

Basic Detail Report



Harpsichord

Date

1530 ca.

Description

This harpsichord, with 45 notes (C/E to c3) and a single 8' register, is among the oldest playable strung keyboards. In typical Italian style, the instrument, with its thin walls, was kept in a separate outer case. Material: Beechwood key levers; boxwood (*Buxus*) naturals with trefoil keyfronts cut from two layers of veneer applied to the front ends of the levers painted blue; sharps of pearwood

(*Pyrus* or a closely related species) stained black. Keyframe of spruce (*Picea*; back rail sampled); guide rack of poplar (*Populus*); balance rail of linden (*Tilia*); key guide slips of beech. In the typically Neapolitan manner, the keyboard rests on a framework glued to the bottom, and slides like a drawer into slots in the wrestplank support blocks. Case walls and moldings of maple; bottom board of fir (*Abies*); wrestplank of pear (*Pyrus* etc.); belly rail of spruce (*Picea*). Typical Italian construction with the walls applied to the edges of the bottom. Molded nut of maple in two straight sections mitered between c1 and c#1. Soundboard of fine-grained quartered-sawed spruce (*Picea*); molded bridge of maple, bent to its curve, with mitered-on bass section. A cutoff bar is visible just behind the bridge-side edge of the rose. Original decorative features include the maple moldings applied around the upper and lower edges of the case exterior; a molding around the upper edge of the case interior; and a compound molding around the edges of the soundboard and wrestplank ends. The keycheeks are carved in the form of cornucopias on a stippled background. The soundhole in the soundboard, approximately 86 mm in diameter, is surrounded and covered by an extraordinarily fine geometrical rose made from several layers of veneer, two molded rings of wood, and (over the opening) carved wood. The gilt and painted decoration are, at least in part, later additions. There have been some musical alterations, none of which have substantially affected the integrity of the instrument. Probably first, the harpsichord was attached to an organ underneath. At, presumably, a later stage, probably in the mid-to-late 17th c. or perhaps in the 18th, a second 8' was added, and a small rectangular hole was cut in the spine to install the new box guide. Probably at a somewhat later stage was the addition of pedal pulldowns for the lowest six notes.

Dimensions

Overall: Harpsichord: 1722 mm long by 658 wide (excluding moldings); 202 high. Outer case: 1823 mm long by 707 mm (excluding the lid) Length (without moldings): 1722 mm Width (without moldings): 658 mm near bottom at keyboard front; 661 mm at keycheek tops near nameboard Height: 202 mm (maximum) Width of keywell at keyboard front: 638 mm Tail angle: 32³/₄^o Keyboard: 3-octave measure: at keyboard front: 495 mm at keyboard rack: 496¹/₂ mm on the jack guide: 494 mm Natural heads 34 mm

long; sharps 63 to 65 mm long, 12 to 13 mm (mostly about $12\frac{1}{2}$) wide (not significantly tapered in width), $11\frac{1}{4}$ to 12 mm high (approx. $8\frac{1}{2}$ mm above natural surfaces); key levers (beech) 287 mm long; natural boxwood cover overlap lever fronts by 3 mm; natural front (boxwood cover) to balance $118\frac{1}{2}$ mm; sharp balance line $11\frac{1}{2}$ mm behind natural line; natural balance to back end of lever $171\frac{1}{2}$ mm; scribed line on top of levers 33 mm from back end. Case walls: $4\frac{3}{4}$ mm thick, parts of bentside slightly less, down to about $4\frac{1}{2}$ mm. Bottom board mostly 13 to $15\frac{1}{2}$ mm thick. Diameter of hole in soundboard for rose, approximately 86 mm. String lengths in mm C/E 1310 F 1299 c 1040 c1 525 c2 279 c3 133