

Private Collections of Musical Instruments – Museums with an Expiry Date?

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Abstract

The old tradition of collecting musical instruments persists until the present. Over the last 30 years, keyboard instruments have been at the forefront of attention. Now that harpsichords, spinets, and virginals have stopped cropping up at unknown places, the focus has gradually shifted to younger forms such as the pianoforte and the grand pianos of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Church organs are a similarly astonishing object of collections, as their size makes them unlikely collectibles. Besides the difficulties with storage and set-up, they also pose questions regarding conservation. Often, financial resources lead to very individual solutions. With public resources few and far between and museum capacities at their limits, the future of these collections is uncertain. Based on a selection of examples, the present contribution suggests ways in which private engagement may help to delay the demise of musical instrument collections for one more generation. In contrast, research and documentation of the instruments that are still publically available happens only in exceptional cases.

Private Sammlungen – Museen mit Verfallsdatum?

Die alte Tradition des Sammelns von Musikinstrumenten hält bis in die Gegenwart an. In den letzten 30 Jahren sind dabei vor allem Tasteninstrumente in den Fokus geraten. Nachdem Cembali, Spinette und Virginalen kaum noch an unbekanntem Orten zum Vorschein kommen, gilt das Augenmerk vermehrt den jüngeren Instrumentenausprägungen, dem Pianoforte oder den Hammerflügeln des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts. Erstaunlich ist auch das Zusammentragen von Kirchenorgeln, die man aus Gründen des Platzbedarfes nicht unbedingt als Objekte von Sammelleidenschaft erwarten würde. Neben den Schwierigkeiten bei der Lagerung und Aufstellung treten bei diesen größeren Musikinstrumenten Fragen der Konservierung in den Vordergrund. Nicht selten sorgen die finanziellen Rahmenbedingungen für sehr individuelle Lösungsansätze. Da öffentliche Mittel immer seltener zur Bewahrung und Präsentation verfügbar und die Kapazitäten der Museen an Grenzen gelangt sind, ist die Zukunft solcher Sammlungen vollkommen unklar. Anhand von ausgewählten Beispielen soll versucht werden zu zeigen, wie privates Engagement das Ende historischer Musikinstrumente womöglich um die Zeitspanne einer Generation verzögern kann. Erforschung und Dokumentation der aktuell noch verfügbaren Bestände erfolgt dagegen nur in Ausnahmefällen.

The collection of works of art by private citizens has a long tradition, going back at least to the 15th century.¹ An interest in collecting musical instruments can be first traced in the 16th century. From its beginnings, the *Accademia filarmo-*

nica in Verona was an association of young aristocrats,² but individual initiatives remained the exception for a long time. In 1657, Andreas Unger, cantor in Naumburg (Saale), bequeathed the astounding number of 10 string instruments and 53 wind instruments from his collection to the town's church of St Wenceslas. These were later acquired by the

1 Gerda Ridler: *Privat gesammelt – öffentlich präsentiert. Über den Erfolg eines neuen musealen Trends bei Kunstsammlungen*. Bielefeld 2012, pp. 23-32. – Jeffrey Abt: *The origins of the public museum*. In: *A companion to museum studies* (Blackwell companions in cultural studies 12). Ed. by Sharon Macdonald. Chichester 2011, pp. 115-134, esp. pp. 119-123.

2 Giuseppe Turrini: *L'Accademia filarmonica di Verona dalla fondazione (maggio 1543) al 1600 e il suo patrimonio musicale antico*. Annunziando il prossimo quarto centenario (*Atti e memorie dell'accademia di Agricoltura, Scienze e Lettere di Verona*, 5/18). Verona 1941, pp. 24-48, pp. 169-190, and pp. 242-244.

Prussian Ministry for Culture as additions to the collection of ancient musical instruments at the Königliche Hochschule für Musik in Berlin.³ In this way an early ensemble of instruments became a constituent part of a public collection. At the outset of this contribution, it needs to be emphasized that what holds true for many museums in general, is particularly true in the field of music: without the many private collectors there would hardly be any musical instrument museums today.⁴

Considering the developments of the last decades, however, one could easily get the impression that love, passion, and commitment have reached a limit of sorts. Private collectors and public collections seem to have lost their common understanding and no longer help each other. One might be forgiven for thinking that collecting musical instruments was a really wonderful thing in the early days of Ulrich Rück and others. According to a logic which no one has bothered to scrutinize any further – it was self-evident, it seems – the instruments found their way into a museum. The present, in contrast, suggests that there is an expiry date for private collections – and it is with the origins of this disaffection between private and public collections that this article is concerned.

Results of Lacking Storage Space

Undoubtedly, there are still private persons who purchase one instrument after another, and there are perhaps even a few curators who are still waiting expectantly for the moment when a donation or possibly even the acquisition of a large and interesting collection will expand their house significantly. In the year 2000, for instance, the collector Dr. Andreas Beurmann donated more than 700 instruments to the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg. The instruments could not all be integrated into the collection at once, but the donation was greeted by appropriately positive commentary in the local media. In 1994, a friend of Beur-

mann's, the prominent businessman Hans-Otto Schümann had offered to finance an extension to the museum that was to cost 14 million DM.⁵ Two floors in this new building were to be reserved for Beurmann's keyboard instruments.

It is likely that there will be no more projects of this sort in future. The terms have shifted further and further apart in the last few decades, so that the case of the Beurmann collection will remain an exception. The course of events in Hamburg demonstrates that the spatial capacity of museums plays an important role in such decisions, for the space for exhibitions is exhausted and the depots are overflowing.

Difficulties in Storing and Performances

It is easy to conceive how much room keyboard instruments, particularly those of the grand piano type, require. In the course of more than 25 years, Wolfgang Petzoldt has collected together about 300 such instruments in Wiesbaden, almost all of them built between c. 1880 and 1930.⁶ Petzoldt has specialized in grand pianos, and he even owns several examples of some series. It is not very difficult to see where an undertaking of this kind reaches its limits. It needs a lot of space to display such a large number of pianos, and such an area in a town – hundreds of square metres – costs a lot of money. Even if an appropriate space can be found, that is only the beginning of the difficulties. Suitable air-conditioning must be created for musical instruments, humidifiers and heating drive up the costs.

When looking through photographs on Petzoldt's web-site, the extent of the problem caused by the collector's passion becomes visible. The photographs, taken in 2013, show grand pianos without their mechanics, grand pianos which have been tipped onto their sides, left lying on their spine for lack of space.⁷ There is no doubt that the collector has an outstanding level of knowledge about his instruments and is able to carry out adequate restoration work. Yet the questions how he will cope with their enormous number, how he will be able to solve the spatial bottleneck remain unanswered. The collection's fate may be regarded as uncertain.

To display organs which were built for churches is no easier. The Organ Museum in Valley (Upper Bavaria) is a good

3 Dieter Krickeberg: Die alte Musikinstrumentensammlung der Naumburger St. Wenzelskirche im Spiegel ihrer Verzeichnisse. In: Jahrbuch des Staatlichen Instituts für Musikforschung Preußischer Kulturbesitz 1977. Berlin 1978, pp. 7-30.

4 Cf. Katrin Louise Holzmann: Sammler und Museen. Kooperationsformen der Einbindung von privaten zeitgenössischen Kunstsammlungen in die deutsche Museumslandschaft (Kunst- und Kulturmanagement). Wiesbaden 2016, p. 11.

5 Hamburger Morgenpost, 21 Jan. 2000.

6 URL: <http://www.pianokultur-petzoldt.de/page1/index.html> [8.8.2017].

7 URL: <http://www.pianokultur-petzoldt.de/photos/index.html> [8.8.2017].

example.⁸ In the Altes Schloss and several other buildings in the grounds, the former official adviser on organs to the Bayerisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege Dr. Sixtus Lampl exhibits 17 playable organs which date from the Baroque to the 20th century. The greater part of the instruments, however, is kept in storage. Among these are the Koulen organ of 1914 from Saint Martin's church in Landshut with 3 manuals and 72 stops, the former main organ of Our Lady's Cathedral in Munich (Zeilhuber 1952-1957; IV manuals / 79 stops), and the organ from the Kongressaal at the Deutsches Museum in Munich (Steinmeyer 1946/7; IV/75) which will probably never be exhibited. Large organs such as those from concert halls and cathedrals might enrich the life of musical instrument museums only sometime in the unlikely future.

In art galleries, pictures need relatively little room within the exhibition and even less in the depot. Comparisons of this sort can also go the other way, though, as flutes and clarinets are not very voluminous while there are stone and bronze sculptures of considerable three-dimensional proportions. In essence, it does not make sense to compare works of art with each other without pointing out the fundamental difference between them: whereas pictures or statues are themselves works of art, musical instruments must be understood merely as part of a work of art which includes, besides the composition and its notated form, the performing artist and their instrument.⁹ As an exhibit in a museum, the musical instrument has been separated from its true *raison d'être*, and here lie the roots of the different motivations of private and public collections of musical instruments. The »essential tasks of a museum«, according to Katrin Louise Holzmann's definition which relies on the ICOM principles, include preservation, research, and mediation.¹⁰ If we accept these premises for figurative art, we find ourselves in a dilemma when it comes to music. Conservation is often irreconcilable with performance. Achieving a playable state requires operations on the instrument which frequently involve the loss of original substance, hindering both research and preservation.

Prevented Conservation and Research

It is precisely in the realm of conservation that there has been a significant shift of attitudes which should not be underestimated. Forty years ago the aim was to make the instrument playable, but today more and more attention is paid to conservation; much care is taken in order not to risk the loss of original substance, so that research on an instrument might remain possible for future generations. Sometimes, private collectors do distinguish themselves as researchers, as in the case of Karl Ventzke of Düren who was awarded the honorary degree of Dr. phil. by the Faculty of Arts of Tübingen University in 1999.¹¹ Their main concern, however, is to play music on the instruments, which therefore have to be kept in a playable state or need to be restored to it. We, therefore, in the following example have to speak of the problems of the conservators.

The Berlin collector Hubert Jenner had the provision of playable instruments in mind when he created his non-profit trust »Lebensfarben« in the year 2000. According to its statutes, which can be accessed on the internet,¹² the trust aims a) to engage in cultural activities and b) to promote the integration of persons in particular need as defined by § 53 AO [Abgabenordnung: German fiscal code]. The statute also contains the following clause: »The aim of the trust as outlined in paragraph 1a will be achieved particularly by a) expanding its collection of keyboard instruments, caring for them, and making them available to the public, b) by ensuring that the instruments will be played in public, and c) by making the instruments available to music students and scholars for the purpose of study.«

Today the trust's collection consists of 57 harpsichords, pianofortes, square pianos, upright pianos, harmoniums, and a few other instruments – and it is currently up for sale.¹³ When I was visiting the collection in 2015, the instruments were stored in a flat in a housing development in Berlin. Building work was in progress nearby, and the measures taken to

8 Sixtus Lampl: Das Orgelmuseum Valley. Ausdruck eines gewandelten Orgelbewusstseins. In: *Ars Organi* 50, 2002, pp. 22-26.

9 Cf. Walter Wiora: *Das musikalische Kunstwerk*. Tutzing 1983, pp. 13-16. – Nicolai Hartmann: *Ästhetik*. Berlin 1953, 2nd ed. 1966, p. 123.

10 Cf. Holzmann 2016 (note 4), p. 11. <http://icom.museum/professional-standards/standards-guidelines/> [10. 8. 2017].

11 See Karl Ventzke: *Boehm-Oboen und die neueren französischen Oboen-Systeme* (Das Musikinstrument 10). Frankfurt (Main) 1969. – Karl Ventzke: *Die Boehmflöte. Werdegang eines Musikinstruments* (Das Musikinstrument 15). Frankfurt (Main) 1966. – Theobald Böhm and Karl Ventzke (Eds.): *On the construction of flutes. Über den Flötenbau*. Buren 1982.

12 URL: <http://www.stiftung-lebensfarben.de/index.php?id=175> [10. 8. 2017].

13 URL: <http://www.stiftung-lebensfarben.de/index.php?id=450> [10. 8. 2017].

protect the instruments were inadequate to keep the dust out. As the opportunity of purchasing the collection appears not to have attracted much interest, the trust is now offering the instruments to public and non-profit-making institutions so that the trust's aims, as stated in the statutes, may still be fulfilled. Admittedly, some of the historically interesting instruments, for instance a pianoforte by Johann Andreas Stein (dated 1784), an anonymous harpsichord from around 1600, or two Lyra pianos by Johann Christian Schleich (dated 1824 and 1827) have been subjected to severe restoration work in order to make them playable. The Stein pianoforte – formerly in the possession of Wolf Dieter Neupert – has suffered the loss of a considerable amount of original substance. That has consequences: a national collection of instruments would hardly burden itself with a pianoforte which has undergone dubious restoration, for something else would have to be removed and a place in the depot cleared in order to exhibit this instrument. Generally, one could say that it is the human biological clock which sets a limit to the projects of private collectors. It appears impossible to predict the future of Wolfgang Petzoldt's instruments or of those owned by the Lebensfarben trust in Berlin which must obey its own statutes. In spite of these uncertainties there is, of course, the possibility that some temporary arrangement might be made, some fortuitous development, or maybe simply a moratorium could prolong the life of a collection, or at least some of its more interesting objects.

Here we must look once more at the motives of these collectors. Wolfgang Petzoldt is passionate about pianos from the late 19th and early 20th centuries and for that reason he lovingly restores them and makes them playable. The statute of the Berlin Lebensfarben trust cites public performance as well as scientific research as its aims; Sixtus Lampl brings organs to Valley in order to rescue them from final destruction. A team of expert craftsmen prepares these instruments for concert appearances. It is always a question of making the instruments playable, and when an instrument is playable it should be presented in public. Concerning their rationale, there is little difference between the private collectors of the past and the present. While public museums of earlier generations stood much closer to the intentions of collectors, today – at least in Germany – they insist on their great responsibility for their funds which mainly come from taxes. In the past few decades, the conviction has grown that the main duties of public collections of musical instruments are preservation and research.

While this does not mean that harpsichords and pianofortes which have been made playable may never play again, only that before each measure is taken, it needs to be carefully considered what repairs are necessary in order to preserve the original. A mechanism that permits an occasional performance can certainly play a role in such deliberations. Research projects have to determine how the mechanical load generated by string tension affects the stability of a piano's corpus. Exact analyses by means of CT, 3D scan, and endoscopic photography, measurements, and drawings document the state of the instrument and any changes over the course of time.¹⁴ The German Society for the Advancement of Scientific Research (DFG)¹⁵, the German Federal Cultural Foundation¹⁶, and the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States allocate very considerable sums of money for this purpose. Private collectors are, as a rule, excluded from this sort of support. Even if the Berlin Lebensfarben trust is willing to include scientific research, this aspect can, at best, be no more than a side product of the massive interventions necessary to keep the instruments in playing condition.

Large Instruments Hard to Sell

A look on the situation in Great Britain offers a different picture. Here, numerous collections of musical instruments

14 Clemens Birnbaum, Stefan Ehrich, Michael Kaliske, Susanne Saft (Eds.): Analysis and description of music instruments using engineering methods. Konferenzbericht zur internationalen Fachtagung: Ingenieurwissenschaftliche Analyse und Beschreibung von Musikinstrumenten, 12.–13. Mai 2011, Stiftung Händel-Haus Halle. Halle (Saale) 2011. – Michael Kaliske, Susanne Saft, Christian Jenkel, Ronny Lang, Achim Haufe, Stefan Ehrich: Statische Strukturuntersuchungen an historischen Tasteninstrumenten. Abschlussbericht April 2012, URL: http://www.hornemann-institut.de/german/epubl_txt/2012_KURProjekt_Kaliske.pdf [7.9.2017]. – Franz Körndle, Gert-Dieter Ulferts: Von Mozart bis Liszt – Weimars verborgene Saiten. In: *Arsprototo* 2, 2006, pp. 15–18.

15 MUSICES – Musikinstrumenten-Computertomographie-Examinierungs-Standard (Nov. 2014 to Oct. 2017), Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg in cooperation with the Fraunhofer-Institut Integrierte Schaltungen (IIS), Entwicklungszentrum Röntgentechnik (EZRT).

16 KUR – Programm zur Konservierung und Restaurierung von mobilem Kulturgut 2007. Contains: Statische Untersuchungen an historischen Tasteninstrumenten (Stiftung Händel-Haus Halle), and Historische Tasteninstrumente in den Sammlungen der Klassik Stiftung Weimar. See Franz Körndle, Gert-Dieter Ulferts (Eds.): Konservierung und Restaurierung historischer Tasteninstrumente in den Sammlungen der Klassik Stiftung Weimar: Bericht über die internationale Tagung vom 12. bis 14. Sept. 2008 im Schlossmuseum Weimar. Augsburg 2011.

are in private hands. They are in good company with the many other small collections which can be visited in old mansions and country houses. Experts know the names of such collections well, for example the excellent Colt Clavier Collection which is referred to in all the relevant literature. These museums have had to finance themselves from the very beginning and it is unlikely that any of their exhibitions would be possible without voluntary helpers. Yet these private collections are also in danger. In 2005, Saint Michael's College in Tenbury decided, for financial reasons, to give up and sell its collection of keyboard instruments. Several items, almost all of which were well-known through Donald Boalch's¹⁷ standard work on harpsichords and clavichords, came under the hammer at Sotheby's in the autumn of 2005. Nevertheless, fewer than half of the instruments were sold. A harpsichord from the workshop of Burkat Shudi¹⁸ dated to 1773 made £ 102,000, about the estimated value. A square piano by Mu-

zio Clementi¹⁹, sold at £ 2,160, attracted considerably more attention than expected. Why other instruments such as those by Tomkinson, Kirckman, or Hitchcock were less successful can only be guessed at. Perhaps their condition was the deciding factor. Sotheby's experts set prices with all these things in mind so that it is possible to read the value and rarity as well as condition from an instrument's pricing. I did not succeed in obtaining information about the new owners, nor about the whereabouts of the rest of the instruments after the auction.

It is not easy for many private collectors to raise a five-digit sum. Once the threshold of £ 100,000 is left behind, it is probably only public museums that are interested to fill a gap in their main collection with a rare instrument. Even they cannot manage alone, for they need sponsors to provide part or most of the money, and the time available before auctions is not long enough to make such arrangements.

Maker	Year of construction	Estimated price GBP	Selling price GBP
Thomas Tomkinson Grand pianoforte	c. 1815	4,000-7,000	2,880
Jacob Kirckman Cembalo	London 1763	30,000-35,000	-
Burkat Shudi Cembalo	London 1773	90,000-120,000	102,000
Thomas Hitchcock Bentside spinet	London, c. 1735	10,000-15,000	-
Ferdinand Seiler Pianoforte	München, c. 1820	8,000-12,000	-
Burkat Shudi Cembalo	London 1779	40,000-60,000	-
Clementi & Co. Tafelklavier	London c. 1815	1,000-1,500	2,160
William Stodart Grand pianoforte	London, c. 1815	5,000-7,000	-

Table 1 Instruments auctioned at Sotheby's, London, 8 November 2005

17 Donald Boalch and Charles Mould (Eds.): *Makers of the harpsichord and clavichord. 1440-1840*. 3rd ed. Oxford 1995.

18 Boalch 1995 (note 17), pp. 620-621. – URL: <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2005/early-musical-instruments-105253/lot.373.html> [10.8.2017].

19 URL: <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2005/early-musical-instruments-105253/lot.378.html> [10.8.2017].

Restoration for Performances

Anyone who purchases a historical musical instrument can do what they like with it. The rules and methods for the conservation of cultural assets are usually ignored, for these conditions are seen to stand in the way of making a historical instrument playable. Synthetic resin helps to stabilize wooden constructions in pianos. Wrest planks are shaved down to make new parts to hold the pins firmly; and new pins are necessary anyway so that a piano-tuner can do their work. Their success proves these people right – at least in part. These instruments can be presented at concert, allowing the audience to experience the original sound. Such grand pianos do sound different from modern ones, though whether they really sound as they did in the past is at least questionable.²⁰ Most audience members do not take note of the measures taken to conserve the instruments. If there is a call for them to be taken into public ownership at a later stage, it will be discovered how little of the original substance is left when the instruments have been kept in a playable state for years.

In this field of tension between the private collectors, who have their instruments played in concerts, and the public museums, which for reasons of conservation seldom allow the playing of original instruments, the interest of the public is of course affected. Looking at a collection of silent instruments is of limited interest. There is no ideal way out of this dilemma, but some suggestions can be outlined nonetheless.

- a) Collectors of pianos in particular should be made more aware of the consequences of the measures they have initiated. The person who buys a historical instrument holds responsibility for this valuable cultural asset – a responsibility which should, strictly speaking, exclude any unauthorised amateur tinkering.
- b) It could be considered whether musical instruments should be included in the list of valuable national cultural assets outlined in the new Kulturgutschutzgesetz²¹ of 2016.²² However, in addition to the uncertainty about

which instruments should be included in the list for protection, it can provide no more than a warning that any unauthorized changes to cultural assets would preclude them from being taken over later by public institutions.

- c) The question of what would happen to the altered works of a Johann Andreas Stein, an Anton Walter, or a Carl Bechstein would be completely open if they failed to find a place in a museum.
- d) It urgently needs to be debated whether these instruments should really be left to go to ruin. Just as a fragment of a letter from Mozart should not be declared worthless or the autographs of Bach's Matthew Passion and Mass in B minor be left to decay because of their restoration in the 19th and 20th centuries, neither should access to these altered musical instruments be categorically excluded. A lost instrument is no good even for research.

The things that can be achieved through conservation and restoration concern the material aspect of musical instruments, their sheer existence. In this respect, there is a resemblance to works of art, pictures, or furniture. As pointed out above, however, a musical instrument has a purpose different from that of a piece of furniture or equipment. All those who long to hear the sound of the past are interested in the instruments in which this sound may be locked away. Early on, the collector Ulrich Rück recognized that making copies²³ could be a way out of the dilemma between preservation of the substance versus the desire to hear the authentic sound. Rück can be counted among the pioneers who transferred the methods of experimental archaeology and re-enactment to the field of music.

Since Rück's days, such methods have been developed further. Art historians are increasingly studying the materials and substances out of which sculptures, pictures, and altar-pieces are made. Moreover, attention is paid to work processes, tools, and to the nature of the co-operation between the joiners, sculptors, and painters to whom we owe such works of art. Much of this research is relevant to the field of musical instruments. If one does not wish to touch the sub-

20 Bruce Haynes: A correctly-attributed fake. In: *Performance Practice Review* 13 / 1, 2008, pp. 1-7; here pp. 4-5.

21 Law for the protection of cultural assets. Gesetz zum Schutz von Kulturgut (KGSG) vom August 1955 in der Neufassung vom 31. Juli 2016. See Olaf Zimmermann, Theo Geißler (Eds.): *Altes Zeug. Beiträge zur Diskussion zum nachhaltigen Kulturgutschutz* (Aus Politik & Kultur 14). Berlin 2016.

22 KGSG § 6 On national cultural assets (1) »National cultural assets are assets which 1. are included in a catalogue of valuable national cultural assets.« Nationales Kulturgut (1) »Nationales Kulturgut ist Kulturgut, das 1. in ein Verzeichnis national wertvollen Kulturgutes eingetragen ist.«

23 Haynes 2008 (note 20), pp. 1-7.

stance of a historical harpsichord, it is still possible to prepare documentation and drawings which can serve to construct a replica. The individual nature of each instrument needs to be taken into account. Until the early 19th century, workshops did not aim for serial production, but tried to improve on each piece. The piano builders Johann David and Johann Lorenz Schiedmayer kept a workshop notebook between 1778 and about 1821 in which they entered not only notes on the cost of apprentices and journeymen but also recorded details of the instruments they made as well as their purchasers. The following entry dates from 1821:

»Flügel Resonanz

Dabey ist zu bemerken, den Boden überhaupt und besonders im *Pas* nicht zuschwach indem ein schwacher Boden einen dünnen lehren krellen Ton giebt, im *Discant* aber, beyläufig 4 [Zoll] herein mus die Stärke schnell abnehmen [...] auch mach[t] zuviel Truck über den Steg einen Stumpfen Ton.«

(It should be observed that the soundboard in general, and, especially in the bass, is not too thin, because a thin soundboard produces a thin, empty, [and] piercing tone; but in the treble, however, more or less 4 [Zoll] from the edge, the thickness must quickly decrease [...] also too much bearing causes a dull tone.)²⁴

Not only improvements in the regarding resonance, but also the stabilisation of the interior construction were noted down, as additional strings increased the forces working on the corpus. We cannot know what thoughts guided Stein, Schiedmayer, or Boisselot as they developed their pianos. As they were not working for musicologists or imitators, they did not pass on the construction plans and instructions with the instruments. These have to be reconstructed by patient research. Doing so can take an extremely long time, but this is the path developed by Ulrich Rück and currently followed by government-financed museums or institutions payed by foundations.²⁵

Of course, there are obstacles to using replicas.²⁶ The first of these is what Walter Benjamin called »aura«.²⁷ For some

people, the aura of an old musical instrument is so important that they would rather not play on a modern copy, and there have been harpsichord makers who have deliberately made their new instruments look old. In 1984, the Elsässische Werkstatt für Cembalobau Rémy Gug (Alsace Workshop for Harpsichords, Rémy Gug) advertised their instruments with the slogan »At first sight, some people think it is a well-restored original«.²⁸ From here, it is not very far to fakes. When Andreas Beurmann pointed out a group of very well preserved harpsichords from Spain in 1999,²⁹ John Koster quickly reacted to the signs that one of them was a late 20th-century fake.³⁰ A little later, Martin Skowronek admitted that he had passed off one of his own instruments as an original by Nicholas Lefebvre from 1755.³¹ This instrument had been in the possession of Gustav Leonhardt, who, despite knowing the true provenance, used it for recordings and concerts under the name »Lefebvre 1755«. As a result, Bruce Haynes was led to contemplate the difference was between faking a picture and a harpsichord concert, inventing the ironic term »fake performance«.³²

This example, at its core, demonstrates that music is not just a question of the instrument, not just of the original, replicated, or faked source of sound. The question whether one can fake sound cannot be answered by the following old fable which appears in the works of Plutarch in ancient Greece³³, but it can perhaps take us nearer to the subject of »aura«:

»The ship wherein Theseus and the youth of Athens returned from Crete had thirty oars, and was preserved by the Athenians down even to the time of Demetrius Phalereus, for they took away the old planks as they decayed, putting in new and stronger timber in their places, insomuch that

27 Walter Benjamin: Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit. Dritte Fassung 1939 (Walter Benjamin: Gesammelte Schriften 1). Ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser. Frankfurt (Main) 1972, pp. 471-508.

28 E. g.: Concerto. Das Magazin für Alte Musik 3 Mar. 1984, p. 63.

29 Andreas E. Beurmann: Iberian discoveries: six Spanish 17th-century harpsichords. In: Early Music 27 / 2, Instruments and instrumental music, May 1999, pp. 183-208.

30 John Koster: A contemporary example of harpsichord forgery. In: Early Music 28, 2000, pp. 91-97.

31 Martin Skowronek: The harpsichord of Nicholas Lefebvre 1755. The story of a forgery without intent to defraud. In: The Galpin Society Journal 55, Apr. 2002, pp. 4-14 and 161.

32 Haynes 2008 (note 20), p. 6.

33 Plutarch, Theseus 23,1.

24 Preethi de Silva: The fortepiano writings of Streicher, Dieudonné and the Schiedmayers: two manuals and a notebook, translated from the original German, with commentary. Lewiston NY 2008, p. 500, translation p. 501.

25 For example, by the »Greifenberger Institut für Musikinstrumentenkunde«.

26 Haynes 2008 (note 20), pp. 3 and 5.



1 So called Tannheimer grand piano in a private garage in Vils, Austria.
Photo: F. Körndle

this ship became a standing example among the philosophers, for the logical question as to things that grow; one side holding that the ship remained the same, and the other contending that it was not the same.³⁴

For some of the people in Plutarch's tale, Theseus' ship, renewed piecemeal, had remained the same and its aura had been transferred. A similar kind of transfer must have taken place on hearing the copy of the Lefebure instrument, and the same process can be assumed for other copies or replicas. If so, we no longer need to aim at getting historical musical instruments to function for a performance.

34 Translation: Plutarch: Theseus. In: Plutarch's Lives. The translation called Dryden's, corrected from the Greek and Revised by A. H. Clough, Vol. I. Boston 1868, p. 21. See also: Richard Hunter, Anna Uhlig: Introduction. What is reperformance? In: Imagining reperformance in ancient culture. Studies in the traditions of drama and lyric (Cambridge Classical Studies). Ed. by Richard Hunter and Anna Uhlig. Cambridge, New York 2017, p. 4.

A last example may remind us of the difficulties even experts encounter. In 2012, I commented on an early pianoforte which had probably been made in the workshop of Frantz Jacob Spath in Regensburg (fig. 1).³⁵ To date (2017), its type of simple single action (Stoßmechanik without escapement) is known from only one other instrument worldwide, now held in Vermillion.³⁶ In January 2011, the pianoforte from the Austrian Tannheim valley came to the Greifenberger Institut für Musikinstrumentenkunde where it was comprehensively measured and photographically documented (fig. 2). Later, Helmut Balk constructed an exact replica, for which a few parts (legs, damper lever rail) which no longer existed had to be reconstructed. In April 2016 the former owner sold the instrument to a private collector who works as a restorer at a big German museum. It appears that it is not planned to exhibit the historically valuable piano in such a museum, but to restore it privately in order to put it into a condition in which it can be played in concerts. The documentation work undertaken in Greifenberg shows with certainty how much of the original substance would be lost in the works necessary to make the instrument playable.

Given that even restorers who work in the service of public museums alter historically valuable instruments in their identity as private aficionados and thus rob future generations of the original, the conclusion of this article can hardly be optimistic. Replicas – including the one of the Tannheim piano – make it unnecessary to execute such questionable changes to make historical instruments playable. Since it is even possible to transfer an original's aura to a replica, it must be the relatively high price of copies – particularly of pianofortes – that encourages such works on historical instruments. Yet if the question of money, if buying and altering cheaply is to be the main criterion that governs the collection of pianos, that would be the worst possible basis. An Ulrich Rück did not need such a poor rationale.

(Translation by Marian Lampe and Henry Hope)

35 Franz Körndle: Johann Andreas Stein und die »spätlichen Clavier. In: Musik in Baden-Württemberg. Jahrbuch 2012, pp. 179-190.

36 John Koster: Among Mozart's »spätlichen Clavier. a Pandaleon-Clavecin by Frantz Jacob Spath, Regensburg, 1767? In: Early Keyboard Journal 25 / 26, 2007 / 2008, 2010, pp. 153-223.



2 The Tannheimer grand piano at the Greifenberger Institut. Photo: H. Balk

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