

Which Harpsichords for Domenico Scarlatti?

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A summary of our present knowledge about the harpsichords found in Spain during the eighteenth century and about the most prominent maker at that time, Diego Fernández.

Over the past forty years, information about Spanish harpsichord makers has grown significantly, largely due to the excellent contributions of scholars such as the late Beryl Kenyon de Pascual, Cristina Bordas, John Koster and Michael Latcham. Additionally, the symposium ‘*Diego Fernández*’, which is part of the festival FIMTE organised by the author since 2000, along with its associated publications, has made a significant contribution to stimulating research on this subject and disseminating information regarding the various Spanish schools of harpsichord making, which are intrinsically connected to the composers of keyboard music.¹ In this article, I will summarise the state of the art regarding Domenico Scarlatti instruments, drawing on previous publications in a way that I hope will be useful for performers.²

In the first place, we should consider the instruments Scarlatti had at home. The only document available concerning the keyboard instruments present in Scarlatti’s residence is the inventory compiled at the time of his death, which indicates that he had three ‘*clavicordios*’.³ Two of these were the property of Queen Maria Bárbara and were returned to her following Scarlatti’s death. The third belonged to the composer himself and was valued by Diego Fernández at 3,000 *reales*. The record indicates that Scarlatti obtained that *clavicordio* during his second marriage, which took place between 1740 and 1742.⁴ There is no description of these three *clavicordios*, their makers, or whether they were harpsichords or pianos. However, when comparing with other contemporary inventories, we are strongly inclined to believe that all three instruments were harpsichords. Similar documents tend to use ‘*clavicordio de piano*’ or ‘*clavicordio de martillos*’ to refer to a piano and ‘*clavicordio*’ or ‘*clavicordio de plumas*’ for a harpsichord.⁵ Considering the prices of the harpsichords owned by other musicians at the Madrid court and the costs of those made by Diego Fernández for Queen Maria Bárbara, the price of Scarlatti’s own harpsichord seems to imply that it was a fine and valuable instrument.⁶

¹ Among the publications from FIMTE, the following books, edited by Luisa Morales: *Claves y pianos españoles. Interpretación y repertorio hasta 1830* (Almería: Diputación Provincial-LEAL, 2003); *Five Centuries of Spanish Keyboard Music* (Almería: LEAL 2007); *Domenico Scarlatti in Spain* (Almería, LEAL: 2009); *Domenico Scarlatti Forwards and Backwards* (Almería: FIMTE 2024). For a complete record see www.fimte.org.

² The forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Domenico Scarlatti*, edited by the author will contribute significantly to the exploration of this and various other relevant subjects.

³ *Clavicordio* was the standard generic term of the eighteenth century used to designate keyboard string instruments. Thus, *Clavicordio de pluma* referred to a harpsichord, and *Clavicordio de piano*, to a piano.

⁴ AGP. Sección Jurídica. Bureo. Caja 36/2, fol. 102, transcribed and translated in Luisa Morales, ‘Domenico Scarlatti in Spain: An Introduction’, in Morales 2009, 15-27, at 21.

⁵ Morales 2009, 20-23.

⁶ For example, Maria Bárbara paid Diego Fernández 2,100 *reales* for the harpsichord he made in 1749, and 4,800 *reales* each in 1757 for the harpsichords at Aranjuez and El Escorial. Among the court musicians, the tenor Pérez de la Torre (1763) possessed a Ruckers valued at 1,200 *reales* and a large harpsichord valued at 1,880 *reales* (Morales 2009, 20 and 22).

More detailed information on the instruments available to Scarlatti can be found in the inventory of Queen Maria Bárbara, a highly significant document, as she was Scarlatti's patroness and primary recipient of his sonatas. The inventory, dated 1758, was compiled a few months after the Queen's death. It lists twelve keyboard instruments, including both harpsichords and pianos. As Latcham points out, as the court was itinerant, the instruments were spread across the Royal Palaces. Eight instruments appear to have been located at the Buen Retiro palace, with two others at the royal palace of Aranjuez and the Royal Seat at El Escorial. Three of the instruments listed as 1, 2 and 3, the Queen's favourites, were bequeathed by Maria Bárbara to Farinelli. A comprehensive summary of the information we have regarding the twelve instruments is as follows:⁷

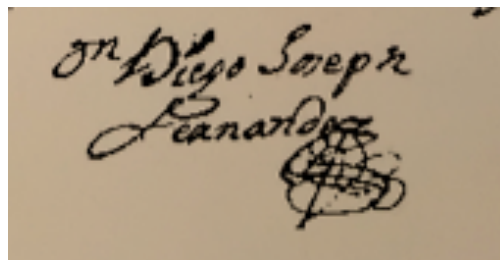
1. A piano (*clavicordio de piano*) of fifty-six keys (GG-d''') made in Florence, attributed to Giovanni Ferrini and dated 1730, bequeathed to Farinelli.
2. A harpsichord of fifty-six keys (GG-d''') with five *registros* and four sets of strings. Made by Diego Fernández in 1753. Bequeathed to Farinelli. Following Farinelli's inventory, this harpsichord had five registers, four sets of strings (gut, brass and iron) and ten foot pommels for selecting the stops.
3. A harpsichord of sixty-one keys (1749?; GG-g'''), likely by Fernández, also inherited by Farinelli.
4. A harpsichord (*clavicordio de pluma*) of fifty-six keys, formerly a piano made in Florence.
5. A harpsichord (*clavicordio de pluma*) of fifty keys, formerly a piano made in Florence.
6. A harpsichord (*clavicordio de pluma*) of fifty-eight keys, three sets of strings.
7. A Flemish harpsichord with three sets of strings.
8. A harpsichord (*clavicordio de pluma*) of fifty-six keys, three sets of strings.
9. A piano (*clavicordio de piano*) of forty-nine keys (C-c''') made in Florence, kept at Aranjuez.
10. A harpsichord of sixty-one keys (GG-g''') made by Fernández in 1757, kept at Aranjuez palace.⁸
11. A piano (*clavicordio de piano*) of fifty-four keys (GG-c''').
12. A harpsichord of sixty-one keys (GG-g'''), likely made by Fernández in 1757, kept at El Escorial.⁹

⁷ Michael Latcham, 'The twelve clavicordios owned by Queen Maria Bárbara of Spain and the seven cembali owned by Carlo Broschi, known as Farinelli: facts and speculation', in Morales 2007, 255-81. The following summary of the inventory of Queen Maria Bárbara's keyboard instruments is based on information from that article.

⁸ An invoice by Fernández dated 1757 describes instruments 10 and 12, delivered to Aranjuez and El Escorial royal residences, see Latcham 2007, 265.

Four of the instruments in Maria Bárbara's inventory were made by Diego Fernández. Diego José Fernández Caparrós (1703-1775) was born in Vera, in the province of Almería. At a young age, he was already engaged in repairing harpsichords in Madrid for Queen Isabella Farnesio and the infantas, as evidenced by several invoices dated 1724 and 1726.

Signature of the royal harpsichord builder, Diego Fernández



A document recently discovered by Michael Latcham proves that Diego Fernández had been working for the then Princess Maria Bárbara since at least 1733. In effect, in Farinelli's inventory the following description appears:

‘A little hammer, or key for tuning harpsichords, of worked iron, back gilded; In the cross is incised “I belong to my *Señora* the Princess” On one side of the foot, “Madrid 1733” and on the other, “D: Fernandez” This little hammer enclosed in its purse of turquoise velvet with a little braid of silver’.¹⁰

In 1747, following the accession to the throne of Fernando VI and Maria Bárbara, Diego Fernández was assigned an annual salary of 500 *ducados* with the duty of building and maintaining all harpsichords needed for the Royal House. Subsequently, in 1755, an additional 200 *ducados* were added to his salary. When Fernández was summoned to the Reales Sitios, the royal residences outside Madrid, the royal household arranged a coach and a mule for him, as well as accommodation.¹¹ During the reign of Carlos III, Fernández continued to build harpsichords for the Infante Gabriel, maintaining his annual salary of 700 *ducados*. Other notable clients of Fernández included the Duke of Medina Sidonia, the Duchess of Osuna, and the Duchess of Beaufort.¹²

As highlighted by Kenyon de Pascual, Diego Fernández made a diverse array of harpsichords featuring single and double keyboards, ranging from 51 to 63 keys and equipped with 2 to 6 registers. An exceptionally remarkable harpsichord created by Fernández is the second item on Maria Bárbara's inventory. This harpsichord with *registros* is dated 1753 in an entry from an anonymous dictionary discovered by Oscar Mischiati among the documents of Padre Martini:

⁹ The inventory of Queen María Bárbara's keyboard instruments is kept in the archives of the Palacio Real in Madrid, sig.II 305, fol. 228 to 231r. It is quoted in full in the original Spanish, translated and discussed in: *Carlo Broschi Farinelli: A manuscript description of the operas and festivities at the Spanish Court 1747-1758*, transcription of the 1758 manuscript held in the Royal Library, Madrid with an introduction, an illustrated and annotated translation and appendices by Michael Latcham, (Munich & Salzburg: 2023), 513-19 and 539-61.

¹⁰ ‘Una Martellina, o sia Chiave per accordar Cembali, d'acciaro lavorato fondo indorato; Nella Croce stà inciso “Soy de mi S:^a La Princessa” Al piede da una parte, “Madrid 1733” e dall'altra “D: Fernandez” Rinchiusa detta Martellina nella Sua burseta di velluto torchino con piccolo galloncino d'argento’, Farinelli inventory 126, transcribed and translated in Latcham 2023, 559.

¹¹ Beryl Kenyon de Pascual, ‘Diego Fernández Caparrós y sus instrumentos’, in Morales 2003, 255-281, at 101.

¹² Kenyon de Pascual 2003, 102.

‘The same Don Diego Fernández made a *cembalo a penna* in the year 1753 with 10 *registri* with *piano* and *forte* with *registri* expressing the flute, the harp, the theorbo, small flutes, and all together form the *ripieno*.’¹³

A detailed account of this instrument is available in the inventory of Farinelli, who inherited it. The harpsichord features four sets of strings made from gut, iron, and brass, as well as five registers: 16’, 2 x 8’, 4’, and harp stop. It is likely that one of these registers had leather plectra.¹⁴ Several of the five sets of jacks were split into two sections, bass and treble (divided registers). In addition, the harpsichord was equipped with ten foot pommels to achieve a variety of effects. The combinations and effects available from the registers, as well as the foot pommels, are documented in Farinelli’s inventory by Antonio Viola and according to Latcham, can be summarised as follows:¹⁵

Pommel 1: 4-foot

Pommel 2: 16-foot

Pommel 3: Harp using the gut strings (bass only)

Pommel 4: 4-foot (bass only)

Pommel 5: 16-foot + 4-foot

Pommel 6: Harp + *cembalo* (two 8-foot stops)

Pommel 7: *Cembalo* (two 8-foot stops)

Pommel 8: 4-foot (treble only)

Pommel 9: Harp using the gut strings (treble only)

Pommel 10: Harp using the gut strings

Also of note in Maria Bárbara’s catalogue are two harpsichords made by Fernández in 1757, featuring 61 keys (entries 10 and 12 in the list). These instruments were likely designed with a range extending from GG to g’’ or FF to f’’.

In the past fifteen years, two harpsichords have been identified as potentially attributable to Diego Fernández. One of these instruments is located at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC (cat. No. 315,749), attributed to Diego Fernández by John Koster. This is a short harpsichord measuring 1619 mm in length, featuring two sets of 8-foot strings and 61 notes, ranging from GG-g’’. The case is made of walnut, and the keyboard is of ebony and ivory.¹⁶

¹³ ‘D. Diego Fernandez [...] L’istesso fece un cembalo nell’anno 1753 con 10 registri con piano e forte a penna con registri esprimenti Flauto, l’Arpa, la Tiorba, Flautini, e tutti assieme formano il ripieno’. Museo Internazionale e biblioteca della música, Bologna, ms. H.62/D, transcribed in: Oscar Mischiati, ‘Notizie di storia organaria e cembalaria nelle carte di padre Giambattista Martini’, *L’organo* XXXII, 1998-1999, 89-222, 124. Quoted and translated in Latcham 2023, 553.

¹⁴ Kenyon de Pascual 2003, 102-3 and Latcham 2023, 553.

¹⁵ Latcham 2023, 554.

¹⁶ See John Koster, ‘A Harpsichord by Diego Fernández?’, *The Galpin Society Journal* LXIV, 2011, 5-48; Latcham 2023, 545.

A new harpsichord has been recently reported in La Rioja, Spain, credited to Fernández by the organ builder Rubén Pérez. The harpsichord was discovered in the rear of the church in Herramélluri and is currently housed in the Taller Diocesano de Restauración in Santo Domingo de la Calzada. According to Pérez, it is a large harpsichord (2370 mm) with three sets of strings (2 x 8 and 4') and 56 notes (GG-d'''). The case is made of walnut, the keyboard of ebony and ivory.¹⁷

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It is extremely difficult to associate the ranges of Scarlatti sonatas with specific instruments from Maria Bárbara's collection. As we know, we have information on the construction dates of only three instruments, alongside the uncertainty regarding the dates of the sonatas' composition. It is worth considering that during the nearly three decades Scarlatti spent at the Spanish court, other instruments may have been used that are not listed in the Queen's inventory.

The instruments with sixty-one keys likely had a range GG-g''' or alternatively, could have been FF-g''' without FF# and GG#. In fact, only five sonatas in the Venice and Parma collections require the bass FF, thus: K387 (FF-f'''), K394 (FF-e'''), K468 (FF-f'''), K483 (FF-c''') and K485 (FF-g'''). None of those sonatas have FF# nor GG#, therefore, they could be played on the harpsichord with sixty-one keys GG-g''' by tuning the GG# to FF.¹⁸

The harpsichord with sixty-one keys, listed as number three in Maria Bárbara's inventory, was probably acquired in 1749 and remained in the Queen's possession until her death in 1757. This leads us to think that the seventeen sonatas that encompass a wide range GG-g''' and the thirteen with a range from GG to f''', were played or conceived for such an instrument.¹⁹

In 1761, Fernández made a harpsichord with 63 keys (FF-g''') for Prince Gabriel. This raises the possibility that a similar instrument may have been accessible to Scarlatti several years earlier, during the later years of his life, which would explain the presence of the only sonata within this range in the composer's catalogue: Sonata K 485. (Venice 12, 2).²⁰ The approximately 400 sonatas

¹⁷ See Rubén Pérez Iracheta, 'El clave Diego Fernández de Herramélluri (La Rioja) un clave para la reina Bárbara de Braganza', *Nassarre*, vol. 38 No. 1, 2022, 59-112. A copy of another Fernández harpsichord, in the Smithsonian, is currently being made at Ugo and Claudio Casiglia's workshop.

¹⁸ Latcham, private correspondence.

¹⁹ Harpsichords ranging from GG to g''' seem to have been favoured for the performance of Scarlatti's sonatas at the Madrid court, even after the composer's death. A harpsichord with a compass GG-g''' was in the household of the Duke of Medina Sidonia, whose representative requested a new one with the same compass for the Duke's protégé, Pedro de Santamant, in August 1765 in the following terms: 'a harpsichord such as His Excellency has here, or better to say, from Gesolreut to Gesolreut [GG to g''', or five octaves], of the type on which one could play the sonatas of Scarlatti. He who makes them knows well how it should be...' (*un clave como el que tiene S. E. aquí, o por mejor decir, de Gesolreut a Gesolreut, de modo que se puedan tocar las sonatas de Escarlatti, que bien sabe el que los hace como debe ser*). Santamant was a thirteen-year-old Catalan harpsichord student originating from the Montserrat school, who began lessons with Padre Antonio Soler in Madrid on the recommendation of the Duke. See George Truett Hollis, 'El diablo vestido de fraile': Some Unpublished Correspondence of Padre Soler', in Malcolm Boyd and Juan José Carreras (eds.), *Music in Spain during the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 192-206, at 197-198.

²⁰ Beryl Kenyon de Pascual, 'Infante Gabriel de Borbón y Sajonia (1752-1788) and his musical instruments', in: *Musique-Images-Instruments* 9, 2007, 9-27.

that extend no lower than GG but require either c#''' or d''' could have been played on any of Maria Bárbara instruments.

In comparing the inventories of instruments belonging to the court musicians with that of Maria Bárbara, it is surprising to note that in the Queen's inventory the number of manuals for the instruments as well as the names of their makers have been omitted. The reason for this omission is difficult to explain; it is possible that an additional section, which has since been lost, once existed within the inventory that provided detailed descriptions together with the valuations of the instruments.

Indeed, the inventories of court musicians indicate that two-manual harpsichords were relatively common, especially from the 1710s onward. For instance, the composer Diego Jaraba (circa 1650–1716), who served as a harpsichord teacher (*Maestro de clave*) to Queen Marie Louise Gabrielle de Savoie, the first consort of Felipe V, is a good example. The inventory of goods at the time of his death includes a harpsichord with two manuals and three sets of strings with a mechanism to play automatically a variety of songs, a two-manual harpsichord made in France with three sets of strings, a harpsichord made in Naples with one keyboard and two registers; one spinet and a virginal.²¹ After 1758, advertisements for second-hand instruments in the *Diario de Madrid* feature harpsichords with two and three keyboards, including a two-manual harpsichord made by Diego Fernández.²²

In all, twelve harpsichords by Spanish makers are extant today. These include the two aforementioned attributed to Diego Fernández, the Joseph Bueno (Valladolid, 1712; compass C/E-c'''), Andrés Fernández Santos (Valladolid, 1728; compass C/E-c'''), Salvador Bofill (Barcelona, 1743; compass C/E-c'''), Zeferino Fernández (Valladolid, 1750; compass GG/BB-c'''), and the combined harpsichord-piano-organ by Tadeus Tornel (Murcia, 1777; compass GG-g'''). The other five are anonymous.²³ All of them are single-manual instruments.

During his lifetime, Scarlatti's sonatas underwent an early and considerable dissemination, both within Spain and across Europe. This spread became notably more intensive following the

²¹ 'A two-manual harpsichord [...] with three registers and three sets of strings, and underneath a Musical and Mathematical invention accompanied behind the name board by a set of wheels like a clock, with two weights, the whole to enable the harpsichord to play by itself different songs; another two-manual harpsichord from France [...], with three registers and three sets of strings; another one-manual harpsichord from Naples [...] with two registers; one spinet [...] a square harpsichord'. (*Un clavicordio [...] con dos teclados y tres ordenes de martinetes y cuerdas, y debajo un ingenio Musico y Mathematico a que acompaña por detrás del taviqe un juego de ruedas a manera de reloj con dos pesas que todo sirve para qué el dicho clavicordio toque por si solo diferentes canciones; otro clavicordio de Franzia [...] con dos teclados y tres ordenes de martinetes y cuerdas; otro clavicordio de Napoles [...] con un teclado y dos ordenes de martinetes; una espineta [...] otro clavicordio cuadrado con un teclado*). Translation by the author. See Nicolás Morales, *L'artiste de Cour dans l'Espagne du XVIIIe siècle* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez 2007), 482.

²² Beryl Kenyon de Pascual, 'Harpsichords, clavichords and similar instruments in Madrid in the second half of the eighteenth century', *Research Chronicle* 1982, 66-84, at 80.

²³ For a list and catalogue, see Luisa Morales, 'Introducción y catálogo de claves y pianos españoles', in Morales 2003, 14-97, and Koster 2011, 41-42. Another notable maker of harpsichords and pianos in the contemporary period was Francisco Pérez de Mirabal (circa 1698 – circa 1773). While no harpsichords by him have survived, two pianos remain: one from around 1745, with a compass of GG-d'', located in a private collection, and another housed in the Museo de Bellas Artes in Sevilla (c.1750; compass GG-g'''), see Morales 2003, 48-53.

publication of the *Essercizi* in London in 1738/9. Concurrently, in cities such as Madrid, Paris, London, Amsterdam, Bologna or Naples, the sonatas were performed on a diverse array of instruments. Furthermore, the diverse collections of sonatas scattered across Europe and the United States show many variants with the nominally authoritative sources, Venice and Parma. These variants frequently manifest in the range, the number of repeated bars, ornaments or even in the titles. Each collection reflects how the chosen sonatas were tailored to the owner's specific circumstances and needs, including their tastes and preferences as well as the instruments at hand. Overall, these adaptations are shaped by the collection's intended purpose. If the sonatas originate from the archives of a monastery or convent, they are often found as part of the organ notebook belonging to the nun or monk who served as the organist. This is exemplified in the case of the female convent of San Pedro de las Dueñas in León and the Monastery of Montserrat in Barcelona. In these instances, the sonatas are frequently adapted for a limited range and were performed as part of a repertoire intended for church services or for the enjoyment of the community within the cloisters.

Among the collections closely associated with the Madrid court circle, the Ayerbe and Worgan manuscripts stand out prominently, as both are linked to the keyboard composer Sebastián de Albero (1722-1756), who served as chamber musician to King Fernando VI and as organist at the Royal Chapel. The Ms. Ayerbe (Ms 3/1408) housed at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Madrid is likely derived from the Royal Palace library.²⁴ It can be dated between 1749-1755 and comprises thirty sonatas with a range GG-e'''. Francisco Ayerbe, who was the father of the collection's owner, Ygnacia, had been a courtier at the Royal House (*gentilhombre numerario*) since 1748. Evidence indicates that Sr. Ayerbe was part of Albero's circle, as both entered the Royal Fraternity of Servants to His Majesty on June 30, 1755.²⁵

The Worgan manuscript (Add MS 31553) at the British Library was once owned by Sebastián de Albero, as can be seen on the title page of the collection, despite an apparent attempt to erase this information.²⁶ Therefore, it must have been copied prior to March 1756, the date of Albero's death. It contains forty-four sonatas within a range GG-d'''.

Given the variety of keyboard instruments available in Scarlatti's circle, the quest for a definitive or *ur-clavier* for interpreting his sonatas emerges as an idealistic endeavour, as elusive as the search for an *ur-text*, considering the numerous variants among the sources. Quilled harpsichords and hammered harpsichords (*Clavicordio de pluma*, *Clavicordio de piano*) were not so different in

²⁴ Laura Cuervo, 'El manuscrito Ayerbe: una fuente española de las sonatas de Domenico Scarlatti de mediados del siglo XVIII'. *Ad Parnassum. A Journal of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Instrumental Music* 13, 2015, 1-26, at 2. According to Águeda Pedrero-Encabo, the copyist of the Ayerbe manuscript was José Alaguero, one of the scribes in the service of the Royal Chamber. Alaguero was also the copyist of the Parma and Venice volumes, see Águeda Pedrero-Encabo 'Scarlatti in Spain', in: Mark Kroll (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Harpsichord* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) 204-210, at 204.

²⁵ See Cuervo 2015, 6.

²⁶ On the title page of the manuscript, the following inscription has been erased but is still legible: '[Es] de Sebastian de Albero, organista principal de la Real Capilla de su Magestad'.

the 1740s. Viewing it through my lens as a performer, the Giovanni Ferrini combined instrument (1746) in the Tagliavini collection can easily be perceived as a harpsichord with a piano register.²⁷



The Ferrini combined harpsichord-pianoforte (1746) at Museo San Colombano in the Tagliavini collection during a recording session. In the image are Luisa Morales, harpsichord maker Graziano Bandini, and recording engineer Stefano Albarello. *(photo kindly supplied by the Author)*

The Historically Informed Performance (HIP) movement has taught us to open our eyes and ears wide to fully appreciate the richness inherent in the diverse performance practices of the past.

²⁷ Tagliavini collection (cat. No. C1). My recording of Scarlatti sonatas on the Ferrini combined instrument can be heard at: *Cantabile: Domenico Scarlatti*. Luisa Morales, harpsichord-pianoforte. FIMTE 2021 – 3237816).