

Matthew and William Stodart grand piano, 1796

When Haydn came to London in 1794, he was given a Stodart fortepiano and it is believed he composed his final three piano sonatas using this instrument. The instrument in my collection is dated 1796, and has a nameboard inscription that reads: 'Matthoeus et Gulielmus Stodart, Londoni, Fecerunt, 1796, Golden Square.' It employs the distinctive action designed, probably in the late 1760s, by Americus Backers (although only one Backers instrument survives, in the Russell Collection at the University of Edinburgh), for which, as the 'English grand action,' Robert Stodart (1748–1831) was granted a patent in 1777. The compass is five-and-a-half octaves, FF-c⁴ – the extended range with 'additional notes' beyond five octaves introduced by Broadwood around 1790.

The fortepiano was bought at auction in London in 2007 by its former owner, from whom I bought it in 2014. It had previously belonged to the late actor Alec Clunes (Hastings in Laurence Olivier's *Richard III*, with other film credits including *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*; father of the actor/comedian Martin Clunes), and was sold by his estate in a condition that was basically original, including around 60% of the original strings and the beautifully veneered case, but lacking the action and keyboard. The frames of early grands are, of course, built from wood, adopting the shape of harpsichords. This was adequate for harpsichords, but by the 1790s when triple stringing was being used, the tension placed on the frame was significantly increased. This became more critical when the half octave increase in range was added, requiring an extension to the frame on the right (top) end. Over time this commonly resulted in twists that could damage integral parts and/or make instruments unplayable; when taken together with the considerable purchase price of fortepianos, this may explain why relatively few such instruments survive. The first surviving Broadwood with 'additional notes' is dated 1792, and the extended compass was quickly adopted by others: Longman and Broderip followed suit in 1793, and one of their instruments with this compass survives in the Cobbe Collection at Hatchlands, Surrey, dated 1794, while the earliest known Stodart with the extended range dates from 1795. The relationship between composers and makers was critical, and 'additional notes' were required for Dussek's op.24 sonata as well as Clementi's sonata in f, scores for which were published by Longman and Broderip in 1793 (David Rowland discusses the increased compass, and works using it, in *Early Music* 27/2 (1999)).

After the auction, detailed plans for a new action, based on a surviving 1802 Stodart in the now dispersed Finchcocks collection but also considering a 1799 instrument kept at City University, London, were drawn up. However, before restoration commenced – by the Music Room Workshop – a second Stodart fortepiano came up at auction which had been converted into a harpsichord. This instrument was acquired to provide an original action and keyboard. The action and keyboard was found to fit the 1796 instrument exactly, although a new complete top box for the keyboard was required. However, the ivory key coverings of the 1795 instrument were not all original and some did not match as a set, so all were replaced using a matched set from a Stodart square piano of the same period. In the restoration, authentic replacement keyboard cloth and listing cloth was used, and outer hammer coverings were restored using Herzog leather. The original dampers were retained, fitting new cloth. The frame did have slight distortion; this was not critical and did not affect the instrument. but the wrestplank capping was weak and had to be replaced, a hairline crack in the soundboard had to be repaired by shimming, and the soundboard needed to be re-glued to the soundboard bearer. The stringing scale was drawn up by Walker in consultation with both Music Room Workshop and David Hunt.

