

# Oxford Music Online

Grove Music Online

## Instruments, collections of, §3: Renaissance to 1800

article url: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/47690pg3>

### Instruments, collections of, §3: Renaissance to 1800

#### 3. Renaissance to 1800.

The flourishing of instrument collections during the Renaissance, especially in Italy, is best understood in the context of collecting in general. With increasing wealth and ease of travel, collectors gathered great numbers of exotic objects both for amusement and instruction. Competition led to ostentation, since according to Matarazzo 'it belongs to the position of the great to keep horses, dogs, ... court jesters, singers and foreign animals', and the largest number of different specimens was most impressive. The contemporaneous development of idiomatic instrumental music elevated the status of instrument makers, who in some towns were protected by professional guilds. Growth of instrument families in all pitch ranges made it desirable to obtain complete consorts, adding new varieties as they became fashionable. Fulfilling aristocratic demands for instruments of utmost magnificence, makers produced art objects worthy of display in private *musei* and *Wunderkammern*; an impression of these studios survives in the intarsias that lined Federigo da Montefeltro's studios at Urbino and Gubbio. By commissioning elegant instruments towns and churches joined the nobility and rich merchants in demonstrating prosperity and good taste. All these factors encouraged instrument collecting.

With important exceptions noted below, most of the Renaissance and Baroque collections have become dispersed. Some idea of their contents can be gained from various published inventories and descriptions. A 1503 inventory of Isabella of Castile's royal alcázar reveals about 20 instruments, some old and broken, a modest assemblage used mainly in performance. A century later Philip II's royal palace in Madrid boasted not only 136 wind, 44 string and 11 keyboard instruments, but also ten Chinese instruments (1602 inventory; the collection, part of which Philip inherited from his aunt, Queen Mary of Hungary, was dispersed through sale a few years later). Wind instruments likewise far outnumbered strings at Henry VIII's Westminster (1547 inventory), where Philip van Wilder had in his charge about 320 instruments (not counting gilt horns, drums and the like), including 40 keyboards. Raymond Fugger's music chamber in Augsburg held (in 1566) nearly 400 instruments, including over 100 flutes and recorders, about 140 lutes and many violins and harpsichords by famous makers, gathered from all over Europe. The Berlin court orchestra owned (in 1582) 72 instruments, 60 of them wind, while Archduke Ferdinand II of the Tyrol's collections (1596) comprised over 230 costly instruments, nearly 80% wind. Ferdinand's personal collection, now at the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum, was kept at his Ambras residence near Innsbruck. French 16th-century collections were far less impressive, but Jean de Badonvilliers, councillor to François I, left a number of string and keyboard instruments at his death in 1544. A 1603 inventory of the Hengrave Hall collection survives; in that year the royal collection provided violins for Queen Elizabeth's funeral.

Woodwind instruments usually outnumbered strings in Renaissance repositories, but have not survived in such profusion. Wooden flutes and reed instruments, being cheaper and offering less opportunity for decoration than strings, were considered less worth preserving when they became obsolete; they were also harder to modernize (ivory ones were more precious and often elaborately carved, but less useful in performance; hence they survive in relatively high numbers). Wind instruments in sets often belonged to repositories heavily drawn on by professional performers. The Kassel Hofkapelle inventories of 1573, 1613 and 1638 record loans to the

count's musicians; there and elsewhere it appears that valuable, decorated keyboard instruments seldom left their usual chambers (hence more harpsichords and organs occur in inventories than one might expect since one or more might have had to be kept wherever music was often performed). These stationary, seldom loaned instruments are more likely than most to have become 'collectors' items'.

Only gradually did connoisseurs evolve the concept of a collection as a work of art, capable of displaying internal harmony and of expressing its owner's taste. Private collectors rather than institutional buyers were mainly responsible for developing this attitude, and Italy in particular was full of collectors. Venice boasted Agostino Amadi, Luigi Balbi, Marco Contarini (whose collection passed to the Correr family and parts of which came to the Paris and Brussels conservatory collections), Leonardo Sanudo and Catarino Zeno; in Bologna lived Ferdinando Cospi; in Ferrara, Antonio Goretti; in Florence, Ridolfo Sirigatti; in Padua, Enea degli Obizzi (whose collection is now in the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum); in Rome, Michele Todini and Athanasius Kircher; and in Milan, Manfredo Settala. Finally, there were the more renowned d'Este, Sforza and Medici families. According to Bottrigari, Isabella d'Este's nephew Alfonso II kept his collection in two great chambers where his musicians played; the instruments were arranged by category, and separated according to whether they were played or 'different from those ... usually made today', and included Vicentino's *arcicembalo* and a set of crumhorns (possibly those now in the Musée des Instruments de Musique, Brussels).

In Spain and Portugal, noteworthy collections belonged to the Duke of Calabria at Valencia and to Queen Mary of Hungary. Northwards were the private holdings of Jean Baptiste Dandeleu, Caspar Duitz, Hendrick van Brederode, and Constantijn Huygens. Hans Burgkmair's *Triumphzug* illustrates instruments from Maximilian I's Hofkapelle. A certain Felix Platter owned instruments in Basle.

In 1659 Elias Ashmole received a Guinea Coast drum from Johan Tradescant the younger, whose 1656 *Musaeum Tradescantianum* catalogue records several African and Indian drums under the heading 'Warlike Instruments' (a Guinea drum and a fragment of a side-blown horn remain in the Ashmolean collection, Oxford); similar instruments had been illustrated by Praetorius (*Theatrum instrumentorum*, 1620). Athanasius Kircher's museum at Rome contained instruments discussed in his *Musurgia universalis* (1650); and Filippo Bonanni, curator of Kircher's collection from 1698, drew on Kircher's text as well as Marin Mersenne's *Harmonie universelle* (1636–7) for his own *Gabinetto armonico* (1722). Michele Todini's *Dichiaratione della galleria armonica* (1676) describes his own idiosyncratic collection, which included curious instruments of his own design; his extraordinary harpsichord flanked by figures of Polyphemus and Galatea survives in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Todini exhibited his collection publicly, and Winternitz believed that it might have constituted 'the first museum exclusively devoted to musical instruments'.

Of particular interest later in the Baroque era were the keyboard instruments in collections of Cosimo III and Ferdinando de' Medici (supervised by Bartolomeo Cristofori after 1716), Cardinal Ottoboni and Queen Maria Barbara de Braganza. In England Sir Samuel Hellier assembled a distinguished collection in the mid-18th century including the Stradivari violin now known by his name; the greater part, however, he sent to his country house so that his estate workers could enjoy orchestral music-making – an early example of the provision of sets of instruments for workers' recreation which became common with 19th-century industrialists. By that time it was common for collectors to obtain antique instruments at public sales.

Some outstanding 18th-century musicians were collectors. The celebrated castrato Farinelli owned several precious keyboard instruments (nicknamed 'Coreggio', Rafael', 'Titian' and so on), some inherited from Queen Maria Barbara; his testament (1782) specifies that his collection, formed for playing domestic music, should be perpetually preserved in good order along with his music library for the exclusive enjoyment of devoted musicians. Bach at his death owned 19 instruments estimated at nearly a third of the entire value of his estate. Curatorial responsibilities may have stimulated other notable composers of instrumental music. In 1673 Henry Purcell was apprenticed to John Hingeston, Charles II's instrument keeper, as an unpaid 'keeper, maker, mender, repayrer and tuner of the regalls, organs, virginalls, flutes and recorders and all other kind of wind instruments whatsoever'; ten years later Purcell succeeded Hingeston. One of Haydn's contractual responsibilities as Vice-Kapellmeister to the Esterházy was to look after the instruments and order new ones for the prince's orchestra. Vivaldi's duties at the Pio Ospedale

18.3.2011

Instruments, collections of, §3: Renai...

della Pietà included the purchase of instruments.

**Laurence Libin, Arnold Myers**

Copyright © [Oxford University Press](#) 2007 — 2011.