



Harpsichord, Clavichord & Fortepiano: A History of Early Keyboard Instruments (Shire Library)

Derek Adlam

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This book looks at the history of the three types of stringed keyboard instrument that dominated Western music from the sixteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century. The Virginal, which provided the musical accompaniment to the reign of Elizabeth 1st, was part of the family that also included the harpsichord, which was *the* concert keyboard for over two hundred years, and its smaller cousin the spinet, which could be found in ladies' chambers across Europe. But not every polite lady owned a spinet - for some this instrument, with its plucked strings, was altogether too harsh -and the clavichord, which used flexible quills to stroke the strings, was much a much gentler option. In the latter part of the eighteenth century a new type of keyboard began to sweep all of these instruments into history: the fortepiano, the forerunner of the piano. This instrument used hammers to strike the strings, giving the possibility, for the first time, of real dynamic contrast.

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