



Musical Instruments

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Source: *Notable Acquisitions (Metropolitan Museum of Art)*, No. 1979/1980 (1979 - 1980), pp. 38-39

Published by: [The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1513667>

Accessed: 03/12/2013 20:46

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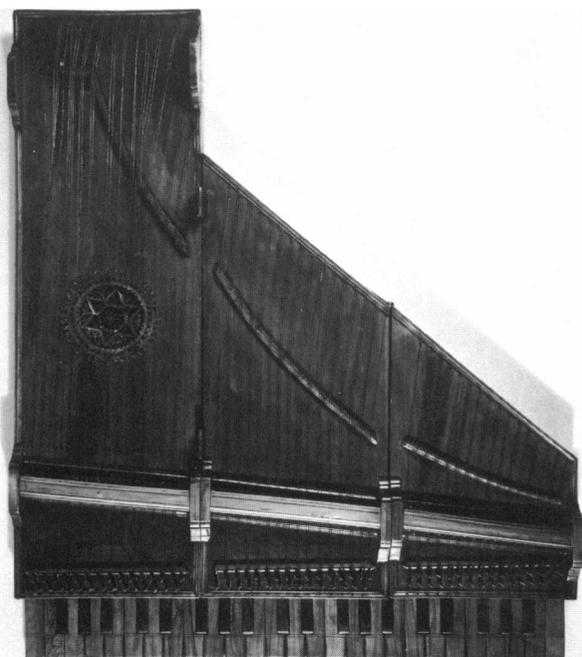
MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

CLAVECIN BRISÉ

Italian. Mid-18th century. Wood and various other materials, length 29½" (75 cm.). Gift of Chicago Historical Society. 1979.522.1

The Frenchman Jean Marius is fondly remembered for having invented popular conveniences such as umbrellas and collapsible tents. Like many another mechanical genius he also turned his busy mind to improving keyboard instruments, and in 1700 won a royal patent for his *clavecin brisé*, a portable harpsichord built in three sections that fold together into a compact box. During the twenty years of Marius's monopoly his invention earned widespread approbation. One accompanied Frederick the Great on his voyages; another entered the Medici instrument collection. After 1720 the idea was copied outside France, and until last year the only *clavecin brisé* known in the United States was a German example in our collection, dated 1757 and signed by Christianus Nonnemacker, a maker otherwise obscure. By great good fortune I located a second folding harpsichord in Chicago; it appeared in the background of an old photograph and was traced to a storeroom in the Chicago Historical Society, a childhood haunt of mine.

This unsigned harpsichord is clearly of Italian workmanship, fine in every detail but particularly noteworthy for its engraved brass hinges, lovely parchment rosette, and remarkably fresh condition. Apart from its unmistakable Italian characteristics (choice of materials; style of keyboard, moldings, and rosette; typical jack construction), this instrument is uncannily like Nonnemacker's. Their dimensions and overall plan are so similar that both makers apparently copied a single



model, perhaps from a published design. Our happy new discovery, like its northern counterpart, encompasses a range of forty-five notes and has two sets of strings sounding an octave above normal pitch. No other Italian harpsichord of this type has ever been found, and how ours came to Chicago remains a mystery. Shown side by side, these clever instruments demonstrate perfectly the manner in which baroque craftsmen gave distinctive national and personal forms to a single successful concept.

HARPSICHORD

Italian. c. 1725. Wood and various other materials, length 8' 2½" (250 cm.). Gift of Bernice Richard. 1980.146

Incomparably richer in appearance and musically more versatile than the small *clavecin brisé* is an imposing North Italian harpsichord of about 1725. The delicate instrument, restored in the mid-nineteenth century, can be removed from its elegant outer case and placed on a lower table for performance. If this were not done, the fifty-five-note keyboard would be so far above the floor that the player would be forced to stand. Performers did, in fact, often stand in this period, perhaps because they were forbidden to sit in the presence of a noble audience.

Besides protecting the thin cypress sides and soundboard of the lidless harpsichord, this outer case is a notable work of art in itself. It is over eight feet long, lightly poised on curiously disparate legs. Masterful gilt carvings, set off by a green ground, frame paintings that represent scenes from Greek mythology and, along one side, a country dance. The inside of the lid is similarly decorated. The back of the case is no less ornate than the front and lid, indicating that the instrument stood in the center of a room where it could be admired from all sides. Clearly it was meant for display in aristocratic surroundings, since no mere hired musician could have afforded such luxurious cabinetwork on his own instrument.



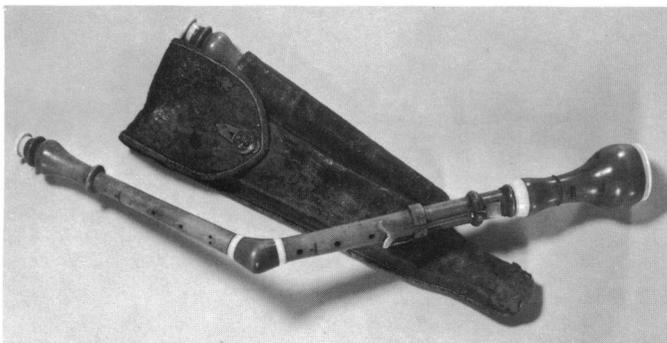
Entries by Laurence Libin, *Curator*

Of striking interest too is the disposition of the strings—three complete choirs instead of the usual two. This apparently original feature relates the harpsichord to another in our collection, similarly disposed and also beautifully encased, that was probably built in Rome for the Colonna family. Yet another of our Italian harpsichords, designed by Michele Todini about 1670, shares decorative mythological subject matter with this example, whose pictorial sources are of seventeenth-century origin. These three fine instruments represent the highest achievement of Italian builders in those distinctively baroque forms that emphasize the harpsichord's elite status.

JOHANN HEINRICH GRENSER
1764–1813

ENGLISH HORN. Late 18th century. Boxwood and ivory, length 29 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (74 cm.). Rogers Fund. 1980.111ab

Frequently nonmusicians ask this department to identify unfamiliar instruments they have found in attics or antiques shops. One visitor recently brought for inspection a peculiar two-keyed boxwood-and-ivory woodwind in an old leather case. To everyone's delight this bulbous-belled, sharply angled instrument proved to be a rare English horn by a celebrated late eighteenth-century maker, Johann Heinrich Grenser. Only one other Grenser example is known, in the Naples Conservatory. An excellent oboe by the Dresden craftsman was already in our collection; the lower-pitched English horn—actually a tenor member of the oboe family—is its ideal complement. This English horn is especially significant because of its nearly perfect condition; also, it was found with an alternate top section enabling performance at high or low pitch, a relic of the days before pitch standardization. The unusual preservation of this additional section, and of two reeds, is probably due to the holsterlike case that neatly encloses the loose parts. We can surmise that the original owner found few occasions to play his instrument. It was employed chiefly in military bands, though Mozart scored for it in three divertimenti of 1771 and 1773 and Beethoven in two trios of 1795. Soon thereafter, reformers "improved" the instrument's rich, bucolic timbre and added more keys, making our example obsolete. Now, thanks to a visitor's curiosity, we are again able to enjoy the tone and explore the technique of a pure preromantic English horn.



CHRISTIAN FREDERICK MARTIN

American. 1796?–1873

GUITAR. New York. c. 1835. Wood, length 36 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (93.5 cm.).

Rogers Fund. 1979.380ab

ANTON STAUFER

Austrian. 1805–1843

GUITAR. Vienna. c. 1835. Wood, length 33 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (84.2 cm.).

Rogers Fund. 1979.390

Guitars played an important role in nineteenth-century salon music, and Austrian luthiers in particular created designs that were widely admired. Among the most ingenious Viennese makers was Georg Stauer, best remembered for having invented the "arpeggione," a bowed guitar held like a cello, of which a fine example of 1831 is in our collection. Stauer's son Anton earned fame for his own guitars and violins, while Georg's shop foreman, Christian Frederick Martin, came to New York in 1833 to found a guitar manufactory that continues in operation today. Martin was a pioneer in introducing the parlor guitar to the United States, and his earliest instruments are highly prized.

In the past year we were fortunate in purchasing guitars by both Anton Stauer and C. F. Martin, enabling us to document the influence of Georg Stauer on the generation that succeeded him. The Martin can be dated about 1838 from the street address on its label, engraved by W. F. Harrison, who is better known for engraving exquisite bank notes. This guitar incorporates a key-operated adjustable neck that alters the angle and height of its strings. Its back and sides are of bird's-eye maple; its spruce top bears ornaments of pearl and abalone inlaid in ebony. A compartment in its fitted case holds a *capo tasto*, a padded bar that clamps over the fingerboard to change the tuning.

Stauer's guitar, made after the model of Luigi Legnani, is of small proportions, evidently intended for a lady's hand. It too has the novel adjustable neck that also appears on his father's arpeggione. These two guitars extend our collection's scope well into the romantic era, and bring us a good step closer to understanding the roots of the guitar's present popularity.