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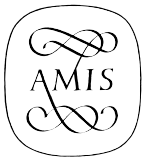

FORUM

Uprights Grand and Practical: A Matter of Definition

The 1994 JOURNAL published a communication from Kenneth Mobbs of the Mobbs Keyboard Collection in Bristol, England. Professor Mobbs expressed concern about the correct, or at least, the generally accepted, definitions of *upright grand* and *cabinet piano*. Referring to the recent book *Makers of the Piano 1700–1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) by the Editor of this JOURNAL, he noted that the American "familiar" use of these terms, according to definitions that he had seen in *Makers of the Piano* and also in Edwin M. Good's *Giraffes, Black Dragons, and Other Pianos* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), appears to differ from that of the British. Mobbs also observed that a few earlier American books on the piano described these types of piano in a manner with which he agreed and that a change may have stemmed from Professor Good's *Giraffes*. Professor Good and the Editor, both of whom have long been concerned about the lack of consistency in piano terminology, seized the opportunity to discuss one of the many problems faced by the historian of the piano. Their responses are printed here. —MNC

Cabinets and Other Pianos

I suppose it's flattering to be designated as original about something, though when it is identified as an original sin, the flattery somewhat diminishes.

If I had in fact transgressed the definitions of all the folks to whom Kenneth Mobbs refers, I would abjectly repent. But did Robert Stodart entitle his 1795 patent "Upright Grand in the form of a bookcase" or "Upright Piano in the form of a bookcase"? Rosamond Harding in the second edition of the *Piano-Forte* purports to quote the patent title and uses the former wording.[1] I do not have the patent document before me, but David S. Grover in his *Piano* calls the instrument an "Upright Grand," seeming to quote it in the latter form,[2] as I do in my *Giraffes*—

1. Rosamond Harding, *The Piano-Forte: Its History Traced to the Great Exhibition of 1851* (Old Woking, Surrey: Gresham, 1978), 347, and cf. 60.

2. David S. Grover, *The Piano: Its Story from Zither to Grand* (London: Hale, 1976), 130.

and I thought that I was quoting the patent there.[3] I would not contend that we must accept the inventor's term, nor does Mobbs insist that we must. His plea is serious and modest.

Two of the authorities Mobbs calls in favor of his terminology, Cyril Ehrlich and the *New Grove Piano*, are ambiguous about "definitions." Ehrlich, as far as I can discover, does not use the term *upright grand*, but he captions a *cabinet piano* in an illustration in his *Piano: A History* as Mobbs wishes.[4] *New Grove Piano* is just partly on his side, even in its glossary, where *upright grand pianoforte* refers only to Stodart, but *cabinet piano* covers both Mobbs's definition and tiny uprights resting on the floor, like Mathias Müller's and John Hawkins's (one of the nicer lily-gildings in piano history, called by the inventor a *portable grand piano*—another reason to distrust inventors' terms).[5]

Harding gives some price lists from Broadwood. In a list from 1828 are six models of "Cabinet Pianofortes" priced at 65 to 80 guineas, four models of "Patent Grand Cabinet Pianofortes" priced at 85 to 100 guineas, and five models of "Upright Grand Pianofortes" priced at 110 to 172 guineas.[6] Evidently the patent grand cabinet pianos are bigger than the cabinet pianos but not as large as the upright grands. A later list, dated January 1840, from Broadwood omits upright grands but lists both "Cabinet" and "Grand Patent Cabinet" pianos.[7] What are we to make of the terminology? Arthur Loesser distinguishes them by the use of Broadwood's patented iron string plate in the "grand cabinets."[8] He may be right, but I don't think that we ought to prefer Broadwood's categories any more than we should prefer inventors' terms.

David Wainwright[9] and C. F. Colt and Antony Miall[10] all use the words Mobbs prefers, as does Loesser (an American, after all). So does Sibyl Marcuse in her *Musical Instruments*, although she does not refer to Stodart's patent and includes the earlier pyramid pianos in the entry

3. Good, *Giraffes*, 103, note.

4. Cyril Ehrlich, *The Piano: A History*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), plate 3.

5. *New Grove Piano*, Grove Musical Instruments Series (London: Macmillan, 1988), 144–55.

6. Harding, *Piano-Forte*, 396–97.

7. Ibid., 399.

8. Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women, and Pianos: A Social History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 249–50.

9. David Wainwright, *Broadwood by Appointment* (London: Quiller, 1982).

10. C. F. Colt and Antony Miall, *The Early Piano* (London: Stainer and Bell, 1981).

under "upright grand."[11] But in her *Survey of Musical Instruments*, Marcuse plays even looser games with terms than I did: "Elongated uprights of harpsichord dimensions . . . set on stands were given the name 'giraffe,' " says she, wrongly, and at the end of the paragraph: "Uprights of the period were also built in cupboard form—huge rectangles—and have more recently been called grand upright pianos."[12] Apart from the fact that Marcuse is chronologically prior to me, she seems to claim that *grand upright* has been something like the "usual designation" for what Mobbs wants us to name *cabinet piano.*

Franz Josef Hirt is a counter-example. In the bilingual edition of *Meisterwerke des Klavierbaus*, *upright grand* is the generic term for large upright pianos,[13] and Hirt follows Tobias Norlind's typology of three varieties: (1) cabinet pianos with doors, (2) cabinet pianos, and (3) upright pianos without doors.[14] Norlind's second category, cabinet pianos, covers both types that Mobbs wishes to distinguish: Stodart's bookcase piano (which Hirt calls in his discussion an upright grand) and Viennese and German models "considerably lower in height." The latter no doubt coheres with Mobbs's definition of a cabinet piano, though Hirt does not refer specifically to English types. Hirt's typology, in favor of which I would not argue, shows its confusion by the fact that giraffes are placed in the third category, though every one I have ever seen has a door in the front.

I do this nit-picking simply to say that the case is clearly not of the Old World arrayed against the New, but of terminology with a history of variance. Do we help readers more by taking up a consistent terminology from now on and letting them be confused by our predecessors, or by defining clearly what we mean by our terms, whether or not we all agree about them? Is the public misled by the fact that most American writers call *pin block* and *tuning pins* what most British and some Americans call *wrest plank* and *wrest pins*? I don't think so, nor is the interchangeable use of *frame* and *plate* confusing. After all, we have gotten along perfectly well for a very long time with *bonnet* and *boot* in the United Kingdom and

11. Sibyl Marcuse, *Musical Instruments: A Comprehensive Dictionary* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964).

12. Sibyl Marcuse, *Survey of Musical Instruments* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 114.

13. Franz Josef Hirt, *Meisterwerke des Klavierbaus* (Dietikon: Urs Graf, 1981), 91–92.

14. Tobias Norlind, *Systematik der Saiteninstrumente*, vol. 2, *Geschichte des Klaviers* (Hanover and Stockholm: Distribution by Fritze, 1939).

hood and *trunk* in North America. Venturing further into the instrument world, we observe that a Russian bassoon is not a bassoon, a marine trumpet is not a trumpet, and neither the English horn nor the basset horn is a horn. Nobody seems to worry about those.

Hirt's use of *upright grand* generically for all large uprights may be a start on a typology, if we must have one. Perhaps *vertical grand* is better for definitional purposes, perhaps *large vertical* better yet. If the world's musical instrument societies held a conference for the purpose of deciding whether or not to establish a common typology for piano terms and if I were invited to express my opinion, I would argue the negative. But I should happily assist in hammering one out, should my colleagues decide to do so.

I will do one thing, now that Mobbs has called my attention to what really is an error if not a sin. Any new edition of *Giraffes, Black Dragons, and Other Pianos* will excise the words "usual designation" from the sentence that he quotes from p. 105.

EDWIN M. GOOD
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON

Pianos for the Cabinet

If I had known when I started to collect information about pianos how many different definitions there are for similar types of upright, I would have made a methodical list of them. Pandora's box was not so full of troubles as the collection of descriptions I have discovered. With every new upright patent it seems that a new descriptive term was devised. Each maker fought to be recognized as more original, and as proof of his ingenuity he was apt to submit a new name for what often turned out to be but a slight variation on the old theme. To be an Erfinder—an inventor—was important for sales, and a maker's instrument must be neuerfunden—just invented. Advertising as an industry flourished with the distribution of the piano during the early years of the nineteenth century and late in the eighteenth, as John Rice shows in his article in this JOURNAL. Early nineteenth-century promotion of drawing-room social activity around the piano was not unlike today's television advertisements for luxurious automobiles: the giraffe is to the Thunderbird what the upright grand is to the Lexus.

Any word that has been around for two centuries or so changes its meaning. Good dictionaries show that the more frequent a word's use,

the more diverse the permutations of its definition. Serious readers know this. Piano makers learned it, too, for despite their efforts through patent application and advertisement, their inventions were likely to be renamed by the public. Thus, our most familiar musical instrument proves the truth of definitional flux.

The piano has inspired meanings as individual as the person who conjures its shape in his own mind. For earlier generations of Americans the typical piano may have been the "baby" grand, an oxymoron whose masquerade was undone by its own lack of tone and volume. Our grandparents might have dismissed the upright, or vertical, piano as a turn-of-the-century monster, clumsy and devoid of any grace. As for the square—now there is a curious term, because this type, although always rectangular, was almost never square—many of our own contemporaries have seen only the cumbersome late nineteenth-century square grands, and seldom the delicate instruments appropriate to the Georgian salon and suitable for young ladies to play while their admirers listened. Germans know the square well, of course, and their term *Tafelklavier* (table piano) is more logical than ours.

Dictionaries are often more amusing than helpful. One of the better known defines the piano thus: "a large, stringed, percussion instrument played from a keyboard, each key of which operates a small, felt-covered hammer that strikes and vibrates a corresponding steel wire: the wires produce tones ranging over seven octaves and are mounted on a harp-shaped frame in a wooden case of various forms; cf. grand piano, upright piano."[15] Historians of the piano may smile at this oversimplification and the further references only to "grand piano" and "upright piano." What of the square? And the giraffe, the pyramid, the recumbent (lying, or horizontal) harp, the console, the pianino, the cottage? Did they never exist? Cabinet piano? Upright square? Upright grand? Harp piano? The lexicographers of the mid 1950s, out of ignorance or deliberate choice, declined to inform us of the bewildering variety of forms that the piano might take.

Musical lexicographers have been just as reluctant to clarify the varieties of the piano. As recently as 1986, Charles P. Fisher bypassed virtually all of them in his *Harvard Dictionary* article, although he reminded us of the *spinet*, not a type of harpsichord but the modern small upright,

15. *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Co., 1957), 1105.

or console, its name implying the intimacy both of the drawing room and an apartment's small living room.[16] Fisher mentions uprights only as "the commonest pianos in the first third of the 20th century," and there his recognition of the whole type ends. His discussion, which is general, concerns only the grand piano, his illustrations emphasizing that thesis.

Our quest for the meaning of *cabinet piano* requires that we establish a definition of *cabinet*. Here, too, we encounter problems with nomenclature. Like most misinterpretations, especially of words which have long been part of our common English vocabulary, the shades of meaning become more blurred as they take on more colors. Returning to *Webster's New World,* we find seven different definitions of the noun *cabinet*. But it is the sixth that surprises us: "(Archaic), a small room." How "archaic"? If we consult the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as I did when writing *Makers of the Piano*, we find that *cabinet* is apparently derived from *cabin*, one of its original meanings being "a little cabin, room, repository," and even a "rustic cottage."[17] The *OED* presents several early quotations using *cabinet*, among them one from 1565, "Ther is a cabinet abowte xii fowtes square. . . ." Another, from 1822, refers to "a small cabinet which he calls his study." Are we not closer here to a definition that William Stodart and his contemporaries would have recognized? Would not the Broadwoods have been advertising their cabinet pianos as appropriate for small rooms, and even small houses or country cottages? That, indeed, recalls yet another model of upright: the cottage piano.

To find the very latest in revised etymologies and lexicographical refinement, we can consult the *New Shorter OED.*[18] Here *cabinet* in its second definition is "a case or cupboard with drawers, shelves, etc. . .," and *cabinet piano* is defined as "a small upright piano."[19] *Upright piano* is listed with other facets of the general definition of "upright,"[20] but *vertical* contains no mention of a piano, nor is there a definition for any of

16. Charles P. Fisher, "Piano," *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, ed. Don Randel (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 629–35.

17. *The Oxford English Dictionary,* 12 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933; reprint 1971), 2:5–6.

18. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. Lesley Brown, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

19. Ibid., 1:313.

20. Ibid., 2:3524.

the other upright piano models in the *New Shorter OED*. However, this should not lead us to conclude that any of the various upright types are in any way mongrels; they are all legitimate and deserve our appraisal.

In his "Technical Appendix" to *Broadwood by Appointment*, Wainwright presents short essays on each of the Broadwood models: "The Upright Grand," "The Cabinet," and "The Upright."[21] Broadwood's upright "was originally and for many years known as the cottage piano" and was invented by William Southwell, Robert Wornum, and Frederick William Collard.[22] Broadwood's upright grand was, as Mobbs explained in his 1994 "Communication," a grand turned up to rest on its keyboard end and placed on a four-legged stand; but the cabinet was a legless upright grand turned upside down, so that the tuning (wrest) pins were at the top of the instrument and its tail close to the floor.[23] In German terminology the latter is usually the *Schrankflügel* (cabinet grand), but see van der Meer's *Musikinstrumente*, where a Clementi that fits Mobbs's description of an upright grand is illustrated and called a *Schrankflügel*.[24]

All the permutations of my *upright grand* definition in *Makers* are acceptable, I think, if we remember that *cabinet* formerly meant small room, only peripherally having to do with cupboards, shelves, or doors. However, I never intended to add even the smallest bit of confusion and uncertainty to an already bloated list of piano-model definitions. Good wonders in the companion essay to mine, whether it is better to embrace a "consistent terminology from now on" or simply define our terms so that everyone understands them. I would choose the latter. Let rectangles continue to be squares and wings to be grands. Therefore, I have bowed gratefully to Kenneth Mobbs's earnest plea for universal, or at least intercontinental, agreement and reduced my own terms to their simplest forms: *upright grand* and *cabinet piano*. And so they appear, more "correctly" defined, in the second printing (1995) of *Makers of the Piano 1700–1820*.

Ending this essay on a whimsical note, I would like to share my favorite upright name. It appeared in a "Nachricht von einigen neuerfundenen musikalischen Instrumenten des Herrn Joseph Wachtl, bürgl. Orgel- und Instrumentmacher in Wien" (announcement of some newly

21. Wainwright, *Broadwood*, 326–31.

22. Ibid., 330.

23. Ibid., 329.

24. John Henry van der Meer, *Musikinstrumente: Von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Prestel, 1983), 252.

invented musical instruments by Herr Joseph Wachtl, citizen and maker of organs and other instruments in Vienna) in the *Clavier-Stimmbuch,* a small tuning-and-care manual edited by Gall and published in Vienna in 1805. The publisher Carl Kupffer informed the reader that Wachtl's pianos were ideal for "a small room." With his "Pyramidenförmiges" (pyramid), his "grosses Harfenförmiges" (giraffe), and his "Organisirtes Pianoforte" (organized piano, or organ-square), Wachtl offered a coup de théâtre: his *Aufrecht stehendes Quer-Pianoforte in Form einer Harfe, die in diagonaler Richtung auf einem Tischchen steht.* What is described here seems to have been a *Querflügel* (or perhaps a miniaturized version of a Wachtl giraffe) turned upward and set diagonally to the right atop a small table. The new placement allowed the maker to enlarge the soundboard, thereby widening the distance between the hammers and providing a tone stronger than that of the "liegende Quer-Pianoforte." This domestic marvel was available in cherry with black naturals, walnut with black or ivory [*sic*] naturals, and mahogany with ivory naturals; all models boasted two stops: forte and piano. What lady of fashion could resist such an instrument, or its grandiose name? We can well imagine the impression she made when she invited her friends to see and hear this charming addition to her cabinet.

MARTHA NOVAK CLINKSCALE
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE