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Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. John Koster. *Keyboard Musical Instruments in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*. With contributions by Sheridan Germann and John T. Kirk. Illustrated by Stephen Korber and the author. Boston: The Museum, 1994. xl, 368 pp.: 16 color photographs, 242 black-and-white photographs, 79 line drawings. ISBN: 0-87846-401-8. \$85.00

This can be called, without reservation, a sumptuous book. This is not to say that we have not seen elegant catalogs before; Nicholas Bessaraboff's *Ancient Musical Instruments*¹ surely has pride of place as far as visual and bibliophilic delights are concerned, and even the old Belle Skinner catalog² is a pleasure to scan. But as far as scholarly and technical details are concerned, these volumes offer only the merest tantalizing hints. More recent catalogs, to be sure, address these details with care and outstanding scholarship, although in less lavish format. In the realm of keyboard collections Howard Schott's catalog of the holdings of the Victoria & Albert Museum³ and the Gernhardt, Henkel, and Schrammek catalog of organs and harmoniums in the Leipzig University collection⁴ are among those which have set the standard by which subsequent efforts of this type may be judged. And by this standard Koster's work measures up admirably.

As an entity, the musical instrument collection at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts can be said to date from 1917, when William Lindsey acquired the lifetime collection of Canon Francis W. Galpin, the noted turn-of-the-century British organologist and author, and presented it to the Museum in memory of his daughter, a victim of the sinking of the *Lusitania* at the outbreak of World War I. Although Galpin's collection was highly eclectic in nature, it contained significant holdings in keyboard instruments and helped from the outset to establish the Museum collection's strength in this area. A virginal and a spinet, both Italian and

1. Nicholas Bessaraboff, *Ancient European Musical Instruments: An Organological Study of the Musical Instruments in the Leslie Lindsey Mason Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, preface by E. J. Hipkins, foreword by F. W. Galpin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941).

2. William Skinner, ed., *The Belle Skinner Collection of Old Musical Instruments, Holyoke, Massachusetts: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Philadelphia: Beck Engraving, 1933).

3. Howard Schott, *Keyboard Instruments*, vol. 1 of *Catalogue of Musical Instruments, Victoria and Albert Museum*, 2d ed., 2 vols. (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1978–85).

4. Klaus Gernhardt, Hubert Henkel, and Winfried Schrammek, *Orgelinstrumente, Harmoniums*, vol. 6 of *Katalog: Musikinstrumenten-Museum der Karl-Marx-Universität Leipzig* (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1983).

dating from the beginning of the seventeenth century, originated in the Galpin collection, and Lindsey continued to donate historic instruments to the Museum.

More recently, important instruments from other private collections have arrived to further strengthen the Museum's holdings. Edward F. Searles of Methuen, Massachusetts, heir to the Southern Pacific Railroad fortune (via his late wife), was a collector who boasted perhaps the largest instrument ever to be "collected"—the 1863 "Great Organ," formerly in Boston's downtown Music Hall, for which he built a private concert hall (now in public hands and in regular use). But his taste in fine keyboard instruments also extended to such things as a seventeenth-century regal and the splendid Henri Hemsch double harpsichord, which, with several other instruments, were willed by Searles to Benjamin Allen Rowland and given to the Museum by Rowland's heirs in 1981. The name of the distinguished organologist, collector, and author Edward M. Ripin will be familiar to all who read these pages; in 1977 many items from this connoisseur's collection were acquired by purchase and added to the Museum collection, including a Kirkman harpsichord fitted with an added piano action and an elegant Viennese piano by Ehlers.

American artifacts have always been a strong element in the Museum's holdings, particularly with regard to prints, paintings, and furniture. Through various individual gifts and purchases a number of important American keyboard instruments, many by Boston makers, have found their way into the collection. Indeed, with but one exception, all of the instruments dating from the second half of the nineteenth century (mostly pianos and reed organs) are American, and from the first half of the nineteenth century one finds pianos by such historically important American makers as Geib, Crehore, Babcock, and Osborne. It is a pity that one of the rarest and most unique of the Museum's American instruments, an early nineteenth-century Boston claviorganum, was not acquired until after the completion of the book.

Until fairly recent times the instrument collection was something of an "orphan" among the Museum's holdings, located in the cellar (one door down from the boiler room) and inaccessible to the general public. It was, nonetheless, lovingly tended for many years by Narcissa Williamson, who maintained it on a severely restricted budget, and by her successor Barbara Lambert, who was the first to lobby for a better location with more public access and better climate control. This has since

become a reality, and while not all of the collection's keyboard instruments can be accommodated in this attractively laid-out space at any one time, some of the most outstanding are now regularly on display, and those that have been restored are occasionally used in concerts.

Bessaraboff's 1941 opus dealt only with the instruments in the Leslie Lindsey Mason (Galpin) collection, keyboard and non-keyboard; instruments from other sources are not mentioned. Since then occasional brief pamphlets and journal articles have helped to keep pace with the growth of the collection, but something of greater scope has been wanting for some time. Koster's catalog of the keyboard instruments is both an impressive start to what one hopes will be a complete series on the Museum's instruments and a sign that American organologists are catching up with the Europeans in this regard.

There seems to be a trend to arrange instrument catalogs chronologically, and I for one like this approach for what it teaches about the development of the instruments. While Koster interleaves the stringed and wind instruments via this method, the manageable number of objects (fifty-four) tends to minimize any problems that might be caused by this. It also means that the occasional instruments that combine categories (a harpsichord-piano or a piano-harmonium) simply fall into their natural chronological niche and need not be chopped in two and divided between two catalogs (or categories), as actually happened to an instrument in a German collection.

There are many strengths in this catalog that will make it a useful reference work for some time to come, as well as a model for the curators of other American collections. Most obvious, perhaps, is the fine photography and reproduction, both color and black-and-white. Not only are all instruments pictured as a whole, but nearly all have supplementary photographs showing important details of ornamentation, keyboards, soundboards, action, makers' labels, harpsichord jacks, organ pipes, etc. Also in the realm of graphics are the many fine line drawings. Not every instrument is given the same amount of graphics, but many of the unique or most representative ones are treated in satisfying detail. The fine 1680 Couchet harpsichord (with additions by Blanchet and Taskin) not only rates seven photographs, but four drawings of action and construction details. Ten photographs show action and decoration details of a 1796 Broadwood piano, and there are three drawings as well. The 1692 German regal likewise rates ten photographs, plus a section drawing of the windchest and a measured diagram of the parts of one of the reed pipes.

Impressive as the graphics are, it is the textual material that distinguishes this volume. All entries begin with a statement of provenance and a list of references in other written sources when applicable, followed by a description of the various aspects of the instrument—action, construction, materials, decoration, etc. Included in many (but not all) entries are string lengths or pipe dimensions, as well as descriptions of any alterations or additions. These “nuts-and-bolts” details are followed by a scholarly evaluation of the instrument, with information about its maker (where known), its generic style, dating (where it is questionable), and sometimes comparison with similar extant instruments and commentary on musical use. Occasionally the footnotes become the tail that wags the dog; in a few entries they take up nearly as much space as the actual text.

Koster is a thorough scholar in all aspects of keyboard instruments, but his major field of expertise is in harpsichords and fortepianos, and the outstanding specimens of these receive lavish, even loving attention. Sometimes a dramatic little footnote to history appears, as in the case of an elaborate Sheraton-designed Broadwood piano (1796), whose original owner was Manuel de Godoy of Spain—possibly the only courtier to be made Prime Minister (rather than beheaded) after openly cuckolding a king.

Perhaps it is inevitable that a few value judgments slip into any discussion of individual instruments. Many of these are laudatory or simply neutral (most of the accounts of square pianos are rendered with minimal enthusiasm), but a few fall on the pejorative side, as when melodeons as a class are rated, in their socio-economic and musical aspects, as “the equivalent of the modern Casiotone.” In all, however, there is precious little to criticize and a vast amount to praise in this painstaking, scholarly, and lucidly written catalog.

Appendixes to the work include a list of seven modern copies of historic instruments in the collection, all but two of which (a clavichord and a harpsichord made by Chickering to Arnold Dolmetsch’s specifications) are of little consequence, and glossaries of wood terminology and technical terms used in the text. There is also an extensive bibliography and an index of names.

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