna was apparently first effected by the *Hammerflügel*; in London it was the square piano that started the takeover, already in the 1760s, followed by the grand piano in the 1780s. See Latcham, „Pianos and Harpsichords“ (see n. 1).

1690 to 1712 and wrote numerous pieces for performance there; Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757) directed music at the court of King João in Portugal and then at the Spanish court, in all covering the period 1719 to 1757; and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714–1788) was Frederick the Great's accompanist in Potsdam for 27 years. In short, those select surroundings in which the piano peacefully coexisted with the harpsichord were courts at which some of the most important composers of the 18th century were active for many years. Those composers included two of the greatest keyboard composers of all time, Domenico Scarlatti and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach.

Before concentrating on the Spanish court, a brief return to Vienna. There, the takeover by the piano from the harpsichord between about 1770 and 1790 has of course consequences for an informed performance of the keyboard music of Haydn and Mozart. Today, the choice of period instruments for the performance of their keyboard music is often wrongly biased: Viennese pianos (or copies of them) from between 1790 and 1800 have become accepted for the performance of almost all the keyboard music of Haydn and Mozart even though both composers lived through the period of change in Vienna from the harpsichord to the piano. But although both composers would surely have enjoyed the use of the most modern piano of 1790 for the performance of their works of the 1770s, this does not detract from the value today of trying the early keyboard works of Haydn and Mozart on the right period instruments, for instance on the harpsichords or on the pianos with bare wooden hammer-heads that these two composers would have known earlier in their lives. The possibilities offered by both these types of instruments need to be explored in relation to the Viennese classics. Instead of resorting to the comfortable-sounding Viennese pianos of 1795, the more incisive and clearer sounds of harpsichords, in which plectra pluck the strings, and of many early pianos, in which bare wood strike the strings, should be rediscovered. The sound made by bare wooden hammer-heads was probably the sound Mozart would have heard when he played the instruments of Frantz Jakob Spath (1714–1786) or the pianos of Johann Andreas Stein (1728–1792).³ The instruments of Spath were Mozart's favourites until 1777, those of Stein were his favourites after 1777 and up to about 1782.⁴ Most likely, all of Spath's instruments and those

³ For Spath, see Michael Latcham, „Franz Jakob Spath and the *Tangentenflügel*, an Eighteenth-Century Tradition“, *GSJ* 57 (2004), 150–170 and John Koster, „Among Mozart's spättischen *Clavier*. A Pandaleon-Clavecin by Frantz Jacob Spath, Regensburg, 1767?“, *Early Keyboard Journal* 25/26 (2010), 153–223. For Stein, see Michael Latcham, „Johann Andreas Stein and the Search for the Expressive *Clavier*“, in: Thomas Steiner (ed.), *Cordes et claviers au temps de Mozart. Actes des Rencontres Internationales harmoniques Lausanne 2006*, Bern etc.: Peter Lang, 2010, 133–215.

⁴ Mozart's letter to his father of the October 17th, 1777 starts as follows: „Nun muß ich gleich bey die steinischen Piano forte anfangen. Ehe ich noch vom stein seiner arbeit etwas gesehen habe, waren mir die spättischen Clavier die liebsten; Nun muß ich aber den steinischen den vorzug lassen [...]“. See Wilhelm A. Bauer et al. (eds.), *Mozart, Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, 7 vols., Kassel etc.: Bärenreiter, 1962–1975, II, 68.

of Stein's instruments of before 1782 had bare hammerheads; they used bare wood to strike the strings.⁵

Haydn surely often thought of the clavichord when composing and both Haydn and Mozart must have had the harpsichord in mind for some of their earliest works.⁶ A little later, they may have been thinking specifically of pianos with bare hammerheads and later still of pianos with leathered hammerheads. In Mozart's case he would no doubt often have thought of his piano by Anton Walter (1752–1826), the instrument he acquired in about 1782.⁷ Haydn, even later, was certainly thinking of English grand pianos for his last sonatas. But neither Haydn nor Mozart would always have been thinking of specific instruments, and when they did, they probably never thought of specific instruments to the exclusion of others.

The right instrument for the piece was not fixed. Sometimes there are indications for a preferred instrument but if so, it would have been preferred rather than obligatory. The question: 'Was this piece written for the harpsichord or the piano?' is a modern, wretched question. Lurking in the background is the false idea that today's opposition between the harpsichord and the piano – two different subjects at conservatories – has always been present. The truth is surely that in the 18th century, there was no dichotomy; there were keyboard players, not harpsichordists and pianists.

So whether the piece is by Franz Joseph Haydn or Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, or by Domenico Scarlatti or by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, there may well be more than one right instrument. The difference is that with Mozart, the fact that the piano was taking over from the harpsichord during his lifetime will rightly bias the choice of instrument for his later work in the direction of the piano. With Haydn it is the same although his delight in the clavichord should also be taken into consideration. With Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach the presence of both harpsichords and pianos at the court of Frederick the Great suggests that the choice of instrument for Bach's work might be quite open. Nonetheless, it seems that the three *Hammerflügel* by Gottfried Silbermann (all probably of the mid 1740s) at King Frederick's court were mainly used for more intimate music making, including the King's regular concerts at which

⁵ It should be noted however that perhaps all of Spath's instruments and those of Stein up to 1782 had moderators. The moderator is the stop with which leather or cloth is interposed between the hammers and the strings when required. In the instruments of both these makers, the moderator was almost certainly equipped with leather tabs, giving an effect similar to that given by leathered hammers. The way this stop was used is not specified in the literature. Usually the moderator was engaged using hand levers and only after about 1795 using a knee lever.

⁶ For Haydn, see Horst Walter, „Haydns Klaviere“, *Haydn Studien*, 2/4 (1970), 256–288.

⁷ The state of Mozart's instrument when he owned it is not known. The present action postdates Mozart's death. See Michael Latcham, „Mozart and the Pianos of Gabriel Anton Walter“, *EM* 25 (1997), 382–400; and idem, „Zur Frage der Authentizität und Datierung der Klaviere von Anton Walter zwischen 1780 und 1800“, in: Rudolph Angermüller and Alfons Huber (eds.), *Der Hammerflügel von Anton Walter aus dem Besitz von Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, Salzburg: Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum, 2000, 114–145.

he played the flute while the harpsichords (all of the 1760s) by Burkat Shudi (1702–1773) were used at the opera and for concerts on a larger scale. Earlier, that is before the Shudi harpsichords arrived, Bach would have played on other harpsichords including two by Michael Mietke (*ca.* 1665 – *ca.* 1728).⁸ Nonetheless, it is likely that the instruments Bach played at court were probably chosen by the authoritarian King Frederick and that Bach's own preferences were largely formed independently of his service to the King. In assessing those preferences, most weight should in the first place be given to Bach's few remarks on instruments in his *Versuch* (both volumes of which appeared while Bach was in the King's service) and to the study of his compositions rather than directly to the instruments he had to play at Potsdam and Berlin.⁹ Nevertheless, Bach was at Potsdam for 27 years, a period for most of which he regularly played both harpsichords by different makers as well as the Silbermann *Hammerflügel*.¹⁰ This experience would without doubt have continued to influence him even after he left for Hamburg in 1767.

Domenico Scarlatti may first have come into contact with Cristofori's pianos when he and his father visited Grand Prince Ferdinando de' Medici (1663–1713) in Florence in 1702 and again in 1705. The enthusiasm at the Medici court for the new instruments and Scarlatti's own appreciation of them may have inspired him later to encourage King João V of Portugal to order pianos from Cristofori. Whether or not Scarlatti advised the Portuguese King in this matter, pianos by Cristofori were present at the Lisbon court when Scarlatti was in charge of the music there from 1719 to 1729. One of Scarlatti's duties at the Portuguese court was to teach the King's daughter, Maria Bárbara (1711–1758), eight years old when Scarlatti arrived in 1719. When she moved from Portugal to Spain in 1729 to marry the Spanish Crown Prince, Fernando (1713–1759),

⁸ See Latcham, „Pianos and Harpsichords“, (see n. 1).

⁹ Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, vol. I, Berlin: G. L. Winter, 1753 and vol. II, Berlin: G. L. Winter, 1762. Perhaps most interesting here is the following from vol. II, 121: „Das Clavicord und das Fortepiano sind zu unserer Fantasie die bequemsten Instrumente. Beyde können und müssen rein gestimmt seyn. Das ungedämpfte Register des Fortepiano ist das angenehmste, und, wenn man die nöthige Behutsamkeit wegen des Nachklingens anzuwenden weiß, das reizendste zum Fantasiren.“ The ‚undamped register‘ refers to the sustaining device. Perhaps Bach was thinking of the Silbermann pianos he played at the time in Potsdam. These have two hand levers with which the player could lift the dampers in the bass and in the treble. Similar damper lifting devices, which can only be operated at suitable moments (for instance between movements) are found in English square pianos of a few years later and in some smaller German pianos of unknown date. The first mention of a device for operating all the dampers at once while playing is the 1769 report of a knee lever for engaging (not disengaging) all the dampers in an instrument by Stein. See Anon., „Von Erfindung eines Poly-Toni-Clavichordii oder musikalischen Affecten-Instruments, und von Verbesserung eines neuen Orgelwerks“ under: item 13, „Gelehrte Sachen“, *Augsburger Intelligenz-Blatt* 40, October 5th, 1769.

¹⁰ At first he almost certainly played the harpsichord. The Silbermann *Hammerflügel* probably arrived in 1746 and 1747. It was at one of these that Johann Sebastian Bach improvised on the royal theme on the May 7th, 1747. For more details, see Latcham, „Pianos and Harpsichords“ (see n. 1).

Scarlatti followed her. In 1746, King Felipe died and Fernando and Maria Bárbara were crowned King and Queen Consort of Spain; Scarlatti continued to serve the Queen as her music tutor until his death in 1757.

The other great musician who served at the Spanish court was Farinelli, the famous castrato otherwise called Carlo Broschi (1705–1782). In 1737, Queen Isabella Farnese (1692–1766) had attracted Farinelli to the Spanish court hoping that his singing could alleviate the depressions and sleeplessness of her husband King Felipe.¹¹ In general, Isabella only allowed music behind closed doors. After King Felipe's death in 1746, however, and after about another year of Isabella's repressive attitude at court, things changed enormously, particularly for Farinelli; he became director of the royal opera and was able to put on unbelievably extravagant productions.

The relationship between Scarlatti and Maria Bárbara was quite different from the one between Maria Bach and King Frederick. Most of Scarlatti's huge output of sonatas were written for Bárbara as his pupil. For this reason the instruments owned by her may be seen as a reflection not only of her preferences but of those of Scarlatti as well. Twelve keyboard instruments are listed on the inventory of Maria Bárbara's possessions; they comprise five pianos and seven harpsichords, none of which is known to have survived.¹² To go some way to understanding the preferences of Bárbara and of Scarlatti, these instruments are now discussed.¹³

The first on the inventory was a piano built in 1730 by Giovanni Ferrini, Cristofori's pupil in Florence, and was one of the three instruments the Queen mentioned in her will as her 'best instruments', bequeathing them to Farinelli. The 1730 piano was probably similar to the only surviving large instrument certainly built by Ferrini, the 1746 *cembalo* that has two keyboards, one for a set of hammers and the other for two sets of harpsichord jacks with quills.¹⁴ Unlike that instrument however, Maria Bárbara's 1730 instrument had only one keyboard for the hammers. The inventory mentions that there were 56 keys; a common 56-note range was *GG* to *d''*, enough notes for just over 400 of Scarlatti's 560 sonatas.

¹¹ See Ralph Kirkpatrick, *Domenico Scarlatti*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953, 107–111.

¹² The list, appended to her will, of twelve keyboard instruments owned by the Queen now in the library of the Royal Palace in Madrid, sig. VII E 4 305, fol. 228r to fol. 231r., is quoted in full in the original Spanish in Kirkpatrick, *Domenico Scarlatti* (see n. 11), 361. Since Kirkpatrick wrote, the list has a new signature, however. See Beryl Kenyon de Pascual, „Diego Fernández – Harpsichord-Maker to the Spanish Royal Family from 1722 to 1775 – and His Nephew Julián Fernández“, *GSJ* 38 (1985), 35–47, where the signature is given as ‚Madrid royal palace library – II 305‘.

¹³ For a fuller discussion and references, see Michael Latcham, „The Twelve *Clavicordios* Owned by Queen Maria Bárbara of Spain and the Seven *Cembali* Owned by Carlo Broschi, Known as Farinelli. Facts and Speculation“, in: Luisa Morales (ed.), *Five Centuries of Spanish Keyboard Music, the Proceedings of the FIMTE Conferences 2002–2004*, Almería: Asociación Cultural LEAL, 2007, 255–281.

¹⁴ In the Tagliavini Collection, Bologna.

The second instrument on the list of Maria Bárbara's instruments, another of her three 'best' ones, was a harpsichord, again with 56 keys but with four sets of strings and five stops for giving different sounds. Maria Bárbara, talking one day to Farinelli, said she would have liked a harpsichord with 'more varied voices' and asked him if he had ever seen such a one.¹⁵ He answered that he had not and then, without telling the Queen, went to Diego Fernández (1703–1775), the court harpsichord maker, to order an appropriate instrument. When it was ready, Farinelli left it in the Queen's apartments as a surprise. This is all reported to have taken place when Maria Bárbara was Queen, so this 'new invention' may be dated between 1746, the year of her accession, and 1756 when she made her will bequeathing the instrument to Farinelli. The instrument had ten foot pommels to select and combine the various stops.¹⁶

The 1730 piano by Ferrini would surely have been acquired with Scarlatti's advice and approval. The harpsichord with ten foot pommels, on the other hand, probably had nothing to do with Scarlatti; it was the product of the Queen's whim, her relationship with Farinelli and his relationship with Fernández. Furthermore, the Ferrini *piano forte* responded directly to the Queen's touch with loud and soft, an advantage to which she would have been accustomed for at least fifteen years by the time Farinelli presented her with the new harpsichord. Although she must have treasured the *cembalo di registro* because it was a gift from her beloved Farinelli, it seems more than likely that Maria Bárbara and Scarlatti would have preferred the 1730 piano by Ferrini to the harpsichord ordered for her by Farinelli and built by Fernández.

The third instrument on the list, also bequeathed to Farinelli, was a 61-note harpsichord, made in 1749, again by Fernández. His invoice to the court for this harpsichord coincided with an invoice for a collapsible harpsichord stand, presumably intended for the same harpsichord, sent by the royal cabinetmaker.¹⁷ The description of the stand in the cabinetmaker's invoice even corresponds to the description of the stand of the harpsichord when it later belonged to Farinelli.¹⁸ The arrival of the new harpsichord in 1749 is important. This event seems to have signalled the start of the feeling at court in favour of the harpsichord and the order for a collapsible stand suggests an interest in transporting this instrument.

¹⁵ See Giovenale Sacchi, *Vita del cavaliere Don Carlo Broschi*, Venice: Coleti, 1784, 47.

¹⁶ Archivio di Stato di Bologna, sig. Lorenzo Gambarini, 1783 BIS, 5/14, No. 17, 118. The inventory is transcribed in the original Italian in: Sandro Cappelletto, *La voce perduta. Vita di Farinelli evirato cantore [...]*, Turin: Editione di Tonino, 1995, 209.

¹⁷ See Kenyon de Pascual, „Diego Fernández – Harpsichord-Maker“, (see n. 12), and idem., „Queen Maria Barbara's Harpsichords“, *GSJ* 39 (1986), 125–126.

¹⁸ The instrument is described in the inventory of Farinelli's possessions and in his will. For these, see Cappelletto, *La voce perduta* (see n. 16).

The court habitually moved around from one royal residence to the next according to the season.¹⁹ The residences included Buen Retiro, on the outskirts of Madrid, San Lorenzo, El Escorial, both a monastery and a residence, and Aranjuez, the palace in the valley of the Tajo between Madrid and Toledo. Instruments were carried on the backs of mules from one residence to the next; the difficulties involved even led to a request for a cart to facilitate transport. Perhaps the collapsible stand for the 1749 harpsichord was made for the same reason.

A jump now to the tenth and the twelfth instruments on the list, very similar to the third in that both were large 61-note harpsichords; these two were certainly by Fernández. One was kept at Aranjuez, the other at El Escorial. However, Fernández sent his invoice for these two on the 9th of May 1757.²⁰ Ten weeks later, on the 23rd of July, Scarlatti died. So while there was a 61-note harpsichord in each of three royal palaces (Buen Retiro, El Escorial and Aranjuez) by 1757, and while Scarlatti may have been involved in ordering the two for El Escorial and Aranjuez, he would hardly have had time to play them. Maria Bárbara died in 1758 after months of severe illness. Probably neither Scarlatti nor the Queen ever enjoyed the two new harpsichords.

The seventh of Maria Bárbara's instruments is described on the inventory as Flemish. Perhaps it had been the court instrument owned by the distraught and depressed King Felipe. He was in fact Philippe d'Anjou, the grandson of Louis XIV and the first Bourbon King of Spain. As a music lover, he might have brought this instrument from France on his contested accession to the Spanish throne in 1700. Flemish instruments, especially those of the Ruckers family of Antwerp, were highly prized in France, even above those made in Paris, and it is thus quite possible that Philippe d'Anjou owned one.

According to the inventory, the ninth and eleventh instruments on the list were both pianos. One, made in Florence, was kept at Aranjuez; the other, from its description also made in Florence, was kept at El Escorial. These two could originally have been instruments ordered by King João V in Portugal and sent on to his daughter after her move to Spain. These two pianos appear to have been the only permanent keyboard instruments at Aranjuez and El Escorial until 1757, the year of Scarlatti's death and the year in which the two 61-note harpsichords arrived at those residences.

¹⁹ After their marriage in 1729, Maria Bárbara and Fernando resided in the Alcazar palace in Seville for four years so the piano by Ferrini, built in 1730, was most likely first delivered there. After this four-year period, the court moved from residence to residence as follows: January to mid-March at the old hunting lodge of El Pardo; Easter at Buen Retiro; April to June in Aranjuez; at the end of June Buen Retiro again; July to October La Granja, high up in the Guadarrama mountains toward Segovia; the end of October to the beginning of December at El Escorial and at the end of December Buen Retiro again for Christmas. See Kirkpatrick, *Domenico Scarlatti*, (see n. 11), 91–92.

²⁰ See Beryl Kenyon de Pascual, „Diego Fernández Caparrós y sus instrumentos“, in: Luisa Morales (ed.), *Claves y pianos españoles. Interpretación y repertorio hasta 1830, Actas del I y II symposium internacional „Diego Fernández“ de musica de tecla Española Vera-Mojacar 2000–2001*, Almería: Instituto de Estudios Almerienses, 2003, 101–106.

Now comes an important conclusion: if the 1730 Florentine piano by Ferrini was Maria Bárbara's favourite at Buen Retiro until 1749, and if at each of two other residences, Aranjuez and El Escorial, there was only a Florentine or Florentine-like piano until 1757, there is evidence enough that the piano was important to Maria Bárbara, and thus to Scarlatti, from about 1720 in Portugal until 1749 in Spain. For nearly thirty years the Florentine piano seems to have been the preferred instrument.

Then, in 1749, things changed. In that year a harpsichord arrived, probably the one with 61 notes. The fact that the stand could be dismantled supports the idea that from 1749 onwards this harpsichord was carried round between the three residences as an alternative to the three stationary pianos, one at each residence. The new harpsichord may have been an alternative to the smaller pianos simply because it was the only instrument at court with 61 notes. Perhaps however, the new preference for the harpsichord was because it was a harpsichord, more brilliant than the pianos. The cumbersome business of transporting this large instrument each time the court moved could well have been the reason that in the end led to the order from Fernández for the two similar 61-note harpsichords for Aranjuez and San Lorenzo.

In Buen Retiro, according to the inventory, there were two more Florentine pianos, the fourth and fifth on the list. These may also have been acquired by King João and sent on to his daughter in Spain after she had moved there. Both these pianos were converted to harpsichords at some time. But before this happened, there would have been no less than five pianos in Maria Bárbara's collection: her favourite, that is the 1730 piano by Ferrini at Buen Retiro; the two pianos, one at Aranjuez, the other at El Escorial; and the two spare ones in Buen Retiro.

The sixth and the eighth instruments of the twelve, the only ones so far not mentioned, were both quilled harpsichords, each with three sets of strings. They were probably also by Fernández.

In the early days, when she was still the Crown Princess and probably for a short time after she had become Queen, Maria Bárbara, and with her Scarlatti, thus appear to have given their preference to the piano. When the new harpsichord, presumably the one with 61 notes, arrived in 1749, they appear to have turned more towards the harpsichord. Perhaps it was no coincidence that this harpsichord, brilliant and incisive in comparison with the Florentine pianos, should have taken up the interests of Maria Bárbara and Scarlatti when the closed atmosphere at court could give way to a new extrovert mood, when there was no insomniac and melancholic king to be comforted in his chamber and, with at least equal significance to the royal collection of keyboard instruments, when Farinelli's spectacular opera productions could be enjoyed.

Farinelli would sometimes have required quite a number of harpsichords as continuo instruments for his magnificent operas. Some occasions required more than one band of musicians. In 1752, for instance, Farinelli „[...] offered his sovereigns a miniature fleet on the Tajo, with separate boats for each

of the royal personages, each boat with its own orchestra.²¹ Each of those orchestras would have required at least one continuo instrument. Assuming these were keyboard instruments, which ones of the twelve might reasonably have been available for this purpose? The Queen's three 'best' ones (nos. 1, 2 and 3) would surely have been permanently reserved for her personal use and could not have been requisitioned for the opera. The two pianos at Aranjuez and El Escorial (nos. 9 and 11) were probably also kept for her use as the only two permanent instruments at those residences. The two 1757 harpsichords (nos. 10 and 12) had not yet arrived. This leaves only the Flemish harpsichord, the two spare Florentine pianos (nos. 4 and 5) and two harpsichords (nos. 6 and 8) for Farinelli's use as continuo instruments. If the two harpsichords had not yet arrived, as might be speculated, only the Flemish harpsichord and the two pianos would have been available. The two pianos would have been too quiet, particularly for the events held in Aranjuez, some in the open air. With only the Flemish harpsichord available, something would have needed to have been done. Soon after Farinelli's productions started, he may have decided to have both the spare pianos at Buen Retiro (nos. 4 and 5) converted into harpsichords and commissioned two new harpsichords (nos. 6 and 8), thus giving four new continuo harpsichords for the opera. Meanwhile, Maria Bárbara and Scarlatti still retained not only three pianos, one at each of three residences, but also the *cembalo di registro* at Buen Retiro, and from 1749 onwards, a *cembalo a penne* with 61 notes, moved around from residence to residence. This speculative interpretation accounts for all twelve of the instruments listed in the inventory except for the two 1757 harpsichords by Fernández. Sadly, they arrived at El Escorial and Aranjuez too late to be of service.

To sum up: in the period before Maria Bárbara became Queen of Spain, perhaps already in Lisbon, she and Scarlatti may have given their attention to the piano almost to the exclusion of the harpsichord. The exciting years that started about a year after the coronation in 1746 seem to have more or less coincided with the order for a new 61-note harpsichord, suggesting a new interest in the harpsichord, more brilliant than the piano. Farinelli's appointment as director of the court opera came at about the same time; his need for continuo instruments would only have increased the new accent on the harpsichord. But while the interest in the harpsichord certainly appears to have taken hold at court, the former interest in the piano for their own music making would surely not have been suddenly lost by Scarlatti and Bárbara. In the eight years left to them together after the arrival of the 1749 harpsichord, their preferences on any one day for the older piano or the newer harpsichord may have been a matter of their moods as much as anything else. Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that not long after the coronation there was a new interest in the harpsichord, in particular in a harpsichord with 61 notes, the range required for some of Scarlatti's most exuberant sonatas.

²¹ See Kirkpatrick, *Domenico Scarlatti* (see n. 11), 113.

The moral of the tale is clear: the preferences of Princess Maria Bárbara and Scarlatti appear to have been for the Florentine piano from 1719 until 1749. In 1749, when life brightened up, they turned more often to the harpsichord. No one knows how many of Scarlatti's sonatas were written in this period but it seems likely that those requiring 61 notes are from this happier phase at the Spanish court.

Maria Bárbara mentioned in her will the three instruments she bequeathed to Farinelli as: „[...] three *cembali*, one with stops, another with hammers, and another with quills, the best ones.“²² Those three comprised: the one Farinelli ordered for her from Fernández, surely mentioned first out of deference to Farinelli; then her favourite, the 1730 piano by Ferrini; then the 61-note harpsichord by Fernández. Charles Burney (1726–1814), describing his visit to Farinelli in Bologna in 1770, specifically mentioned the piano by Ferrini and the 61-note harpsichord by Fernández:

„Signor Farinelli has long left off singing, but amuses himself still on the harpsichord and viol d'amour: he has a great number of harpsichords, made in different countries, which he has named according to the place they hold in his favour, after the greatest of the Italian painters. His first favourite is a piano forte, made at Florence in the year 1730, on which is written in gold letters, Rafael d'Urbino; then, Coreggio, Titian, Guido, &c. He played a considerable time upon his Raphael, with great judgement and delicacy, and has composed several elegant pieces for that instrument. The next in favour is a harpsichord given him by the late Queen of Spain, who was Scarlatti's scholar, both in Portugal and Spain. [...] this harpsichord, which was made in Spain, has more tone than any of the others.“²³

First the piano, then the harpsichord. At least, from a modern point of view; in those days, as Burney's words intimate, they were all harpsichords, some with hammers, some with quills.

²² See note 12 above.

²³ Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy. Or, the Journal of a Tour Through Those Countries, Undertaken to Collect Materials for a General History of Music*, London: T. Becket & Co. et al., 1773, 211.