

Selected Quotations

By nature it is given to me, music of strings To love full well,
Its soft and gentle sound sets free, the greatest Joy my heart can tell;
And so all praise to thee, my ward,
Thou sweet and gentle clavichord.

*Est ist mir von Natur gegeben, das Saitenspiel
Gefällt mir wohl,
Voraus ist es mein ganzes Leben, wenn ich was
Sachtes hören soll;
Drum lob ich auch mein Eigentum, mein Susses Clavichordium.*

Johann Krieger, *Musikalische Ergetzlichkeit*, 1684. (tr. Neupert)

"a good clavichord, except for its feebler tone, shares in the fine features of the latter; [fortepiano] and has in addition the advantage of vibrato and portato which can be produced after striking each note by means of added pressure. The clavichord is accordingly the instrument by which one can best judge the quality of a keyboard player."

C.P.E. Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art, des Clavier zu spielen*, 1753.

"Those who want to judge a sensitive touch and a pure style, should lead their candidate to a simple clavichord, for on a harpsichord fitted out with three or four stops, too much clatter confuses the ear, and one can scarcely make out the embellishments distinctly."

J. Mattheson, *Das neu-oröffnete Orchester*, Hamburg 1713. (tr. Neupert)

"the foundation of all keyboard instruments."

M. Praetorius, *Syntagme Musicum*, Wolfenbüttel, 1611

“...the first grammar of all keyboard players, and if they understand it well, they can not only play the above-mentioned six instruments (organ, positive, regal, harpsichord, clavictherium, spinet), but they can also learn other instruments ten times sooner and play them better than one who is inexperienced at the keyboard. (clavier?)

Martin Heinrich Fuhrmann, *Musicalischer-Trichte*, Frankfurt an der Spree. [Berlin] 1706.

This very well known instrument is, so to speak, every player's elementary grammar."

J.G. Walther, *Musikalisches Lexicon*, Leipzig, 1732. (tr. Neupert)

"one should not always practice on the harpsichord, since this might cost one one's good touch. He who cannot have them both, should choose the clavichord."

D.G. Türk, *Klavier Schule*, 1789.

J.S. Bach and the clavichord - as reported by Forkel...

"He liked best to play upon the clavichord: the harpsichord, though certainly susceptible of a very great variety of expression had not soul enough for him; and-the-piano-**was** in his lifetime-too-much in its infancy, and-still-much too coarse to satisfy him. He therefore considered the clavichord the best instrument for study, and in general for private and musical entertainment. He found it the most convenient for the expression of his most refined thoughts, and did not believe it possible to produce from any harpsichord or pianoforte such a variety in the gradations of tone as on this instrument, which is, indeed, poor in tone, but on a small scale extremely flexible."

Forkel, *Über Johann Sebastian Bach's Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke*, Leipzig 1802.
(tr. R.S. Terry, London, 1930)

Mozart and the clavichord - as outlined by Neupert...

Mozart who grew up in his parent's house at Salzburg with a two-manual harpsichord made by C.E. Friederici of Gere, [made clavichords for C.P.E. Bach as well], and a five octave clavichord, took with him on his travels a clavichord bought in 1763: "A nice little clavichord by Mr. Stein of Augsburg, which does us great service in allowing us to exercise our fingers on the journey." In 1777 he improvised and played a sonata and variations by Fischer on a clavichord at the monastery of the Holy Cross in Augsburg, and in 1778 he wrote to his father on the way home from Paris: "I should like to have the little clavichord beside my writing table."

Haydn...

"his poverty isolated him from his fellow-men, and he therefore sought all the more his only joy with his clavichord, which best understood him."

Pohl, Joseph Haydn, Berlin 1875. (tr. Neupert)

Schubart, foremost poetical eulogist of the period -

He reviews the technical developments of the clavichord of his time, judging that it has reached its peak... "they have five or six octaves, can be fretted or fret-free with or without buff stops; there hardly seems to be any further refinement to be added for the benefit of the sensitive player." He mentions the fretted clavichord, which co-existed alongside fret-free instruments... Schubart's intimation that the clavichord could not be further refined can lead us to view much of the gadgetry as described in Türk as superfluous.

"The clavichord, that individual, melancholic, inexpressibly sweet instrument, has advantages over the harpsichord and fortepiano when made by a master of his craft. Not only the musical colouring, but also the middle tints, notes swelling and dying away, mellowing trills, hardly breathing under the fingers, portato or vibrato, in a word, expressions for every shade of feeling. All this can be reproduced and conjured up by the pressure of the finger, the vibration and throb of the strings, and by a touch, heavy or gently. Those who do not like bluster, frenzy, and storm, whose heart finds frequent and welcome relief in the overflow of sweet sentiments will pass over the harpsichord and choose a clavichord by Fritz, Späth or Stein."

C.F. Daniel Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Aesthetik der Tonkunst*, edited from his papers by his son, supposedly 1785. (tr. Neupert)

More strongly expressed...

"It is true that you cannot play heavy-fisted concertos, for it (the clavichord) cannot hail and thunder like the fortepiano; not can you, surrounded by your numerous audience, rouse storms with it and use it to drown their cries of applause as if they were mere murmurings of waves. But if your instrument (I mean the clavichord) was created by Stein or Fritz, Silbermann or Späth, tender and responsive to your soul's every inspiration, it is here that you will find your heart's soundboard. He who, seated at the clavichord, hankers still after the harpsichord, has not heart, he is a coarse and grained fellow, stands on the banks of the Rhine and longs for - a brook.

Sweet melancholy, languishing love, pining grief, the soul's communing with God, uneasy forebodings, glimpses of Paradise through suddenly rent clouds, sweetly purling tears - and furthermore the embellishment of the art with double trills, dying away beneath the fingers, melting appoggiature: in voluptuously languishing phrasing, in slur and release (*Schwebung*), in *portato* and *bebung*, in the contact, both part and entire, as in *pizzicato* and *vibrato* of these wonderful strings and persuasive keys. Behold player, all this lies in your clavichord.

Therefore, pine not, when you improvise by the light of the moon, or refresh your soul on summer nights, or celebrate the evenings of spring; ah, then pine not for the strident harpsichord. See, your clavichord breathes as gently as your heart."

C.F. Daniel Schubert, *Musikalischen Rhapsodien*, 1786. (tr. Neupert)