

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE HARPSICHORD

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Abstrac: *This article explores the history of the creation of the harpsichord. It examines the historical development of the instrument and its gradual refinement as an innovative musical instrument. Particular attention is given to the evolution of the harpsichord within the context of musical culture and instrumental performance.*

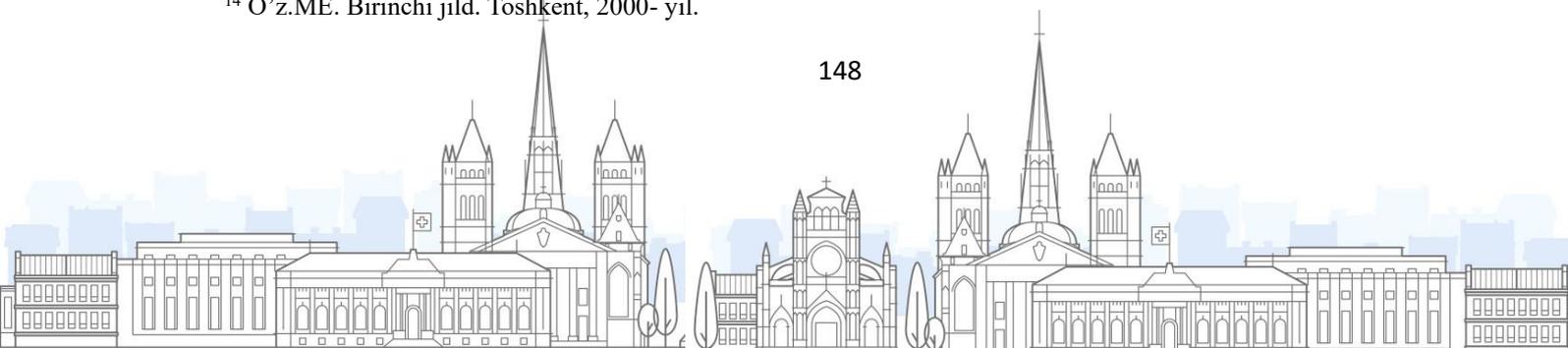
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The harpsichord (from the French *clavesin* and the Italian *cymbalum*) is a keyboard musical instrument whose sound is produced by the plucking of strings. The instrument was widely used during the Baroque period and unlike the piano, produces tones of uniform volume that is the performer cannot vary the loudness of the sound during performance through touch. The harpsichord was invented in Italy between the 15th and 16th centuries and typically featured one or two strings per note (occasionally three). When a key is pressed, a plectrum made from bird feather plucks the string, causing the sound to resonate. The strings of the harpsichord are arranged parallel to the keyboard, similar to those of the modern piano.¹⁴

The sound of the harpsichord used in concert performance is relatively sharp and bright. However, in order to achieve a more expressive resonance in sustained notes, composers frequently employed ornamentation (*melisma*, from the Greek *melisma*) including trills, grace notes (*appoggiaturas*) and *glissandi*, which often resulted in a softer and more delicate musical character. The harpsichord was also widely used in secular vocal music, chamber ensembles and as a *continuo* instrument in orchestral settings, where it often fulfilled the role of the bass line accompaniment. Many harpsichords were intended primarily for domestic music-making and were richly decorated, serving not only as musical instruments but also as elements of interior decoration.

During the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the design of the harpsichord and the number of keyboards underwent significant changes. Gut strings were replaced with

¹⁴ O'z.ME. Birinchi jild. Toshkent, 2000- yil.



metal strings, the instrument's range was expanded to five octaves and new types such as the spinet and clavicytherium were developed.



17th-Century French Harpsichord



Based on the historical Ruckers model
Franco-Flemish harpsichord
Crafted in 2004 by T. Kreyenen

Initially, the harpsichord had a rectangular shape. By the 17th century, it underwent significant development and was refined into a wing-shaped, elongated triangular form. As a result of this structural evolution, metal strings gradually replaced gut strings. As previously noted, the harpsichord was richly decorated by French craftsmen, featuring elegant ornamentation, carved designs, inlays work and refined woodcarving techniques.

Harpsichords produced during the 16th and 17th centuries by the Antwerp master builders of the Ruckers family were particularly valued for their exceptional sound quality and elaborate decorative carving.

The registers of the harpsichord are characterized by a bright, sharp tone, however, they do not allow for dynamic variation, meaning that smooth increases or decreases in sound intensity are not possible.

The harpsichord featured multiple registers, which were controlled manually through levers and stops. By 1750, foot and knee pedals were introduced to facilitate register changes during performance.

In the 15th century, the harpsichord had a range of three octaves and certain chromatic notes were absent in the lower octave.¹⁵

¹⁵ Мартинов И. История западноевропейской музыки. Том 5. М. 1963.



In the 16th century, the range of the harpsichord was expanded to four octaves and by the 18th century, it was further extended to five octaves.

Depending on the model, the harpsichord is divided into several registers:

- 16-foot register, producing a sound one octave lower;
- 8-foot register, producing sound at written pitch;
- 4-foot register, producing a sound one octave higher.

On the harpsichord, sound is produced not by striking but by plucking the strings. Consequently, the harpsichordist cannot control the dynamics of the melody by making the sound louder or softer according to personal preference during performance.

The more advanced harpsichord models were equipped with two manuals (keyboards) and pedals.

The harpsichord possesses a distinctive character due to its specific sound range, limited octave keyboard and the absence of gradual dynamic shaping in performance.

The art of harpsichord performance in the 16th century contributed to the emergence of national schools and laid the foundation for performance traditions that influenced subsequent generations of composers.

The founder of the French harpsichord school is considered to be Jacques Champion de Chambonnières, whose name gained wide recognition. In his creative activity, the harpsichord occupied a central and significant role. One of the most prominent representatives of the harpsichord school was François Couperin, who further developed the tradition and brought it to its highest level. Domenico Scarlatti, George Frideric Handel and Johann Sebastian Bach are regarded among the leading figures associated with this school. In addition to these composers, William Byrd, François Couperin and Jean-Philippe Rameau composed highly accomplished works for the harpsichord, leaving a rich artistic legacy.¹⁶ Moreover, the harpsichord was considered one of the favorite instruments of the great German composer Johann Sebastian Bach. For this reason, he composed the monumental cycle “The Well-Tempered Clavier” (twenty-four preludes and fugues) for keyboard instruments, including the harpsichord. This work brought the composer great fame. Even today, Bach’s works originally written for the harpsichord continue to be masterfully performed by skilled musicians on the modern piano.

By the late 18th century, extensive efforts by instrument makers to improve the harpsichord led to long-term experimentation and in 1711 the Italian instrument maker Bartolomeo Cristofori invented the piano. However, the piano initially failed to attract widespread public attention. As a result, interest in the harpsichord was revived in the early 20th century, along with renewed attention to musical works composed for the

¹⁶ Клавесин. Большая советская энциклопедия. 1973. Т. 12.



instrument. Taking into account certain limitations of the harpsichord such as its restricted dynamic range and the relative inconvenience of its keyboard action many prominent composers adapted their works for the piano. This transition made performance technically easier for musicians. Subsequently, the harpsichord was also incorporated into the “Turkiston” Chamber Orchestra, where it served in the bass section, valued not only for its musical function but also for its refined decorative appearance and aesthetic elegance.

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