

THE STATE OF
RESEARCH INTO
THE HISTORY OF
PIANO-MAKING
ON POLISH SOIL

FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO
THE NEW EDITION OF *FORTEPIAN
POLSKI* ('THE POLISH PIANO')

Around the turn of the 1980s, there was a noticeable surge of interest in the history of the Polish piano-making industry and in historical pianos of foreign and domestic production. Research into the manufacture of these instruments in Poland was conducted by myself, under the auspices of the Institute of Musicology of the University of Warsaw, and from 1978 the Historical Monuments Documentation Centre (now National Heritage Board of Poland) began compiling an inventory of old pianos preserved throughout the country. Besides the Museum of Musical Instruments in Poznań, new museums and collections were established, with pianos among their display: in 1978 the Collection of Historical Pianos attached to the Pomeranian Philharmonic in Bydgoszcz (now the Andrzej Szwalbe Collection of Historical Pianos in Ostromecko, near Bydgoszcz) and in 1981 the Industrial History Museum in Opatówek, near Kalisz (with a Piano Section). At the same time, historical pianos began to be restored and used in performances of early music (Pomeranian Philharmonic in Bydgoszcz, Warsaw Chamber Opera). In the twenty-first century, the Fryderyk Chopin Institute joined that movement, giving historical pianos (originals and their copies) a permanent place in concert life, recordings of early music and musical education, as well as competitions, including the Chopin Competition on Period Instruments.¹ In 2015 the Institute of Music and Dance in Warsaw launched the open access website ‘The Piano in Polish Collections’, presenting the history and technical evolution of the piano and catalogue descriptions of historical pianos in museum collections in Poland.²

As research progressed and the documentation grew, it became essential to bring some order to knowledge relating to the making of pianos on Polish soil, their role in the material and spiritual culture of Polish society and their place in European culture. This does not mean that the subject has been exhausted and the material comprehensively researched.³ Previously unknown written sources and historical instruments continue to appear. Despite the mainly organological aspect of the research conducted to date, many issues still await detailed study, including the acoustics of old Polish pianos. Nevertheless, we can already sketch the core elements to the history of the production of pianos and developments in their design on Polish soil.

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The Fryderyk Chopin Institute’s releases have included Chopin’s complete works on historical pianos in the series *The Real Chopin*: <https://en.chopin.nifc.pl/institute/publications/musics>.

Music workshops are organised by the Fryderyk Chopin Institute at Radziejowice, near Warsaw, with the participation of world-renowned period instrument performers and teachers. The First International Chopin Competition on Period Instruments was held in 2018, <http://iccp.eu/pl>, accessed 28 April 2019.

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‘The Piano in Polish Collections’, <http://fortepian.instrumenty.edu.pl>.

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See also Benjamin Vogel, ‘Instrumentologia polska w ostatnim stuleciu’ [Polish organology over the last one hundred years], in Dagmara Łopatowska-Romsvik and Aleksandra Patalas (ed.), *Sto lat muzykologii polskiej – Historia – Terazniejszość – Perspektywy* [A hundred years of Polish musicology: history, present and prospects] (Kraków, 2016), 151–178.

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Nonetheless, it is worth recommending here numerous texts by the author relating to piano-making in what is now Gdańsk and Kaliningrad (formerly Königsberg) published in the proceedings of cycles of conferences held in Gdańsk, including 'Piano Music, Organs and Organ Music' and 'Musica Baltica'. Those texts include the following: 'Pianos of Gdańsk until 1815', in Janusz Krassowski, et al. (eds), *Muzyka Fortepianowa XII* [Piano Music 12] (Gdańsk, 2001), 346–361; 'Fortepianmistrze Gdańska kontra fortepianmistrze Królewca w świetle wystaw przemysłowo-rzemieślniczych w XIX w. i na początku XX w.' [Piano makers of Gdańsk versus piano makers of Königsberg in light of industrial-craft exhibitions in the nineteenth and early twentieth century], in Janusz Krassowski, et al. (eds), *Muzyka Fortepianowa XIII* [Piano Music 13] (Gdańsk, 2004), 483–498; 'Königsberg as a Center of Musical Instrument Manufacture', in Danuta Popinięs, Danuta Szlagowska and Jolanta Woźniak (eds), *Musica Baltica. Music-making in Baltic Cities* (Gdańsk, 2015), 299–313.

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Teresa Zielińska, 'Nieznany autograf Jana Sebastiana Bacha' [An unknown autograph of Johann Sebastian Bach], *Muzyka*, 1967/3, 69; Christoph Wolff, 'New Research on Bach's *Musical Offering*', *The Musical Quarterly*, 57/3 (1971), 403; Benjamin Vogel, 'Pierwsze fortepiany na ziemiach polskich' [The first pianos on Polish soil], in Alicja Kozłowska-Lewna and Renata Skupin (eds), *Muzyka Fortepianowa XVI* [Piano music 16] (Gdańsk, 2015), 15–19.

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Hieronim Florian Radziwiłł, *Diariusze i pisma różne* [Diaries and various writings], ed. Maria Brzezina (Warsaw, 1998), 82 (26 September 1748).

The new expanded edition of my book on this subject from 1995 will discuss the production of all the varieties of horizontal (grand, table) and upright (cabinet, giraffe, lyre, piano, etc.) piano by craftsmen in small workshops and by smaller and larger production companies, only the latter of which may be called factories in our present-day sense of the word. Information on non-professional makers merely complement the picture, particularly since their instruments or improvements most often failed to gain wider use.

It is difficult to specify the exact territorial range of the subject in hand, partly because of the complicated political situation during the nineteenth century, as a result of the Partitions of Poland. It essentially covers the vast lands of the former Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania (which is also linked to the adopted timeframe), also taking into account foreigners settled and assimilated in those lands. The lack of information about Polish makers in Silesia, which was captured from Poland much earlier than other regions, made it practically impossible to take Silesia more broadly into account. During the period in question, German crafts and industry were thriving there, and any trace of the work of Polish makers has been effaced or lost. The pool of information from other borderland areas (including Pomerania) is also considerably more modest than from central lands, due partly to the limited access to archive sources and partly to the comparatively weak economic activity in those lands during the period of the Partitions, which was dominated by the central lands of the Kingdom of Prussia, then the German Empire, the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich.⁴ The sources are supplemented by information concerning the work of Polish piano makers in other European countries, e.g. Russia, Belgium and France.

The timeframe for our subject is delineated by the appearance of the piano on Polish soil and the outbreak of the Second World War, in the wake of which serious changes occurred in the domestic piano-making industry. The oldest extant Polish piano dates from 1774, but pianos were probably made here earlier, particularly given that the tradition of building the piano's predecessors – the harpsichord and clavichord – and of playing on them was very old in Polish lands. This instrument possibly arrived in Poland from German lands during Saxon times, and the well-known fact that Johann Sebastian Bach (court composer to Augustus III, king of Poland and elector of Saxony) acted as go-between in the purchase of a piano by Gottfried Silbermann (organ builder at the same court) for Jan Klemens Branicki of Białystok in 1749 was not an isolated occurrence.⁵ A year earlier, Hieronim Florian Radziwiłł, of Biała, secured the services of some 'master of the fortepiano, an instrument newly invented by him, from the city of Vienna'.⁶ Ultimately, he bought an instrument

in Vienna for 100 ducats (1800 zł).⁷ We also have a photograph of a piano from 1756 (lost during the Second World War) at the castle in Podhorce, made by the Warsaw-based organ builder Paweł Ernest Rikert (Rückert), probably to a commission from the castle's owner, the hetman Waław Rzewuski.⁸ So we cannot give a more precise initial date for our timeframe.

Over the period under discussion, we can distinguish several stages corresponding to phases in the development of the piano's construction. This division was broken up into sub-periods, determined by the last Partition of Poland, the Congress of Vienna, the November (1830) and January (1863) uprisings and the two world wars. They are linked to political-economic changes which bore a crucial influence on the evolution of the piano-making craft – and then industry – in Poland. The material evidence from the period of the Partitions was necessarily divided between the three partitions – the Austrian, Russian and Prussian.

The study is based on historical pianos preserved in Poland and abroad, of which more than 300 Polish-made instruments and more than 350 pianos made abroad (used as comparative material) were subjected to precise analysis. A considerable part of their organological and photographic documentation, in the form of record cards, is held in the archive of the National Heritage Board of Poland in Warsaw. The bigger manufacturers are represented by up to several dozen specimens. The instruments by some firms have not been inventoried thus far, and it is possible that none have survived. The situation alters as new information is gathered and the author's documentational work proceeds. Nonetheless, the NHB's card index, completed up to c.2010, already represents quite abundant material, enabling the development of piano-making to be traced over time.

Those material resources are crucially complemented by written and iconographic sources, containing above all biographical data about makers, information about companies and, to a lesser extent, descriptions and prints of instruments. The largest group among them constitutes the daily press, containing advertisements, descriptions of industrial exhibitions, instruments and firms, reports on the state of the industry, and so on. Only in a small number of cases were the authors experts on the subject. During the second half of the nineteenth century, a professional music press appeared, which naturally proved far more precise in its information. Another abundant source consists of all kinds of calendars, guidebooks, address books and annuals containing, for example, statistical data relating to crafts and industries, manufacturers and guilds. Immensely important are archive sources, which unfortunately are often not fully intact (e.g. the files of the Directorate of Craft and Industry attached to the Government Commission for Internal Affairs and the Police of the Kingdom of Poland were completely destroyed by flames in 1944). What remains are searches for indirect

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Irena Bierkowska, *Muzyka na dworze księżniczki Hieronima Floriana Radziwiłła* [Music at the court of Prince Hieronim Florian Radziwiłł] (Warsaw, 2013), 131.

8

Benjamin Vogel, 'Wirginat królowej Marysienki' [Queen Mary's virginals], *Studia Wilanowskie*, 21 (2014), 187–200; Benjamin Vogel, 'Do dziejów tradycji muzycznych zamku w Podhorcach' [A contribution to the history of the musical traditions at the castle in Podhorce], *Polski Rocznik Muzykologiczny*, 13 (2015), 99–124; B. Vogel, 'Pierwsze fortepiany', 19–26.

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J. S. [Józef Sikorski], 'Narzędzia muzyczne z klawiaturą' [Musical instruments with a keyboard], *Biblioteka Warszawska*, 1848/2, 372–379.

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Władysław Wiślicki, 'Fabryki krajowe fortepianów' [Domestic piano manufacturers], *Kłosy*, 309 (1871), 349–351.

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Tadeusz Bieńkowski, 'Przemysł fortepianowy w Polsce' [The piano-making industry in Poland], master's thesis, Biblioteka Szkoły Głównej Handlowej w Warszawie, Warsaw, 1934.

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Beniamin Vogel, 'Fortepiany i idiofony klawiszowe w Królestwie Polskim w latach młodości Chopina' [Pianos and keyboard idiophones in the Kingdom of Poland during Chopin's youth], *Rocznik Chopinowski*, 9 (1975), 38–69; idem, 'Fortepianowy pejzaż ziem polskich czasów Chopina' [The piano landscape in Polish lands during Chopin's times], *Rocznik Chopinowski*, 26 (2018), 95–124; idem, *Kolekcja Zabytkowych Fortepianów Filharmonii Pomorskiej* [The Pomeranian Philharmonic's collection of historical pianos] (Bydgoszcz, 1980), 2nd edn (1987); idem, *Kolekcja Zabytkowych Fortepianów im. Andrzeja Szwalbego w Ostromecku* [The Andrzej Szwalbe Collection of Historical Pianos in Ostromecko], with the collaboration of Joanna Gul and Agata Mierzejewska, ed. Joanna Gul (Bydgoszcz, 2016); idem, *Polskie fortepiany XIX-XX w. Kolekcja Muzeum Historii Przemysłu w Opatówku* [Polish pianos of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the collection of the Industrial History Museum in Opatówek] (Opatówek, 1994).

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Beniamin Vogel, 'Przemysł muzyczny Warszawy w II połowie XIX wieku' [The music industry in Warsaw during the second half of the nineteenth century], in Andrzej Spóz (ed.), *Kultura muzyczna Warszawy drugiej połowy XIX wieku* [Musical culture in Warsaw during the second half of the nineteenth century] (Warsaw, 1980), 283–291; idem, 'Przemysł muzyczny w Królestwie Polskim 1815–1830' [The music industry in the Kingdom of Poland 1815–1830], in Zofia Chechlińska (ed.), *Szkice o kulturze muzycznej XIX w.* [Sketches of nineteenth-century musical culture], iv (Warsaw, 1980), 219–275; idem, *Instrumenty muzyczne w kulturze Królestwa Polskiego* [Musical instruments in the culture of the Kingdom of Poland] (Kraków, 1980); idem, 'Przemysł muzyczny Warszawy w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym' [The music industry in Warsaw between the wars], *Muzyka*, 1985/3–4, 57–94.

information in the records of central government agencies, which are often random and fruitless, due to the laconic nature of inventories and indexes. For that reason, no account was taken of the records of provincial commissions; although they may contain unknown detailed information, it could only alter the picture obtained from printed sources to a minimal extent. Furthermore, there are no such records for the period between the two world wars.

Quite a lot of statistical data is contained in annual company records held in the Archive of Statistics Poland (formerly the Central Statistical Office), but they cover only the period from 1935 to 1938 and concern larger companies. Records from earlier years were deleted during the inter-war period, while the Nazis destroyed (or transported out) material relating to western lands. Those gaps are partly filled by the *Statystyki Przemysłowe* ('Industrial statistics') published during that period by the CSO. Indirect information can be found in the records of the Central Clearing Office, active after the First World War, and its Revindication Committee, and in the records of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Warsaw from 1945 to 1950. An important group of materials consists of wills, posthumous inventories, premarital contracts and others held among the Warsaw Notaries Records, which provided biographical information, descriptions of instruments (production contracts), descriptions of workshops, and so on.

The subject literature is rather limited. In 1848, Józef Sikorski published an article on keyboard instruments, including instruments used in Polish musical practice.⁹ A little more than two decades later, also in the form of an article, Władysław Wiślicki presented the development of the piano-making industry in the Congress Kingdom of Poland.¹⁰ Tadeusz Bieńkowski's master's thesis from 1934 concerns the piano-making industry in Poland after the First World War, primarily from the economic perspective.¹¹ Contemporary literature is not much richer. A brief description of the piano-making industry during the nineteenth century, mainly in the lands of the Kingdom of Poland, has been published by myself.¹² Sections devoted to this subject can also be found in my other works on the music industry in Warsaw and the Kingdom of Poland.¹³ Yet they constitute just a fragment of the panorama of the production of all types of instruments, primarily from an historical perspective. A substantial contribution

to the subject in hand has been made by Krzysztof Rottermund's studies on the piano-making centres in Kalisz, Greater Poland and Silesia.¹⁴ While articles and studies from before the Second World War were of an historical or economic character, later texts combined those two aspects and expanded their scope to include the sociological aspect.¹⁵ Due to the state of research at that time, quite modest information on the history of piano-making is contained by other Polish works on domestic instruments.¹⁶ Today we can not only considerably expand and supplement the historical material, but also initiate strictly organological research, enabling us to characterise the successive stages in the development of the design and construction of Polish pianos and compare them with the products of the European and global industry.

In the voluminous foreign literature, Polish instruments and makers are passed over in silence. Only Alfred Dolge, in 1911, mentioned a dozen or so firms in the 'Russia' section of the appendix to his book, and Bob Pierce reiterated similar information in 1977.¹⁷ Franz Josef Hirt was one of the few to mention the factories of Krall & Seidler, Małecki & Szreder and Julian Małecki among prominent European manufacturers before 1880, no doubt basing his information on reports from the world industrial exhibitions, in which those firms received prizes.¹⁸ Petr N. Zimin also made light of Polish instruments (sold mainly in the East), due to a lack of information.¹⁹ The lack of knowledge among foreign researchers is due mainly to a lack of Polish publications on the global market, although sporadic information is beginning to appear on the subject in encyclopaedic publications.²⁰

The planned study will be preceded by a quite lengthy chapter on the history of the piano across the world. This was dictated on one hand by the lack of any studies on that subject in the Polish musicological literature and on the other by the need to create a point of reference for considerations relating to the history of the development of Polish pianos. The questions of the piano in musical life and in the everyday life of Polish society and of the spread of the instrument will be outlined in the last chapter. The author has discussed the social standing of piano makers in his previous works.²¹ Besides the organological aspect of the subject, hitherto overlooked, there will also be lengthy sections on the evolution of the piano as an object of decorative art

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Krzysztof Rottermund, *Przemysł muzyczny Kalisza XIX i XX wieku ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem działalności rodziny Fibigerów* [The music industry in Kalisz during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, taking particular account of the work of the Fibiger family], *Zeszyty Naukowe Akademii Muzycznej we Wrocławiu* 39 (Wrocław, 1985); idem, *Budownictwo instrumentów muzycznych na terenie Wielkopolski w XIX i I połowie XX wieku* [The production of musical instruments in Greater Poland during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century] (Poznań, 2002); idem, *Budownictwo fortepianów na Śląsku do 1945 roku* [Piano-making in Silesia up to 1945] (Szczecin, 2004).

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Benjamin Vogel, 'Piano: the main attraction of the Polish salon during Maria Szymanowska time', *Annales. Centre Scientifique de l'Académie Polonaise des Sciences à Paris*, 16 (2014), 125–41.

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Mateusz Gliński (ed.), *Instrumenty muzyczne* [Musical instruments] (Warsaw, 1929); Kazimierz Rudzki, 'Przemysł muzyczny w Polsce' [The music industry in Poland], master's thesis, Biblioteka Szkoły Głównej Handlowej w Warszawie, Warsaw, 1935; Włodzimierz Kamiński, *Instrumenty muzyczne na ziemiach polskich* [Musical instruments in Polish lands] (Kraków, 1971).

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Alfred Dolge, *Pianos and their Makers* (Covina, 1911); Bob Pierce, *Pierce Piano Atlas*, 7th edn (Long Beach, 1977).

18

Franz Joseph Hirt, *Meisterwerke des Klavierbaus* (Olten, 1955).

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Petr N. Zimin, *Istoria fortepiano i jevo predsestviennikov* [History of the piano and its predecessors] (Moscow, 1968).

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Benjamin Vogel, 'Poland, Piano Industry in', in Robert Palmieri (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Keyboard Instruments*, i: *The Piano* (New York, 1995), 298–299; idem, incl. entries on the piano-makers Fryderyk Buchholtz, Rudolph Friedrich Dalitz, Józef Długosz, Gustaw Arnold Fibiger, Jan Kerntopf, Krall & Seidler and Małecki, in Laurence Libin (ed.), *The Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*, 5 vols, 2nd edn (Oxford, 2014).

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B. Vogel, *Instrumenty muzyczne*, 104–133; see also idem, 'Muzycy, muzykusi i muzykanci Księstwa Warszawskiego' [Musicians and players in the Duchy of Warsaw], *Muzyka*, 1975/2, 82–107.

and on the mutual influences between instrument-making and furniture production (styles, decoration, etc.). This area merits separate study. For the sake of clarity, most of the factographic data is placed in the appendix, in a register of piano makers and companies producing grand and upright pianos, where the entries are complemented by a bibliography. The planned second edition of this book on Polish pianos, prepared almost a quarter of a century after the first edition, will be much richer in new sources, addenda and corrigenda and, no less importantly, the author's many years of research experience.