if they can be related to details of design and construction. Very little research of this nature has emerged so far.

As a result, we must admit that the desire to hear how historical music or instruments sound cannot be seriously justified in terms of increasing our objective knowledge of music history. That desire is mainly confined to developing a subjective relationship with that history.

In early times, music performers were the least respectable of music professionals. The most respectable were music theoreticians who explored the universality of the musical intervals in all aspects of our physical and spiritual existence. No one thought of actually trying to hear what the music of the spheres sounded like. They were not concerned with themselves enjoying the sounds, but they enjoyed the idea that music was a unifying factor in understanding the world and the universe.

We can enjoy our objective knowledge of music history without being influenced by enjoying or not enjoying hearing what it really sounded like. Good history books don’t include CDs. What is on offer from the modern early-music movement is not what it really sounded like, but interpretations thoroughly infused with modern professional performance practices, adapted for the enjoyment of modern audiences. It is rather like tourism, and makes the same compromises with authenticity.

What the music really sounded like is a very legitimate subject for music scholarship. The practitioners have so far been much more interested in having an impact on the musical public than in pursuing this subject objectively. Thus they make the practical compromise of assuming that modern performance aesthetics is essentially the same as that aesthetics centuries ago, deliberately ignoring clear evidence otherwise. Perhaps future generations will be more devoted to uncompromised historical scholarship than to perform a service to the contemporary public, and so will be able to study this subject properly. Till then, it seems to be appropriate to avoid the issue and just enjoy hearing the sounds we like and ignoring those we don’t, and be careful about claiming that discovering what the original music sounded like is the purpose of our scholarship.

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Quarterly No. 100, July 2000

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BULLETIN 100
Bulletin Supplement separate cover
Membership List Supplement J. Montagu 8

COMMUNICATIONS

J. Montagu 9

J. Montagu 12

E. Segerman 14

M. Cole 17

1715 True pianos
M. Cole 18

1716 The design of an early Italian harpsichord at the RCM
D. Wright 20 - 25

1717 Arnsault’s cimbalum mechanisms
D. Wright 26 - 33

1718 How were the earliest viols played?
E. Segerman 34

1719 On Francesco Antonio Squarcig’s book [...] La viola da sei, o sette corde, in Bologna 1747
per Tommaso Colla e S. Tommaso d’Aquino (an Italian viola d’amore)
M. Tiella 36

1720 Some old Italian units of measurements
M. Tiella 40

1721 Some brief thoughts about the future of FoMRHI
L. Jones 41

1722 Filing FoMRHI Quarterlies
D. L. Smith 43

1723 English usage in publications
J. Catch 44

1724 Pitch of electrical appliances - comments on Comm. 1706
J. Swayne 44

1725 Decoration and its current use
E. Segerman 45

1726 Why want to hear what it sounds like?
E. Segerman 47

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Arnaut's *clavisimbalum Mechanismus*

**Introduction**

Despite the fact that a facsimile edition of Arnaut's treatise, with a translation of the Latin into French, has been available since 1932, there is relatively little literature on the four types of action which Arnaut describes as suitable for inclusion in the *clavisimbalum*. It is the second mechanism which has attracted least attention, but has been discussed by Clutton, Lester, Pollens, and Kauffmann. I believe that Lester has described correctly all the essential details of actions 1, 2, and 4 (with photos of models of the action types), but as he says himself, action no. 2 is difficult to interpret. Clutton, Lester, and Le Cerf and Labande did not incorporate the spring in their description of the second action, so their solutions are incomplete. Pollens, whose book was devoted to the piano, concentrated his attention on the seventh mechanism (which is evidently of the striking type), thus his description, which correctly lists all the features of the second action, is extremely brief. There is, therefore, a useful purpose to be served in considering the second action in further detail.

**The Text**

Lester, and more recently Pollens, have translated the Latin into English. I shall start with a fresh translation in this paper, using the literal translation to preserve the "telegraphic" style of the original and to avoid conveying a possibly misleading impression of a clear, unambiguous text. Thus, my text will be found to be vaguer in places than Le Cerf and Labande, Lester, and Pollens. Some of Arnaut's Latin is grammatically wrong and one must interpret his intended meaning from the context, but these faults are not serious enough to warrant detailed consideration here.

On fol. 128r* Arnaut gives a drawing of the four types of action and describes them in notes alongside the sketches. My translation of the Latin text is as follows:

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*fol. 128 r* is reproduced full size as plate VI in Le Cerf and Labande's Latin text appears on pp. 3-8.

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**Modus into forpex casum**

"Est cum causo formato quato et formatum triangula at in seu habet duo formas quae contraria habebat peciam unam latines rigidum stili affixum per modum parve cathedra, ad dilatandum et converso caput forpex post sumit. Parsimono venar interius hactenus cathedram affixum clavi per quanam claves, ipsam forpex tenet, percussit cordam et in isto modo opus est quod alias et quod cucullatium quasi unum ad, et tum est opus etiam quod ubi claves bicurtum sunt, abscit, fit in portativa, propria concussio longitudo."

**There is another section (following the description of the fourth action) where some additional detail is given about parts of the second and third actions, as follows:**

"Nota quod bini duo modi forpex situantur in quoque abscis secundum saltanmam juxta penis, ubi quando dojuntur assis, cum ipsa immobiliae dependuntur et forpex, et in sequenter modo forpex oscillat est unus per modum eorum locum; et in tertio modo resilientis fit filo ferro vel lacrima, et eis per fugitum ut asse prope forpex, et ex se curvis curvavit, sub illa che, et iacet in qua est componas, et in converso depressit caput forpex."
plucking mechanisms, and "mechanism" is too vague. "Pivoting lever" would be the nearest correct translation for forpus, but I have left it untranslated.

The second and third actions share one basic feature: a horizontal part is free to swing on an axle, which axle is held in a vertical forked part, the construction of which is apparently identical for both of these actions. Arnaut's sketches show this quite clearly, and the vertical part is made apparently with a sort of pointed "foot" which can be anchored. The Latin word for this vertical piece is duplicate, literally "duplicated"; this name, and the sketch, strongly suggest that this piece is made of sheet metal and folded over so as to hold the swinging part between its two sides. PoIens notes the resemblance of the Kapsel of Viennese piano actions to this part.7

Arnaut's sketches of the four actions

![Sketches of the four actions](image)


It is clear that there is a chain connected from the keylever to the "end [cauda] of the forpus [i.e. of the pivoting part]". It is also clear that at the same end that there is another chain connecting the "end of the forpus" to a brass rod. It is apparent that the front of the keylever must pull the "end [nearest the player] of the forpus" down for any motion to be imparted. Given this, it follows that the vertical forked part (duplicate) which holds the mechanism must be fixed to something immovable. This would have to be a rail attached to the case, and is only described by Arnaut in the second piece of text. The duplicate cannot be fixed to the moving keylever, as Clutton has drawn it. We learn (in the second piece of text) that all the duplicates are mounted on this lathe so that the pivoting forpus can all be removed in one operation. This description of the simple removal of the forpus neglects to mention that they are connected by chains to both the keylevens and the pieces of rigid brass/spring assembly. Thus, removal would require disconnection of all these parts from each other.

Arnaut tells us in the second piece of text translated above that the spring in the second system is mounted above the action. It is a significant omission that in their realizations of the action neither Clutton's diagram nor Tester's photo incorporate this spring. Le Cath and Labande do not describe what the spring did in their action, if indeed it was incorporated.

However, the spring which is mentioned by Arnaut is above the action, and since it was a leaf spring it would either have borne down on the "head" of the mechanism in order to return the action
It appears from the sketch as if the non-chain end of the "piece of rigid brass" is furnished with some sort of axle. Given this clue we can see that the brass rod or lever was probably intended to swing up and down. The leaf spring would have the air leg (at the chain end) to return it to its rest position, and thereby have pulled the keylever up.

It is possible, perhaps even probable, that the rigid piece of brass Arnaut has sketched is in fact the flat brass spring since there is no necessity to have a moving brass lever returned by a spring when the chain could be attached directly to the brass spring, and achieve exactly the same result more simply, than the spring for the third action has been shown on the sketch might be confirmation of this interpretation, but my sketch of the action above shows a rigid piece of brass and the spring.

A box-like structure above the wrestplank, just as is apparently shown in some of the surviving representations, would be necessary to provide a point of anchorage for the pivoting end of the brass rod/lever and/or for anchoring the leaf spring. It is interesting to note that of the mechanisms described by Arnaut, only the second type requires any sort of rail above the plucking mechanism. I have shown a housing for the rigid piece of brass and spring. The action could be stopped by a pad between the rigid piece of brass and the housing, or by a pad between the keylever and latha. For simplicity I have omitted the wrestplank.

It now seems clear enough that this second system involves a rocking member [the Forpex] similar to system three. The spring is essential to returning the system to rest, and it is evident that the player has to overcome the resistance of the spring in order that the action be put into motion. There would also be the additional resistance of exciting the string; as a result, this system appears to have a fairly heavy action. One wonders why clanking chains were preferred to the rigid rod of a (potentially quieter) tracker action.

One detail Arnaut provides us with is obscure: it is said that it is advantageous if the the keys are long, and the point A is suggested. The line A-Y is level with the cheek-bentside corner and parallel to the case front. There is no advantage to having the keylevers this long if they merely pivot in the fashion of a normal harpsichord. The conclusion adopted by all the commentators that the keylevers are hinged at the far end (in the manner of portatives) seems correct; this view takes Arnaut's suggestion of "clavecimentero" to mean that leather or parchment hinges are glued at the far end of the keylever.

The excitation of the string

Arnaut does not distinguish in his descriptions of the actions whether the string is struck or plucked. He only describes the setting in motion of the string for the second and third actions, and then he uses the verb "percuto", intending the sense of striking, even though the third action evidently has a plucking mechanism, similar to a modern tongue-mounted plucked. Thus, Arnaut's verbs of excitation and his verbs of excitation cannot provide a reliable clue as to the nature of the action.

Nevertheless it is fairly clear that the second action involves plucking. It is not clear how we should understand cornu; either it was a triangular piece made of horn (as Kaufmann thought), or "cornu" indicates the shape which was used.

Since the description of the action gives few clues about the exact plucking operation, the sketch is open to interpretation. Actions 1-3 depicted by Arnaut are all viewed from the side, in effect from the bass end of the keyboard. Although they appear mostly like a cross section through the arc, a certain amount of perspective has been included which clearly depicts the plucked strings in actions 1 and 3 and reveals the construction of the fork-like duplicate. It would appear as if the cornu has been given the same perspective treatment as actions 1 and 3. If this is so, then the cornu (looking down the string towards the player, before plucking) would appear like this:

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4Kaufmann op. cit.

Lé Cerf and Labande, p. 4, note 2.
at 90° to the keylever, leading to consequent layout difficulties when a number of keys are incorporated. This hypothesis does not appear correct when we consider that Arnaut envisages that this second action can be fitted in the clavichord, which has its strings running in the same direction as the keys.

Kaufmann suggested that the plectrum would pass by the string on account of its flexibility, which implies that it would pluck as strongly on the return stroke as on the initial, upward movement. He appears to have understood the triangle in a different plane, rotated through 90°, and this view does not appear correct.3

Clutton thought there was a means of avoiding a second pluck on the returning stroke, but his description of the forpus can be discarded since it is not consistent with all of Arnaut's information and neglects to incorporate the spring.

There is something drawn behind the cornu which looks a little like a tongue, but there is no axe, such as is drawn clearly in actions 1 and 3. Le Cezf and Labende's suggestion that this piece contains a damper is not entirely implausible, but it cannot be seen from the sketch how this would work. Le Cezf and Labende describe having constructed this mechanism, although their realization is neither described in detail nor drawn. It is the only unresolved detail of this action that we cannot explain the purpose of the piece behind the cornu. Perhaps it was merely part of the mounting of the cornu?

It should not be overlooked that if this mechanism did have a damper, then it would be the only one of those described by Arnaut which did. It is a characteristic of the first three actions that after plucking the string was allowed to sound undamped.

Indeed, as practical experiment reveals, the subjective effect of a plectrum of the first or third type of action striking a still vibrating string is much louder than of the plectrum striking a non-vibrating string. In other words, it sounds much like a second pluck although in fact it is not. A plectrum of the second type of action produces a more substantial sound on the return stroke although it is more of the form of a "zing" which is produced (rather than a normal pluck) as the sloping underside of the plectrum rubs the string on passing it. Thus, this second action, if undamped, produces a more substantial sound on the return stroke than actions 1 and 3.

We can see that the advantage of the first or third type of action with a plectrum in a pivoting tongue lies in the speed of repetition and the reduction of action weight which is possible. The second action must be heavier since there is fair amount of friction which must be overcome when the cornu slides past the string. In addition the second action would have been heavy since the spring pressure which returns the action to rest has to be overcome by the player before even plucking the string.

Summary of the four actions described by Arnaut

Following the interpretation that the second action incorporates a plucking mechanism, we have two different types of action described by Arnaut: actions 1-3 are plucking mechanisms, action 4 is a striking mechanism.

Actions 1 and 3: are plucking mechanisms with a plectrum held in a pivoting tongue. The plectrum material is not specified, but could have been, at least occasionally, metal. Metal plectra were found in the 1619 Johann Mayer harpsichord and Kaufmann writes that metal plectra were used (at some time) in the Royal College of Music clavicetherium.4

Action 2: describes a plectrum action with a distinctly audible sound on the return stroke. The sound of the upward pluck using a rigid horn plectrum is slightly rounder (more like a leather plectrum) than that given by bird quill.

Action 4: is evidently a hammered dulcimer action without check or damping of the string. A metal peg (like a clavichord tangent) strikes the string.

It is characteristic of all these actions that there is no damping, which has obvious consequences for performance style.

3Kaufmann, op. cit.