

HUBBARD HARPSICHORDS INCORPORATED

FRENCH DOUBLE-MANUAL HARPSICHORDS OF THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES

No more idiomatic music has been written for the harpsichord than by French composers of the 17th and 18th centuries. The harpsichords for which this marvelous body of music was composed were superb and these magnificent products of the Parisian workshops were justly prized throughout Europe. And, while both composers and makers influenced each other and mutually helped guide the evolution of the instrument and its music, this particular Darwinian dance was equally driven by the wiles of the ultimate predator - the customer. The public for things musical was sizable, opinionated, sometimes knowledgeable and, of course, largely rich. The highest prices were paid for antique 'Flemish' harpsichords *mis à gran ravalement*. Some of them actually HAD been Ruckers before they grew up but, disregarding all issues of dubious heritage, virtually all the instruments sold as antiques bore little musical resemblance to their earlier incarnations. There are several reasons why this should be so but such considerations are largely beside the point. Suffice it to say that in making an instrument larger, increasing the number of strings and choirs and sending the cumulative load on the instrument through the roof, original beauties inevitably get lost but, done right, new delights can emerge. What is important here is that, in dealing with the wealthy class's taste for Flemish antiques (more like a ravening hunger), and its ability to pay top *sou*, the Parisian makers had not only unparalleled opportunities to study Flemish techniques but, in the bargain, enjoyed a level of financial support that allowed them, by and large, to get the butchery right. This obsession served to obliterate virtually all evidence of an earlier, relatively coherent and indigenous school of building. But the builders who engaged in the practice were paid, in essence, to attend a clinic on Flemish building practices that influenced the subsequent practices of all Parisian makers. The ultimate result was the mid-18th century type of large, five-octave, double-manual harpsichord that later received such overwhelming attention in the second half of the 20th Century.

French 17th Century Double-Manual Harpsichord

HARPSICHORD AFTER MICHEL RICHARD (1688)

The late 17th century was a time of flux in French harpsichord making. The earlier native school of building was being set aside in favor of antique Flemish harpsichords that had newly been enlarged to accommodate the increased range necessary for contemporary composers such as Henri d'Anglebert, Nicolas leBegue or Elizabeth Jacquet de la Guerre. Given that the physical enlargement necessary to meet this need was quite modest, the musical results were not grossly out of line with the original qualities of the instruments involved. One could hardly blame a prominent maker such as Michel Richard for making an instrument closely modeled on the Ruckers design and then passing it off as a Ruckers. It would seem that this is exactly what he did in 1688. The original represents an interesting mix of features: some Flemish, some indigenous French (including the soundboard barring) and a few which would later, in the 18th century, become established practice.



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As a strict copy, the instrument we offer in this model would have a plain, bright treble and powerful bass at $a'=415\text{Hz}$, but the scale is marginally too long. At $a'=392\text{Hz}$, one whole tone below modern pitch (and the original's probable design pitch), the sound achieves its full potential and becomes better balanced, darker and more complex while retaining the clear sound associated with the small range and relatively small volume of the case. Alternatively, we can adjust the dimensions of the instrument for $a'=415\text{Hz}$. Much like the larger instruments of the 18th century, that designs such as this helped spawn, the sound is useful across a broad range of musical styles.

Sitting at the keyboard the player immediately notices differences. The playing surfaces retain the dimensions and proportions of the original. The octave span is among the smallest we make ($6\frac{1}{8}''$) and the lengths of both key heads and accidentals are shorter than later, more expansive designs. The short octave with the split $D\#$ also presents possibilities to the player. The player should not find it particularly difficult to adapt to these keyboards. Additionally, they can be regarded as a cordial invitation to pursue old fingerings and techniques. They also make possible a few passages that are famously impossible on the usual chromatic keyboard. We have extended the treble two semitones (from c''' to d''') to accommodate slightly later music, as well. It was within just this range that François Couperin *le Grand* (1668-1733) set the overwhelming majority of his music. In fact, an astonishing proportion of harpsichord music written in the first half of the 18th century will fit comfortably within this range, which is also perfect for continuo accompaniment.

Flemish 17th Century Harpsichords mis à grand ravalement

In the latter third of the 17th century, the development of the French harpsichord became intimately related to the practice of *ravalement*, the practice of re-fashioning Flemish instruments by the Ruckers and others inherited from the previous age for contemporary requirements. Antiques even then, these wonderful instruments with their naive, appealing decoration and vibrant sound, were eminently collectible. An extinguished line of makers held in highest regard further assured their stature. Their only fault lay in their restricted range and meager musical resources, faults easily enough remedied but at the cost of their original sound. This cost became progressively greater as the expected gamut of the keyboard widened. These were the street-'rods of their time, but it was lucrative work and no maker could afford to be a purist about the prospect. *Caveat emptor*. If many so-called Ruckers harpsichords first saw the light of day in 17th and 18th century Parisian shops, many more genuine 17th century instruments of (sometimes) Flemish origin by less well-known makers were disassembled, mined for parts which, intermingled, were then reassembled and re-christened "Ruckers" for purposes of salability.



HARPSICHORD AFTER RUCKERS & BLANCHET (CA. 1750)

This is almost certainly the case with the instrument handed down to us as by Ruckers and *ravalé* by Blanchet (above). Although made of century-old parts, and disguised with a rather

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convincing 18th century forgery of a Ruckers soundboard painting, along with a Ioannes Ruckers rose medallion, the tonal design differed little, if at all, from the current practices of the Blanchet workshop. As such it is ideal for the 18th century literature. But, as with the earlier instrument by Richard, Blanchet carried the Flemish fiction further, spreading the string band to nearly Flemish dimensions. This results in an atypically large soundboard area with relatively lower loading. Consequently, this design boasts a forthright sound with a strong, focused bass and a clear, vibrant treble.

HARPSICHORD AFTER RUCKERS & TASKIN
(1646/1780)

The harpsichord after Ruckers, Blanchet and Taskin, on the other hand, is just that. We can be certain that underneath the layers of Parisian work there is a single Ruckers harpsichord, still enough intact to give, perhaps, a faint hint of the Ruckers mystique. The original enlargement was carried out in 1756 by Blanchet and sported the range FF-e^{'''}. Taskin added the f^{'''} in a 1780 rebuilding. This instrument is as compact as the previous is generous. The sound has a subtle, characterful sweetness that always engages the interest. During a residency in Paris in the late 1960s, Frank Hubbard became intimately acquainted with, and consulted on, the restoration of this instrument. He drew the plans for this instrument immediately upon his return to his own shop.



French 18th Century Double-Manual Harpsichords



For the legion of (relatively) poor souls who could not afford a "Ruckers", there was still the option of ordering a new instrument by a living maker (a definition that, ironically, fit more than one "Ruckers"). It is fairly certain that such new-instrument orders constituted the bread-and-butter of most shops. It is doubtful that any shop could afford to be seen as all-Ruckers, all-the-time - people might talk. All such cynical considerations aside, the existence of modern forgeries amongst the ranks of the accepted 'antiques' would have made it particularly difficult to argue that the contemporary instruments being produced were in any manner musically inferior. And, of course, fashion aside, they decidedly were not inferior, but in many or most cases, superior. The prominent makers had a firm grasp of the principles that would produce a first-class, very salable harpsichord and a

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talented, competent maker could follow those principles far more closely in new construction.

Interestingly, the makers of the originals of the two instruments that follow were both immigrants to Paris who established workshops that became very well known and well patronized in the last century of the harpsichord's pre-eminence. Another later immigrant, the famous Pascal Taskin, managed to gain his own foothold in the Parisian scene by strategically marrying the last Blanchet's widow.

SMALL DOUBLE-MANUAL HARPSICHORD AFTER IOANNES GOERMANS (1748)

Jean Goermans was admitted to the maker's guild around 1730. He was Flemish in origin and, understandably enough in a Ruckers-mad time, seems to have been content to trade heavily on this simple association. His instruments were clearly designed with an eye to imitate Flemish designs in general form and lightness. Consequently, the instrument of his we have chosen to copy, produced when he must have been at his prime, is perforce one of the smaller, lighter mid-18th century instruments that can be considered equally as musically successful as its larger confreres from competing shops (photo, previous page). In fact this real French double would go unremarked among a gathering of so-called 18th century Flemish doubles (a 'type' that is, in its current understanding, essentially a 20th century invention). Frank Hubbard was involved in two restorations of this instrument, the first with William Dowd in the 1950's and the second in 1969, at which time a full plan was drawn.

LARGE DOUBLE-MANUAL HARPSICHORD AFTER HENRI HEMSCH (1746?)

Sometime in the first half of the 18th century Henri Hemsch migrated from Switzerland to Paris and stayed to live the rest of his professional life there.

Admitted to the maker's guild in 1746 (about the suspected time of our original's manufacture), Henri seems to have achieved particular importance in the circle around Rameau. His designs and execution tend to the other end of the size, weight and rigidity continuum than those of Goermans. The length of this design translates into a larger case volume and longer bass strings, which serve to push the boom tones a few notes lower than in shorter designs. The weight and rigidity of the case serve to increase treble and bass sustain at the slight expense of some bloom. This is actually a decided advantage for the instrument that will

normally be tuned to equal temperament (the tuning that Rameau came to advocate) or some mild, 1/6th comma-based *temperament ordinaire*, such as *Valotti*. Frank Hubbard examined, drew and restored this instrument in his shop in the late 1960's.



Each of the four 18th century designs offered here represents a distinct facet of the harpsichord-maker's art. Though each is subtly different from the others, in the grand scheme of things they are more alike than otherwise and each will serve the literature a bit differently but, overall, equally well. The rich, well-balanced sonorities possessed by these mid-century

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designs work well with all manner of musical styles – even those of much earlier times. They are offered in the certainty that different people and institutions will have different needs and that, along with the later harpsichord after Taskin (for some, our signature instrument - offered separately), this selection covers the possibilities of the approximately five-octave French double as well as we can imagine, short of offering all designs.

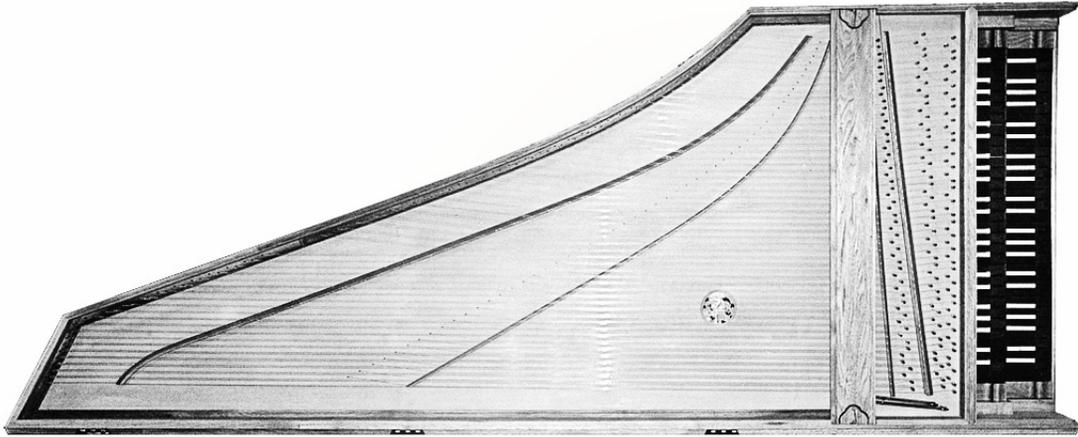
The keyboards of all our instruments are replicas of appropriate originals. The key levers are rear-guided using the traditional schemes. The lower-manual keys are balanced for evenness of touch by hand carving; to the same end the upper keys are discreetly weighted with lead. Except where noted, the octave span is 6 1/4" and the key heads are 1 3/8" long, conforming to the original French practice. The accidentals are set relatively low and, with their ample width, accommodate both old and more modern fingerings. Key fronts are decorated with wood arcades (pear or box, as available), the ebony key heads are rounded and scored with decorative lines, and the stained hardwood, bone-topped sharps are tapered in height and width. The jacks are meticulous reproductions of 18th century French jacks manufactured from the correct woods. Tongues can be furnished pierced for Delrin or feather plectra with return springs of either Nylon or hog bristle. Hubbard Delrin jacks may be substituted. It is close attention to details such as these that results in the light, comfortable, reliable action favored by 18th century composers and players – just the sort that these instruments possess.

Our French doubles are offered painted in traditional style, with contrasting interior and exterior colors reconciled by gilded moldings and accented with gilt bands on case and lid. The soundboard and wrestplank may be decorated in 18th century French style. A simple trestle stand is the standard offering. A Louis XVI apron stand with turned and fluted legs or a French Provincial cabriole stand may be substituted at additional cost. Our *ravalement* doubles may also be decorated in earlier Flemish style. Matching benches are available.



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Specifications and prices



HARPSICHORD AFTER MICHEL RICHARD (1688)

Range: 53 notes, GG/BB-d''' (split D#), a' = 392 Hz. non transposing

Octave span: 6 1/8" - identical to original

Disposition: Upper manual: 1 x 8'; lower manual: 1 x 4', 1 x 8', manual coupler

Dimensions: length 7' 4"; width 2' 9"

Instrument weight (exclusive of stand): 135 lbs.

Shipping weight: 390 lbs. crated

With painted & gilded decor, oak trestle stand, wood jacks \$ 26,500

Options - Richard

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| a. Delrin® jack credit | \$ -1,350 |
| b. Instrument built for a' = 415 Hz, non-transposing | N.C. |
| c. Case & lid with chinoiserie decor | inquire |
| d. Louis XIV tapered square leg apron stand | inquire |
| e. Cordura nylon carrying cover | \$ 350 |

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Flemish 17th Century Harpsichords mis à grand ravalement

HARPSICHORD AFTER RUCKERS & BLANCHET

Range: 60 notes, FF-e^{'''}, transposing (a' = 415 Hz, 440 Hz)

Disposition: Upper manual 1 x 8'; lower manual 1 x 8', 1 x 4', buff stop; handstops & shove coupler

Dimensions: length 7' 8"; width 3' 1"

Instrument weight (exclusive of stand): 145 lbs.

Shipping weight: 400 lbs. crated

With painted & gilded decor, oak trestle stand, wood jacks \$ 29,000

HARPSICHORD AFTER RUCKERS & TASKIN

Range: 61 notes, five octaves, FF-f^{'''}, transposing (a' = 415 Hz, 440 Hz)

Disposition: Upper manual 1 x 8'; lower manual 1 x 8', 1 x 4', buff stop, optional *peau de buffle*; handstops and shove coupler

Dimensions: length 7' 5"; width 2' 11"

Instrument weight (exclusive of stand): 140 lbs.

Shipping weight: 400 lbs. crated

With painted & gilded decor, oak trestle stand, wood jacks \$ 29,000

Options

The following options pertain to both the Blanchet and the Taskin

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| a. Delrin® jack credit | \$ -1,500 |
| b. Bone-covered naturals, ebony-capped, stained hardwood sharps | \$ 1,200 |
| c. Queen Anne cabriole apron stand | \$ 5,500 |
| d. Louis XVI apron stand | \$ 4,500 |
| e. Soundboard decorated in XVII c. Flemish or XVIII c. French style | \$ inquire |
| f. Keywell & interior lid & case decorated with Flemish papers, mottoes & Ruckers style name batten, reproduction Flemish soundboard rose | \$ 1000 |
| g. 18 th C. pattern music desk | \$ 400 |
| h. Cordura nylon carrying cover | \$ 350 |

The following option pertains only to the Ruckers & Taskin

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| k. <i>Peau de buffle</i> register with <i>genouillieres</i> and handstop-actuated <i>eleveur</i> (wood jacks only) | \$ 4,000 |
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French 18th Century Double-Manual Harpsichords

SMALL HARPSICHORD AFTER IOANNES GOERMANS (1748)

Range: 58 notes, five octaves less three semi-tones, GG-e^{'''}, transposing (a' = 415 Hz, 440 Hz)

Disposition: Upper manual 1 x 8'; lower manual 1 x 8', 1 x 4', buff stop; handstops and shove coupler

Dimensions: length 7' 6"; width 2' 10 1/4"

Instrument weight (exclusive of stand): 135-140 lbs.

Shipping weight: 390 lbs. crated

With painted & gilded case, trestle stand, wood jacks, leather-covered registers
\$ 29,000

LARGE HARPSICHORD AFTER HENRI HEMSCH (1746?)

Range: 60 notes, five octaves less one semi-tone, FF-e^{'''}, transposing (a' = 415 Hz, 440 Hz)

Disposition: Upper manual 1 x 8'; lower manual 1 x 8', 1 x 4', buff stop; handstops and shove coupler

Dimensions: length 7' 11"; width 3'

Instrument weight (exclusive of stand): 145-50 lbs.

Shipping weight: 420 lbs. crated

With painted & gilded case, trestle stand, wood jacks, leather-covered registers
\$ 29,000

Options

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| a. Delrin® jack credit | \$ -1,500 |
| b. Soundboard & wrestplank decorated in XVIIIc. French style | \$inquire |
| c. Queen Anne cabriole apron stand | \$ 5,500 |
| d. Louis XVI apron stand | \$ 4,500 |
| e. 18 th C. pattern music desk | \$ 400 |
| f. Cordura nylon carrying cover | \$ 350 |

Price: July 1, 2007