

Jean Tournay

Portrait of Albertus Delin

These pages, written in 1985, have two quite separate origins. On the one hand they come from a long familiarity with the work of Delin, especially wing spinets (*cembalo traverso, petit clavecin façon anglaise, bentside spinet, épinette triangulaire, querflügel*), the ultimate stage in development and simplicity, and on the other hand, research in a depot of archives torn apart by bombs. They are an attempt to reconstruct the face of a man whose hand, in other respects, was so decisive in his work.

The fragmentary picture which emerges from this jumble of odds and ends is, as could be expected, even more enigmatic. The name of Delin appears, then disappears, and should it now be coming to the surface (but for how long?), it is because his work never ceases to re-emerge and inspire.

Finally, this essay follows and, above all, corrects the theoretical sketches already published elsewhere in 1980. The classification by type is deliberately put aside here for a chronological order, more natural, more alive, allowing each instrument to appear against a more equable canvas. The work is thus more closely bound to its author, both being forks of a branch mysteriously named style, for want of a better definition.

The second and more recent text was begun in 1989, and is given in its 1991 version, open, of course, to any possible alterations.

In evoking Ruckers, a Ruckers finally beginning to be understood, Delin forces us backwards in time. There can be no such withdrawal with Dulcken, who pushes us forwards to Bull, his perplexed eyewitness, who deserts him and deserts us too, despite the external appearances.

From which the ellipsis of the situation and the title: The Germans of Antwerp.

Sober and sombre, elegant, like masks, such are the instruments of Albertus Delin, should they not have been modified. Some have been modified, but in such a luxurious and misplaced style that there can be no hesitation in recognizing the hand of the master under the plaster of his heirs. Delin's spinets and harpsichords have been made with neither repentance nor repainting. This is visible, tangible. The man can be divined behind his work. The work is precise, clear, without detours. The man is simple, austere, singular, without the slightest frivolity. The strength of his plan is evident, from the beginning to the end, with the force of perseverance. Delin repeats himself tirelessly, without ostentation or provocation. He repeats himself with the quiet conviction of those who have little to say but say it clearly. I will show that he is modest, with a monotonous honesty, refusing decoration to please, without extravagance. He is a classic, isolated and provincial. His audacities, for he has some, are never spectacular, even if his cherished clavicytheriums may lead one to think so by the originality of the concept.

Delin was a knowledgeable heir, sensitive to the famous Flemish tradition. He purified the forms, simplified the functions, concentrated the effects and pushed the art of the harpsichord to its limit by reducing it to its essentials. He was to be the last. Nobody resembled him, especially not Ioannes Daniel Dulcken, his contemporary, who had other dreams, other audacities. From the moment that something can no longer progress, it seeks to transform itself. Delin did not transform, and though he must have sensed the coming decline, he did not share in it. A poor seducer and doubtless a wretched businessman, whose pleasures were in memories. Dulcken lengthened the strings, cut open the wrestplanks, advanced, seeking to discover, then retreated. Dulcken was on the breach. The nervousness of his genius is admirable. Delin upset nothing, but conserved, and showed a little-known practice, forgotten in his century, by simply inverting the points of attack, thus opposing the contrasts. The result is known, one qualified by van der Meer as "vigorous" and "rustling", Ernst as "coloured", and the prudent Hubbard as "particularly good". Nothing is more redundant - nor more perilous - than the qualifying of a sound: the music of words is not the music of notes.

The spirit of Albertus Delin is quite naturally Flemish. The clear, luminous, golden sound of his harpsichords evokes the timbre of Antwerp harpsichords. This typically Flemish sound, emerging

out of the Northern haze of the sixteenth century, enhances polyphony. It recalls the acid mixtures of the Northern organs, cutting like a whiplash, a sound aureoled like the humming of a beehive, contrasting with the rattling of arms of Italian harpsichords. A singing, murmuring sound. A sound which lasts, in comparison to the impulsive attack of the Italians. The Flemish sing like vowels, the Italians hammer out their consonants. The lavish Ruckers harpsichords proclaim pleasures and celebrations. Full of the atmosphere of Breughel, they triumph like the pictures of Rubens, the cases painted in imitation marble, the lid interiors covered with glued-on printed paper, printed with mottoes. The stands are those of heavily-laden festal tables. A banquet is painted on the soundboard where flowers, fruit, shrimps and border scrolls (like tablecloth lace) and grotesque scenes come to life under the strings. The keyboard is noisy - it doesn't matter! - the guests make more noise. The explosion of this truculence and prosperity found another echo in Vermeer, who internalised his pictures before delivering them. Vermeer saved the harpsichords of his century. He was attached to showing them in the tranquil solitude of a room, and it is not clear whether it is the harpsichord in the room or the room containing the harpsichord which makes the people radiant. The only thing missing in these silent portraits is the silence of a clavichord. The instruments are transcended.

Albertus Delin carried out the same operation, by filtering, by observing his pleasure in remaking. His work was an extension of Ruckers without surpassing him and, if it can be said, without imitating him. He cared little for the graces of his period which so loved to put powder on the preceding century. Ornamentation bewildered him. He denudes the better to see and to love. He is at the beginning and at the end as if he wished to forget that time passes. He is of the same closed world, of "an infinite duration" as Chardin, sharing with him the same chaste and quiet joys in epicureanism, the same talent, the same feelings, the same "substantial gravity".

The allegory of Renown, described with the traits of a woman with a hundred mouths, found a variation in Flanders: a winged angel playing a lyre in almost all the 17th century Flemish harpsichord roses. The symbol of the Orphic initiation was to associate painters and musicians for two centuries. Each harpsichord that left the Ruckers' workshop had the appearance of an emblem. The name Ruckers became a synonym of the harpsichord. All the followers were to relate themselves, to take as a reference, to conform to this unique Nordic model. In 1640 a type, in 1740 an archetype, the Antwerp harpsichord was able to impose its concept of sound and to come down to us intact, at least in our emotion in rediscovering it, in conserving it. Narrow, with a short spine, the bent side just slightly curved, the flanks of poplar masked by wide paper friezes, this harpsichord is recognizable from afar. The geometric black sea-horses retell the fables of Plantin. The frankness, the naïvety of the decoration bear witness to a culture which was robust, idealized, slowly acquired, codified, defended by the guild police. The commerce of culture, the only worthy thing in the eyes of the bourgeoisie that lacked nothing: courage, money; and that nothing was to unseat for a long time.

However, these instruments, exported to every European court, appreciated by musicians, searched after by builders looking for models to "copy", instruments seen everywhere, were to undergo a strange adventure, carried out by heavy hands, in an adventure well-known to architects under the name of 'ravalement'. Neither war nor natural disaster could have engulfed them in such a subtle catastrophe as that into which an iconoclastic and adulating succession plunged them. A "ravalé" harpsichord is a small harpsichord swallowed up by a large one. From this mortal union a phantom was to be born. Save error or omission on my part, ravalements were never carried out with as much application, blindness and craftsmanship as in Paris in the first half of the eighteenth century. The massacre was systematic and brought into being the industry of counterfeit Ruckers. Fake roses, fake signatures, fake soundboards, fake cases. This commerce, whose aberrant aesthetic and acoustic repercussions will be looked at later, was first of all timid. The 'petit ravalement' compressed the string choirs and the keyboard to put more notes in and break the voices. The 'grand ravalement' broke open the module and opened the breach.

In the Northern provinces, things happened differently. There were fewer salons, and fewer people in them. In the provinces, one adores somewhat less. This ambiguous refuge hides and preserves its adventurers. Albertus Delin, to return to him, (but one could say the same of the Lyons builders Colesse and Donzelague) was scrupulous on the width of the keyboard. He happily suppressed the low C sharp, when the keyboard descended to C, and the G sharp when the keyboard descended to G, sharps that were not used, and if he included them later, it was that it offended less his sense of economy (or a habit acquired heaven knows how and where) than the symmetry of numbers.

Whatever the answer, he developed without transforming. He knew that a case should not lengthened without being made shallower. The height of cases was a serious point.

Nobody knows where he learnt his trade but we observe what he liked and what he chose. His harpsichords stem from the Antwerp tradition even should they have neither the appearance nor the reputation. Hubbard, who speaks so much of Ruckers and so little of Delin, nevertheless says the essential in that they do not differ. It is a short eulogy, thus, the best. Thanks to one man, a century had passed without origins having been effaced. On the contrary, here was this tradition, strengthened, its warts removed. The historians of the Austrian reign of Marie-Thérèse, in which falls the career of Delin at Tournai, are probably more solemn than ironic in talking of "enlightened despotism". For it is true that Flanders changed invaders without profoundly changing its mores.

However, the grotesque elements of the decoration are stylised. Is this not a path of impoverishment and abstraction, unconsciously celebrated in the rocaille style, the ultimate period of the Baroque? Of all the things carried by the sea, deposited in the port of Antwerp, washed by the Scheldt, are not the only things that rest a few shell spirals? The structure itself of the work is enfeebled, masked, conjured away — unless one wishes to magnify it? — by stucco and pebbling. Covering and substitution. The stucco is sometimes of such a volume that it is possible not to know the internal structure and no longer to understand the sense. A new way of seeing, more pessimistic than nihilistic. The artificial, skilful, airy aspects of *trompe-l'œil* would not have been feasible without this intermediate layer which denies the basic material while being spread over it.

The decoration of Regency harpsichords does not escape from this dual rule: use a basic material then travesty it. This may have the appearance of nothing at all, but it is everything. Decoration abounds, dividing up the work, this tree bearing more flowers than fruit. Ornaments divert the attention the better to make an illusion, and as the harpsichord is a fragile enigma, no-one is worried about these false appearances nor worries that it will disappear under this shroud. A supremely baroque instrument, here it is in the hands of the ornamentists who invest it with the power of finery. Attribute and symbol of "a society drunk with feasts and their bitter shudders". However, the intertwining of the paintbrush and the gouge-cuts cannot, in their effervescence, mislead us. The artifice is too flagrant, too exuberant. Illusions fascinate because they mix dream and reality. They are "mockeries" in the first sense of the term, familiar or hostile according to whether one provokes them or is the victim of them.

1712

Deligne, Delain, Dellain, Dhellin, Deling, Delin — who is the person hidden behind these names? However, there remains for us his life's work, witness of the spirit and the ability of an artisan of music whose name appears for the first time as number 118 in register 14 of the parish of St. Julien at Ath. Albert, son of Jean-Baptiste Deligne and Marie Dellie (Dellis, Delliste, was baptised on the 17th April 1712. His godfather was Albert Lucas and his godmother Maria Jacoba Bande.

These Deligne, like the Prince of the same name, may have come directly from Ligne, a village near to Ath — the resemblance between these two names, which birth pushed apart, remains troubling. Firstly, because the degree of real nobility is lacking in neither one nor the other, and also because common interests should have joined them. It is a fact that the harpsichord is a salon instrument and that the most brilliant salon of that province was then that of the Prince de Ligne. Alas, the Prince was rarely at Belœil, and when he was there, had eyes only for his gardens. This exquisite man had all passions except that of the practice of a musical instrument. The word "harpsichord" appears but once in his voluminous writings, at the time he met Voltaire, and this is only an anecdote about the harpsichord of Madame Denis. But it would indeed be unbecoming to show ingratitude towards a man who never himself had this characteristic. Ligne forgot the harpsichord. This surprises me, and his heirs; that is all.

It does not seem that Delin had more luck with the Bishopric of Tournay (another salon) where the master, the Count of Salm-Reifferscheid, cousin of the Prince's mother, was a very fine connoisseur. We shall see why when we arrive at the year 1771.

1738

The young Albert left Ath, a town with its garrison and its cabinetmakers, to arrive at Tournay. Just imagine that a *de Ligne* at Tournay could have been called *de Tournay* in Paris or Venice. Strangers are always asked from where they come. This piquant fact is well worth noting.

Delin was twenty-six. What did he come to do at Tournay? Was he looking for work, for a wife, or both at the same time? Who were the people he frequented that he should latinize his Christian name? Why the amputation from his patronymic of a few letters, the most gentle but also the least clear? Ignorance, forgetfulness or intention? The negligences of an unfixing spelling, still in movement, or accents of the Picardy dialect so close to Latin? Whatever the answer, to call himself Albertus Delin was a second birth, that of a man decided on his destiny. From this time on, Delin established himself at Tournay where to this day there is a Spinet Street (Rue de l'Épinette). Good: he made many of them; not so good: the learned, far from supporting my theory, turn round in circles in conjectures about the street name. However, as early as 1338, a checker (*échiquier*) made in Tournay had been sold to the Duke of Burgundy. This has been forgotten. Apart from this, no-one today would dare to describe this type of spinet known as "*échiquier*" because the alternating colours of the keyboard perhaps evoked those of a chess-board, on which the financiers of the Middle Ages did their accounting.

It should be remembered that the town had more than one instrument builder: Depelchin and De Comble. Was it because of these that Delin's younger brother, a luthier, was to set up shop in Antwerp (where Dulcken already reigned over harpsichords) under the name of Laurentius Josephus Deligne? At the same period, the organ builder Nicolas Lenglet was employing "*escriniers*", pseudo cabinetmakers, in conflict with the all-powerful carpenters' corporation, and who must have been happy to create a diversion.

1739

This third date is a third event. In the life of a man of whom we know almost nothing, it allows us to divine that Delin was married in 1738. His wife was called Anne Joseph Martin (or Marte). She was born in Brussels on the 11th January 1717, in the parish of Notre-Dame de la Chapelle.

The 6th August 1739 saw the birth of their first son, baptised as Joseph Albert in the church of St. Piat. It is said that this was a working-class parish. There were carpet manufacturers (rue des Clarisses), wheelwrights (rue des Carliers), brewers (rue des Brasseurs), fish merchants (quai des Poissonceaux), carpenters (rue Madame), tanners, (rue Merdenchon — vicus merdo), stone workers (quai Taille-Pierre), wool-carders (rue des Paniers), minor Brothers (rue des Recollets), a hospital (rue des Filles-Dieu), Jesuits (rue des Jesuites), and naturally a hero, a patron, a pioneer, a saint (Quarrefour de Saint Piat, the church and the street of the same name). The street has two gushing fountains.

Piat de Bénévent was martyred after having evangelised the Romans of Tornacum in the third century. The legend around his sufferings and agony brings its horror to us and remains a precursor of the atrocities to come. The history of this town is a tragedy in fifteen scenes. Each scene brings a new invader to the foreground, unless it is simply a reminder of a former one chasing out the latest. Obeying classic rules, this tragedy ends in a catastrophe. The catastrophe was sudden, irreversible, implacable. Fire burnt everything. A roof can be remade; not archives. No more memory.

Taken, retaken, destroyed, rebuilt, this old city that had so many faces no longer has one today. A phantom city emerged from the ashes of last world war, a veiled city, relegated to paintings, prints and plans, finally giving this art the good fortune of coming back to life. The Scheldt still runs through it, from habit, from laziness. The Scheldt, that bombs didn't manage to fill up, is the last reminder of the trade between Antwerp and Tournay, passing through Ghent. Tournay is a bridgehead to the world's greatest city in the XVIth century: Antwerp, which negotiated its treasures on the Scheldt. A chronicler of the period reports that there were so many barges on the river that no water could be seen.

In 1713, a year after the birth of Delin, two events left their mark on history. The treaties of Utrecht transformed this French province into an Austrian domain. The birth of Diderot came at the same time, (the first volume of the *Encyclopédie* was to appear in 1751: Rhetoric was to take other paths). 1745. A French interlude after the battle of Fontenoy. The Austrians returned in 1748 and stayed until 1792. Then a new French ballet before the Dutch spectacle.

1741

The son born on the 29th of November was to carry the name into the XIXth century. Take care, the name is a trap. This was not the same Delin. When he was about thirty, if my calculations are right, Nicolas Joseph embarked on the river and followed its course to Antwerp. His voyage stopped there. Marriage with Agnès Van Der Merre of 's Hertogenbosch (Bois-le-Duc). Four children. The first, a lad that we will meet again, was born in 1772, the exact year of the foundation of the Academy of Antwerp by Charles of Lorraine. This voyage was a mission. The son was to burn his wings where the father wouldn't risk himself. A pupil of Quérart, he became the celebrated historical painter of whom history retains only a portrait of Delzenne, abbot of St. Martins; a Prometheus; the directors of the Guild of Rotterdam (for 400 florins) and, at the museum of The Hague, the portrait of Prince William-George-Frederick aged 9. I would like to advise the guides of this museum (but without arguments over precedence, each being his own counsel) to indicate the lower floor where stands the last (known) clavicytherium of the father of the artist beside a harpsichord transformed into a piano-forte and signed Louis Dulcken 1793.

1744

"There fell in this city such an abundance of snow that all the roofs of the houses were so white that neither tiles nor slates nor pebbling were to be seen." Abbot Denis was speaking of the glacial spring of 1740 which followed the most calamitous wheat crisis that dealt severely with Tournay and its surrounding region between 1735 and 1742. Between cholera and the plague, please do not forget bad weather and floods. The Scheldt overflowed and overthrew everything: banks, crops and animals. Famine, inflation, unemployment, revolt of the poor. In 1741, the recession was implacable: an epidemic of dysentery, obviously linked to the subsistence crisis, decimated the population.

It was in this macabre decor, lit by pale miracles (death needing material) that passed the first years of Delin at Tournay. The newborn from the bed apparently have precedence over those of the workshop. Vincent Joseph saw the day (not for long) the 7 February. His godfather, Vincent Corneille Devaucenne, was a priest.

1746

The appearance of Marie Madeleine Augustine Joseph on the 23 April was of short duration. Lacking documents, I am forced to abbreviate and announce her disappearance, a week after that of Vincent, the 9 May, 1751.

1748

Pierre François Joseph was born on the 10 September and died the 4 January 1832 at the hospice. This old man of 83 years survived all the others. The two witnesses of his death, anonymous old people of the same house, tell us that he died at midday (imagine the agitation of the residents during the meal), that he was celibate and a companion goldsmith. All his life, his movements, his memory and, to finish with, his ending, are contained in a few words in an entry in the registrar's office .

1750

The first two known and authentic instruments of Albertus Delin were signed in 1750. A spinet and a harpsichord demonstrate from the start the mastery and the precise intentions of the builder. It is true that Delin was already 38 years old at this half-century. His hand was practised and his intelligence honed.

The spinet preserved at the Brussels instrument museum is signed "A. Delin me fecit Tornaci 1750" in a cartouche surrounded by fleur-de-lis motifs, in the clearest rocaille style, painted in the keywell. In the middle of the soundboard "made of excellent pine" as Van Der Straeten observes (somebody whispered it in his ear) "the Tournay builder's trademark in gilded tin may be seen. It represents a winged spirit holding a lyre with on either side the initials A.D."

The keywell and soundboard border paintings, quite faded, show a chalky undercoat beneath the worn patches. In contrast, the exterior painting of the six-sided case is perhaps a repainting in oil paint with a water-green colour. The spinet is shut by a light lid held by two wrought-iron hinges of a simplicity as disarming as it is efficient. This detail was never to change. This little box, which kept its

form so well and which took so little room, was to be placed on the edge of a table or on a pedestal when it wasn't being taken on journeys.

The making of a polygonal virginal in the mid-18th century is positively surprising. It has the air of a stylistic and devotional exercise. The first thing that strikes one is the hybrid aspect of the instrument in which the most archaic, thus finally the most classical, views of the craft, of either Italian or Nordic inspiration, join and blend. It brings to mind the singular polygonal virginal made by Hans Ruckers the elder, the first of the dynasty, an instrument made in 1591 that Delin perhaps saw and played in Flanders. The back guide of the keyboard — typically Italian — also indicates other influences.

The idea of assembling polygonal forms is very old. There are many examples — German, Flemish, Italian — in the iconography, but it may be observed that this style became largely Italian. This method aimed at strengthening the case, compressed by the tension of the strings. By multiplying the number of sides, all the forces of traction are decomposed among them, just as the spokes of a wheel converge the force the better to distribute it.

An examination of the keyboard calls forth many reflections. The compass (C—e^m) was adapted to the requirements of the period. Delin held to this once and for all with the determination of a man who knows where he is going. Many of his colleagues did not show, at the beginning of their careers, as much certainty.

This keyboard of 52 notes (it lacks the low C sharp) is incorporated in the case rather than extending from it. This choice enlarges the case, which is in addition very short in the direction of the string band: this is not an eight-foot spinet but a five-foot one. The ensemble is as compact as a jewellery case. The tool box, at the left of the keyboard, has the appearance of a box within a box. The natural key slips are ebony, the sharps have bone slips. There are all the characteristic signs of Delin which he was not to change: trefoiled sculpted key fronts, the engraved lines on the naturals, the angle of the sharps, the way of making the balance rail and its pins and the back guide, the numeration of key levers faithfully similar from one instrument to the next — the same ink, the same pen, the same hand — with its figure 8 in the form of an isosceles triangle with the point against a circle.

The soundboard is thin, supported around the rose by three fine ribs and, under the straight bridge, by a longer and more rigid rib which colours the timbre just as much as it allows the functional stability of the action. Finally, all of the case is in willow. This is new. A laboratory analysis confirms this: despite the confusion — easy to the naked eye — the microscope reveals that willow has wider annual rings than poplar. The figure 3, written in red pencil, is on the front liner. This will enlighten us as events take their course.

The harpsichord of 1750, now in the Berlin museum, came from the Snoeck collection, whose 1864 catalogue informs us that "it is in a very good state of conservation", a precious testimony. This harpsichord has in common with the spinet that precedes it (unless it follows) the same keyboard compass — 52 notes. This is surprising as this compass was no longer common in the harpsichords of the period.

A second point in common with the spinet is in the sense of the logic of the builder, apparently worried about the permanence of forms. I have already said that the polygonal spinet was out-of-date in the 18th century. It is above all a question of admitting that the solidity of a polygon, just like the practical economy of the short octave (C/E or GG/BB), went further than the petty rules of the period and lasted because of desiderata other than a new taste. Use alone lacks weight without knowledge, and, in return, knowledge is ceaselessly questioned by the practices that formed it. The development of the same idea appears from one century to the next under the form of a preposterous resurgence in the eyes of those who do not include the totality of phenomena. The sufficient reasons for this continuity maintained up to the end of the century views not very distant from those of the Renaissance. Alongside his forte-pianos, Stein serenely built *gebunden* clavichords.

The intrinsic measurements of a keyboard are naturally proportioned to the harpsichord. The key levers are longer, the naturals and the sharps deeper, wider. The later addition of a key lever to the original 52, the 54 register mortises, the pins added to the extremities of the bridge and the nut, and the addition of extra wrestpin holes to the wrestplank have given grounds for Friedrich Ernst to think that

someone was trying to extend the instrument, or perhaps (but Ernst's suppositions remain obscure) to transform it into a fortepiano.

The plan of the stringing (2 x 8') hardly differs from the scaling used in the Ruckers workshop. It is an indication of future scaling. The width from C to C over four octaves remains constant, apart from a few millimetres, the fruit of chance and deformation rather than intention.

The visible and the hidden side of the soundboard give us immediately a great deal of information on the profound tastes and the originality of Albertus Delin. The absence — definitive absence — of a four-foot bridge frees the soundboard from a heavy weight. The barring is thus lightened, the counter-bridge (4' hitchpin rail, were there a 4') balances the weight of the rather low bridge (1 x 1cm), while five ribs of medium weight control the elasticity of the surface pierced by the rose. This is why this innovation is allied to prudence. Delin imagined a system of a flexible joint between an upper brace and the counter-bridge so that the soundboard would neither bulge nor hollow; The system may change, but not the idea. I shall return, as you may expect, to this feature. Delin also decided, as if this innovation and precaution were not enough, to put the soundboard grain at an angle to the spine. This disposition compensates very well for the lack of a 4' bridge. I hesitate to define the nature of the sound towards which we are led by this purpose — dryness? clarity? — but I know from experience that this method of assembly imposes another way of cutting the wood: the planks are shorter and the joints more certain; there is less wastewood and the rigidity of the whole allows greater thinning of the soundboard.

The wood for the case comes from the riverbanks of the plain. It resembles that of the trees on the banks of all the streams in Flanders and which, wide and tall, break the wind and hold back the banks of the Scheldt. Carpenters use it for wardrobe bottoms and for the coffins of the poor. Its tender, long and porous fibres are filled with silica, which blunts tools. The fact that it lacks weight, smell and colour discouraged the epicures and made it contemptuous. Sometimes long bluish or reddish veins accentuate its paleness. Even its scientific name evokes vulgarity: *populus nigra*.

1751

The year started badly. Delin lost two children one after the other. Vincent died the 3 May at the age of 7, and a week later Augustine, aged 5, was buried.

This sad spring must have darkened the faces and held back the activity of the workshop. Organologists would be wrong to neglect this aspect of "hours and work achieved" when they look at the clavicitherium or vertical harpsichord dated 1751 (but this date, as everyone knows, is not always the date of the start of work) which is, according to the opinion of many, one of the most remarkable instruments in the Brussels collection.

The Latin name clavicitherium signifies that the case is placed vertically instead of horizontally, the normal way. I must admit that this case disposition goes together with an uncommon mentality that shows a pronounced taste for difficulties. Good. It follows that an ingenious action, to be described in the following pages, must make the jack repeat as surely as if it were resting on the back of a key lever with all of its vertical inertia. It is clear that, disposed in this manner, the instrument appears in all its two dimensional beauty and that the musician loses nothing of what he is playing, whereas the open score between the keyboard and the soundboard of a "normal" harpsichord forms a screen.

Many commonplace ideas are still current about the clavicitherium. It is said that it doesn't take up much room, as if there was ever a question of space in 18th century salons. This shortsighted remark could only be made today when the economics of modern constructions alters the ceiling height. The principal reason invoked is in favour of the sound, without, however, suspecting that the crudeness of this method would compensate for a deficiency by an excess. It is true, the clavicitherium is hardly modest. It is even narcissistic like the clavichord, but without its delicate nuances. The sound streams out, tumbles out, inundates. The sound explodes in front of you like a rank of chamades, and its use in continuo is difficult as the musician sees with difficulty and hears little of the other parts. More pertinent is the image of a "mirror" in front of the solitary player. This discovery shows well what exaggerations the instrument has in sonorous and flattering, even (to repeat myself) narcissistic effects, in pleasure for the eye and the ear. With which pleasure should one commence?

The action of the instrument with its stickers and transmission squares resembles the action of an organ. This similarity makes me assume a common origin. The organist is a musician who turns his back to the public — when he is not hidden.

This bringing together of different elements is not made freely. It raises the question (a burning one) of knowing where Delin did his apprenticeship. Up until now, no-one has discovered this, and the author of these lines, who spares no opportunity to learn, started off very badly himself. At least we know that organ building frequently went hand in hand with harpsichord building; that both have a basic vocabulary in common. A number of workers attest to this dual activity in one workshop, making either organs or harpsichords or both at the same time.

The Antwerp harpsichord school naturally has quite a different attraction. Its centuries-old tradition has stimulated more than one imagination.

Three clues bring us back to the realm of the organ builders. The first, already given, is the obvious formal relationship of the clavicitherium with the organ case, as if they were variations on the same theme. That no trace has ever been found of this substitution in the clavichord shows to what point the latter, which ingeniously combines the dual exigencies of the continuo for church and chamber sonatas, puts the clavicitherium to one side for this purpose, for the reasons mentioned above.

The second clue comes from an examination of the keyboards, in which the low C sharp in those that descend to C or the low G sharp in those that descend to G is systematically absent. The habit of omitting the lowest and most useless chromatic note in the bottom octave is characteristic of organ building, where care is always taken to save the space on the soundboard that would otherwise be taken by a cumbersome pipe. This is a considerable economy, but superfluous in a harpsichord. The string progression follows the chromaticism of the keyboard logically, without any problems. Delin knew this, and if he didn't make completely chromatic keyboards before 1765, it is that obscurity and ingrained habits had, in his eyes, more sense or more life than the exigencies of a new logic. One doesn't change so quickly, above all in long-term work like this and in an domain where the musicians of the period were still playing instruments with a short octave.

The subtle tenacities of habit bring a third clue to the foreground, a clue that will appear of little moment to some but which interests me precisely because of its apparent insignificance. The key blocks of Delin's harpsichords (ebony veneer contrasting with a wide central strip in bone) are identical to those of the organ keyboards of the Van Peteghem workshop of Ghent from 1753 to 1840. Ditto for the keyboards of the organbuilder Jean-Baptiste Barnabé-Goynaut (1770).

1752

The written sources concerning Delin are rare and short. I have finally resigned myself to forming an idea of the real modesty of the trade and the possible discretion of the personage. I have finally consoled myself by thinking of all the errors and approximations from which he has escaped, while asking the reader to excuse mine. Certainly, I regretted, I still regret, not having found a letter, a bill, an inventory after death or a tombstone. I even admit to having dreamed of a portrait which this poor devil would neither have been able to or desired to order. But who can say whether one of his two painter sons didn't ask him to pose one day? Even for a sketch? Sketches are thrown away.

The incendiary bombs of 1940 lit up the night, this oblivion henceforth confining a few blind historians with hallucinating intuitions whose critical commentary is mutilated. Conjecture covers facts. There remains the work of historical and musical chroniclers from the end of the XIXth century and the beginning of this century, published and divulged in a few restricted circles. A poor harvest.

Van Der Straeten trusts only appearances and Colson is interested only in Taskin. Snoeck is precious but blinkered as a collector. And the antique dealers, preoccupied by financial speculation, psychologists with their clients, have left no trace of history, fragments of which pass through their hands. Those who follow can only glean this meagre harvest. Raymond Russell, the first and the most subtle amongst them, author of the most beautiful book existing on the history of the harpsichord, was unable to go beyond the limits of his argument by investigating Delin whom he quickly and mysteriously qualifies as "successful". The dictionary of the lexicographer Donald Boalch is full of

(honourable) errors. There is not enough, for my taste, in the entry on Delin. Frank Hubbard loved Ruckers because Ruckers was the key to the 18th century Parisian school of harpsichords, which he preferred above all others. I fear that my choices separate me from this American in Paris.

The nudity, the strangeness of the instruments of Albertus Delin did not seduce. They were relegated to the shadows of the second rank. Austerity and economy, it is true, have nothing of worldly joys. They are admitted without a smile. No winks. No gold. His monochrome cases shut by the lid have all the air of a padlocked cupboard. Even the hinges, iron plates with the edges flattened on the anvil, do not commit the onlooker. One must seek something else, advance, open the instrument: the soundboard is splendid; the keyboard, perfect; the joints, invisible. Delin knew what had to be hidden. The dazzled confuse secret and discreet.

It is the moment to introduce another witness whose impartiality and foresight will illuminate a dark part of the life and work of this obscure Delin. A local historian of rare quality, by profession a jurist, applied himself to noting everything, around the beginning of the XXth century. His name was E.J. Soil de Moriamé. Did he foresee the deluge in assembling methodically such diverse studies as those relating to the excavations of the first Roman walls, the persecution of the Huguenots (exodus of the Tallemants to St. Rochelle), the urbanisation of the Grand Siècle, the Theresien perspectives, etc.? This erudite saw both behind and in front of him. I can see him, not without a certain melancholy, coming and going in a great library where the compartmented window bays throw a geometric light, or in the court archives aligning his cards and, almost alone, filling volumes of the *Annales de la Société d'Histoire et d'Archéologie*. I think of him each time that I enter this city that was saved in the First World War. The second was to set the record straight.

So, Soil, who conjugated the past to the present, undertook a complete inventory of the testaments. Misery! The name of Delin is absent. Did this man start from nothing to return to nothing? The succession of events leads us to this supposition. In the 1911 Tournay exhibition of old art industries, a few instruments of Delin were to be found amongst the china and the copper utensils of the Scheldt coppersmiths. Soil de Moriamé wrote the catalogue. The exhibition and his notes must have incited him to search further in this field, as his notes formed the basis of a more important book that appeared in 1912. These lines are taken from this book: "The instruments still preserved and that were in the 1911 exhibition, especially those of Albert Delin, harpsichordist (sic), belong to this latter period (the 18th century), A rare and important item made by him, a vertical harpsichord, signed and dated 1751, was exposed together with two spinets dated 1750 and 1770, and another harpsichord, dated 1767, all signed." I have searched for this harpsichord whose date, neighbouring the admirable 1768 instrument, made me dream. I lost my illusions when I found the 1767 spinet — yes, the date is the same — whose misadventures I shall relate later. My discovery does not necessarily imply that Soil was mistaken, but there remain some doubts. The author continues on his course and it would be bad grace on my part to take any credit away from him. "Albert Delin, harpsichordist (resic), spoken of as Deligne in the first Tournay document referring to him, was a native of Ath, but moved to Tournay before 1752, a period where it is shown that he was established at Tournay, made harpsichords there, and asked the Tournay magistrates for a gratification (25 January 1752). A gratification of 50 florins was granted in the expectation that he was to make harpsichords and spinets with much art and success." (Consaux, vol. 264, folios 220 and 233). These archives no longer exist.

What was the 1738 document? Probably the certificate of his marriage with a woman from Brussels. It is rare, however, to find mentioned the town of origin in early 18th century marriage certificates, which usually contain only the names of the witnesses and the signatures of the spouses. The certificates now to be found at Tournay are copies of those of the Registrars office, even more succinct. Soil goes no further. He does not seem to have noticed the extracts of baptisms, marriage and death of the six brothers and sisters of Delin, nor of his eight children, archives still in existence, almost complete, in the parish records of Ath, Tournay and Antwerp. These people took wives from the north. The discovery of Soil de Moriamé is essentially this 1752 request, which is perhaps not without similarities, as we shall later see, with another document from 1764. The year of 1752, similar to the preceding, started in adversity as this request of the 25 January has all the appearances of a request for subsidies, thus a fiscal exoneration.

Another happy event occurred the 29th July of the same year. The parish priest of St. Piat washed, sprinkled with water and anointed a little girl, the sixth in the lineage of this obscure dynasty. Marie Madeleine Rose Joseph was to make a late marriage, at the age of 41, to a master baker whose

name, with one letter changed, predestined him to the profession. Jean Baptiste Fromont took as his third wife, the 19th November 1793, at St. Jacques (ah — why not at St. Piat?) Rose Delin. I have in front of me a copy of the certificate. Rose signed with a cross. Her baker husband died in 1807, aged 65. Rose survived until the 3rd March 1831 and died in her eighties. The witnesses, a shopkeeper and a shoemaker, were not even related to the widow but the neighbours of number 18 rue de la Ture. Like the registrar's clerk, I laconically note that she was a knitter. At least this much should be remembered. All the members of this family were clever with their hands.

The year 1752 brings us another flagrant proof of this, piously preserved in the Berlin museum. The 1752 clavicytherium resembles its brother of 1751 like a twin. I would wager that they were on the workbench at the same time and made to the same plan. The soundboard decoration has the air of being by the same hand, which suddenly takes audacities in the colours and the composition that are not seen in the preceding works. The case paint is from the same pot: dark bottle green. Both instruments have lost their lids and are placed on elegant stands with four cabriole legs in a horizontal belt with a double curve in the strictest Regency style, reviewed, corrected and rigidified by provincialism. The ravages of time have identically oxidised the soundboards, darkened the pigments and the vermilion, dulled the golds and paled the brilliance of the ceruse. But behind this veil, the ordering of the decoration comes through and its magic consumes like a smouldering fire. Ah! here is a little difference. The 1752 keyboard has escaped revision. The original compass (GG, AA—e^{'''}) has defied the centuries without addition or displacements. The internal structure of the case is practically unchanged, apart from the useless addition of four light upper braces by Rudolf Hartmann in 1921. These were so inoffensive that they were left by Friedrich Ernst in the most recent restoration in 1959. Friedrich Ernst, whose contribution to the sphere of Delin consists of two precious restoration reports, has described the action of the clavicytherium.

Contrary to the action of an Italian clavicytherium in which the lowered key lever raises a square with the form of a reversed L on which are fixed the jacks, pushed towards the player, Delin innovated with an action which is less direct, even elaborate, time-consuming to make and regulate and which, by a series of transmissions, results in a touch which is smooth, supple and surprisingly light. All the levers are balanced and their inertia, if any, comes only from friction around the points and guides. I concede that the appearance of this relatively complicated action could discourage the uninformed reader. In short, the action consists of five elements: 1° the keyboard; 2° the stickers; 3° the squares; 4° the guides; 5° the jacks. Here, Delin shows a breathtaking shrewdness. The five elements are intentionally distinct. They can be taken out and put back separately. Each element becomes joined to the others only when the finger presses the key.

It can be understood that the main aim of this independence is to limit, if not isolate, defects of deformation which can happen in one or other part of the action. Each pair of jacks, fixed one above the other by a pin, is thus guided and fixed to a square, placed under the wrestplank, the square being pushed by a sticker resting on the distal end of the keylever. Finally, repetition is ensured automatically by the weight of the square, whose point of gravity is slightly backwards.

Frank Hubbard observes that the ends of the two registers project from the case through a mortise in the cheekpiece so as to be moveable by the player's right hand, a Flemish (and just as much Italian) detail. Understood: seen in Ruckers instruments and copied. Hubbard had an innate sense of filiation. It appears to me rather that this sort of manual moving of registers is a relic, and in this case a bizarre archaism, lost in the subtleties of this machinery full of gearing down and which is flexibly set into movement. Looking at these elements, this way of moving the registers is as arduous as it is imprecise, even should it be found somewhat convenient.

On the other hand, Friedrich Ernst maintains that one register is fixed and the other free. This delicate point needs authentication. After so many years, it is not easy always to determine the original hand from that of the reviser. This is why I have doubts on the origins of this detail which cancels the contrast between one register and the other.

The inversion of the plucking points is precisely the most characteristic element in Delins' harpsichords. Contrary to time-honoured habit, the shorter of the two 8' choirs (the original Ruckers scaling), is plucked next to the soundboard to the right, the longer to the left, next to the wrestplank (the front 8[']). The authenticity of this disposition is indisputable because the direction of the mortises in the registers (for tongue clearance) and the position of joined pairs of jacks which cannot be

changed (in the clavicytherium), present us with evidence of a precise intention. This inversion colours the tone, especially in the treble, giving it relief and opposing the fundamental to the harmonics. Some think, perhaps bearing in mind the idea of one immobile register (which?), that this combination is ideal only in the tutti. This argument is easy to discard as it favours immobility, fixed sounds, in a period where people were blindly rebelling against the harpsichords "lack of expressiveness". This disarms a builder who has a premonition of dissent and who does not hesitate to underline the character of his means of expression.

The year 1752, rich in events, ended with the death of Jean Baptiste Delin, father of Albertus. Born "Deligne", he died "Delin". This is the only thing I know about him.

1754

The year 1754 left no trace other than the birth, probably the 12th July, of a seventh child. Marie Françoise Joseph, it seems, followed close behind Rose, two years older. But, more obstinate than her sister, she was to taste the acid liberties of celibacy to the end. The two sisters had in common a taste for knitting, a local occupation par excellence, which left the intimacy of the hearth to be raised to the rank of an international institution. Marie-Françoise was 73 when she died. She had as neighbours in the rue des Jésuites two writers, Auguste Wilgaud and Charles Longueville, who rendered her a final service by going to say that it should be written that she no longer existed.

1756

Two years later, according to another Delin tradition, a boy was born, this time the last, the eighth of this name. The name of Charles Bruno Donat Joseph appears three times in the archives. The first time, the 6 October at Tournay, for his birth. The second time, the 12 March 1772 at Antwerp, the occasion being another baptism. Nicolas, a painter established at Antwerp, chose his younger brother Charles to hold at the baptismal font his first son, called Joseph Albert Charles, to keep the record complete. This meeting of painters in a baptistry was a plot. The son-nephew-godson was not to escape from the views of the father-uncle-godfather and was to become a painter in his turn. The baptised was faithfully to baptise the 6th July 1821, at Antwerp, a new Joseph who already had a paintbrush in his belly and colours in his blood. The Antwerp Museum has the self-portrait of this great-grandson of Albertus Delin. I have been given another portrait by his hand, dated 1867, painted from memory, showing a young man with a fine and indecisive face. Charles Bruno Donat returned to Antwerp the 4th December 1775 to marry, at Notre Dame du Nord, Caroline Gertrude Van Den Broeck, a native of Maastricht. Witness: his brother Nicolas.

The following information is not inappropriate here. It nourishes my chronicler's instinct and fills up (a little) the empty period between the years 1752 to 1763. One would be lost in conjecture on this ten-year hole had the course of History not brought up, in 1863, a clue which the same course was to take away in 1951. While waiting for its reappearance, here are the facts.

Vander Straeten, author of *La Musique aux Pays-Bas avant le XIXème siècle*, a work known, by general agreement, as "monumental" doubtless because the sum of printed paper included is monumental, devotes chapter XXXIV of his first book to Delin. This discovery of 1867, in the American reprint of 1969, on which I counted to give me a foothold, was a total disappointment.

The chapter in question closes as abruptly as it starts and Vander Straeten, with a capricious twist of the helm, veers towards Dulcken. I have nothing against Dulcken. On the contrary. I still pose the question to myself why this verbose author didn't re-read himself and how it was that he didn't have in reserve another title for his chapter XXXIV. I was not only put off but disappointed again as Vander Straeten is not more brilliant with Dulcken. We first learn that "Delin left no traces of his existence other than the instruments carrying his name, and for the possession of which collectors vigorously compete"; that "Mr. César Snoeck, of Renaix, who has created the most beautiful instrument museum of the country, has searched in vain to discover any information" (what would Mr. Snoeck have found on the morrow of the second war?); that "examination of the inspection forms of the controllers of objects manufactured in the year 1764 includes no reference to harpsichord making at Tournay"... "Consequently, the name of Albertus Delin is left aside there". Vander Straeten continues: "This omission has a cause which escapes us completely. Was Albert Delin established somewhere else in 1764? Was his workshop of too little importance to be worth a control? We do not know".

Alas! This majestic "we" also puts me in question. Here I am reduced to the company of a man who, not content with abusing my attention, frustrates me, puts me off and now irritates me with his self-sufficiency which is equalled only, as may be supposed, by his ignorance. I quote: "What we can maintain, in all security, is that his harpsichords are not precisely masterpieces. Small in form, thin and shrill in sound, they were destined for artists without the means of procuring the sumptuous harpsichords of Ruckers [dead for more than a hundred years!] or Dulcken, which were sought for above all by the well off or those occupying a certain position in the world". The baseness of such a confession would have made me replace the volume in the shelves forthwith were I not on the warpath. In the text follow the descriptions of four spinets (1750, 1765, 1766, 1770) which finally lead us to understand that Vander Straeten confused harpsichords and spinets "small in form etc." He continues by relating that another instrument, dated 1756, has the same form as that of 1750. If Vander Straeten is not again mistaken and if his description of the 1750 instrument is of the same subject as mine, we are confronted with another example of the anachronistic hexagonal virginal. The figure three written in red pencil, a figure intentionally noted, indicates in all probability that the instrument was one of a series of at least three made at the same time. It is regrettable that Donald Boalch, who mentions this instrument (n° 5 of his list), does not give the source of a supplementary remark: "Seen again in an antique dealer's shop in Brussels in 1951".

1763

"Its exiguous form lets you put it into places too small for a harpsichord; and the simplicity of its construction puts it within the range of a larger number of purses." The first part of this remark by Mr. César Snoeck is exact, the second questionable. Deceived by the considerations of Mr. Snoeck and the illusions of Mr. Vander Straeten, Ernest Closson paraphrases: "The instruments de Delin (who worked for less well-off amateurs) are less carefully built than those of the Antwerp school."

The wing spinet could resemble a small harpsichord. On the contrary, the harpsichord is a historical extension of the spinet, an elongation of the module, become complex in its development. The spinet is like a miniature. Besides, it is not certain, it is even quite doubtful, that it is so simple to make and above all that its price, fixed by ancestral usage at half that of a harpsichord, is proportional to the time needed to make it. Doubtless several must be made at the same time to amortize the cost price.

The production of Albertus Delin's workshop witnesses to the fact that he liked spinets and that he was probably alone in the builders of the Flemish school to have built so many. It is of the greatest interest to observe that he started from the polygonal form to arrive at this elegant, sophisticated and ultimate form beyond which a different future is difficult to envisage. A century earlier, Girolamo Zenti had taken the same road.

The wing spinet is an epiphenomenon. It partakes of the harpsichord in adopting its structure, not without adapting it nor deforming it. Mutation by osmosis. It is the introduction of a curved line into oblique and straight lines, which in a former phase had known the irruption of broken lines (polygons). The wing spinet and the harpsichord are conceived on the same tripartite scheme: 1° the corpus sonore closed by the soundboard; 2° the wrestplank separated from the corpus by the action gap; 3° the keyboard area, superposed, in the spinet, in view of its small size, on that of the corpus sonore.

This small, light, unencumbering instrument, easily handled in the workshop, the salon or the living-room, is usually strung with a single choir of strings at eight-foot pitch. The narrow depth of the wrestplank necessarily places the nut close to the action, thus the plucking point, and the relative rigidity of the case produces a sound which is more nasal, more dense, more compact than that of the harpsichord. The necessary foreshortening of the bass strings (the keyboard compass rarely goes below C), does not help its piercing character which only weak voicing can temper. In addition, the short keylevers and the almost minute jacks do not have, despite certain artifices, the same rapidity nor the same suppleness of a harpsichord. The professionals grumble. And builders use a great deal of cunning to stabilise the oblique angle of the strings over the action just to ensure that the whole stays plane. In a word, the instrument is little appreciated. This negative reasoning make one forget its gracious form, its brilliant and impulsive freshness and relegate the incredible mastery of those who are interested in it to the level of a curiosity.

The city of Antwerp possesses a wing spinet of 1763, the first in date that we know. It is very damaged and traces of shifting of the position of the bridge on the soundboard make one think that someone

tried to modify the pitch. Revised in the last restoration, it is still disfigured, even disguised with the case sides surrounding the soundboard covered with glued-on papers on the manner of 17th century virginals. The keyboard still lacks the low C sharp.

1764

The examination of the inspection forms of the controllers of objects manufactured in the year 1764 forms two large volumes conserved in the Archives Générales du Royaume. They form part of the archives of the Conseil des Finances and now have the numbers 4392 and 4393. Effectively, there is no trace of either Albertus Delin or harpsichords. But the luthiers De Comble, Depelchin, and the organ builder Lenglet are not to be found either. Tournay lives only from the manufacture of "fayance" (earthenware), silk, pure wool, flannel, leather, hats, playing cards, smokers pipes, without overlooking the manufacture of knitted socks.

A second reading of the manuscript shows the intention of the examiners, who classified things according to the raw materials: iron, brass, wood, linen, animal skins, etc. This ordering does not explain the inconsistencies. In the "wood" category there are three headings: boats, carriages, sawmills; excluded are woodcutters, carpenters, cabinetmakers. From this it is easier to conceive that the singular trade of instrument builder, which used to count as one of the lowest, passes by unnoticed. The greatness of the small is overlooked by the middling, and, as frequently happens, those who keep registers have no other quill than that in their hat. The question can be asked: in which register were these artisans catalogued and on what basis were they controlled? But the question is neither important nor urgent.

On the other hand, the account books of Charles de Lorraine contain the names of unknown builders and tuners: Van Malderen, Bisant, Borremans. The accounts of the parish of St. Piat mention two musicians' names: the gentleman Dubrou, organist, who regulated and tuned the instrument, and Brehan, carillon player.

The state of these questions remains acute. The request of 1752 follows the misfortunes of 1751 and, who knows? the expenditures of 1751. One explanation of the period from 1738 to 1750, at the same time fertile and empty, is, one may believe, the crisis of 1735-1742 and its effects. This does not explain all the silence. I suppose that Delin had an employer or that he plied another trade. Until more information is available, his adventure started in 1750. Possible losses take nothing away from the extreme singularity of his first instruments, which define a prudent start and corroborate my hypothesis. The immediate mastery shows that the man had seen a lot and worked for a long time before hammering away at his own bench.

1766

Number 2216 of the Berlin catalogue is none other than the most beautiful spinet that we possess. The conservator has had the moving idea of putting it beside the clavicytherium and the horizontal harpsichord as if they had given birth to this little one which gives nothing away to them as concerns elegance. This Delin family, installed in a corner of room VI, is in the best company possible, and does honour to the Stradivarius in showcase 21.

The painting of the case and the soundboard surrounds is in a mysterious blue where emerald shimmers in the grisaille of caeruleum. The mouldings, covered with silver leaf, form a border contrasting with the soundboard decoration which uses ornamental foliage borrowed from wrought ironwork. No flowers but a few flowerets, a sort of circular combination of the same design. Delin had perhaps admired the gates of the cathedral choir to have repeated its designs on his soundboards. Another traveller, James Thornhill, had already copied them in his travel notebook in 1711.

The inside of the lid seems never to have been painted. I don't know whether, as such, it is negligence or audacity. It can be noticed that it is made in the most astute and advantageous way possible. The period stand is a curved tripod.

1766

The fully chromatic keyboard of the 1765 spinet was a conversion, announcing what was to come. The 1766 spinet has 53 notes whose keytops are so deeply hollowed, worn down by playing, that they are silent tributes. Apart from a revision of the action, this instrument has never, to my knowledge, been restored. The keybed shows interesting signs of the workshop, always in red pencil, showing the grain

of the wood for the worker who was to plane it. In another place, a drawing error is scratched out with a marking point. All these signs of life in an instrument which certainly is not lacking in them still have the smell of the workshop.

The cross-piece which supports the balance rail is not jointed. It is held only by the glueing of the balance rail which goes beyond it on to the keybed side frames. The intention is obvious. It is a question of keeping straight the frame on which the keylevers move, and not to impede its freedom by a glued assembly.

1767

Nothing worse could have happened to the 1767 spinet than what has actually happened. The soundboard has been replaced with a crude assembly of pitchpine. I shut the lid, lifted up into its place the front flap, then helped my host to put back one by one the pious souvenirs and knick-knacks which were placed on it, on a cloth, so as not to damage anything!

This story of souvenirs brings up another one, much more dubious. Bits of a spinet (without remnants of name, rose or date) with measurements coinciding with those of Delin were converted into a new spinet that a fake patina only shows up more. It is signed: Albertus Delin me fecit Tornaci 1770. The author of the project is mixed up with the author of the work but have nothing in common with the presumed author of an instrument of which only a few remnants have come down to us today on an authentic stand. It is true that today's copies are not fakes and that these, being copied with much application, do not give rise to confusion.

I know three other counterfeits. Certainly Delin has had no luck with his counterfeiters who copy him without knowing him. The first and best of them, a spinet of 1738, confounds, I admit, the likelihoods. But, on looking closer, a multitude of clues gives weight to the truth: the crude making of the keyboard, the chromatic notes in the lowest octave, the forms of letters and figures, the height of the case sides, etc. The second, signed Julius Delin 1785, a curiosity with the form of a harpsichord, is related to the third whose bent side strongly feels the after-effects of an Italian trip. The eclecticism of a counterfeiter is not bothered with any rules and the bridges, gilded with gold leaf, are the common signature of these two objects.

The question of fakes is relatively simple. Difficulties (the clavictherium) are never taken up. Either a well-known name is copied so as to take the greatest advantage of the situation, or a less well-known name, in this case Delin, is chosen, with the aim of distracting because of the lack of comparisons and points of reference.

Undated

The undated clavictherium of The Hague has lost its name batten and thus leaves the question open — when and by whom was it built? The small angel of the rose, guardian of the celebrated initials, reassures us immediately, as if there were any need. No-one has any doubt. It is a Delin, and of the best style. The mystery of the date remains an awkward problem despite seven clues found at the restoration. The comparison of these clues with the totality of Delin's output sheds some light.

One thing, lacking in the clavictheriums of 1751 and 1752, strikes me in the soundboard decoration: the logic of the composition. All the patterns are vertical so as to accentuate the verticality of the instrument. Everything rises towards the tailpiece. Even the foliage in trompe-l'œil beneath the rose, because it is hanging, supports this vertical idea. All the flowers turn their heads in the same direction and the layout of this conception calls to mind the layout of a garden where the gardener's hand is less important than that of the architect. The progress, just as much as the taste, is sure. This would lead one to believe that the soundboard of the 1768 harpsichord, a canary's plumage, which follows in my chronological classification, is an earlier work.

This couldn't be more wrong. The compass of the 1768 keyboard shows the same change as that of 1765. Delin has taken the step. His keyboard is chromatic from one end to the other. On the contrary, the last key of the Dutch clavictherium still has no sharp. We regress.

An amusing improvement to the action of the undated clavictherium distinguishes it from its predecessors. Each sticker (there are as many as there are keys, squares and pairs of jacks) has on its top, above the upper guide, a small pin going through it from one side to the other. This allows the

removal of all the stickers at the same time by taking off the guide (the pin does not pass through it), without losing any and keeping them in the right order.

Another detail, new in the "undated", sets it apart from the three preceding harpsichords. The bentside liner is doubled in the middle by a small bar (width 1cm; length 70cm), as if Delin was seeking, by means of this, to give a more ample tenor register.

The three following clues bring the clavicitherium of The Hague back to around 1768. The two harpsichords have in common a similar case height; the grain of the soundboard is lengthwise, not angled; the system of joining together the soundboard and the case is identical. A sort of strut, resembling a gun with its butt and barrel, starts at the upper bellyrail, joins the counterbridge at about the level of the rose and doubles it for the rest of its length. The lightness of this strut together with that of the counterbridge make one think immediately that the two pieces of wood are but one. The strut holds the soundboard back just as much as it supports it. It is a spring.

Thus all these clues, except one, allow the undated clavicitherium of The Hague to be brought close in time to the last known harpsichord of 1768. The keyboard compass is naturally a weighty inconvenience which forces us to go backwards at least three years. The modification of the GG—e''' keyboard to AA—f''', giving rise to problems of either pitch or tension, is perhaps contemporary to a rather crude repair. An enormous pine brace, of which only piano makers have the secret, is glued — without undercutting — under the soundboard in the bass. I can understand that someone wanted to rectify a dip in the soundboard, but I cannot understand why it should have been preferred to neutralise the effect rather than suppress the cause.

The rococo decoration of the case, the lid and the stand is surprising in its extravagance. Ivory and gold form a sunrise on the usual dark earth colours and spinach green. A half-moon has been attached to the tailpiece of the case and the lid. Everything has been rounded. It is the end. Points are no longer in favour. Only the pianoforte is liked, with no points, in both the proper and figurative meanings. The angles of the cheek are filled with stucco. The hypotenuse is weak. I wonder whether the unknown hand who was asked to make this compromise had a moment of hesitation before the unpainted soundboard border whose discordant nudity suddenly became a provocation.

1768

Statistics is a surprising science, as, on the basis of a partial inventory that probability and numbers renders aleatory, it would lead us to think that Delin had made more spinets than horizontal and vertical harpsichords (the latter being his specialty). Only better conditions of preservation could weaken this hypothesis. Until more ample information is available, we may prudently refer to the list of Boalch consisting of 15 instruments among which 9 are known (4 spinets, 3 clavicitheriums and 2 harpsichords), 6 probable and one improbable, and after that, to mine, containing 11 instruments all of which are known (6 spinets, 3 clavicitheriums and 2 harpsichords).

Existing instruments of Albertus Delin in 1988

N°1	Boalch n° 2	1750	Polygonal virginal C (without C#)-e''' 1 x 5'	Instrument Museum, Brussels
N°2	Boalch n° 1	1750	Harpsichord C (without C#)-e''' changed to C-e''' 2 x 8'	Instrument Museum, Berlin
N°3	Boalch n° 3	1751	Clavicytherium GG (without GG#)-e'''	Instrument Museum, Brussels 2 x 8'
N°4	Boalch n° 4	1752	Clavicytherium GG (without GG#)-e''' 2 x 8'	Instrument Museum, Berlin
N°5	Boalch n° 6	1763	Spinet C (without C#)-e''' 1 x 8'	Conservatory, Antwerp
N°6	Boalch n° 8	1765	Spinet C-e''' 1 x 8'	Instrument Museum, Berlin
N°7		1766	Spinet C-e''' 1 x 8'	Private collection
N°8		1767	Spinet C-e''' 1 x 8'	Private collection
N°9	Boalch n° 13 Gemeentemuseum,	Undated	Clavicytherium GG (without GG#)-e''' changed to AA-f''' 2 x 8'	The Hague
N°10	Boalch n° 9a	1768	Harpsichord GG-e''' 2 x 8'	Private collection
N°11	Boalch n° 11	1770	Spinet C-e''' 1 x 8'	Instrument Museum, Brussels

The story of the 1768 harpsichord is not lacking in new developments which should change the statistical data. The abnormal depth of the wrestplank indicates, with little room for doubt, that Delin was forced to adapt this dimension, one finally of little importance, to another dimension, this being irreducible, as it already exists. What I mean is that the keyboard was started, perhaps finished, when the project of assembling the case was modified by the builder or by the client or for some other unknown reason. Now, these longer dimensions are those of a clavicytherium. It is much simpler to widen a wrestplank than to shorten a keyboard. I note in passing that it is good logic to start the work with the keyboard around which and on which the other pieces find their place.

This harpsichord in poplar with thicker scantlings than the others was repainted, gilded, polished at a period when the century was toppling rather badly into the next. The decoration is stiff and its exuberance sterile. The story of the abduction of Europa by Zeus told on the lid is anodyne beside that of the soundboard surround covered with a uniform dark green as much vegetal as mineral and that light, dust and use have fossilised. The cheekpiece mortise, through which the registers project, is blocked up. The image is striking, symbolic. Delin is corrected. This is the last word.

1770

I am especially fond of this wing spinet because it is perhaps the last instrument that Albertus Delin made before his death, and because I imagine that he put into it everything that he knew of his craft. A builder often likes his last instrument which summarizes all the preceding ones and even attempts to surpass them. But to cast no doubts on either his modesty or his pride, it must be added that he likes them anxiously, without indulgence, as the last is none other than the next to last.

The brown case, becoming darker and darker, is today relegated to the obscure reserves of the Brussels instrument museum. All this is not very engaging. The question can be asked - which, the conservator or the conserved, has by chance been the first to adapt to the environment. In short — the lid is raised with the same haste, the same emotion and the same fears. All that is known is found again. The angel, the lyre, the initials, the foliage under the dust, the rounded beech bridge, the alignment of the pins, the eternal treble soundboard crack, the oak wrestplank, the rows of tuning pins, the name batten with the same letters, especially the "A" whose curious horizontal bar forms a lozenge with the point, the same writing, the eloquent "me fecit", the disastrous "Tornaci", the mouldings, always worn in the same places, the black and white keyboard with its engravings eroded by perspiration, four and a half octaves (quite enough!), the trilobed keyfronts, like small breasts (quite enough!), the so short cheekpieces, the small flaps, everything is there; nothing has changed; is this a lack of imagination? A lack of research? A lack of memory? Does all this really exist? And will last? And can last in order to be repeated? What obsession, what fragility, and at the same time what self-assurance! Only one dimension changes: the case height. 1750: 15 cm. 1763: 16 cm. 1765: 16,5 cm. 1766: 16,5 cm. 1767: 17 cm. 1770: 17 cm. The same progression in the harpsichords. 1750: 23,5 cm. 1751: 23,5 cm. 1752: 24 cm. "Undated": 25 cm. 1768: 25 cm. Including the bottom. Including care. Including the quality of the wood. Including ear and judgment. Just one question: that of the height, the depth, the perspective, the third dimension, space — and the sound.

1771

The 16th November, Joseph Albert, the eldest son of Delin, died at the age of 32. Ten days later, it was the father's turn. Albertus Delin was 59. His funeral, which cost 6 livres 6 sous et 8 deniers, took place the 28th November at 9 a.m. at St. Piat. (The service, with four bells but without silverware, cost 16 livres.) I have found no record of anniversary services in his name. The number of deaths listed on the same page leads one to think that there was an epidemic. The son died, having received all the sacraments. The father had only extreme unction, as though his were a sudden death.

The same year appeared at Ghent, published by Varlé, a singular small book whose title alone fills half of the title-page: Catalogue of the diverse curiosities of the Cabinet of the late His Excellency Monsignor the Count of Salm-Reifferscheid, Bishop of Tournay. Paul Rolland tells us that "this great lord loves luxury to the point of madness". This is already suspicious. The historian gives no source. Even more suspicious! The music-loving bishop "had a Chapel of Music for the composition of which he called upon Italian musicians". The taste for music developed so much in the town, under his episcopal impetus, that a concert society was founded in 1774. Thus are the facts.

And here are some more: the contracts, bills and accounts disappeared in the fires of the second war. This catalogue is a sale catalogue and the reasons for this sale remain obscure. The bishop carried out his functions from 1731 to 1770; his successor from 1776 to 1794. The copy which was consulted, and which arrived in the archives of the Cathedral Chapter by an unofficial path, merits attention. It is a masterpiece of the most secret kind of the culture of a period and the ruler of the area.

The inventory starts with a long enumeration (without descriptions) of natural, scientific and artistic objects, finishing with a list of curious arms and old medals. The drawers of the natural history collection contain marble, agate, Hungarian bloodstone, porphyry, amethyst (naturally), wood transformed into agate, onyx, opal, dendrite, malachite, lapis lazuli, sapphires, crystals, pigments for painting, antimony, mercuric sulphur rich in gold, exotic seeds, "letter wood", from which bows are made, insects, stuffed birds, marine plants, stones, coral madrepore, shells, etc., etc.; in other drawers, porcelain from China and Tournay; the mathematical and physical cabinet contains barometers, thermometers, pumps, compasses, experimental machines for electricity, light, fire, optical instruments, microscopes, etc.; the gallery of paintings and the print cupboards align the names of Teniers, Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Rubens, Bramer, Berghem, Van Ostade; canvases after Poussin, Boucher, Watteau, Raphaël. One can see genre scenes, still life, portraits of women, countryside scenes with or without people, smokers, drinkers, card players; a series by Van Loo, Chardins engraved by Lebas or by L'Espicier. The museum is completed (but where are the books ?) by scores of which the composers' names appear, one after another, in alphabetical order. Abel, now known only by gamba players, precedes Alphmayer. Bach announces Bech (?), Bode etc. The names of Gluck and Haydn are there, but one searches in vain for Mozart. The harpsichordist Raick, organist at Ghent, replaces D'Anglebert, the Couperins, Rameau; and (I am leisurely approaching them) the musical instruments; 10 very good violins, 3 basses or violoncellos, one viola da gamba ornamented with precious stones, 8 other very good gambas, 5 violas, 1 double bass, 2 very good harpsichords by Ruchers (read Ruckers), 1 spinet, 1 archlute, 1 harp, 1 small psalterion, 1 pair of horns with their accessories for playing in any key, 4 trumpets, 4 travelling cornets, 1 bassoon, 5 oboes, (the flutes are missing), a wheel for overwinding strings, 10 candelabras for the musicians, 6 pedestal tables, 1 hurdy-gurdy, a pair of kettledrums. I wager that his excellence had an opera. To conclude, the author of the catalogue becomes insistent: "For Musicians, what Resources can be found for Composition in Mathematics, for luthiers (without a capital "L") in the Mechanics for the Construction or the Repair of Musical Instruments".

The presence of two Ruckers harpsichords (ravalé? not ravalé?) fills the horizon. This is obvious. Without documents, I cannot even know whether Delin tuned them, maintained them. This I presume, and my assumptions are based, as has been seen, on a clear prejudice. But the spinet? Which spinet? Note that had it been a Ruckers, it would surely have been declared as such. Nothing is said. The scribe reading this did not have to re-read the name of Ruckers. Hard luck for Ruckers!

1799

"Today, 17 nivôse, year 7 of the Republic appeared in the Town Hall Denis Gérardé brouteur (?), 26 years old, living rue au poids Section Liberté and François Delin goldsmith, 48 years old, living rue clacdent section Fraternité, the first a friend, the second son of Anne Martin born in Brussels widow of Albert Delin who declared to me that the said Anne Martin died yesterday at 9 in the evening, living in rue clacdent aged 80 years. I verified the death of the said Anne Martin."

Note

On the delicate subject of the orthography of Tournai (which can no longer be changed) or Tournay, I referred to the erudite study by Frédéric Hennebert which maintains that the first Frankish then medieval spellings of the name of the city did not have a Y, "a strange neography", "an i with a tail and a fork ... which was introduced into the written language without giving any help to the spoken language". Moreover, hypotheses on the Roman or German origins of the city are relegated to the background by this hellenist who is interested only in the 1856 spelling reform. Hennebert quotes an accomplice, Father Buffin, author of a "French Grammar on a new level" (1726) in which it is presumed that the use of the "Y" was introduced into our language by copyists who, in writing final i's, ornamented it with a loop to show the skill and agility of their handwriting. On the other hand, Hennebert knew very well that printers, relying on current usage, immobilised the "forked letter" by

their typesetting and were responsible for a situation which lasted, not without fluctuations, from 1827 in the papers of the Town Hall to 1870 in the printed matter of the convents. Proof can be obtained by a simple visit to the folklore museum in Tournay. It will be understood that I have not taken this situation lightly and that, in view of the choices of the period, I have made a choice. I needed links. I needed underground concordances.

Jean Tournay

The Germans of Antwerp

I was far from imagining the surprises waiting for me when I started working on Delin twenty years ago. The analogies that I stubbornly insisted on establishing, by impudence, if not imprudence, between periods, schools and styles — well! it had to be admitted that these comparisons sometimes made only reflections, often false reflections. At the certain risk of losing my way, or misleading the reader searching for definitive information, I persist in re-reading, implying myself, thus understanding, but without recourse to either illusion or magic. It is time to believe in a type of historical criticism (and to practise it) that doesn't drape itself in hysterical or lyrical poses at the entrance to the labyrinth, the most obvious allegory of the inner ear and musical vertigo.

The great simplicity of Delin's instruments is a demonstration and a trap. For, effectively, this builder followed the 17th century Flemish style which he modified in other respects by ostensibly abandoning the 4' and the second keyboard which had just been aligned on the first. The compass of his keyboards (Delin's intelligence is circumspect), explores a little at a time the low G, already found in the solution of the GG/BB short octave and the chromatic instruments exported by Ruckers to England. It could also be imagined that considerations of symmetry led him to e^{'''}, an appearance of five octaves; a firmly suppressed desire. This compass, anxiously related to the static problems of the soundboard, was no longer to vary, nor was the idea of supporting the soundboard with a strut, fortunately replaced by a bow. What to think of such mastery behind which hides so much cunning. Two centuries of craftsmanship end up in these hands.

However, a few years earlier, Dulcken was to intervene in this influence. No-one knew anything of this nor wanted to. Neither Delin nor Bull. Let it immediately be said: these men of the north had nothing in common. While Delin admired and concentrated himself, while Bull, in his extravagance, was already in another region, Dulcken had a new idea of sound. The phenomenon became more elaborate, more imaginary. The complexity of his structures followed the complexity of his exigencies, of his imagination. Who knew, who knows what he desired? It can be proposed that he was searching, and, a weightier thing altogether, was researching. Was he searching for the sake of searching, to free and intensify his imagination? Or was he searching to find something? The old Greek quarrel — Do archetypes or individuals actually exist?

Dulcken strides across his century; it could even be said that he held in respect all those who produced without leaving their footprints behind them. All of his instruments are events. Certainly, today we hear only the 1747 and the 1755, and, in a certain sense, this is enough as each instrument proceeds from one or other of his two styles, that of the beginning with the doubled bentside or that of the end with the doubled liner. However, his story can be summarized less in the height of these doublings than in the direction, the precise function that he gave them. I shall return to this point when I sketch the mixture of styles of a period and an individual. The smallest disagreement on this subject excludes any notion of a school.

Dulcken is linked to his doubling of some pieces which in their turn complicate all our discussions on them and on him. Nothing makes me sadder than the opinion that his doublings are expensive and that they should be limited. Restriction, reduction. On the other hand, I am exalted by a colleague's question: "What did Bull do with all this?" The man who spoke to me thus was making a real historical criticism and stirred up, in part, the basis of these few pages.

Bull is an enigmatic case. It was a fugitive and a renegade that was accentuated by the historical witness of Burney, and only four of Bull's harpsichords still exist. 1776, 1778, 1779, 1789. Fortunately, Jeannine Lambrechts gives us a key in revealing a few dates for us. Dulcken died in 1757 and Bull, born in 1723, died in 1804. Decidedly, we are no longer in the century with this "celibate carpenter", the author of four survivors. The comparisons diminish and with this comes a concentration in the hypotheses. Bull is a refined voicer who takes care of his effects. Form, "the life of forms", takes on a delicate sense with him. But how to explain, without restrictive allusions, that his work, where the harmonics of the eye and the ear are chosen, that he succeeds in shrinking the fundamental, as if the rhythm was out of breath.

The harpsichord of 1776 (he was 53) is an assiduous repetition of what we have already seen in the work of Dulcken (dead for 19 years). This instrument is the work of someone who is gifted, certainly,

but rigid. All is visible; nothing is visible. The mastery of materiel without obsessions. It is calm. And it was to stay calm, even were he to introduce novelties: the double-tongued alternative jack and the double-curved bentside (known elsewhere than in Flanders). More "doublings", but no longer those of Dulcken.

There is a domain where Bull is magnificent and demands the adhesion of those who reflect themselves like him, in the mirror of the finish. The perfection of his work is optical, with an intensity that nothing can tarnish. It is clear that his dexterity is exalted by his vision. He belongs to the race of the precious found in each century and each way of life, although certain periods and societies did not favour them. His æstheticism comes through in the engravings of the key fronts and in the profile of the mouldings, to take possession of the lines and sometimes lose them, as in the indulgent form of the sharps. These flagrant details show how much the art of the instrument builder is linked to the two indissociable faculties of seeing and hearing; one does not know which to put in the first place, doubtless neither one nor the other, but both together, penetrated by the same desire to know how and why it is done.

In order to go forward, we must now go backwards, not to problematical origins but to the flowering of the Flemish harpsichord, i.e., the Ruckers clan. Everything has been said about them and done to them and Grant O'Brien has summarised it all in an encyclopædic book that no mood will ever change. While his methodical spirit was collecting notes, another person — solitary, impudent, sensitive, brutal, in the world and not in the world, a cosmopolitan crossing centuries like countries, a new Dolmetsch — was trying to concentrate his spirit in the freshness, the innocence of discovery. This is Jurgenson, the American of Germany.

The essential of what he says to us holds in the suppression of a prefix. We must not rediscover, we must discover. We must not cut up into pieces time, nor thought, nor gesture so that later they can be joined together end to end. Jurgenson makes neither an analysis nor a synthesis. He neither talks nor talks about himself. He tells of how his tool works best on the bench. I am not even sure that he marvels at it. He is abstract, as much as he is a remote-controlled impulsive. When he affirms that "Ruckers is thus", he is testifying from a complete knowledge. This witness has seen that. Nothing else. He has proved the contrary absurd. And he proves it.

Jurgenson is the author of a little essay in macaronic English with the title of "Ruckers Enigma?" This title is so ironical that it loses its question mark. There is no enigma. "It is thus." The subtitle "or 15 years search for the unicorn" underlines, by its allusion to the fabulous allegory, the symbolism of signs. His global interpretation of the Ruckers system is articulated around five characteristic details of construction:

- 1° The angled upper belly rail.
- 2° The doubled lower belly rail.
- 3° The tool-box.
- 4° The upper braces
- 5° The "non-glued" bottom

Many pages have been filled and scholarly stupidities have been uttered on the angle of the upper belly rail. The prudent kept quiet and the conscientious modestly copied it without understanding. This was not too bad. The others "invented". The primary function of the upper belly rail, which must be glued immediately beneath the soundboard, is to guarantee the width of the latter without any variation, the crosswise front part of the bottom having the same function. The second function of this piece, which is a stop, is to facilitate the thinning of the soundboard and its acoustic manipulation. Finally, this oblique piece allows the decorator to work on the soundboard away from the instrument and the workshop, to the undoubted satisfaction of the artist and the artisan. At the last minute, the border arabesques are drawn with a "malhorn", a sort of small tap.

The doubled lower belly rail and the tool box, indissociable in the plan of the structure, are one and the other the keystone of the Ruckers system. The double lower belly rail, in the form of a V, joining, with its two branches, the spine to the critical treble bentside angle, forms an obligatory triangulation. At the same time, the toolbox cavity is an empty space intentionally made in order to weaken the spine and create a symmetry with the weakness of the treble. Minus plus minus gives plus. More flexibility thus less risk of deformation. The idea of weakening may seem paradoxical but it is in the norm of the

complex nature of musical instruments. Nodal analysis confirms this, though it cannot guide our attempts. It is in this spirit that Jurgenson evokes the sophistication of the Ruckers, a notion as vague as the evolutionary complexity of techniques.

The irresistible seduction of this essay lies in the light that is shone on the paradox and the reality of the system, of the interaction of symmetry and flexibility, thus of its asymmetry. One could even think it a eulogy of confusion when he declares that the Ruckers considered these "forces involved as 'living forces' in balance." Jurgenson's generosity and his ardent criticisms of the concept of copies are indispensable to us because he dares to speak to us of himself, thus of us as well, when speaking of Ruckers, Ruckers the Admirable. So, the great freedom of the sound (of the discourse) is impossible without a great freedom of the structure (of the double interpreter builder-musician). This flexibility in the x-y plane, projected onto a surface in a coordinate system, rises in a third dimension z, the height of the case, of the sides, and of that which keeps them sufficiently low: the bottom, unglued.

What happens higher up, under the soundboard, is even more mysterious. It is even a secret, the only secret in the trade, intransmissible because, fortunately, we are all protected from others by our diversity — our freedom. The upper case braces go beyond their role of keeping the case sides vertical. Their horizontal position doubles the horizontal plane of the soundboard; opposite the forces acting on the soundboard are those of the upper braces, in anticipation, in a sort of pre-stressing. On condition of being judiciously fitted, each using his freedom of judgment, they become the spring of the spring.

Despite the spectacular advantages of an angled upper belly rail, Couchet (partly), Delin, Dulcken and Bull didn't use it. The upper belly rail became a fixed structural element in the 18th century. It is true that the keyboard compass and the registers increase: this provokes another point of view, supported by other options. The very idea of triangulation found itself modified and Jurgenson discerns the outline in the Dulcken's triangular belly rail, and in the small treble case brace in Delin. So be it! The tool box disappeared and only the unglued case bottom remained, after a hundred years of having been a workaday habit, the guarantee of a relative flexibility.

There remains (and will remain forever), the question of the upper braces. Could it not be said that in forgetting them, Delin already articulated the example that Bull was to make of the doublings of Dulcken. But, in fact, Delin is the specialist of the spring that can always be found, in one or other form, in his synthetic structures. And Dulcken had, with his doublings and supports, an exact knowledge of empty space, or at the very least, small gaps. The preoccupation of the century was oriented towards timbre and its expressiveness. Now, timbre is the most complex characteristic of a sound because it depends on the number, the distribution and the intensity of the harmonics on to which are grafted all the "mechanical" problems of attack transients. The timbre is also the colour; and since music lends itself so well to other genres, be they architecture, painting, versification, that any relationship with these arts, far from reducing, increases its attraction. We must fearlessly discover the imagination, through our own, that inspired these builders in guiding them in the most practical, the most verifiable way possible. Such is the condition of those who verify nothing that is not practical; it is even the limit of their competence.

Delin respected Ruckers, but not his 4', its difficulties, its timbre. Did he measure what he was setting aside, the reflection which he was doing without. The 4' is a division, a division of everything, starting with the 8', the surface and the tensions which it imprints on the soundboard. It is also a division of taste, of preferences. This luxurious 4', so contrasting, puts in place, however, the elementary things, such as the light and shade of the sound, the speed or the slowness of the images. Of course, depending on the instrument, it can reduce them to strident problems of frequencies or voicing. Nevertheless, the architectural equilibrium changes with its presence or absence.

The solution of two 8' choirs, (historically, the second solution), already so characteristic in Italy and other countries, is an alternative. Either the original 8', the principal — i.e. the shorter of the two, to recapitulate — is plucked to the right, close to the soundboard, and the other, close to the wrestplank, to the left, or they are inverted. It is inappropriate to debate the two cases, each having its own non-exclusive musical value; when the registers are separated, both solutions have sufficient contrast. On the other hand, Delin's choice of combination gives more sparkling harmonics. It is time to observe the new role assigned to the unison and what place it took with regard to the absent 4'. Usage has it that the 4' is plucked next to the soundboard, necessarily to the left. The proximity of the nut perhaps

imposed this rule at the same time as a more evenly balanced division of the string diagram. Only, the addition of a second keyboard brought other possibilities, without forgetting the extra ones presented by the wide gaps of transposing harpsichords.

We know very little of the long period in Flanders joining up, from 1680, the 18th century to the preceding century, as if the massive production of the Ruckers workshop and Couchet's change of course had obliterated all changes of direction and as if it were no longer necessary, thus possible, to build during a certain time. I noticed this in measuring the distance between these two builders and the inevitable distance imposed by the advent of a new style. Interrogating these differences, which nothing seemed be able to reconcile, I observed how much the establishing of a new keyboard compass of five octaves, from F to F, was less underground, progressive, insistent, than it appeared, when suddenly it was found, in one bound, suddenly breaking in with an impertinent audacity, and just as quickly marginalised. On the hand, the Britsen trail teaches us nothing new and the destroyed instruments of the first van den Elsche increase our ignorance.

To my knowledge, only two instruments form the link between the old and the new Antwerp workshops, between Couchet and Dulcken. These are two double-manual harpsichords. The first, signed and dated HVL 1702 (and not 1762 as Mahillon writes in his catalogue) is conserved at the Brussels museum and the second, HM 1728, is in private hands. Both have a dogleg.

The HVL harpsichord, with a keyboard compass of AA—e^{'''}, appears to be built around the soundboard plan of a transposing double whose aligned keyboards control four ranks of jacks in the same gap:

< 8
< 4
> 8 (dogleg)
> 8 (nasal)

This disposition, identical to that of Dulcken, and on the upper keyboard to that of Delin, was, in its very rigidity, a singular portent of the tastes which were to follow. One thinks of the remark of Ripin, considering the transposing instruments as two instruments superposed in the same case. Now, this Flemish harpsichord is a lesson in style with the original use of materials (elm, maple, ivory), and a sure hand presiding over their assembly. It remains no less obvious that the most important lesson that it teaches us, with original markings as evidence, is the general disposition of the registers, indicating the transfer of the 4' to the centre, the use of the unison as a "contrasting main eight foot", and this alternative possibility giving each keyboard a real autonomy.

I presume that the HM 1728 is a Hyeronimus Mahieu. This harpsichord accentuates its superb length by narrow case sides. It could not appear more advantageously despite severe repairs and the ill-treatment of a new décor masking the old blues mixed with green and grey; a standard paint mixture for panelling and wardrobe interiors; a colour emblematic of a now bygone époque. However, the novelty — in 1728 — of a keyboard compass of five complete chromatic octaves, from FF to f^{'''}, is more important than the rest, as is also the disposition:

<4
8>
<8 (dogleg)

The key fronts, sculpted in trilobed arcades, merit being pointed out in passing.

Visibly, Delin's choices do not lack antecedents. The English sphere, with well-known links to Flanders, would bring supplementary proofs if the subject of these pages could accommodate them without overflowing. It appears to me that the 4' had lost its importance, that it had become the pawn moved in the gap to reunite the two 8' stops or to separate them and mark by this distance a clear opposition which excludes the 4' even when it is present.

As for Dulcken, he generally placed the 4' in the centre in his two-manual instruments with four stops, with one exception (assuming that this exception is original) which is his last known large harpsichord, precisely the one without a lute. Among the single-manual instruments, it can be found in equal proportions close to the soundboard or in the middle, as if the only rule was simple judgment

left to individual appreciation. Moreover, I am not far from thinking that an similar flexibility guided the builder in his production, about half of which, beside the five octave singles or doubles, consists in instruments with a narrower case and a GG/BB short octave with the treble stopping at d''', as if the portion given over to «modernity» could not exclude that of tradition, livelier at Antwerp than elsewhere. But it must be emphasised that this diversity is only an veneer and that, essentially, nothing was to modify the complex evolution of the structures.

In such conditions, the only way to include the 4' is to enrich its echo by a lute, a rigid and fixed register whose harmonic character has an obvious similarity with that of the octave register. They both enhance, with their sharp and tight timbre (the specific frequency being of little importance here), the opulence of the principal and the unison. In such a way that, by analogy, I see in this another doubling, one more, on condition that the 4' is in the centre, i.e. close to its nut. The 4' as a doubling of the lute, the two together doubling the principal, itself doubled by the unison. Thus then, by reduplication, by redoubling, everything is reflected in itself, repeats itself, unfurls itself. What to think of the doublings of Dulcken if not that first of all they are the reflection of his mental state, his imaginary world and that, from reflection to reflection, they become obsessive proofs which the instrument spreads, as in a double mirror, the traces to infinity.

There are other details with a direct and causal connection with the voicing; these are the supports. I speak neither of prophylactic crutches nor of the wooden springs of the four foot hitchpin rail but of these wedge-shaped pieces, local doublings of the soundboard, which support it in different parts of the bentside and which are placed — in known positions as they are sealed by glueing — to regularize the resonances, to control them and, to within a millimetre, to shift them. The very dynamic of the fundamental has, under their influence, other movements than those which could be represented by a convex or concave curve according to whether the force is in the middle of the compass or divides it and makes it converge at the extremities. These views on sound, which I formerly considered as enigmatic speculations, reveal to us the hidden yet resonant face of a process. They also show us the position of Dulcken when death stopped him and when his son carried forward (if that can be said) the work of the atelier. The 1769 harpsichord, in some ways a legacy, multiplies the supports, even doubling them, and I fear that a linear rigidity lies under these shackles.

Shortly before or after, but standing out from the ranks with his dandyish refinement, Bull appeared. His diversity was to surprise. I am not sure whether he scorned the obsession of Dulcken, but he underestimated it. His talent was obvious and, as happens often in such cases, dissipates attention, in turn seduced by the skill and abused by the soundness that must be attributed to the talented. His structures are light, of an ethereal neatness. What could be found there that was already known? Typically Flemish lower frames, with a barely triangular belly rail, the upper braces convergent and thinned towards the spine (Dulcken). Two novelties, however: in the 1778, a brace, similar to those of Hensch, consolidates the cheek-bentside angle and, in the two following harpsichords a double bentside, an elegant and solid "innovation", which above all economises a perilous assembly. Apart from this, nothing is to be seen that combats over-tensioning, as if all that was entrusted to the kindness of the materials, to their simplicity made naked by the tools.

The struggle was elsewhere, on the wrestplank, under the wrestplank, and near the knees underneath the bottom, as both hands were needed. Bull's machines say more about his anxieties than about his pleasure. He was the inventor of fearsome springs, placed at the extremities of the gap, between which the guides could be engaged or disengaged with nuances; not at all, as some have calculated, to make the dampers stay in place and to immobilise the rank. As for this, good dampers damp but little. This invention is concomitant with that of the alternative jack whose double tongues, equipped with different plectra (leather and quill), could pluck either to the left or to the right. The movement started off by the knees arches the musician's back as much as it gives to the touch a muffled dynamic, which should, by compression and decompression, try to make the sound swell or diminish, in alternation. To finish with the effects, there is a heavy metal bar covered with cloth which damps both the 8' stops together from above. This radical damper is manœuvred once again by a knee stop and everything leads one to think that it was used by surprise as a retreat or an echo.

His disposition had as a principle to keep the 4' close to the soundboard and thus to tighten up the 8' ranks in opposing and confusing them at the same time by the coming and going of the alternative jack. In a two-manual harpsichord, the alternative jack was a dogleg and with the addition of a lute stop to spice the registrations, the big affair was to pluck the unison twice at the same time. The point can

even be reached where it can be asked when and how the damper stop intervened to stop this cascade of effects or to prepare them.

It could be that the historical story of the Flemish harpsichord finished here and that nothing or nobody, above all Delin, announced it. These extreme orientations isolated Dulcken who worked only on the inside of his cases and who, to this "infernal" 4', gave all his attention: strut, spring, nut on the very edge of the gap for this nasal octave, re-establishing by this the idea of the blockwerk of the first organs.

The imaginary world of Dulcken makes a pause in time; a cæsura much more surprising than time itself (of which we know nothing) or its parts joined together with great effort in order to decipher its meaning. There is no period that is not fossilised, like a style when it is not the witness to a period. The symbolism of roses, on this point, will once again lead us into error. The habit of piercing the soundboard and filling the hole with a rose is a habit as old as instruments themselves. We are drifting in the symbolism of habit. How and why to change when the only urgent thing is to be and to show this. Rose or no rose, one must learn one's identity. Useless to keep quiet, it will be known. It is thus not surprising that harpsichord builders, so linked to use by verification and finally so much taught by fiction, had, amongst all these habits, adopted that for its exemplary value. This "focal point" was a sort of excentric centre from which the ornamentists played with the legs of their compasses. Here we find a sacred rite, charged with allegories. The angel and the lyre unite two distinct worlds. They reconcile the pagan myth of Orpheus and Christianity, and transform into an accomplice, if not a messenger, he who intermingles his initials with the elements of the symbol.

Even so, this ornament was not always so easy to read. The abstract and geometrical lute rose is a sign intentionally retracted before the elliptical form of the instrument: the egg. The rose thus becomes the sign of the sign. It must add nothing which destroys, which explains. Sometimes this happens. From which the confusion of style, of identity. And of the pleasure. But it also happens, in any period, that this intuitive geometry breaks through the curtain and that the famous opening circumscribes a monogram, which is nothing other than an abbreviated signature, but doubled, inverted as in a mirror image. The monogram is a seal. It is the "alchemical signature of the individual". The seal of Tabel announces that of van den Elsche, of Dulcken and that, plump like baroque stucco, of Bull.

Bach's seal

Notes

The absence of bibliographical references merits a short explanation. With an eye to equity and precision, and above all with the apprehension of slowing reading by incessant references that already everyone largely knows, and that only the authors quoted search for with complacency and agony, I suggest that interested readers consult existing glossaries and dictionaries on the subject. They are numerous, polyglot, updated and corrected. Inevitably, the most recent is the most complete.

Among the mistakes which tease proofreaders, there was one which I found and suppressed with regret; should I have silently saved it? It came from the hand of the typist of this manuscript who typed "vocal" instead of "local" when I spoke of Dulcken, "local doublings of the soundboard..." We are all copiers of everyone else, and I salute mine for this error - so exact - which translates much better than mine my idea of voicing by means of the supports. This small unconscious sign of one of the first readers is less negligible than it may seem.

Translator's note: I have chosen, in consultation with Jean Tournay, to make a fairly literal translation of his text. It will be obvious to the reader that there are many expressions and phrases in the original French version that cannot be translated into idiomatic English, and the special nature of Jean Tournay's prose poses even more problems than is usual in such translations.

English translation: Allen James