

A Hypothesis on the Symphony
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While engaged on a study of the instruments of Beverley Minster, an idea came to me on which I would value the opinions of fellow members. As in a number of other representations, the symphony is a small rectangular instrument with the crank at the tuning peg end. This can, I think, be easily explained in that if the wheel is to be held firmly upright the axles must be securely bedded and if, as seems probable, the rectangular instruments are completely hollowed out inside as resonance chambers, the only way of doing this is by running the axle from end to end of the instrument; once one is doing this, it becomes immaterial from the maker's point of view which end of the axle carries the crank. If, as is possible, the symphony players were also familiar with the portative organ, the only other portable keyboard instrument of the period, there is nothing surprising about them preferring to crank with the left hand, instead of pushing the bellows, and playing with the right. This arrangement is thus not particularly a problem.

Where a problem does arise is the position of the keys. These run right along the body, with some of them on the wrong side of the wheel. There are far too many representations of instruments with such keys for them all to be wrong (two examples easily to my hand are Cantigas, Escorial J.b.2, f.154v and Luttrell Psalter, BL Add. ms. 42130, f.176 (plates 16 and V in my *World of Medieval & Renaissance Musical Instruments* respectively). A possibility is that the key-bars were cranked, as on the gebunden clavichord, but if one assumes, as one does, that the keys of the symphony were pushed inwards so that the tangents press the strings from the side, such an arrangement is mechanically disadvantageous, to put it mildly, whereas the clavichord arrangement of the key-bars pivoting so that tangents rise to touch the strings works alright. Now what has occurred to me is that how do we know that the key-bars of the symphony pushed in? Those of the later hurdy-gurdy do, but those of the earlier organistrum turned so that, indeed, wooden blades did rise up and stop the strings. Might an arrangement similar to that of the clavichord been possible on the symphony? .And would it have worked successfully? I can't see why not, but I would value anybody's opinion, and it would be especially interesting if anyone would like to try building such a machine.*

If I am right, two things follow from this. One is that this is how the Luttrell Psalter player could use his instrument with the keys on the upper side of the instrument, which is impossible without a spring arrangement if he is pushing the keys in (and if so, I was wrong in saying on p.30 of my book that the artist got it wrong, and Eph was right to pull me up for doing so in Comm. 44c).

The other is, was this how the clavichord started? Did a symphonist move the keys without cranking and find that he produced a sound? Certainly some of the early clavichords that Ed Bowles illustrates in his checklist in Edwin Ripin's *Keyboard Instruments* (Edinburgh UP & Dover) are very little bigger than a symphony and are only 50 years or so later than Beverley.

I would be grateful for comments as quickly as possible. because I have been writing an article on this, and if enough of you say it's impossible, I'd better cut it out before it's printed! Hence this hasty Comm.

* Ephraim Segerman did make such an instrument after reading this Comm. and it did work