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Royal College of Music Museum of Instruments. Catalogue Part II. Keyboard Instruments by Elizabeth Wells

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Bearing in mind that this is the complete *Syntagma Musicum*, and is published in facsimile at a very competitive price, it perhaps seems a little unfair to find fault with the publication; however, some comments are in order. It is clear that some corners had to be cut, and the most noticeable example is in the binding of the individual volumes. Having used the publication as part of my normal day-to-day research over the course of several months, I have found that the book spines very quickly show wear and tear from opening and reading the books. The box in which the books are enclosed (made of thin cardboard) is overall a good idea and protects the books well, but for any concentrated work requiring the books to be accessible on a daily basis it is perhaps a little cumbersome. As the covers of the individual volumes have a natural tendency to curve and open as a result of use, the box is greatly appreciated overall.

These small criticisms are minor matters in comparison to the great advantages we have in a well-printed facsimile edition of all of the volumes of one of the most important and indispensable reference books, and at an affordable price. Hopefully its publication will allow scholars to use Volumes 1 and 3 in addition to the second Volume when undertaking future research.

DARRYL MARTIN

ELIZABETH WELLS (Ed): *Royal College of Music Museum of Instruments. Catalogue Part II. Keyboard Instruments*. London: Royal College of Music, 2000. viii, pp.143, 19 colour plates, numerous b/w illus., ISBN 0 946119 05 8., Softback, £20.

What makes a good catalogue? The answer must surely be – it depends what you are looking for – and since everyone has different expectations, the assessment of whether a catalogue is ‘good’ is a very subjective matter. At one end of the scale are those masterpieces of thorough and painstaking research such as the Berlin<sup>1</sup> and Boston, Museum of Fine Art<sup>2</sup> catalogues and at the other are the many checklists issued by most Museums having a collection of instruments of any importance. Happily, there is a middle way which meets the needs of most people, and this new catalogue is a splendid example of what can be produced on a limited budget and with dedicated contributors whose aim in life is to serve the majority of scholars of organology.

As might be expected, the catalogue starts with a couple of pages of introduction tracing the history of the collection, giving short notes on the contributors and acknowledging the help of the various charitable institutions and foundations whose help made possible the production of this volume. There are also generous plaudits for the many contributors and others, but since the editor, Elizabeth Wells, wrote the Acknowledgements Section, personal modesty prevented her from doing full justice to the enormous part that she has played over many years in bringing to fruition a project for which she richly deserves the highest praise. There is

also an introductory page explaining the conventions used in the book.

Though strictly speaking this is a 'softback', the covers are sufficiently stiff to afford the pages considerable protection, and the front cover bears a beautiful colour photograph of the collection's chief treasure, the 'Ulmisch' clavicitherium of c.1480, which is believed to be the earliest surviving stringed keyboard instrument.

Sixteen pages of stunning colour photographs of selected instruments lead to the catalogue proper, which is divided into four sections – Harpsichords (and related instruments), Clavichords, Pianos and Organs. In each section the instruments are recorded in roughly chronological order, accompanied by a wealth of black and white photos, and a description of all their main features – history; provenance; inscriptions; measurements, including stringing lists, keyboard and case dimensions; and in most cases a commentary and references.

The whole is rounded off with a fairly comprehensive set of Bibliographical References, and Indexes of Instruments, Makers, Identified Previous Owners and Collections, and Places of Manufacture.

As Ira Gershwin says 'Who could ask for anything more?'

CHARLES MOULD

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<sup>1</sup> *Kielklaviere, Cembali-Spinette-Virginale*. Berlin: Staatliches Institut für Musikforschung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 1991. ISBN 3-922378-11-0.

<sup>2</sup> John Koster. *Keyboard Musical Instruments in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1994. ISBN 0-87846-401-8.