

**A Clavichord By Hieronymus Hass in the Bate
and how we treat our instruments**

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The clavichord is the most intimate of all keyboard instruments, simply because there is no mechanism intervening between the player and the sound. On one end of any key is the player's finger, and on the other end stands a brass tangent which, when the finger end of the key is depressed, comes up, as the other end of a see-saw, to make the sound by touching the string. Like the pianoforte, the clavichord can be played softly or loudly, according to the force with which the tangent meets the string. It is unique in its expressiveness because the player can add a vibrato and even make a slight crescendo on a note by using the *bebung*, an upward and downward vibrato of the finger on the key. Because the tangent remains in contact with the string for as long as the note is sounding, this *bebung* stretches the string very slightly, altering the pitch and also the amplitude of the sound.

One of the greatest eighteenth-century exponents of the clavichord was Johann Sebastian Bach's second son, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. His *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, which was one of the most important and influential keyboard instruction books ever written, was essentially focussed on the clavichord. C P E Bach was Frederick the Great's court composer until, in 1768, he moved to Hamburg, where he became Telemann's successor. Hamburg was one of the great centres of instrument making in the area we know today as Germany, especially for instruments conspicuous for the beauty of their appearance as well as the quality of their sound. One of the leading makers of organs, harpsichords, and clavichords in Hamburg was Hieronymus Albrecht Hass. He was born in 1689 and died some time after 1744, probably before 1746 when his son, Johann Adolf started to sign his name on instruments. His harpsichords are among the most adventurous and elaborate to be made in the eighteenth century. Of the seven clavichords of his manufacture which are known to survive, only one is in Britain, and this, through the generosity of the National Art Collections Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Friends of the Bate Collection, and others including the Austin & Hope Pilkington Trust, and above all H M Government's tax douceur scheme, is now in the Bate Collection of Musical Instruments in the Faculty of Music of the University of Oxford.

It is a beautifully decorated instrument, dating from 1743, the penultimate year of H A Hass's working life, and fully representative of his genius as a craftsman and artist and of the high artistic standards of his city. The wooden keybars are alternately plain and carved with a

wavy, serpentine, upper surface. The naturals are faced with ivory and the accidentals are chequered ivory and ebony in a chevron pattern. The lid of the toolbox, to the left of the keyboard where the tuning key and spare strings were kept, is veneered in wood, ivory, tortoiseshell, and ebony marquetry. The inside of the lid is painted, not outstandingly well, with Apollo and the Muses.

These features can all be seen in the Bate Collection in Oxford. What cannot be seen is its greatest beauty, the feature most important to Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: its sound. Indeed, in many museums this would remain unknown, for it is a common policy among museums today that instruments should never be heard, never be used. Arguments run on the lines that one does not expect to sit on the chairs in a museum, nor, for example, to sleep in the Great Bed of Ware in the V&A. Why, then, should one expect to be able to play the musical instruments? Those in favour of silence argue also that each time an instrument is played, it goes one step further towards its eventual disintegration, and this, one has to admit, is as true as to say that each lumen of light that falls on paint, thread, or panel, takes the colour of that paint, thread, or panel one further instant towards extinction. Nevertheless, we do not keep our art galleries and museums in total darkness. We weigh up the benefits to the present and future generations, and we allow our treasures to be seen. Similarly, a few of us allow our treasures to be heard.

This is particularly important with keyboard instruments, and indeed with all string instruments, for these are built to exist under tension. The wooden box and the frame are constructed to withstand the tension of the strings, and if that tension be relaxed, there is nothing to hold the box together. Of course, if the tension is too great, the box will begin to collapse, and this clavichord was in that state at one stage. It had been badly restored in the 1930s, strung with steel wire, and brought up to modern pitch, which caused some damage in addition to the damage done by the restoration itself. It has recently been properly restored and is now strung with Malcolm Rose's brass wire which made to the old standards of the period, and tuned to the pitch that Hass is known to have used, just under three-quarters of a tone below modern pitch.

What we have not done, and what we would never permit to be done, is to detune the instrument and then, for a special occasion of some sort, tune it up suddenly to playing tension and perform on it. This, which puts untold stresses and strains on an instrument, is something that happens all too frequently in those museums which preach silence, for how else have they produced the recordings which they sell or which we hear on their sound-guides or juke boxes? It is changes, whether of tension or of climatic condition, that cause

damage. An instrument that holds its pitch, month in and month out, from one quarterly tuning to another, is clearly happy at the tension with maintains that pitch. The instrument itself would tell us quickly enough, by going out of tune, that it was at risk of damage.

Where the advocates of silence have some logic on their side is in their opposition to the necessary restoration. No one can deny that restoration involves destruction. This is where it differs from conservation. Conservation attempts to stop the clock, to halt time, to hold an object in its present state, ideally forever, allowing it neither to improve nor to deteriorate. Restoration attempts to turn the clock back, to put the object back into the state when it was new, or at some agreed earlier time, to remove the grime of ages (we all remember the howls of wrath when the National Gallery did just that to some of its paintings) and, in the case of musical instruments, to return them to playing condition. Inevitably, when this is done, some parts need to be renewed. To do so means to destroy those parts which have to be removed in order for them to be replaced. Even with the most meticulous preservation of those parts, some destruction is unavoidable. Whatever attached them must be detached; whatever marks they left on other parts will be obliterated, and while such marks may mean nothing to us today, the ever-increasing technology at our command may render them meaningful to our successors, who may curse our interference.

As a result, one has to treat each case on its merits. To conserve an instrument such as this one would be to preserve the damage done by the pre-war restorer and while it might be argued, with a lesser instrument, that to do that had some merit and some interest, such an argument could not be sustained in the case of an instrument of this quality and this importance. If the damage then done were to be rectified, it could only justifiably be done by attempting to restore this clavichord to something as nearly as possible its original state. If ever we were so fortunate as to acquire a keyboard instrument dilapidated but never touched by a restorer, then there would be argument for leaving it as we found it, and we should either do so or else forgo its acquisition and allow it instead to go to a temple of silence where it may be conserved as a piece of furniture, its musical function forgotten. This has never happened to us. The nearest approach to it is a square piano by Adam Beyer dating from 1779. While this is untouched since that date, it is still in perfect working order, and neither restoration nor conservation has ever been necessary. As a result, we tune it regularly and keep it working as the maker intended.

We treat our woodwind instruments in the same way, though they are at greater risk than keyboards. A wind instrument cannot be played without filling it with moist, warm air, and such change of humidity inevitably risks cracking the wood. With some trepidation we run

these risks because almost all our instruments came from working collections, collections whose owners, Philip Bate, Reginald Morley-Pegge, Anthony Baines, Edgar Hunt, myself, and many others, played our instruments or allowed them to be played, and it seems illogical to say that because they came through these doors a pall of silence should fall upon them. Many of the instruments, certainly including the initial nucleus collection of Philip Bate, were given to us precisely so that they could be played, so that people could know what the instruments of earlier times sounded like. When an instrument has come to us from centuries of silence in an attic, for example the beautiful ebony and ivory Richters oboe, the only example in a public collection in Britain, then we do restrict use; it would not be right to subject such an instrument to the use which it last knew in the early eighteenth century. It would also be wrong to allow it to be used because its purchase was assisted by the Museums and Galleries Commission Local Museums Purchase Fund, which prohibits the use of the objects which they help museums to buy .

We publish plans, measured drawings, of many instruments and these provide the makers of reproduction instruments, such as are used by many of the early music orchestras today, with all the information that they need to recreate the instruments. Like all such plans, these are deficient in one respect, and that the most important: they are silent. And so we allow such people, the measurers and the makers, to play the instruments when they need to. How else can they tell whether they have produced an accurate copy? Their and our instruments may look the same, but only if they sound the same can they be said to be a copy. This is something that we think justifies occasional playing on even our rarest and most important instruments.

To return finally to the instrument with which we began, the Hass clavichord, Bate Collection catalogue number 9, the soundboard is marked in ink: Hieronym: Albr: Hass. / In Hambg. Anno 1743. One of each pair of wrest pins (clavichords have two strings for each note) has its note name written beside it; the other has its wire gauge number. The range is five octaves, FF-f^{'''}, with four-foot strings sounding an octave higher for FF-D. The exterior of the case is painted black, which appears to be original, as is the stand, which also may well be original. The music desk is modern. The overall length is 1755 mm, the overall width 530, the depth of the instrument 168, the *Stichmass* F-f^{'''} 490, the length of the c^{''} string 286, and the pitch at which it is maintained A=408 Hz. The instrument has been on loan to the Faculty of Music of the University of Oxford, in which the Bate Collection is housed, for many years from the Taphouse family, who were the proprietors of a long-established Oxford music shop. It was recorded as being in the T W Taphouse's Collection in an article in *The Musical Times*

of October, 1904. It was illustrated by A J Hipkins in his A Description and History of the Pianoforte, London, 1896 as being part of the Taphouse Collection, and it was exhibited as lent by Taphouse in the International Inventions Exhibition of 1885. Nothing is known of its earlier history. It was purchased by the Bate Collection in April 1993 from Mr Richard Taphouse for £30,000, less tax concession, with the aid of a grant from the National Art Collections Fund of £5,220. It was restored under the supervision of Mr Lewis Jones and has since been played, with much delight, by Trevor Pinnock, Rosalyn Tureck, and others.

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