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Communications

The following communication has been received from John Koster:

As I read Grant O'Brien's *Ruckers: A Harpsichord and Virginal Building Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), questions about several of the instruments came to mind. However, I was not able to resolve them before submitting my review of the book for the 1992 issue of this JOURNAL. Since then, I have had the opportunity to re-examine these instruments and can offer the following as a supplement to the review.

O'Brien states (p. 75) that the *muselar* mother virginals made by Hans Ruckers in 1581 (now at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York) and in 1591 (now at the Yale University Collection of Musical Instruments), instead of having the usual "shaped block of wood . . . about 25mm thick attached to the spine soundboard liner" to control the radiating area of the soundboard around the left bridge, "have a much lighter piece of wood about 6mm thick restricting the tenor area in a way similar to that found in the c. 1580 Iohannes Grouwels virginal (Brussels Museum of Musical Instruments No. 2929)." The Grouwels virginal, which I examined in 1977, does indeed have such a piece—a plate, apparently made from the same quarter-sawn softwood used for the soundboard; it is about 5.5 mm thick and has a curved outline. But this component is *not* present in the 1581 and 1591 Ruckers instruments. In this area of the soundboard, the 1581 virginal has a rib between the bridge and back liner and more or less parallel to them, while the 1591 virginal has the usual shaped block found in later *muselars*.

Regarding the 1591 instrument, O'Brien further states that "it appears to have been decorated by Hans' usual soundboard decorator" (p. 238). As I noted in my review, he does not mention that the soundboard painting atypically consists only of borders and arabesques executed in gold-colored paint. Recently I observed fragments of an original arpicordum-stop batten adhering to the soundboard near the bass end of the right bridge. The painted border around the bridge occupies the area of the soundboard that would have been covered by the missing batten. Thus, it is very probable that the border and presumably the rest of the soundboard painting stem from a later period, when the arpicordum was removed during a rebuild. Because soundboard decoration of this type is similar to that found in Couchet instruments from the

1670s and 1680s, the redecoration of the 1591 virginal might have been executed in that period.

In an earlier article, I discussed a mother virginal (now at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York) made by Lodewijk Grouwels in 1600 in Middelburg, The Netherlands.¹ I suggested that this instrument's keyboard, with its compass of GG/BB to c^3 , is an eighteenth-century replacement and that, because the instrument appeared always to have had fifty strings, the original compass must have been C/E to c^3 , with five divided accidentals. O'Brien first noticed that lines were scratched by the maker on the soundboard to indicate the ends of the row of jack slots. On the basis of this feature, O'Brien suggests (p. 219) that two slots were added in the treble and one in the bass. Thus, according to him, the original compass would have had forty-seven notes, consistent with a compass of C/E to c^3 , with divided D/F \sharp and E/G \sharp keys. O'Brien mentions that X-rays of the balance rail confirm that these keys were split. Laurence Libin recently reexamined the X-rays for me and found no evidence of former balance pins for any divided keys. Both O'Brien and I (until my recent reexamination of the instrument) had failed to notice signs of original slots for only forty-five jacks. These slots had been filled in so that new ones could be cut with a narrower spacing corresponding to that of the replacement fifty-note keyboard. Therefore, the compass of the original keyboard, with forty-five notes, would doubtless have been the same as the standard Ruckers virginal compass of C/E to c^3 .

I also noted in the review that the left-hand bridge of the Grouwels virginal of 1600 is not in its original position, which is indicated by the painted borders. Therefore, what O'Brien and I have previously written about the scaling of this instrument is unfounded. It now seems probable that the underside of the soundboard was thoroughly scrubbed and perhaps even planed when it was taken out of the instrument during an early twentieth-century restoration. Thus, all evidence of any ribs or framing that might previously have been glued to the soundboard would have been effaced. The bizarre present ribbing, shown in a drawing of the instrument in my 1977 article probably does not reflect the original scheme.

1. John Koster, "The Mother and Child Virginal and Its Place in the Keyboard Instrument Culture of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Colloquium: Ruckers klavecimbels en copieën*, ed. Jeannine Lambrechts-Douillez (Antwerp: Ruckers Genootschap, 1977; also issued as Brussels Museum of Musical Instruments Bulletin, no. 7 [1978]).

O'Brien mentions (p. 254) that the bridges of the Ioannes Ruckers harpsichord of 1642 (now in the collection of Hugh Gough in New York) were extended in the treble to accommodate strings for added notes. While a few millimeters were added to the 4' bridge, the 8' bridge was certainly not extended. What might be taken for a joint near the end of the 8' bridge is a minor crack that does not pass all the way through it.

Finally, the Musée Instrumental du Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique in Paris, in its publication *Horizon 2* (February 1991), offers for sale a technical drawing of a *muselar* virginal by Ioannes Ruckers, 1610 (at the Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse in Lille). This instrument, which is not included in O'Brien's catalogue of Ruckers instruments, is probably the "1610 IR (B. 13)" cited by him (p. 283) as untraced. Donald H. Boalch, in *Makers of the Harpsichord and Clavichord 1440–1840*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 132, lists this lost virginal (Ruckers no. 13) as having been in a collection in Lille in 1927. Its reappearance is encouraging.