

Gerock square piano, 1819

Five-and-a-half octave square piano, FF–c⁴, double action with doily dampers. The sides and lid are of solid rosewood with mahogany veneers and the base is pine. The case has decorated double brass banding, with double brass inlays to corner panels and black double stringing to other panels. It has a nameboard in rosewood, with satinwood banding. Music stand, and three drawers underneath the case, each with brass handles, and one sustaining pedal on a fluted but otherwise undecorated column. The square piano sits on six fluted and tapered legs with dark/medium colouring matching the case. Each has a wide brass ring consisting of a central garland inlay and two outer sections with stamped impresses to the top and brass cups and castors at the floor. There are brass finials to the two front corners. The frontboard/nameboard is squared at each side, with two fretwork panels lined with red silk to either side of the inscription. Fretwork continues with two panels that cover the front parts of the inside to the left and right. There is a green painted dustcover, a diagonal cut running above the damper rail. Inlays to the nameboard panels are satinwood, and the nameboard has painted calligraphy in a matching colour: 'Christopher Gerock, 76 Bishopgate Street Within.' The calligraphic hand is not dissimilar to inked calligraphy of earlier pianos although it is less flowery. The piano is stamped 'GD 147' inside to the left of the keys; 147 is also written in pencil on the back. An unidentified name and '5 - 1819' is carved to the back of the keypost at the top (right) end; a further undecipherable name is also given in pencil plus the date '26 April'. The wrestplank has alternate pitch indicators inked for wrest pins.

Christopher Gerock was born in Germany in 1772 or 1773. He was naturalized in England by Act of Parliament in 1804, and he died in England in 1850. From around 1804 until at least 1819, he was based at 76 Bishopsgate, where he was a music seller and publisher as well as a maker of wind instruments. By 1820, he had premises at 79 Cornhill, advertising himself as 'pianoforte and musical instrument manufacturers.' These were the former premises of Astor and Horwood, the successor to George Astor. He entered into a formal partnership with Astor's widow, Elizabeth, sometime around 1822 to create Gerock, Astor and Co. A subsequent partner was Robert Wolf (who in 1831 married Gerock's daughter Sabrina Susannah), and instruments from 1831 and 1832 are marked 'Gerock, Wolf and Co.' Gerock retired from the business in 1837. In the papers of a trial for the theft of flutes by an employee in 1830, Gerock's workshop is reported to make flageolets, piccolos, flutes, clarinets, bassoons, tenor bassoons, bugles, trumpets and serpents. Gerock's pianos follow from those by Astor, a business founded in 1778 by two sons of a Mannheim merchant, George [Georg] Astor (1752–1813) and John [Johann] Astor (1763–1848). John left for the USA in 1783, and profits were generated by importing furs to England and exporting musical instruments to the USA. The Astor business moved to 79 Cornhill in 1797 or 1798.

Gerock 147 is virtually identical to the c1818 Astor and Horwood in the Bate Collection at Oxford University (catalogue number 96), except that the frontboard is squared whereas the Astor and Horwood is curved. 147 is early for a piano marked 'Gerock,' and it is of note that the sole square listed in Clinkscale online, at the Schubert Club in Minneapolis/St Paul, USA, is ascribed the date 1828–1832 and a serial number '7450'.

Restored by Jean Maurer in 2014. In the Keith Howard collection there are two other instruments by Gerock: a clarinet, c.1805 (six-keyed, boxwood with ivory mounts, brass keys with square covers), and a tabletop organ, c.1815 (mahogany case, 14 wooden pipes, with a wooden barrel with staples that activate air in the pipes, playing ten tunes).

