

## The Queen of Instruments.

**Prints of Organs from the Time of Beethoven  
Hans Gerd Klais Collection**

**Special Exhibition of the Beethoven House Bonn  
December 3, 2000 - May 5, 2001**

This exhibition presents a selection of prints relating to the history of the organ from the extensive collection which Hans Gerd Klais, senior partner in the renowned Bonn organ building firm of the same name, has assembled during the past decades.

A topic which is little-known to most music lovers and visitors of the Beethoven House is at the center of interest here: Beethoven and the organ. The world of the organ was well known to the young Beethoven - after all, he earned his living for ten years as an organist in the service of the Electoral Court. Even at the time of his departure from Bonn, he still considered himself an organist, among other things, as the entries he made in his diary as a young man show. Beethoven was soon to cause a sensation as a brilliant improviser at the piano and certainly the background for this is to be found partially in the fact that organ music in the last third of the 18th century was to a considerable extent improvised music. The organ thus plays a larger role in Beethoven's artistic vita than the almost complete lack of compositions by him for this, the queen of instruments, would make us believe.

### Room 5: Young Beethoven and the Organ

Only a few documents exist regarding Beethoven's activities as an organist in Bonn, apart from a few notices in historical records and in the reminiscences of the Bonn master baker, Gottfried Fischer, about Beethoven's youth. The most impressive „real“ witness is the keyboard of the organ from the Minorite Church in Bonn (the rest of the organ has not been preserved). Beethoven played often on it. Beside it (**Case 2**), a manuscript - the so-called Siegburg Organ Book - containing a piece for the organ ascribed to Beethoven, is being displayed for the first time. Oral tradition has it that the manuscript came from the Abbey at Siegburg, which was secularized in 1803. Beethoven is supposed to have once played on the organ there. In **Cases 1 and 3**, works by Beethoven's most important teacher in Bonn and the main court organist, Christian Gottlob Neefe, are to be seen, as well as further prints and music manuscripts which demonstrate the local Bonn traditions of organ playing and chorale singing in the second half of the 18th century.

### Room 6: German and Dutch Organs of the 18th Century

In his youth Beethoven undertook several journeys, among them a trip to the Netherlands and the long journey to Vienna in 1787. The engravings displayed here show the organs which he was able to play

and inspect during his visits to Amsterdam and Rotterdam, as well as during his long journey to the Austrian capital. A high point of his trip to Vienna was no doubt the visit to Johann Andreas Stein in Augsburg. Stein, an important piano and organ builder and the father of Beethoven's later advisor in household matters, Nannette Streicher, most probably showed Beethoven his organ in the Barfüßer Church, where he was himself the organist.

### Room 7: Organs and Organ Building in Prints of the 17th and 18th Centuries

In the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, the art of organ building flourished. It is therefore very understandable that many pictures of organs, but also of organ builders and organists were produced during this period. On the one hand there was great interest in especially famous instruments, such as the organs in London's St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey (**Cases 7 and 8**). On the other hand, many sets of plans for organs were published and numerous special works about organ building were richly illustrated. On the right-hand wall of the room, a selection of the most important publications about organ building are displayed. Among them, the etchings taken from the seminal textbook on the subject, written by the French Benedictine monk and organ builder, Dom Bédos de Celles, (**Case 6** and the picture on the wall above it) are especially impressive. This work became the basis for most of the handbooks about organ building written later.

The series of designs for organ facades on the opposite wall was created by the Nürnberg scholar, Johann Jacob Schübler. He collected a repertory of ornaments for various branches of the decorative arts and, in addition to designs for wardrobes and cupboards, fireplace mantles and gravestones, he included plans for organs which, however, were in no way practicable for real organ building. In the cases below (**9 and 10**), selected pictures of organ builders at work and organists playing their instruments are displayed, demonstrating the growing importance of these professions in the course of the 18th century.

An overview of prints about organ building in the 17th and 18th centuries must, of course, not ignore the patron saint of the instrument, St. Cecilia. In the etching in **Case 11** she is shown playing an organ so beautifully that the angels and cherubim lay their own instruments aside in order to hear her better.

## **Continuation of the Exhibition in Room 12 (Ground floor)**

### **Room 12: The Organ in the 19th Century**

The state of the art of organ building at the turn of the century is shown in the manuscripts and tracts in **Case 1**, among them a manuscript textbook about organ building by the piano and organ builder Johann Kaspar Kirchner from the Main-Franconian area. He created here a kind of encyclopaedia, collecting all contemporary knowledge on the subject as well as including his own thoughts about it.

Foremost among the organ-playing methods of Beethoven's time was the one by Justin Heinrich Knecht (Leipzig 1795-1798) (**Cases 2 and 3**). Beethoven owned it and used it to learn about the ecclesiastical modes, among other things. This organ method contains many model compositions, among them an oboe concerto for solo organ. At the time, people were trying to establish the organ as a substitute for the orchestra as well as to imitate individual instruments on it. Knecht also composed a piece called „The Shepherd's Idyll Interrupted By a Thunderstorm“, thus anticipating the program of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony to a certain degree.

The pictorial representations in this room clearly trace the development of the organ in the course of the 19th century from an instrument for religious services to the magnificent concert organ. This gradual process of secularization is revealed most palpably in the colored aquatint after a drawing by Thomas Rowlandson and Augustus Charles Pugin (**Case 2**). It shows a religious service with a sermon at Whitehall Palace in which those present already seem very distracted. A first high point for the use of the organ in the concert hall is depicted in the woodcut above **Case 3**: the Handel Festival in London's Crystal Palace in the year 1857, in which more than 2000 singers and 500 instrumentalists participated. In the case below is the „Encyclopédie-Roret“, a work first published in the middle of the 19th century and reprinted again and again up until today. It is opened up to a picture which shows how the orche-

stra was arranged in front of the organ in Paris concert halls of the day.

Especially striking in this room are the two instruments presented here: a so-called serinette (**in the wooden cupboard**) - that is a small organ with a cylinder. Such instruments were used in the 18th century above all by upper-class ladies in order to teach their canaries to sing. It was not unusual for the organ builders of the time to build such instruments, as can be seen in the picture of a similar instrument from the organ building textbook by Dom Bédos. The tour ends at the large flute-clock from the first half of the 19th century. It contains a small mechanical organ with two registers. Using a built-in cylinder, it can play eight different pieces, including a waltz from the popular Singspiel „The Swiss Family“ by Joseph Weigl, a Viennese composer who knew Beethoven well. This instrument, which is still in working order, was probably built around 1820 in Waldkirch in the Black Forest.

S.B. and M.L. / J.C.-B.