

## Christopher Ganer square piano, c.1785

In the 2008 BBC adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, Colonel Brandon (David Morrissey) hands Marianne Dashwood (Charity Wakefield) some piano sheet music. 'You have an instrument?' 'Yes, of sorts', she replies. The instrument of sorts that we see is the oldest square piano in my collection, made by Christopher Ganer when Beethoven was a young teenager, in or around 1785. The instrument, a five-octave (FF-f<sup>3</sup>) single action, may be slightly earlier, but the assumption of 1785 is based on the received understanding that this was when Ganer changed his nameboard inscriptions from Latin to English, and this piano is inscribed in familiar inked calligraphy in English: Christopher Ganer Musical Instrument Maker, Broad Street, Golden Square, London. The nameboard includes painted decoration: a long garland, with red ribbon above the plaque and medallions to either side. No date is given on the nameboard or anywhere inside the instrument, although the letter 'B' is stamped in many places (including on the lowest key shaft, and where parts of the case meet) and the lowest key shaft is stamped '23'.

The instrument heard in *Sense and Sensibility* is, sadly, a modern piano because, when filming took place, the Ganer had recently been rescued by Lucy Coad in Bath from long service as somebody's sideboard. It had stood, unopened, for perhaps 200 years, plant pots on top occasionally leaking and staining the varnish. The inside was thick with dust, the leather hammers were caked in mold, and the strings were rusty and broken. Although another Ganer piano had long graced the Jane Austen House Museum in Chawton, Hampshire, this c.1785 'instrument of sorts' is one of the earliest to survive with two pedals – not the pedals of modern pianos, since one operates a lid flap to the right, an adaptation of the 'Viennese swell' that is common to many square pianos and which lets sound escape as a kind of rudimentary 'loud' pedal. As would be expected, this 'instrument of sorts' uses a single action and over dampers. It retains its original plain trestle stand. Inked pitches are given next to pegs, and key shafts are stamped with their pitches.

Lucy Coad commented in her report that the piano was in excellent original condition, a state now comparatively difficult to find but which potentially reveals important historical information. The moth-eaten original cloth to the underside of the lid flap would once have softened the impact of the swell as it was opened and closed; the remaining leather on the hammers provided a means of accurately matching replacement material; the buff stop was present although its hand lever (if ever fitted – see below) was missing, and although the pedal mechanisms had been lost, the evidence for their original fitting was clear – and it would appear pedals were part of the original construction. The case had not been sanded or re-polished, but had only been waxed over the many years. Jean Maurer undertook the restoration: a join in the soundboard had come apart, the bridge was broken in two and had lifted and twisted off in the middle/upper registers, the case was bowed, and the wrestplank had come forward while the hitchpin rail was detached from the back and base. The iron hinges to the damper rack were rusted in place. While all hammers were present, their hinges were fragile and some had broken free – two were located under the soundboard. The leather needed careful attention. Although many strings were broken, enough were present to allowing the stringing scaling to be reconstructed with accuracy. Keyframe cloth linings had largely been eaten by moth larvae, but there was enough remaining to deduce the original thickness; all keywork was intact, but attention was needed to restore leather heads, action sticks, and lead weights to the key ends. The two pedals once operated the buff stop and lid flap, but the sockets and other traces of their former presence allowed reconstruction; evidence showed there may originally have been two hand levers, as would be standard, but the second of these may never have actually been fitted (since, as a buff stop it would have duplicated one pedal). Some anchorage posts for a dust cover were present, although not in the places familiar from other contemporary pianos; as an optional extra, a dust cover may never have been supplied. The restoration of the action and case, completed by Jean Maurer in 2008, retained most of the original parts, using replacements as needed; apart

from the rusty strings, all elements that were removed from the instrument as found (including a Victorian penny red stamp!) have been kept in a box.

Ganer came to England from Leipzig. He settled in Broad Street in 1774 (20 Broad Street is suggested as an initial residence, but he is mostly associated with 47, and later also 48), and remained in London until his death in 1809 (some sources suggest 1811). He was given letters of denization in 1792. His earliest surviving instrument is, according to *New Grove*, dated 1775 (Clinkscale notes that the whereabouts of this instrument is 'unknown'), and is said to have the slightly short compass GG–f<sup>3</sup>. Most of his surviving instruments have a five octave compass, although one later instrument with a five-and-a-half octave range is known. The instruments vary little in internal construction. Cases are often plain, with double stringing (this instrument had (faded) green and black stringing) – Ganer is reported to have been the only maker who bothered to have double stringing *inside* the lid – but may be finely inlaid. Trestles attach to the body with pegs, and some later instruments use the Sheraton or 'French' stand.





