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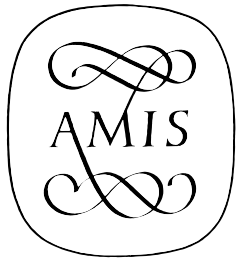

# Let the *Cembali* Come Out of the Attics! New Light Cast on Pianos Made in Milan at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century: The Instruments of the Elli Brothers and Gaetano Scappa

Elena Previdi

Up to now, scholars have shown little interest in early Italian piano makers (with the understandable exception of the earliest, Bartolomeo Cristofori, and his first pupils).[1] The lack of surviving Italian instruments from the second half of the eighteenth century has led to the belief that Italy's harpsichord makers did not, as would naturally be expected, convert to piano making during those years, and that Italian buyers turned to foreign imports for their instruments. Does this mean that the centuries-long Italian harpsichord-making tradition simply vanished into thin air in a matter of decades, with no follow-up industries emerging to take its

1. The only comprehensive study of the piano in Italy is Patrizio Barbieri, "Italy, Piano Industry in," in *Encyclopedia of Keyboard Instruments,* vol. 1, *The Piano,* ed. Robert Palmieri and Margaret W. Palmieri (New York: Routledge, 2003). However, with the exception of Cristofori and his first followers, not one Italian name is to be found among the hundreds of entries dedicated to individual piano makers in the same volume. A few Italian workshops are listed in Martha Novak Clinkscale, *Makers of the Piano,* vol. 1, *1700–1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) and *Makers of the Piano,* vol. 2, *1820–1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). In Rosamond Harding, *The Piano-Forte: Its History Traced to the Great Exhibition of 1851* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1973; 2nd ed., Old Woking, UK: Gresham Press, 1978), there is almost no discussion of the Italian piano. For information on the Florentine school after Cristofori, see in particular Stewart Pollens, *The Early Pianoforte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 96–117; see also John A. Rice, "The Tuscan Piano in the 1780s: Some Builders, Composers and Performers," *Early Music* 21 (1993): 4–26, and Pierluigi Ferrari and Giuliana Montanari, "Presenza del pianoforte alla corte del Granducato di Toscana 1770–1859: Uno studio documentario, con riferimenti alle vicissitudini di clavicembali, spinette e spinettoni," *Recercare* 7 (1995): 163–211 and 8 (1996): 59–153. On the Neapolitan piano, see Paologiovanni Maione and Francesca Seller, "Prime ricognizioni archivistiche sui costruttori di pianoforti a Napoli nell'Ottocento," *Liuteria musica e cultura 1997* (Lucca: LIM Editrice, 1998): 21–41, and Vincenzo Vitale, *Il pianoforte a Napoli nell'Ottocento* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1983); for Turin, see Annarita Colturato, "Un'industria 'troppo imperfetta': La fabbricazione dei pianoforti a Torino nell'Ottocento," *Fonti Musicali Italiane* 12 (2007): 167–214, and Daniele Poletto, "Presenza di strumenti a tastiera alla corte sabauda: Prima ricognizione," *Fonti Musicali Italiane* 12 (2007): 215–25.

place? It is true that occurrences of whole industries disappearing practically overnight may be found in the history of instrument making.[2] In the case of the Italian harpsichord industry, however, such a belief may now be strongly contested.

The city of Milan offers an excellent field for research into this issue and, at the same time, a control case for other similar investigations. During the course of my study of the traces of the Milanese craftsman Gaetano Elli (ca. 1740–1809),[3] several surviving pianos have materialized (fig. 1). These instruments, which are the subject of this article, were found in attics, barns, ancient manor houses in the process of being dismantled, and austere houses of the Lombard bourgeoisie, as well as, in rare cases, on the antiques market. They came out of their long and anonymous confinement humiliated by the treatment they had received through the years. With the reappearance of these instruments (and also instruments by other makers), it is now necessary to revise the long-held notion that the contribution of Italian craftsmen to the field of piano making at the dawn of Romanticism was at best marginal. In fact, the Milanese *cembalari* (makers of stringed keyboard instruments) never ceased their activity during the latter part of the eighteenth century. Those craftsmen who had worked as harpsichord makers transformed themselves into piano makers without interrupting production. The very name by which they called their instruments gives testimony to this fact: the Italian word for harpsichord, *cembalo,* was used as a synonym for *pianoforte* well into the nineteenth century.[4] Curiously, though, most of this production activity was focused on a single type of instrument, the

2. In Italy, for example, the viola da gamba and its players disappeared by about 1630, as cellos with reduced dimensions and using the new overspun strings became common. Foreign travelers reported that it was difficult to find viols or good players; see Stephen Bonta, "From Violone to Violoncello? A Question of Strings," this JOURNAL 3 (1977): 64–99, and Ian Woodfield, *The Early History of the Viol* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 217.

3. Elli's death notice, which I uncovered in 2008, certifies that he died on July 13, 1809 (Milan, Archivio Storico Civico, *Registro dei Morti*, 1809, n° 2199; see also, in the same archive, "Nota delle persone morte dal giorno 9 a tutto il giorno 15 luglio nelle parrocchie della città, e circondario esterno di Milano estratta dal Registro presso la Deputazione di Sanità," n° 28, July 13, 1809). Elli's baptismal record has not yet been found, but since he was sixty-eight when he died on July 13, he must have been born in 1740 or 1741.

4. In the *Guida di Milano* the use of *cembalo* in place of *pianoforte* occurs as late as 1856. See *Guida di Milano per l'anno 1856: Anno XXXIII* (Milan: Giuseppe Bernardoni, 1856), quoted in Elena Previdi, "I costruttori milanesi di strumenti musicali nelle guide commerciali dell'Ottocento," *Fonti Musicali Italiane* 9 (2004): 133–83.

FIGURE 1. Square piano "Fratelli Elli - Milano 1794" (piano No. 4). Modena, private collection; photograph by the author.

so-called *fortepiano a tavolino* (square piano). Every piano that emerged during this study was of this type.[5]

5. On the square piano, see *Geschichte und Bauweise des Tafelklaviers*, ed. Boje E. Hans Schmuhl, Michaelsteiner Konferenzberichte 68 (Blankenburg am Harz: Kultur- und Forschungsstätte Michaelstein; Augsburg: Wißner, 2006); Conny Restle, "Clavichord und Tafelklavier: Bautechnische, mechanische sowie klangliche Gemeinsamkeiten," in "*Fundament aller Clavirten Instrumenten*": *Das Clavichord: Symposium im Rahmen der 26. Tage alter Musik in Herne 2001,* ed. Christian Ahrens and Gregor Klinke (Munich: Katzbichler, 2003), 45–52; Michael Cole, "Tafelklaviere in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum: Some Preliminary Observations," *Galpin Society Journal* 50 (1997): 180–207; Cole, *The Pianoforte in the Classical Era* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Hubert Henkel, *Besaitete Tasteninstrumente* (Frankfurt am Main: Erwin Bochinsky, 1994); John Koster, *Keyboard Musical Instruments in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1994); Sabine K. Klaus, "German Square Pianos with *Prellmechanik* in Major American Museum Collections: Distinguishing Characteristics of Regional Schools in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," this JOURNAL 24 (1998): 27–80; Klaus, "German Square and Harp-Shaped Pianos with *Stoßmechanik* in American Collections: Distinguishing Characteristics of Regional Types in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," this JOURNAL 27 (2001): 120–82; Klaus, *Studien zur Entwicklungsgeschichte besaiteter Tasteninstrumente bis etwa*

### *Piano Music in Milan at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century*

The square piano was exactly the right instrument to meet the needs of the Milanese market around the turn of the nineteenth century. Milan was at that time fast becoming the most culturally advanced among the Italian cities—in music, in particular—thanks to the interest taken in that art by the enlightened aristocracy and the enterprising middle class of that city. The city gained increasingly more prominence over the course of the nineteenth century, while in the realm of household music the piano began its swift climb to the top. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, opera was by far the most popular musical genre in Milan. Every new hit aria or duet sung on the stage of La Scala was immediately in demand, and countless reductions of operatic music for *pianoforte, fortepiano, forte-piano,* and *piano-forte* were published, for solo performance, for voice with piano, and for piano with various other instruments (fig. 2). A large collection of these Milanese piano reductions of operatic music is found in the library of the Conservatorio di musica Giuseppe Verdi in Milan, which contains many scores from the private collections that once constituted the music libraries of members of Milanese and Lombard high society (it is, in fact, the largest collection of nineteenth-century Italian editions in the world).

A survey of such editions from the early 1800s provides information on the type of instrument they were intended for: only limited ranges are used; dynamic signs are mostly restricted to *piano* and *forte* (with sporadic appearances of *pianissimo*, *fortissimo*, *rinforzato,* and a very few others); *crescendi* and *diminuendi* are practically non-existent; there are few indications for *mutazioni* (stops); and articulation markings are very rare, with the exception of *staccato,* which is abundantly used. Were it not for the latter marking, which is undoubtedly pianistic, one might think that these scores were intended to be played on the harpsichord (fig. 3). From a purely technical point of view, extremely simple idiomatic writing

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*1830 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Instrumente im Musikinstrumentenmuseum im Münchner Stadtmuseum* (PhD diss., Tübingen University, 1994; microfiche ed., Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1998), vol. 4, *Tafelklaviere;* Kurt Birsak, "Salzburger Klaviere," *Salzburger Museum Carolino Augusteum Jahresschrift* 34 (1988): 8–176. Some Italian square pianos are listed in *Alla ricerca dei suoni perduti: Arte e musica negli strumenti della collezione di Fernanda Giulini: Milano e Briosco / In Search of Lost Sounds: Art and Music in the Instruments Collection of Fernanda Giulini: Milan and Briosco,* ed. John Henry van der Meer (Briosco: Villa Medici Giulini, 2006).


FIGURE 2. Ferdinando Orlandi, *Cavatina La vedovella senza marito nell'opera La dama soldato* (Milan: Ricordi, 1808), "forte-piano" score, title page. Milan, Biblioteca del Conservatorio di musica Giuseppe Verdi.

is used,[6] and both harmony and rhythm are simplified. Thus, the pieces seem intended for amateurs, perhaps even for sight-reading at home. As far as range is concerned, suffice it to say that an analysis of all the surviving Ricordi reductions of the operas produced in Milan, Bologna, and Cremona in the year 1808 reveals that these arrangements (all also from the year 1808) never required a keyboard with notes below AA nor above f‴. The Milanese *pianoforti a tavolino* were perfectly suited to playing music of this type.

### *Milanese Piano Workshops*

No grand piano made by Milanese craftsmen is known to have survived to the present day, with the exception of the well-known instru-

6. Such choices on the part of the arrangers become even more evident when it is possible to compare the reduction with the full score.

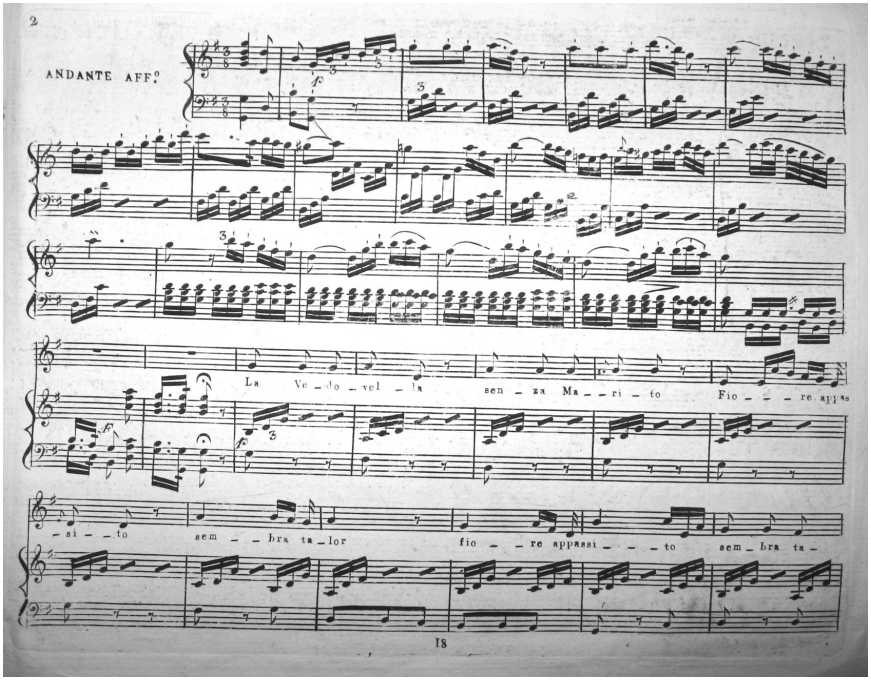


Figure 3. Ferdinando Orlandi, *Cavatina La vedovella senza marito,* "forte-piano" score, p. 2.

ment of 1799 by Baldassare Pastori,[7] which is, however, a *Tangentenflügel.* This instrument, luxurious in comparison to other known Milanese pianos of the time, none of which are decorated in a figurative style, was based on instruments by Franz Jakob Späth and Friedrich Schmal,[8] and it stands out in the panorama of Milanese piano making as an exception. Grand pianos were indeed made by Milanese *cembalari:* in 1786 a Roman magazine advertised the fact that the "abilissimo artefice di musica" (most able musical craftsman) Gaetano Elli in Milan had made a grand piano with several stops the year before. This reference would seem to indicate an unusual event in instrument making, and the instrument "di

7. Milan, private collection.

8. Giovanni Paolo Di Stefano, "Tangentenflügel and other Pianos with Non-Pivoting Hammers," *Galpin Society Journal* 61 (2008): 79–104, esp. 101–2. The first description of this instrument is found in Elena Ferrari Barassi, "Un raro esemplare di fortepiano milanese," in *Restauro, conservazione e recupero di antichi strumenti musicali* (Florence: Olschki, 1986), 111–23.

nobile struttura a piccoli martelli" (of noble construction with small hammers) described there must indeed have been out of the ordinary: it was also fitted with a music desk that automatically turned the pages.[9]

Apart from these examples, it is evident that the thriving group of craftsmen working in the Milan area was mainly dedicated to the manufacture of pianos for domestic use. Thus, they were probably supplying those amateur musicians whose profiles are musically silhouetted in the pages of the opera reductions described above. Square pianos take up little room and, above all, do not require a large outlay of money. In the production of more sophisticated grand pianos, the Milanese instrument makers found themselves in competition with makers beyond the Alps. Traces of the importation of grand pianos from Vienna[10] become ever more visible with the passage of time, and even a nearly twenty-year period of French domination—1796–98, then 1800–1815, a relatively brief interruption in a very long period of Austrian rule—does not seem to have altered this tendency.[11] Two influences in particular contributed

9. Patrizio Barbieri, "Giuseppe Sarti, fisico acustico e teorico musicale," in *Giuseppe Sarti musicista faentino*, ed. Mario Baroni and Maria Gioia Tavoni (Modena: Mucchi, 1986), 238. Barbieri includes the following quotation from the *Giornale delle belle arti e della incisione, antiquaria, musica e poesia per l'anno 1786* (Rome): 4–5: "Il Sig. Gaetano Elli dimorante nella Città di Milano abilissimo artefice di musica ha nel decorso anno 1785 terminato un Cimbalo grande, di nobile struttura a piccoli martelli, con varietà di registri a piano e forte, e con un unione [*sic*] ammirabile di gratissime sonore voci" (Mr. Gaetano Elli, resident in the City of Milan and most able musical craftsman, in the past year of 1785 completed a grand piano, of noble construction with small hammers, with a variety of stops both in piano and forte, and with the admirable union of the most pleasantly sonorous voices).

10. See Gianna Melloni, *Costruzione e commercio di strumenti musicali nelle botteghe milanesi dell'Ottocento* (Lucca: LIM, 2005), esp. 50–57, and Renato Meucci, "I costruttori di pianoforte a Milano tra XVIII e XIX secolo," in *Il pianoforte in Italia*, ed. Marco Di Pasquale (forthcoming), which the author most kindly allowed me to consult prior to publication. I wish to thank Renato Meucci for his fundamental support in this research, in particular for his supply of constant and disinterested information, critique, and advice. The issue of the importation of Viennese instruments into Italy, and in particular to Milan, has recently begun to come under investigation, but a detailed study of the subject is still lacking. On the presence of Schantz pianos in Italy, see Giovanni Paolo Di Stefano, "Johann Schantz e i pianoforti viennesi in Italia," in *Johann Schantz*, ed. Giovanni Paolo Di Stefano, Fernando Mazzocca, and Grant O'Brien (Briosco: Villa Medici Giulini, forthcoming). Thanks to Di Stefano's work, which he kindly allowed me to read prior to publication, we can safely say that Schantz grand pianos were a strong presence on the Italian market. On Viennese piano makers, see Richard Maunder, *Keyboard Instruments in Eighteenth-Century Vienna* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

11. Under both Austrian and French rule, Milan was the capital of the Venetian Lombard Territory. Of the entire Austro-Hungarian Empire, Lombardy was surely the most financially productive province.

to the popularity of imported instruments: the discovery by the Milanese of the rapidly growing literature of pieces written specifically for the piano, for the most part outside Italy;[12] and the rise of a new and thoroughly nineteenth-century phenomenon: the piano virtuoso—the conservatory in Milan, founded in 1808, had its own *scuola di pianoforte* (piano class), around which a small army of demanding keyboard professionals was soon to grow up.[13]

A close scrutiny of Milanese commercial indexes from the last decade of the eighteenth century through the middle of the nineteenth enabled me to create a list of craftsmen operating during that era. Among the large number of names that emerged, most were completely unknown, while a few were at least linked to a particular instrument that has survived into the twenty-first century. Very few of these craftsmen (only two out of about twenty) have more than one surviving piano to their names. Furthermore, not one of them had been the subject of a research project until recently.[14]

A chance glimpse a few years ago into the life story of one of these craftsmen, Gaetano Elli, opened a window onto a *cembalo* (piano)-making industry that now seems rather significant. To any reader curious to find out more about this remarkable man's most adventurous and eccentric public life, I recommend my article on Elli.[15] Born in Paderno,

12. A significant exception is the series of sonatas by Francesco Giuseppe Pollini, a prominent pianist who lived in Milan, but cultivated close ties with Vienna. In his sonatas, he made full use of a wider compass than was normal in Milan at the time, to the point of dwelling on the upper and lower extremes of the keyboard. These works simply cannot be played on the Milan-made square pianos under discussion here.

13. During the early years of the Milan Conservatory, the piano's role was mainly limited to accompanying. Only after 1816 did the first fruits of the Conservatory's commitment to the piano begin to ripen, as the first graduate students arrived. Pollini, who taught piano from his home from the early years of the nineteenth century (he never taught at the Conservatory), was, in fact, the true founder of the prestigious Milanese school of piano playing. See Marina Vaccarini Gallarani, "Modelli culturali e contenuti dell'istruzione musicale," in *Milano e il suo Conservatorio 1808–2002,* ed. Guido Salvetti (Milan: Skira, 2002), 125–210, esp. 133–34. Pollini's *Metodo pel clavicembalo* (Milan: Ricordi, [1811]), commissioned by the Conservatory, was the first piano method published in Italy.

14. For the list of Milanese piano makers operating from 1791 to 1860, see Previdi, "I costruttori milanesi di strumenti musicali." An inventory dedicated specifically to Italian piano makers from the beginning of this trade to the present day is currently being compiled by Patrizio Barbieri and Marco Di Pasquale.

15. Elena Previdi, "Gaetano Elli, costruttore di strumenti musicali e patriota milanese," *Recercare* 14 (2002): 217–33.

he came to Milan from Brianza;[16] he was a revolutionary who worked his way up through the ranks to the highest levels of the Cisalpine hierarchy, eventually becoming a legislator of the Italian Republic. His reputation as a first-rate wood craftsman gained him privileged access to men of power, first among the Austrians and then among the French. On account "of his talents, especially the mechanical ones," he was elected as *socio corrispondente* (corresponding member) to the prestigious *Società Patriotica* (*Patriotic Society*) of Milan in 1786. This society, which honored the work of eminent scientists, craftsmen, and intellectuals as representative of Milanese culture and encouraged further developments in these fields, was founded and promoted by the Austrians.[17] Later (in a complete turnaround) Elli accepted commissions from Napoleon himself. Even his political adversaries, while criticizing him as a terrible city administrator, recognized his excellence as an instrument maker.

Elli was certainly not the only piano maker in Milan, but no research has yet been carried out on other important figures in this industry from those days. It is a particular shame that no work has been done on Antonio Battaglia, once noted only as a psaltery maker, but who, at least toward the end of his working life, turned ever more to piano making;[18] on the various members of the Piantanida, Pastori, Barbanti or Prestinari families; or on Gaetano Scappa (a maker of elegant and refined instruments who will be discussed below) and others working around the turn of the nineteenth century. Very little documentary material has so far been brought to light on these people; but thanks to the fact that the seeds of such a project have finally been sown in the work of Renato

16. Gaetano Elli's death notice indicates that he was born in Paderno. Brianza is an area northeast of Milan famed for its intense industrial activity. See n. 3 above.

17. The *Società Patriotica* [not "Patriottica" as one usually finds] was founded by Empress Maria Theresia in 1776. See Previdi, "Gaetano Elli, costruttore di strumenti musicali," 220–22.

18. See *Il servitore di piazza ad uso di commercio per la città di Milano: Per l'anno 1791* (Milan: Veladini, 1791), 77, which identifies him specifically as a *costruttore di cembali;* in this period Battaglia was in the twilight of his working life, and so it may be deduced that in the preceding years he had gradually converted from psaltery making to piano making. Just one of this brilliant craftsman's pianos is presently known. Kept in the Museo degli Strumenti Musicali in Milan's Sforzesco Castle, it reveals, inside the usual *a tavolino* form, a thoroughly innovative action; see Augusto Bonza, "Strumenti a tastiera," in *Musei e gallerie di Milano: Museo degli Strumenti Musicali,* ed. Andrea Gatti (Milan: Electa, 1997), 375–76, inv. no. 615, catalog no. 481: "Pianoforte a tavolo ottavino, Antonio Battaglia, Milano, 1778." I am very grateful to Augusto Bonza for his help in every phase of the present study.

Meucci,[19] we can hope that this important field of research will receive more attention in the near future.

### *The Fratelli Elli and Their Eight Surviving Pianos*

It has long been a mystery why the Elli pianos were signed "Fratelli Elli" (Elli Brothers), when all the available evidence pointed to their being the work of Gaetano Elli alone. But Gaetano apparently had a brother, Pietro Francesco, who was also his business partner.[20] Pietro Francesco was, in fact, an *organaro* (organ builder).[21] This may be why he is not named in any of those documentary sources that praise Gaetano's expertise: we may suppose that the two brothers collaborated in the construction of all the firm's instruments, but that Gaetano was principally responsible for the making of pianos and Francesco for the maintenance of the organs of several Milanese churches.[22]

Seven pianos by the Elli brothers had been located as of 2008, allowing us to carry out a comparative analysis. An eighth piano, sold on the antiques market some years ago, is known through a photograph. The eight pianos were made over a fifteen-year period, from 1786 to 1801 (table 1). With the exception of those few kept in collections that are open to the public, these pianos had never before been studied. The pianos, all *a tavolino* instruments, will be described one by one, so as to draw connections between the time of construction of each instrument and the life and times of Gaetano Elli.

19. Meucci, "I costruttori di pianoforte a Milano tra XVIII e XIX secolo" (see n. 10 above); see also Melloni, *Costruzione e commercio di strumenti musicali,* 17–31, 50–57; Previdi, "I costruttori milanesi di strumenti musicali"; and Previdi, "Il fortepiano milanese fra Sette ed Ottocento: Una prima ricognizione," in *La cultura del fortepiano / Die Kultur des Hammerklaviers: 1770–1830; Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Roma, 26–29 maggio 2004, Istituto Storico Austriaco, Istituto Storico Germanico, Società Italiana di Musicologia,* ed. Richard Bösel (Bologna: Ut Orpheus, 2009), 281–97.

20. Renato Meucci, personal communication, 2008. Meucci has also been able to trace the names of Gaetano's children Giovanni Battista and Caterina. All of the members of the Elli family were registered in the Milanese parish of San Raffaele in the years 1790–91.

21. See Melloni, *Costruzione e commercio di strumenti musicali* (2005), 97–98. Melloni wrote about Francesco Elli some years before Meucci's discovery of his tie with Gaetano, but we can now confirm that this "Francesco Elli" is Gaetano's brother.

22. It is not known if he only repaired the organs of these Milanese churches, or if he also constructed new ones. The figure of Francesco Elli awaits further investigation. The fact that he was an organ builder clarifies the confusion wrought by certain political sources, which credit Gaetano with this profession (see Previdi, "Gaetano Elli, costruttore di strumenti musicali," 218).

Table 1. Surviving square pianos by the Elli brothers, Milan.

| No. | Date | Current ownership | Compass | Action | Present state of preservation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1786 | Ferrara, private coll. | C–f‴ | *Stoßmechanik* without escapement | Critical, almost destroyed |
| 2 | 1789 | Milan, private coll. | C–f‴ | *Stoßmechanik* without escapement | Reasonably good original (?) condition |
| 3 | 1791 | Milan, private coll. | FF–f‴ | *Prellmechanik* without escapement | Never restored; original (?) condition |
| 4 | 1794 | Modena, private coll. | FF–f‴ | *Stoßmechanik* with escapement | Functional restoration in 2005 |
| 5 | undated (presum. 1794–95) | Milan, private coll. | FF–f‴ | *Stoßmechanik* with escapement | Traces of limited restoration work carried out during the 20th century |
| 6 | 1799 | Naples, Conservatorio di musica S. Pietro a Majella | FF–f‴ | *Stoßmechanik* without escapement | Clumsy functional restoration in the past |
| 7 | 1800 | Briosco (Milan), Fernanda Giulini coll. | FF–f‴ | *Stoßmechanik* without escapement | Functional restoration in 2004 |
| 8 | 1801 | Private coll. (?) | FF–f‴ | ? | ? |

No. 1, the oldest surviving Elli piano, is in very poor condition. Subjected several times to public auction, it has even had its ivory accidentals removed (sometime after the mid-1990s). This instrument is dated 1786, the year in which the first hints of Gaetano Elli's growing fame appear: his admission to the *Società Patriotica* in Milan and the Roman magazine article mentioned above, which bears witness to the fact that his work had already achieved renown outside his native region.

Piano No. 2 is dated 1789. It is a particularly interesting example, distinguished from the others by its smaller dimensions and fine decoration. Its story is noteworthy: it came from the Palazzo Serbelloni, one of the most important historical residences in Milan, and was part of the Serbelloni family estate. One cannot help but be struck by the fact that Gaetano Elli was on good terms with Duke Gian Galeazzo Serbelloni (1744–1802). The duke was Elli's colleague in the *Società Patriotica,* and

later, having become one of the foremost Milanese supporters of Napoleon Bonaparte, likely also Elli's principal political supporter.[23] Gian Galeazzo had commissioned an unusual enharmonic *cembalo* from the Elli brothers a few years earlier (between 1779 and 1784), at the request of his protégé Giuseppe Sarti, at that time *maestro di cappella* at Milan cathedral.[24] It is not known whether this instrument was actually made; however, the piano dated 1789 was clearly made with the greatest care and attention to detail, probably for the same duke.

Piano No. 3, dated 1791, is, like No. 2, in a private Milanese collection. It is a *Prellmechanik* instrument, in contrast to the two preceding and four following examples, all of which are *Stoßmechanik* instruments. No. 3 is thus closer to the surviving Milanese pianos by other craftsmen from the time, all of whom seem to have preferred the *Prellmechanik* type. However, it seems an exception in relation to the rest of the Elli brothers' production.

Piano No. 4 is dated 1794, while the date on No. 5 is illegible, although it may not be so far in time from No. 4. Piano No. 5 appears to have suffered the consequences of flooding (perhaps in a cellar), as will be discussed below. The years 1794 and 1795 constitute the period in which Gaetano Elli was a sitting member (*socio sedente*) of the *Società Patriotica*, participating in various committees and at the same time cultivating important contacts beyond his city: the society had many "corresponding members" all over Europe and even in America. In 1795, Elli was praised by Simon (Giovanni Simone) Mayr as a brilliant maker of *violicembali*

23. Gian Galeazzo Serbelloni transformed the palace, which he had built, into the official headquarters of the Napoleonic administration; in fact, Bonaparte himself stayed there when he visited Milan.

24. The renowned organ builder Giuseppe Serassi mentions this commission, which dates from the years 1779–84 (the time of Giuseppe Sarti's sojourn in Milan), in a letter of 1816 to Simon Mayr: "S[ua] E[ccellenza] Duca Serbelloni, grande genio per la musica . . . fece in tal guisa costruire un organo per Gorgonzola dal celebre Fontana, ed un cembalo da' fratelli Elli, artisti tutti cotanto rinomati di quella Città" (His Excellency Duke Serbelloni, a great genius in music . . . had caused to be constructed in this manner [i.e., with enharmonic notes] an organ for [the town of] Gorgonzola by the celebrated Fontana, and a *cembalo* by the Elli brothers, all artists of much renown in that city [Milan]): Giuseppe Serassi, *Sugli organi: Lettere – 1816* (Bergamo, 1816; repr., ed. Oscar Mischiati, Biblioteca di cultura organaria e organistica 4, Bologna: Pàtron, 1973), 22–23, quoted in Barbieri, "Giuseppe Sarti, fisico acustico e teorico musicale," 232, and in Previdi, "Gaetano Elli, costruttore di strumenti musicali," 219. Gorgonzola, at that time one of the duke's feudal possessions, is a small town east of Milan. The "celebrated Fontana" was Antonio Fontana, an esteemed Milanese organ builder (see Previdi, "I costruttori milanesi di strumenti musicali," 172).

(sostenente pianos).[25] At that time, according to Mayr, Elli was also designing a *cembalo* that would print onto paper the notes played by the fingers on the keys in real time.[26] There is no concrete evidence that such an instrument was ever completed. During the following years, Elli reached the height of his political career, while his activity as a piano maker seems to have ceased, or was at least greatly reduced.

Indeed, it may not be a coincidence that pianos No. 6 (1799) and No. 7 (1800) date from the notorious years of the Austrian return to power in Lombardy. Elli, who was a Jacobin and so at odds with the new regime, prudently stepped aside politically. What could have been safer and more natural for him than going back to piano making? Instrument No. 6 is the only Elli instrument in the possession of an institution, the Conservatorio di musica San Pietro a Majella in Naples. It has not yet been possible to trace the purchase of this square piano, which has been in the conservatory's collection for no less than eighty years.[27] On the other hand, piano No. 7 is the only one to be found in a large private collection, that of Fernanda Giulini. It has had the good fortune to undergo careful functional restoration work, and was described by John Henry van der Meer in 2006.[28]

25. The *violicembalo* was a type of sostenente piano, a stringed keyboard instrument whose strings are not plucked by jacks nor struck by hammers, but usually pressed with a wheel. In this case, the strings were sounded by tiny gut strings (on a wheel?). Among the several attempts to make a sostenente piano, a distant remembrance of Elli's instrument probably survived in 1876, when Cesare Ponsicchi mentioned the work of one "Gerli" of Milan, a craftsman who constructed a better version of the *violicembalo* "replacing the wheels with some bows of horsehair" (Gerli di Milano tolse le ruote e aggiunse degli archi armati di crino). See Cesare Ponsicchi, *Il pianoforte: Sua origine e sviluppo* (Florence: Guidi Editore, 1876), 65.

26. "Questo fabbricatore si lusinga pure di venir a capo con la costruzione di un Cembalo, che stampi in note od altri segni distinti ed intelligibili nel medesimo tempo che si suona, tutto ciò, che si eseguisce con i tasti" (This craftsman flatters himself that he might construct a *cembalo*, which prints all that is played on the keys in notes or other distinct and intelligible signs, at the moment of being played). Simon Mayr, "Il Clavicembalo," Bergamo, Biblioteca comunale Angelo Mai, Salone 9 – 5/6, n° 225, quoted in Previdi, "Gaetano Elli, costruttore di strumenti musicali," 220.

27. Ettore Santagata, *Il Museo storico musicale di S. Pietro a Majella* (Naples: Francesco Giannini & figli, 1930), 100, catalog no. 433.

28. See Van der Meer, "Schedules of the Early Keyboard Instruments from No. 1 to No. 32," in *Alla ricerca dei suoni perduti*, 260–63, catalog no. 28: "Fortepiano a tavolo Fratelli Elli, Milano, 1800 / Square piano Fratelli Elli, Milan, 1800." It is noteworthy that this catalog includes descriptions of a number of square pianos of Italian origin (some certified, some presumed).

Piano No. 8 (1801) is currently known only through a photograph from an auction catalog of 1971.[29] So far, all efforts to track down the instrument have been in vain. It was around the time of this piano's construction that Elli's life turned around yet again. The return of the French resulted in the granting of a living allowance to Elli,[30] and it is therefore possible that this was among the last instruments he ever made. He probably stopped making instruments when he became *Consultore,* a member of the *Consulta Straordinaria* for the constitution of the Italian Republic, in 1801 (in 1802, with the founding of the Republic, he became a member of the *Corpo legislativo,* with an annual allowance of 6,000 lire). However, evidence has since come to light that the Elli brothers' workshop still existed in the years 1805–8, and enjoyed some prestige. It had been transferred from the contrada di Santa Radegonda 987, a highly central but modest location, to the far more elegant corsia del Giardino 1204. Gaetano Elli lived in rooms above the shop until his death, on July 13, 1809. Lists of Milanese manufacturers compiled by the French government tell us that the shop sold not only *cembali* but also clocks and clockwork devices, perhaps not surprising in view of Gaetano Elli's demonstrated interest in things mechanical.[31]

29. See the catalog of the auction *Il Bacìo all'Impruneta,* October 15, 1971, Palazzo Internazionale delle Aste ed Esposizioni Spa, Firenze, Palazzo Corsini – Il Prato (Florence: Polistampa, 1971). Beneath the photo of the instrument, which was item no. 674, is written the description: "Spinetta [*sic*] in ciliegio decorata da intarsi con quattro gambe tornite. F.lli Elly [*sic*] - Milano 1801. l. cm. 156 x h. cm 78 x p. cm 56." I wish to thank Adriano Cavicchi for providing me with this information and with the photograph of fig. 10.

30. Previdi, "Gaetano Elli, costruttore di strumenti musicali," 231.

31. Milan, Archivio di Stato, fondo Commercio, PM [Parte Moderna], cart. 9, "All'Amministrazione Municipale di Milano" (in pencil: "Febbraio 1805"): "Nel novero dei lavoratori, ossia Artista [*sic*] in istromenti a corde ha un vanto esclusivo la famiglia Elli. Il bello dell'immaginazione, la perfezione dell'arte, il comodo, ed il dilettevole sono mirabilmente marcate nei loro lavori di meccanica segnatamente nei cembali. Vi sono pure altri Artista [*sic*] distinti in questo genere, come il Pastori, il Prestinari, il Piantanida ed altri rinomati anche pegli Stromenti da fiato" (Among the ranks of makers, or artists, of string instruments, the Elli family boasts an exclusive fame. The beauty of imagination, the perfection of art, comfort, and delight are all admirably pronounced in their mechanical works, especially in their pianos. There are also other distinguished artists in this field, such as Pastori, Prestinari, Piantanida, and others renowned also for wind instruments). See also, in the same archive, cart. 9, the "Elenco di alcuni manifatturieri abitanti in Milano" (undated document): "Ubicazione: Corsia del Giardino, n° 1204. Cognome e nome: Elli Fratelli. Qualità delle manifatture: Cembali, e Pendoli" (Address: corsia del Giardino 1204. Surname and given name: Elli Fratelli. Type of manufacture: pianos and pendulums); and the "Elenco di alcuni manifatturieri abitanti in Milano" (in pencil "1808"): "Qualità delle

### *The Problematic Question of Austrian Influence on Milanese Piano Makers*

The technical analysis of the Fratelli Elli pianos has resulted in some surprising conclusions regarding the actions of Milanese instruments. Before the Elli results were available, a preliminary inspection of the actions of surviving instruments indicated a clear prevalence of so-called *Prellmechanik* pianos in the Milan area, *Stoßmechanik* instruments being rare. *Prellmechanik* is a type of action in which the hammer is attached to the key; usually the hammer is mounted in a *Kapsel* (the wooden or metal element that holds the hammer itself), which is fixed to the back of the key lever; in this action the point of articulation of the hammer moves with the key lever itself. *Stoßmechanik* is an action mechanism in which the hammer is attached to a separate rail (or some other structure) and pivots independently from the key: its point of articulation remains stationary as the key moves.[32] Italian terms for these actions were introduced only in modern times, by Renato Meucci: the *Prellmechanik* is called "meccanica a contraccolpo" (counter-strike action) and the *Stoßmechanik* is called "meccanica a spinta" (push action). These terms are now widely used in Italy, but are not historical; I therefore prefer the German terminology here.

To return to the situation in the Milan area around the turn of the nineteenth century, one might therefore conclude that the *Stoßmechanik* never really took root there. Perhaps, although we do not really know, the close links between Milan and Vienna, both politically and commercially, may have caused the Milanese craftsmen to favor the *Prellmechanik,* which was common in Vienna. On the one hand, these links could have created a strong incentive to trade in Viennese instruments, causing them to be sold in large numbers in Milan; but, on the other, these links could also have given Milanese craftsmen more opportunities to study and reconstruct Austrian models than those made in other areas of

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Fabbriche: Di cembali, orologi ed altre macchine. Cognome e Nome: Elli Fratelli. Ubicazione delle fabbriche: Corsia del Giardino n° 1204" (Type of factory: of pianos, clocks, and other mechanical devices. Surname and given name: Elli Fratelli. Address of the factory: corsia del Giardino 1204).

32. As Michael Cole points out, these terms have come to be so widely used in the literature concerning this subject that it hardly seems necessary to replace them with coined English equivalents (Cole, *The Pianoforte in the Classical Era*, 362–66).

Europe. Aside from Antonio Battaglia's unique (and precocious) *Stoßmechanik* piano of 1778, all the other Milanese square pianos hitherto known seem to have been *Prellmechanik* instruments. Pianos of the latter type were made by Domenico Morandi, Gaetano Scappa, Padre Aquilino, Francesco Barbanti, "G. P." (perhaps Gaetano Piantanida or Giuseppe Prestinari[33]), and perhaps one "Gaspare Bolla" (though for lack of solid evidence we cannot be certain of his identity); examples by these makers may be found in the Museo degli Strumenti Musicali in Sforzesco Castle, Milan.[34] When it came to commissioning a new instrument, the tastes of the Milanese customers may have tended to favor the *Prellmechanik,* in close contact as they were with the latest Viennese fashions.

The prevalence of German action has been associated with the long period of Habsburg rule, from the eighteenth century through 1861. But with this new knowledge of Elli's instruments, the history of Milanese piano making needs to be refined. Scholars have not considered the possible influences of the periods of French rule (1796–98 and 1800–1816), during which French influence on cultural life was very strong (the Conservatory, for example, was a copy of the Parisian one, and method books from the Paris Conservatory were translated into Italian to serve as models for new methods written by Milanese teachers). It seems hardly likely that the Viennese influence on piano making continued as strongly as before; however, since few instruments by Elli's Milanese contemporaries are known and the patterns of trade during this time await investigation, it is impossible to come to definitive conclusions. The imported instruments mentioned above (see p. 80) appear to show that contacts between Milan and Vienna continued throughout the period of French domination. Whatever the case may be, my study of Gaetano Elli's pianos has put a cat among the pigeons: his unexpectedly numerous surviving pianos show a highly frequent—though not exclusive—use of *Stoßmechanik;* and in the other features of their construction they demonstrate how a decided influence from the English school could be wedded with Elli's Milanese approach to the instrument.

33. Meucci, "I costruttori di pianoforte a Milano."

34. Bonza, "Strumenti a tastiera," 373–405. Morandi's piano is preserved in the Museo degli Strumenti Musicali in Rome; see *La galleria armonica: Catalogo del Museo degli strumenti musicali di Roma*, ed. Luisa Cervelli (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1994), 140. On Battaglia's piano, see n. 18 above.

### *The Structural Characteristics of Elli's Pianos*

Before turning to comparative analysis of the instruments, some comments should be made concerning their dating. All of these pianos bear a rectangular maple panel on the nameboard (framed by varying decoration), in the center of which is written "Fratelli Elli Milano," followed by the year of production. A nib and black ink were used to create this text between two more or less visible scored lines. On some of the instruments this writing is very faded. In the unluckiest case, piano No. 5, it is almost invisible, and someone has clumsily retraced the word "Elli," compounding damage with damage. For the other instruments, despite the fact that their frail maker's marks have better withstood the test of time, doubt nonetheless persists as to the last digit of the year of production. The "6" of the year 1786 on instrument No. 1 is not very clear, but it is legible and seems to be original, and the same appears to be true for the "1" of the year 1791 on instrument No. 3, although it too is extremely faded. This troublesome last digit is also much more faded than the others on instruments No. 4 and No. 7 (the numerals "4" and "0," respectively), and was reinforced during the recent restoration work carried out on these pianos. For the purposes of this study, it was not deemed necessary to doubt the reliability of the dates provided by the restorers.

But this issue raises a further consideration. That the problem of the faded last digit should arise so consistently encourages the supposition that the nameboards were actually prepared beforehand, with the first three digits already written, and that the last digit was added upon completion of the instrument—as though demand for the workshop's goods was so great that they needed to produce a large number of nameboards ahead of time, ready for use at any moment. Or perhaps it is more realistic to suppose that the delivery date of each Elli instrument was not foreseeable. This would suggest that the workshop did not follow a rigidly organized production process. The revealing detail of the nameboard manufacture seems to indicate a method of production very different from that adopted by Zumpe (who, as we shall see, was an important model for Elli) and his various successors and imitators in London. On the other hand, the number of instruments that has emerged in only a few years of research bears witness to the Elli brothers' seriousness and to the continuity of their work, which cannot be ignored.

The main characteristics of the "Fratelli Elli" pianos will now be described, leaving the analysis of their actions for last. The instruments of

1786 and 1789 have a very small compass by any standard, only fifty-four keys, from C to f'". This had increased by piano No. 3 (1791) to a full five-octave range (FF to f'"), which would remain standard for Elli instruments to the end of Gaetano's working life. As noted above, this range was perfectly suited to playing the music published and sold in Milan in that period; in fact, all known Milanese pianos from that time have roughly the same range, which was in any case common for pianos in many places right up to the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, English makers such as Broadwood were already building pianos with the compass FF–c"" by 1790. Furthermore, during the 1790s, English grand pianos by Broadwood and Longman & Broderip reached six octaves.[35] Square pianos would have to wait a few years, but not too many: the earliest known Broadwood square piano with a compass as large as FF–c"" dates to 1796, and a Longman & Broderip square of the same year has a six-octave range (FF–f""). The earliest certified Erard five-and-half-octave square piano dates from 1799.[36]

The Milanese *cembalari* did not begin to enlarge the limited compass of their pianos for some time. And in spite of the compass extensions going on elsewhere, arrangers working for Ricordi continued to limit themselves to the compass of the Milanese pianos as late as 1808, even though their scores were widely sold north of the Alps. This tendency to maintain a modest keyboard compass lasted through the following decades, and seems to have been common to piano makers throughout Italy. Significantly, surviving pianos by Schantz and Graf imported into Italy in the 1820s generally have a compass of FF–f"":[37] Italian buyers obviously felt that a compass a fourth smaller than the CC–f"" common in Vienna at that time was more than adequate for their needs.

35. See David Rowland, "Piano Music and Keyboard Compass in the 1790s," *Early Music* 27 (1999): 283–93. A general outline of the progressive expansion of piano compasses, which, however, makes no distinction between grand and square pianos, is to be found in John Henry van der Meer, "Nascita e sviluppo del pianoforte," in *Alla ricerca dei suoni perduti*, 60. See also Robert Winter, "The Nineteenth Century: Keyboards," in *Performance Practice: Music after 1600,* ed. Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillian, 1990), 346–48.

36. On Broadwood, see Michael Cole, *Broadwood Square Pianos* (Cheltenham: Tatchley Books, 2005), 128. According to Edwin M. Good, Broadwood also extended the compass of their square pianos in 1790–91; see Good, "Keyboards," in *Encyclopedia of Keyboard Instruments*, vol. 1, *The Piano*, 202–4. On Longman & Broderip, see Rowland, "Piano Music and Keyboard Compass," 284. On Erard, see Clinkscale, *Makers of the Piano* 1:97.

37. Di Stefano, "Johann Schantz e i pianoforti viennesi in Italia."

The keyboards of Elli pianos have black naturals and white accidentals, a characteristic of practically all known Italian pianos made prior to 1801.[38] The Elli instruments thus differ in appearance from English ones of the same period, which they resemble in other ways. For example, the *Stichmaß* (three-octave width) of the Elli pianos is similar to that of contemporary English pianos and wider than that of other Milanese instruments, which are usually of more restricted dimensions.[39] Indeed, the *Stichmaß* of the Elli pianos measures 483–84 mm (No. 1, 483 mm; No. 2, 483–84 mm; No. 3, 484 mm; Nos. 4, 5, and 7, 483–84 mm; the measurement for No. 6 is not available). The keyboard of the Elli pianos is recessed and offset to the left in all of their instruments. The key levers are always made of spruce; the naturals are always topped with ebony and the accidentals are ivory over mahogany. On piano No. 1, which is in critical condition, the cover plates of the accidentals have been detached and removed. From the sole surviving fragment it was ascertained that the cover plates were of ivory. The keyboard of the Serbelloni piano (No. 2) is decidedly more refined than those of the other Elli instruments. The raised front portion of the accidentals, in ebonized wood, is covered with alternating strips of ivory, ebony, and ivory. Furthermore, the naturals have key-fronts in yellowish hardwood with molding and also show two score lines, typical of the Italian tradition. This same piano has a unique "dust board," consisting of a wooden frame upholstered with green silk, which hides the action and the soundboard. All the Elli pianos have a toolbox between the left key cheek and left side. On some instruments (Nos. 2, 6, and 7) the lid of the box, in walnut, is preserved; it is furnished with a brass knob. Under the lid of piano No. 7 is written in black ink "di Natale Zaccheo," together with a fragment of music written on two staves in a child-like hand. Natale Zaccheo, possibly the first owner of this piano (the handwriting seems eighteenth-century) is unknown.

38. Among Milanese instruments, the only one with white naturals is the square piano, far ahead of its time, by Antonio Battaglia (see n. 18 above). As already noted, he was also the only craftsman apart from Elli to adopt the *Stoßmechanik*.

39. The following are the *Stichmaße* of some Milanese square pianos in the Sforzesco Castle collection: Antonio Battaglia (inv. no. 615): 449 mm; Padre Aquilino (inv. no. 622): 470–71 mm; Gaetano Scappa (inv. no. 623): 477.5 mm; "G.P." (inv. no. 617): 470 mm; Francesco Barbanti (inv. no. 624): 471 mm; Giuseppe Prestinari (inv. no. 628): 478.5 mm. Like the reduced compass, a restricted *Stichmaß* seems to be a common characteristic, not only among the Milanese instruments, but also of many others currently known from around Italy.

The case construction of the Elli pianos is rather standardized. The case is always rectangular, with the walls attached to the top surface of the spruce baseboard. The lid is usually made up of three parts that are connected with brass hinges: a main part, connected to the spine; a full-length flap joined to the main part of the lid; and a lockboard, connected to the flap. This set-up allows two possible ranges of volume, as the player can choose to raise either the whole lid or just the flap. On pianos No. 2 and No. 5 the lid is divided into four parts: rather than a full-length flap, there are two separate hinged flats, one over the keyboard and the other in front of the soundboard. This set-up provides three different ranges of volume: maximum volume with the entire lid raised; medium volume with the two flaps raised; and minimum volume with only the keyboard flap raised. On pianos No. 3, 4, 5, and 7, both of the original music desks have survived: the first is a folding one, fastened behind the nameboard; the other is a wooden ledge glued to the inner side of the front flap. The latter desk can be used when the lid is down and the lockboard flap is folded back. The Serbelloni piano (No. 2) does not have a folding music desk, but only a small ledge on the flap over the keyboard.

As far as the legs of the Elli pianos are concerned, the Serbelloni instrument again differs from the others. This elegant piano of small dimensions was constructed without legs or any other form of support; rather, it was designed to be set upon a table. While the legs of piano No. 3 have been lost, those of all the other instruments are original. Indeed, they faithfully mirror the trends of Milanese fashion in that time. Piano No. 1 (1786), which is also fitted with a convenient shelf for keeping scores under the main body, has square tapered legs, with the capitals attached to the bottom of the case. The legs of the later pianos are turned and tapered, with ornamental beads or bands near the top and bottom.

The style of decoration of the Elli pianos, which is relatively consistent from instrument to instrument, helps confirm that these instruments were all turned out by the same workshop, and the fact that the decoration is never overly lavish aligns them with other Milanese instruments of the time. The decoration is sober, completely lacking in floral motives, inlays, paintings, or metal ornaments—it seems truly to mirror the pragmatic and dignified composedness of the Milanese public for whom these instruments were made.

A unique and well-defined decorative style is present throughout the existence of the Elli workshop, even though the decoration varies in

detail from one instrument to another, so that no two are the same. One may consider, for example, the nameboard, described above, to be an Elli trademark. On piano No. 1, a central rectangular maple panel is inlaid in the mahogany nameboard panel, and contains the signature, which is framed by a strip of a different wood that is painted black. A similar simple decoration (a black band bordered by two thin maple strips) runs around the nameboard and likewise appears on the sides of the instrument. On the elegant piano No. 2, the materials are completely different, and their disposition is more complex. Here the central panel with the signature is satinwood; the signature is bordered by a band of *bois de rose* (*Dalbergia spp.*[40]); and the black-painted wood is replaced by ebony. Furthermore, on the walnut nameboard there are two additional satinwood panels, both bordered by a narrow ebony strip. Similar panels of satinwood are found on the key cheeks. On piano No. 3, the craftsman returned to a middle-class clientele, and to less expensive woods. Here the entire nameboard is maple painted in black, and only the frame bearing the signature has been left in the original colour. A narrow strip of wood painted in black outlines the inside of the frame, giving it definition. Even though this decoration differs from the rest in terms of technique, it is stylistically completely in line with all the other pianos. On piano No. 4, the mahogany nameboard has a central maple panel bordered by two parallel strips of wood painted black, joined by small vertical black elements. This decoration looks like a prototype for that of piano No. 7, on which the same light-and-dark effect is more elegantly obtained by alternating elements of mahogany and maple. The central panels of pianos No. 5, 6, and 8 have a more elaborate border made of small rectangles. In all the Elli instruments, a linear decorative border is present on all sides of the case.

With the exception of the Serbelloni piano, which has been played very little, all of the Elli pianos appear to be well used. The keys of piano No. 1 are extremely worn (fig. 4). The instrument's storage shelf is shaped to allow room for the player's legs, allowing him or her to sit comfortably at the keyboard while using the shelf as a little writing desk for music (fig. 5). The shelf itself shows clear traces of ink staining, suggesting that the piano might have belonged to a composer.[41] Piano

40. See Bonza, "Terminologia dei legni / Wood Terminology," in *Alla ricerca dei suoni perduti,* 668–69.

41. Unfortunately it has not been possible to trace the provenance of this instrument.

FIGURE 4. Square piano "Fratelli Elli - Milano 1786" (piano No. 1), the keyboard. Ferrara, private collection; photograph by the author.

No. 4, which also has very worn keys (fig. 6), surprisingly shows traces of lead (removed during restoration), which had been glued to the rear ends of the key levers to give them a heavier touch. As it is rare to find lead used in eighteenth-century pianos, this is a sure sign of continued use in eras long after the piano's construction, when heavier actions had radically changed people's approach to keyboard playing. Fitting lead weights to the keys was an act of love on the owner's part, an attempt to salvage a future for an instrument that had become obsolete. The hammer sticks and the strings of this piano (which was found in a Modenese cellar, where it was doomed to become firewood) had nearly all snapped, probably because of their exposure to unnaturally high tension.

The Elli pianos were all double strung. The soundboards (all of spruce) have not withstood the passage of time—all show cracks or buckling. Piano No. 6 (fig. 7) also shows cracks that are probably due to its being re-strung in a modern way, with no respect for the proportions and the needs of the instrument.[42] On piano No. 5, the typical deformation

42. The date and method of the wanton restoration carried out on this piano are unknown.

FIGURE 5. Square piano "Fratelli Elli - Milano 1786" (piano No. 1), the music shelf. Ferrara, private collection; photograph by the owner.

caused by string tension can be seen: the rear left and front right corners appear raised, while the rear right and front left corners appear lowered. As well, this piano's soundboard is cracked and buckled in many places.

The soundboard of pianos No. 1, 2, 5, and 7 extends partly over the top three key levers. This type of construction also occurs in the remaining pianos (Nos. 3, 4, and 6), but only in the area corresponding to the curve of the bridge. The tuning pins are always arranged in a series of rows of four, each row paired into twos (except for instrument No. 2, where, due to the restricted dimensions of soundboard and wrest plank, the tuning pins are merely aligned in fours). The names of the notes in alphabetic notation (F, F♯, G, etc.) are notated in black ink in eighteenth-century handwriting at the foot of each pair of tuning pins; on

FIGURE 6. Square piano "Fratelli Elli - Milano 1794" (piano No. 4), the keyboard. Modena, private collection; photograph by the author.

piano No. 2, where the tuning pins are aligned in fours, only the names of the outside notes are notated (C, D, E, F♯, etc.). Piano No. 5 originally had the names of the notes to the left of each row of tuning pins and, to the right, progressive numbering of the groups of tuning pins themselves (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.). The writing on the wrest plank is only partially visible, since it too was damaged by the same accident that almost completely dissolved the writing on the nameboard (the maker's mark and the date). It seems, in fact, that this instrument was at some point left in water for quite some time: possibly it was being kept in a cellar which subsequently flooded. The writing next to the tuning pins is better preserved than that on the smooth surface of the nameboard, thanks to the fact that the wood there was rough. On the nameboard, only the two incised lines that guided the signature remain clearly visible.

The bridge, in pear, is glued to the soundboard and is always a single piece that forms a curved line in the upper register and a straight line in the lower (fig. 8). This is one of many elements that make one think of the square pianos by Zumpe and his successors. It is difficult to

FIGURE 7. Square piano "Fratelli Elli - Milano 1799" (piano No. 6). Naples, Conservatorio di musica S. Pietro a Majella; photograph by Umberto Debiaggi.

reconstruct the original stringing. From the remains of the strings, it is only possible to deduce that some were overspun brass, some of simple brass, and others (most, in fact) of iron. Among those instruments whose present condition may be similar to its original state, piano No. 2 has the lowest strings (C and C♯) of overspun brass, from D to b of simple brass, and from c' to f''' of iron, while piano No. 3 reveals no strings made of simple brass: on this instrument it seems that the strings of the lowest fifth (FF–C) were of overspun brass, while the rest were iron.

Among the other parallels with the Zumpe-type instruments, one of the most important concerns the structure of the stops. Elli seems to have shied away from excessive timbral variety, as the only uses to which stops are put are the following three: (1) to raise all of the dampers or (2) only those of the upper register (when present, the division is always between b and c'); and (3) to insert a so-called buff stop. This is nothing new: these additions had already been thought out by Zumpe for his

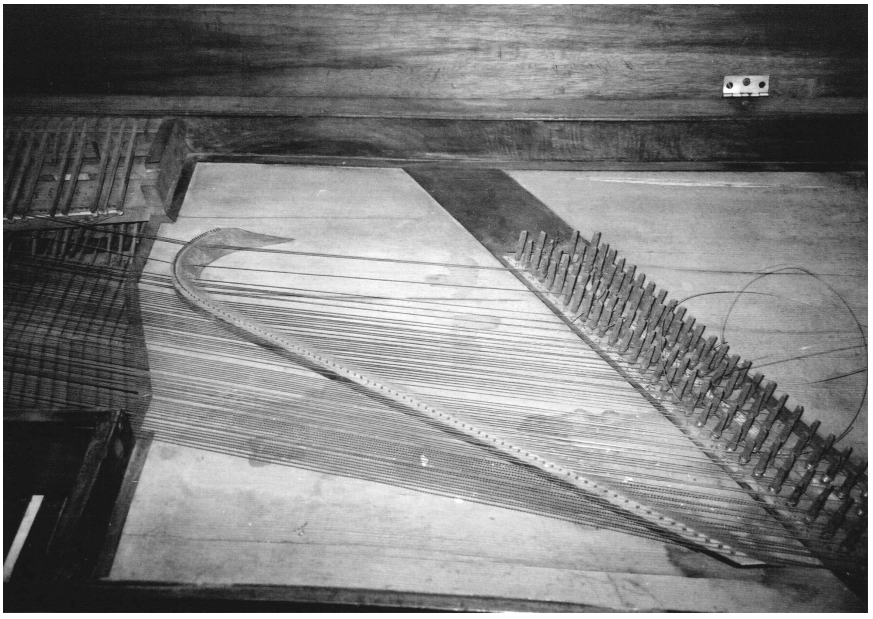

FIGURE 8. Square piano "Fratelli Elli - Milano 1791" (piano No. 3), soundboard and bridge. Milan, private collection; photograph by the author.

square pianos made between 1767 and 1770.[43] The oldest of the Elli pianos, No. 1, from 1786, is the only one without knee levers, presenting all of the stops mentioned above as hand levers (fig. 9). This arrangement is one of the instrument's archaic features, as is the relatively restricted compass. The Serbelloni piano reveals modest performance expectations, having no stops for altering or changing the tone (it may have been for this very reason that the craftsman decided to enrich the choices pertaining to volume in this instrument, by dividing the lid flap into two independent parts, as noted above). The other pianos mostly distribute the three stop functions among one hand lever (positioned to the left of the keyboard, above the tool box) and two knee levers. The exception is piano No. 6, on which there are only two stops: a hand lever,

43. Cole, *The Pianoforte in the Classical Era*, 55. Concerning the stops on early pianos, see Kenneth Mobbs, "Stops and Other Special Effects on the Early Piano," *Early Music* 12 (1984): 471–76.

FIGURE 9. Square piano "Fratelli Elli - Milano 1786" (piano No. 1), hand levers. Ferrara, private collection; photograph by the author.

which operates the buff stop, and a single knee lever, which operates the dampers across the entire compass.[44]

Even though the aim was the same in all cases, there was no single method of achieving it. In instruments No. 3 and No. 7 the right-side knee lever acts on the whole compass, while that on the left side acts only on the upper register; the buff stop, which is positioned on the hitchpin rail, is activated by a hand lever. On instrument No. 4, only the right-side knee lever maintains the function observed above on instruments No. 3 and 7; the left-side knee lever works the buff stop while the hand lever raises the upper-register dampers (as reported by the restorer, who undertook large-scale functional repair work on this piano).[45] It would

44. See Santagata, *Il Museo storico musicale di S. Pietro a Majella* (1930). I have not been able to examine this instrument. In recent times only Umberto Debiaggi has been able to do so, and then only briefly. I thank him for his kind help and for the photograph published in this article.

45. On English square pianos and instruments made elsewhere after English originals, the buff stop is normally operated by a hand lever rather than by a knee lever; see Cole, *The Pianoforte in the Classical Era*, 73–74.

seem that the badly preserved piano No. 5 was originally constructed in the same manner. This disposition seems not to be the result of practical necessity, as playing must be interrupted in order to lower the dampers. Indeed, it would seem to be more logical, on the basis of performance needs, to work the upper-register dampers with a knee lever and the buff stop with a hand-operated lever. Piano No. 5 resembles No. 4 in many further ways. It presently has only the two knee levers, but there are clear remains of the now-missing hand lever, including the block on which the lever pivoted and parts of the mechanism that allowed it to raise the upper-register dampers (two guide shafts from the mechanism are still visible on the left side of the case, at the back of the hitchpin rail); also, the rail that lifts the dampers is divided into two parts, just as on the other Elli pianos. The disposition of the stops on instrument No. 8 is unknown. From the only image we possess of this instrument (fig. 10), which bears witness to its existence, we can hypothesize that its stops are arranged in the same way as those of piano No. 7. In any case these two pianos were made very close together in time.

Among the actions of the pianos turned out by the Fratelli Elli workshop in the years between 1786 and 1800 are both *Prellmechanik* and *Stoßmechanik*. Among Elli instruments, pianos with *Stoßmechanik* always have hammer heads pointing away from the player (we will call this "intro" action),[46] while the one with *Prellmechanik* has hammer heads pointing toward the player (we will call this "retro" action). All the Elli pianos have up-striking actions, as the hammers are situated beneath the strings.

Unlike his fellow Milanese piano makers (who preferred the *Prellmechanik*, so far as we have been able to tell),[47] Gaetano Elli seems to have preferred the *Stoßmechanik*, found in six of seven instruments. This was unexpected, as it deviates from what seems to have been the standard approach of Milanese craftsmen of his time. It is also a little surprising to find Elli making both types, as it surely cannot have been standard practice that instruments with such very different mechanical principles should have been produced side by side in a single workshop. Furthermore, his *Stoßmechanik* instruments are sometimes fitted with escapements and checks, and sometimes have neither, irrespective of the chronological

46. Cole, "A Proposal for the Systematic Classification of Piano Actions," Appendix II in *The Pianoforte in the Classical Era*, 362.

47. See Bonza, "Strumenti a tastiera," 373–405, and Meucci, "I costruttori di pianoforte a Milano." However, since just one example survives for each maker, one cannot be certain.

FIGURE 10. Square piano "Fratelli Elli - Milano 1801" (piano No. 8). ?, private collection; catalog of the auction *Il Bacìo all'Impruneta,* October 15, 1971, Palazzo Internazionale delle Aste ed Esposizioni Spa, Firenze, Palazzo Corsini – Il Prato (Florence: Polistampa, 1971), item no. 674.

order of their construction. In the two oldest pianos (1786 and 1789), we find a *Stoßmechanik* with no escapement; in the third (1791) a simple *Prellmechanik;* in the fourth (1794) and fifth (probably ca. 1794–95) we find a complete *Stoßmechanik* with escapement and check; and in the sixth (1799) and seventh (1800) a *Stoßmechanik* with no escapement. It is notable that there is no apparent connection between the complexity of the action and the level of refinement of the instrument's exterior (the clearest example is the piano for the Serbelloni family). The existence of different models, fitted out at varying levels of technical complexity and with different types of decoration, is probably tied to individual taste and to just how much money the buyer was prepared to spend.[48] However, no purchase price is known for any of the Elli instruments.

48. This much is evident in the case of the piano maker Johann Andreas Stein. A particularly complete picture of his character and work has emerged thanks to the discovery of his sketches and workshop documents. See Michael Latcham, "The Pianos of Johann

An exhaustive analysis of the action of piano No. 1 would appear to be a "mission impossible." Unfortunately, the instrument, which miraculously escaped destruction, is lacking many fundamental parts. Only one of its hammers has survived (fig. 11). The damper section is completely lost, and we can only observe that the instrument probably had a system of dampers, as traces of it remain (the damper pusher dowels are still to be seen, as well as two hand levers that lifted the dampers). The few elements available to us are, however, enough to let us understand just what type of instrument it once was. The head of the small hammer is covered with two layers of leather, and the hammer's thin, rectangular shank is furnished with a central aperture in which a small metal guide pin is fitted. Furthermore, the hammer and hammer rail are connected by means of a parchment hinge, and there is no escapement. The hammer heads, as we know, point away from the player. These features suggest that we are looking at a copy of Zumpe's action. If we remember that the stops were also modeled on Zumpe's, it seems reasonable at this point to assume that the missing dampers were, as well. In that case, they would have been wooden lever over-dampers. This instrument, whose dimensions are 1205 mm (w) x 415 mm (depth of the case) x 185 mm (height of the case without its lid, which is missing), looks archaic compared to its successors, and may be typical of the first phase of Elli's work.

Piano No. 2, the Serbelloni piano, contains the same action and differs from the preceding instrument in dimensions, being even smaller: its body measures only 1065 x 347 x 156 mm. The fact that the dampers are present only on the first twelve strings (C–b) contributes to its reduced dimensions (and it should be recalled that it is not fitted with any stops). The dampers are lever over-dampers of walnut, fitted with spongy leather.[49]

Piano No. 3 is dated two years later. Just like No. 1, it may be considered a copy, though of a very different original (fig. 12). It has tiny hammers, all mounted on small wooden blocks (*Kapseln*) glued onto the key

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Andreas Stein," in *Zur Geschichte des Hammerklaviers: 14. Musikinstrumentenbau-Symposium in Michaelstein am 12. und 13. November 1993*, ed. Monika Lustig (Michaelstein: Institut für Aufführungspraxis, 1996), 15–49, and Latcham, "Mozart and the Pianos of Johann Andreas Stein," *Galpin Society Journal* 51 (1998): 114–53.

49. This instrument has some characteristics in common with the Ludovicus Verel square piano (965 x 330 x 146 mm, no dampers, no stops, no legs, range: F/G–f‴) in the Colt Collection. See C. F. Colt, *The Early Piano* (London: Stainer & Bell, 1981), 30, and Clinkscale, *Makers of the Piano,* 1:304. Nothing is known about this craftsman, who may have been from London.

FIGURE 11. Square piano "Fratelli Elli - Milano 1786" (piano No. 1), hammer. Ferrara, private collection; photograph by the author.

levers; there is no escapement. For this reason we can define it as an example of *Prellmechanik*. Thus, piano No. 3 appears to have been modeled on a German *Tafelklavier:* the hammers and dampers all seem to follow this model. The hammers (fig. 13)—unlike those of the rest of the known Elli pianos—have an elongated head covered with one thin layer of leather. Their heads point toward the player, in the orientation typical of this kind of *Prellmechanik* square piano, even though it is an isolated example among the Elli instruments. The dampers are lever overdampers, connected to the rail by a support rod. None of the sticks that raised the dampers have survived. Nevertheless, their fittings are evident, at the halfway mark between the hammer heads and the *Kapseln*. This system, which can be found in certain German *Tafelklaviere*, dates back to at least 1772, the date of the claviorganum ("piano organisé") made by the French craftsman Adrien L'Epine, which is depicted in the famous engraving in Dom Bedos de Celles, *L'art de facteur d'orgues* (Paris, 1778).[50]

50. Dom Bedos de Celles, *L'Art du facteur d'orgues* (Paris, 1778), vol. 4, plate 130 (artist and engraver: De la Gardette).

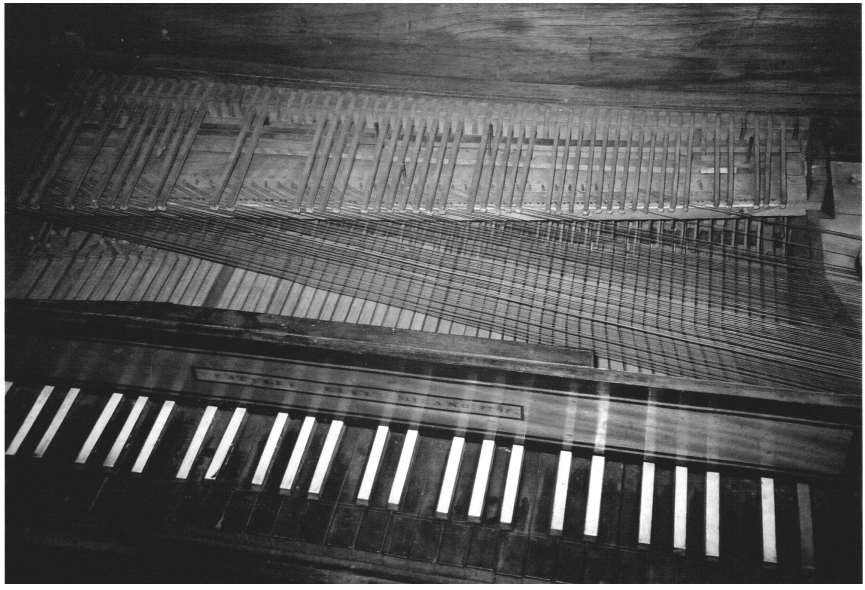

FIGURE 12. Square piano "Fratelli Elli - Milano 1791" (piano No. 3), action. Milan, private collection; photograph by the author.

FIGURE 13. Square piano "Fratelli Elli - Milano 1791" (piano No. 3), hammer. Milan, private collection; photograph by the author.

The dimensions of piano No. 3 are 1555 x 520 x 220 mm. It is the widest of all the known Elli pianos, which is understandable, considering the type of action it contains.

In its action, piano No. 4 shows a considerable leap in complexity and refinement. The action is a *Stoßmechanik* with multi-layered hammer heads pointing away from the player, complete with escapement, check, lever over-dampers, and rounded shanks (fig. 14). The hammers are much more robust than those of pianos No. 1 and No. 2, and they lack the central aperture and the metal guide pin. Behind the hammer shanks are brass regulating springs in an inverted v shape; the damper pushers are adjusted by pins. The hammers are no longer linked to the rail by strips of parchment; rather, a metal pin is fitted into a hollow in the wood. I inserted piano No. 5, whose date of production is unknown, into table 1 at its present place because its action is the same as that of No. 4. Likewise, these two pianos have exactly the same dimensions: 1535 x 545 x 220 mm (height without lid). Their *Stichmaß* is 483–84. The only differences between these two pianos are those details of the decoration that have already been commented on.

At this point it may be seen how, toward the end of the century, two successive instruments were to make an unexpected step backwards. The dimensions of instrument No. 7 are similar to those of Nos. 4 and 5: 1531 mm x 528 x 220 mm (height without lid). Its depth is slightly less; but we shall soon see why. Its action, again an "intro" *Stoßmechanik* with lever over-dampers, has no escapement (fig. 15). The hammers are fixed to the hammer rail by the old technique of parchment strips (as on piano No. 1). Slots with guide pins even reappear in the hammer shanks. This action is thus less advanced than the pianos we have just seen, making it a cheaper purchase, even though its appearance would suggest that it was made for a client who had little need for economy[51] (the decoration of this piano, perfectly in line with the elegant sobriety that is characteristic of Milanese square pianos, is finely detailed).[52]

Piano No. 6 presents the same characteristics as piano No. 5, even though some features of the original instrument have been lost as a result of restoration work; the only difference is that No. 6 has one stop less than the other pianos, as mentioned above. A new and better-planned conservative restoration that was to have begun in 2003 unfor-

51. Perhaps this client was none other than "Natale Zaccheo"; see p. 92 above.
52. See pp. 93–94 and n. 28 above.

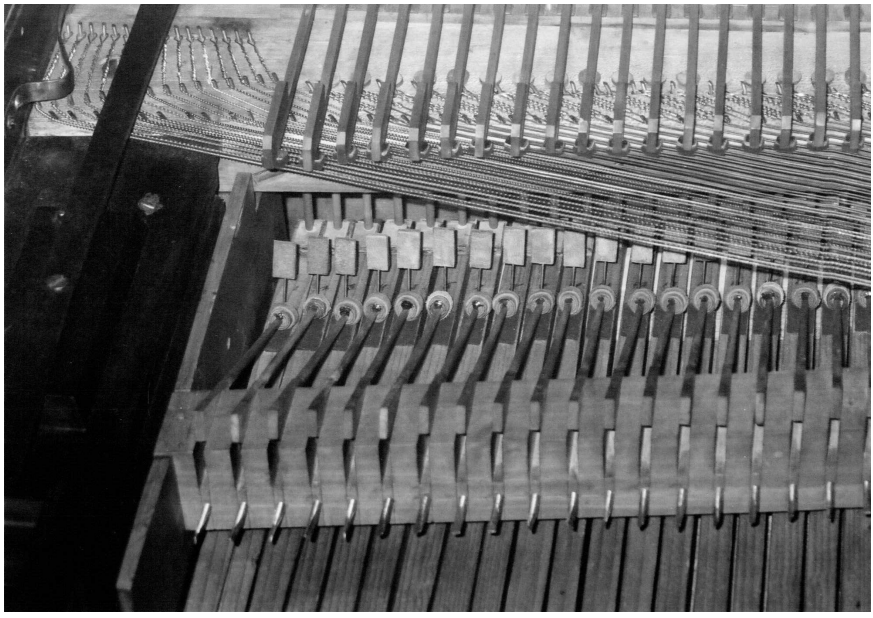

FIGURE 14. Square piano "Fratelli Elli - Milano 1794" (piano No. 4), action. Modena, private collection; photograph by the author.

tunately did not go ahead, and the instrument probably remains in a poor state.[53]

### *Conclusion, or Starting Point? The Scappa Case*

What meaning can we draw from the use of such a kaleidoscopic variety of techniques within the walls of one single workshop? Given that all of these instruments seem to reveal the same kind of workmanship, one point does seem to be clear: in spite of all the contemporary accounts noting Gaetano Elli's creative imagination, the surviving Elli pianos do not show signs of particular inventiveness in their actions, which simply reproduce models that had already been in circulation for some time—models that were, as we have seen, quite normal. What emerges, on the other hand, is the general strategy adopted by the "Fratelli Elli" firm in

53. Information courtesy of Umberto Debiaggi; see n. 44 above.

FIGURE 15. Square piano "Fratelli Elli - Milano 1800" (piano No. 7), action. Briosco, Milan, Fernanda Giulini Collection; photograph by the author.

the field of piano production, a field that was not at all standardized in Milan at that time. This strategy seems to have been to experiment with varying technical solutions by making copies of pre-existing models of square pianos.

In 1786 Gaetano Elli was forty-five years old, and the fame of the "Fratelli Elli" had already spread, if the accounts quoted above are to be believed.[54] Elli's nomination as *socio corrispondente* in the *Società Patriotica* came about precisely in that crucial year, to which the earliest of his known pianos is dated. Nevertheless, it was more for his skill as a carpenter and machinist than as an instrument maker that Gaetano was invited to join the *Società Patriotica*. Indeed, he is first referred to in the minutes

54. Serassi's letter to Mayr, quoted in n. 24 above, was written many years after the events it describes. Nevertheless, the fact that it refers to Giuseppe Sarti, who stayed in Milan for several years, helps make it seem credible. The notice in the *Giornale delle belle arti e della incisione, antiquaria, musica e poesia* of 1786 (see n. 9 above) seems to be authentic praise of Elli's work, but might possibly have been a self-advertising strategy set in motion by Elli himself.

as a *macchinista* (machinist/engineer). The society's archives contain many and varied critiques that he made of new inventions by Lombard craftsmen of his time (the society provided incentives to craftsmen to be more creative by organizing competitions and giving prizes). In nearly all cases, his critiques concern inventions made of wood or new tools to be used for working wood. Elli rendered judgment on various types of tools for the art of inlaying; on an ingenious technique for gold-plating wood; on a controversial method for the in-depth coloring of wood inlays; on a new model for a weaver's loom; on a machine for balling wool; on a new silk-threading machine; and on many other issues.[55] In 1794 he was given the task of restoring the mechanical devices that were in the society's archives, all of which have since been lost.

In conclusion, I wish to say that this is only the beginning. The next step would be to undertake similar research projects on other Milanese musical instrument craftsmen. In 2007 work began on another interesting personality of the time, Gaetano Scappa, already mentioned above, who worked in Milan from the time of Elli's last years as a craftsman onwards. He may even have worked shoulder to shoulder with him, judging by the similar way he signed his 1796 piano, the oldest of his instruments that I have so far been able to inspect.[56] Perhaps these two craftsmen, Scappa and Elli, were linked in some way that remains elusive to us. In any case, Scappa—contrary to Elli—modified his way of signing and dating his instruments several times. However, the instruments of these two makers have radically different actions. Only two examples of Scappa's work were known until recently (the instrument in the Giulini collection, dated 1796, and one housed in the Museo degli Strumenti Musicali, Milan, and dated 1804). The oldest of the two is fitted with an upstriking "retro" *Prellmechanik*, with two *Kapseln*, one holding the hammer, the other holding the under-damper lever. This action is of the type that began to appear toward the middle of the 1770s in some square pianos from the German lands (particularly south of Mainz, near the river Rhine); the oldest of these is an instrument of 1775 by Christian

55. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, "Appuntamenti della Società Patriotica di Milano," II–IV (AF, XI, 34–35). See Previdi, "Gaetano Elli, costruttore di strumenti musicali," 222–24.

56. This piano is found in the Giulini Collection and has been studied by Van der Meer (*Alla ricerca dei suoni perduti*, 264–67, no. 29: "Fortepiano a tavolo Gaetano Scappa, Milano, 1796"). The same instrument is mentioned in Clinkscale, *Makers of the Piano*, 1:236.

Baumann of Zweibrücken.[57] The other piano, dated 1804, cannot be fully evaluated, as its system of dampers is not original.

By 2007, however, four further Scappa instruments had been uncovered: three more square pianos and a psaltery. The psaltery, privately owned, was sold in early 2008 by John Moran Auctioneers (CA); it is signed "GAETANO SCAPPA MIL. no. 1706,"[58] and, judging by the style of the signature, we may be sure that it dates from the first period of his activity. The case is in the shape of an isosceles trapezoid, fitted into an outer case (also in the shape of an isosceles trapezoid), as many Italian instruments are. The outer case is decorated with vegetable motifs, and there is a stand with four *cabriole* legs, painted in the same manner; a similar style of decoration is found on an anonymous harpsichord transformed into a grand piano, preserved in the Museo degli Strumenti Musicali, Milan.[59] On the soundboard of the psaltery there were two roses (unfortunately now missing). This unexpected find enriches our knowledge of the panorama of production of the Milanese *cembalari*, allowing us to associate the figure of Scappa with the older Antonio Battaglia, who also made both *cembali* and psalteries.[60] Making both types of instruments was, however, by no means the prerogative of Battaglia alone; rather it was probably a tradition in the city.

Table 2 provides details of Scappa's known pianos. The oldest known piano, from 1792, is in a private collection in Rome (I have not yet been able to track it down). Piano No. 3 is a square piano dated 1799; it is currently in a private collection in Milan (fig. 16). Piano No. 5, the latest known of Scappa's production, probably dates to 1805–10 (the compass is FF–c"", larger than the earlier instruments); it was discovered in a Milanese attic. The latter two pianos have the same action as the 1796 Scappa piano described above (figs. 17 and 18).[61]

57. On Baumann, see Bernard Brauchli, "Christian Baumann's Square Pianos and Mozart," *Galpin Society Journal* 45 (1992): 29–49. Klaus, "German Square Pianos with *Prellmechanik* in Major American Museum Collections," 31ff., demonstrates how pianos by Baumann, Thiébaut Eppel, Michael Bogner, and other makers from the area south of Mainz are fitted with this type of *Prellmechanik* and have various characteristic features in common.

58. I.e., "Mil[ano] n[umer]o [=serial number] 1706."

59. This anonymous instrument has been attributed by Augusto Bonza to the Piedmontese craftsman Giovanni Francesco Franco (see Bonza, "Strumenti a tastiera," 331–33, inv. no. 620).

60. On Antonio Battaglia, psaltery and piano maker, see n. 18 above. See also Teresa Chirico, "Il salterio in Italia fra Seicento e Ottocento," *Recercare* 13 (2001): 147–97.

61. The 1792 piano is mentioned by Meucci in "I costruttori di pianoforte a Milano." On the 1804 piano, see Bonza, "Strumenti a tastiera," 380–81, inv. no. 487: "Pianoforte a

Table 2. Gaetano Scappa's square pianos.

| No. | Date | Current ownership | Compass | Action | Present state of preservation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1792 | Rome, private coll. | ? | ? | ? |
| 2 | 1796 | Briosco (Milan), Fernanda Giulini coll. | FF–f‴ | *Prellmechanik* with two *Kapseln* and lever under-dampers | Functional restoration in the first decade of the 21st century |
| 3 | 1799 | Milan, private coll. | FF–f‴ | *Prellmechanik* with two *Kapseln* and lever under-dampers | Never restored; original (?) condition |
| 4 | 1804 | Milan, Museo degli Strumenti Musicali | FF–f‴ | *Prellmechanik* (with . . . ?) | Clumsy functional restoration in the past |
| 5 | undated (presum. 1805–10) | Milan, private coll. | FF–c⁗ | *Prellmechanik* with two *Kapseln* and lever under-dampers | Never restored; original (?) condition |

Scappa's six known instruments promise to provide a fuller profile of this craftsman, who was the father of the composer Giuseppe Scappa (in turn the teacher of the great soprano Giuditta Pasta, whose family owned the 1804 instrument). Adding a more detailed study of Gaetano Scappa and his production to what has already emerged concerning the Elli Brothers would let us entertain the future possibility of being able to speak of a Milanese "school" of piano making, a school of craftsmen who seem to have been united by strong affinity in matters of external aesthetic taste on the one hand, but who were quite disparate and free in their choices of technology and models to follow, on the other.

Translated by Ivan Fowler

tavolo Gaetano Scappa, Milano, 1804." I was able to track down Scappa instruments No. 3 and No. 5 thanks to Augusto Bonza.

FIGURE 16. Square piano "Gaetano Scappa - Milano 1799" (piano No. 3). Milan, private collection; photograph by the author.

FIGURE 17. Square piano "Gaetano Scappa - Milano 1799" (piano No. 3), action. Milan, private collection; photograph by the author.

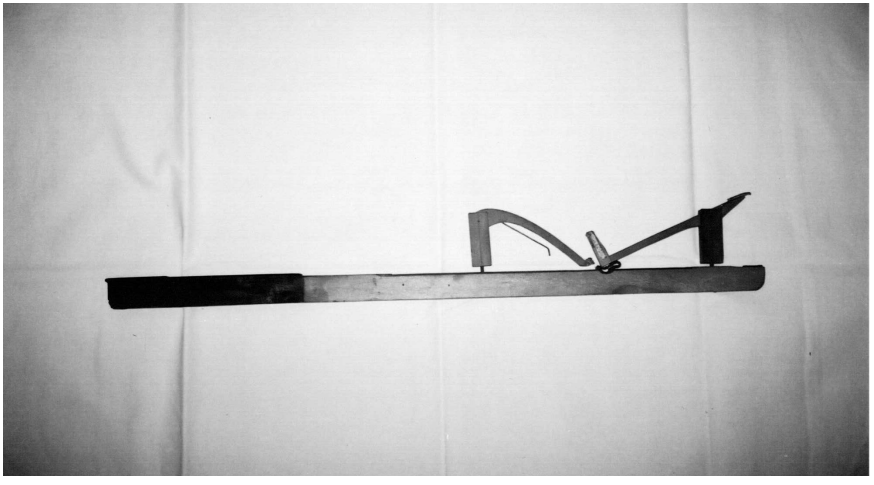

FIGURE 18. Square piano "Gaetano Scappa - Milano 1799" (piano No. 3), hammer. Milan, private collection; photograph by the author.