

“The brothers Érard of Paris have given a gift of a mahogany piano to Beethoven (as they did earlier to Haydn).”¹ This was how the diplomat August Griesinger (1769–1845) described Beethoven's acquisition of grand piano No. 133, sent by the Paris firm Érard frères in the summer of 1803.² The wording of Griesinger's letter, written only a few months after Beethoven received the instrument, is unequivocal, and the notion of a gift was repeated by Beethoven and others in subsequent years.³ This gift narrative, however, has come under attack in recent years following the discovery of a number of sales ledgers from the Érard firm. In 2005, the musicologist and pianist Maria van Epenhuysen Rose argued that the ledger entry for Beethoven's piano demonstrated that Beethoven had not received the piano as a gift but rather had ordered the piano and then perhaps never paid for it.⁴ Rose's article has been remarkably influential in Beethoven scholarship; virtually everything written about Beethoven's pianos in the past fifteen years has repeated its conclusions, treating the ‘gift myth’ with disdain.⁵ Some musicologists have even expounded on Rose's conclusions, speculating that Beethoven intentionally misled Griesinger in an act of self-aggrandisement fuelled by his jealousy of Haydn.⁶

- 1 Emphasis added. “Die Brüder Erard in Paris haben dem Beethoven (wie früher dem Haydn) ein Geschenk mit einem Fortepiano von Mahony gemacht.” Letter of 14 December 1803 from August Griesinger in Vienna to Härtel in Leipzig, in: “Eben komme ich von Haydn ...”. Georg August Griesingers Korrespondenz mit Joseph Haydns Verleger Breitkopf & Härtel, 1799–1819, ed. by Otto Biba, Zürich 1987, p. 216.
- 2 The piano left the Érard workshop on the rue du Mail sometime on or after 8 August 1803, arriving in Vienna by October. Érard sales ledger (1802–06), folio 93. N° inv. E.2009.5.101, Musée de la musique, Paris.
- 3 Letters of 18 September and November 1810 from Beethoven to Andreas Streicher, in: Ludwig van Beethoven: Briefwechsel. Gesamtausgabe, ed. by Sieghard Brandenburg, Munich 1996/1997, Vol. 2, pp. 153 and 168. See also Charles Bannelier: Les instruments historiques à l'Exposition universelle de Vienne (1873), in: *Revue et gazette musicale*, 5 September 1875, p. 284.
- 4 Maria van Epenhuysen Rose: Beethoven and his “French Piano”. Proof of Purchase, in: *Musique, Images, Instruments* 7 (2005), pp. 110–122.
- 5 See, for example, Tilman Skowronek: *Beethoven the Pianist*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 85–115.
- 6 Rose and organologist Michael Latcham concur that as soon as Beethoven saw Haydn's Érard piano, he was overcome with jealousy. Rose: Beethoven and his “French Piano”, pp. 114 and 118; Michael Latcham: The Development of the Streicher Firm of Piano Builders Under the Leadership of Nannette Streicher, 1792 to 1823, in: *Das Wiener Klavier bis 1850*, ed. by Beatrix Darmstädter, Alfons Huber and Rudolf Hopfner, Tutzing 2007, pp. 43–71, here pp. 54f. Rose and Skowronek also insinuate that the Érard firm subsequently lied about the history of Beethoven's piano for commercial purposes. Rose: Beethoven and his “French Piano”, pp. 119f.; Skowronek: *Beethoven the Pianist*, pp. 86f.

Rose's conclusions are plausible insofar as one limits one's analysis solely to the ledger entry for Beethoven's piano. However, when this entry is considered in the context of the entirety of the Érard firm's business transactions, as well as the bookkeeping practices of the firm and several newly discovered documents in the Érard family archives, it becomes clear that the piano was indeed a gift from the Érards to Beethoven, although perhaps not for the reasons that had previously been assumed.⁷

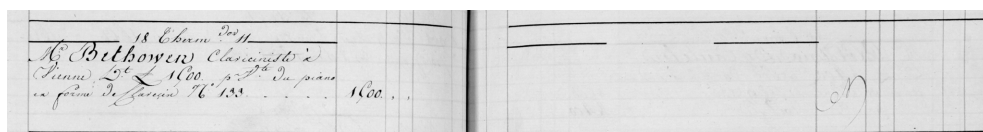


FIGURE 1 Ledger entry for the gift of Beethoven's grand piano. N° inv. E.2009.5.101, folio 93. All figures in this article: Fonds d'archives Érard, Pleyel et Gaveau, Musée de la musique, Paris © Cité de la musique/Philharmonie de Paris

As a starting point for this discussion, it will be useful to summarise briefly Rose's arguments, which are both textual and historical. Her textual argument consists of an interpretation of the ledger entry for Beethoven's piano, which reads: "18 therm.^{dor} 11 / M.^r Beethoven Claviciniste à / Vienne D.^t L 1500 p V.^{te} du piano / en forme de Claveçin N° 133". ("18 thermidor year 11: M. Beethoven, harpsichordist in Vienna, owes 1500 francs for the sale of a harpsichord-shaped piano, No. 133")⁸ – see Figure 1. Central to Rose's argument are the abbreviations for the words "Doit" (owes) and "par vente" (by sale of), and the presence of the price (1,500 francs), all of which seem to suggest that the piano was ordered. Moreover, the right-hand credit column, where normally payments are recorded, is empty, implying that Beethoven did not pay for the piano (Rose does not mention a faint letter "N" in the credit column, which will be discussed below). Rose supplements her textual analysis with a historical argument: the Érard firm would have had no reason to give a gift of a piano to Beethoven because in 1803, Beethoven's music was largely unknown and unappreciated in France. In the following analysis, I will first address Rose's textual concerns, then the historical question.

- 7 At the time *The History of the Erard Piano and Harp* was published, I had not yet determined that Beethoven's piano was given as a gift, and therefore provisionally accepted Rose's theory. See *The History of the Erard Piano and Harp in Letters and Documents, 1785–1959*, ed. by Robert Adelson, Alain Roudier, Jenny Nex, Laure Barthel and Michel Foussard, 2 vols., Cambridge 2015, p. 19, footnote n. 70.
- 8 Érard sales ledger (1802–06), p. 93. N° inv. E.2009.5.101, Musée de la musique, Paris. Jean-Baptiste Érard identifies Beethoven as merely a "harpsichordist in Vienna", a description that attests to the absence of a clearly defined pianistic *mentalité* in France as late as 1803.

Textual evidence for the gift Beethoven cannot be considered a delinquent customer because the Érard firm had a clear and consistent way of notating the fact that a customer did not pay his or her bills, and this notation for non-payment is conspicuously absent from the entry for Beethoven's piano. To understand how the Érards notated non-payment, one must first understand how they recorded normal paying transactions. Each entry in Érard's sales ledgers is spread across two pages: the left page consists of a column entitled "Debit" ("Doit") and the right page a column for "Credit" ("Avoir"). On the day of a transaction, the customer was charged in the debit column with the price of the instrument, minus any eventual discounts that might apply. The same day, or several days later, Jean-Baptiste Érard (1749–1826) (who was primarily responsible for the bookkeeping) noted in the credit column the first payment that came in, the date and the mode of payment (for example, cash, bill of exchange or trading in an older instrument) – see Figure 2.

Top Entry (Cash Payment)		Bottom Entry (Mixed Payment)	
Debit (Doit)	Credit (Avoir)	Debit (Doit)	Credit (Avoir)
18. 6. 1800 M. Boulet neu Mererac à l'achat en Suède 5 ^e 1100 p. p. du piano à 3 Cordes à l'achat 76. 000 1100 . . .	18. 6. 1800 Avoir 1100 par la maine de M. Boulet à 1100 . .	18. 6. 1800 M. Mayer Mane 1000 p. p. du piano à 3 Cordes à l'achat 76. 000 ainsi, les p. p. de l'ancien en l'achat de l'ancien par M. Boulet 8000 . .	18. 6. 1800 Avoir 1000 par la maine de M. Mayer Mane à l'achat de l'ancien piano 700 1000 . .

FIGURE 2 Examples of normal piano sales in the Érard ledgers. The top entry shows a customer who paid entirely in cash; the bottom shows a customer who paid partly in cash and partly through exchange of an older piano. In both cases, the payment was made within days of the sale. N° inv. E.2009.5.101, folio 93.

If the first payment was not for the entire sum, there might be additional payments, and the transaction was considered fully settled when the amount in the credit column equalled the amount in the debit column. Jean-Baptiste occasionally added the word “paid” (“soldé”), especially in complicated situations involving many instruments sold to dealers, but this was not a systematic practice.

The Érards generally did not allow customers to leave their shop with a piano or a harp without having paid for it or having made arrangements for payments. Similarly, they did not send instruments abroad without first obtaining assurances of payment. Problems with non-payment almost always arose in situations involving credit, which usually took the form of a *traite*, or bill of exchange, ordering a third party (often a banker) to pay the amount by a specified date – see Figure 3.

FIGURE 3 An example of a piano bought on credit in the Érard ledgers. The customer made a down payment of 200 francs in cash and paid the remaining 1,000 francs with a bill of exchange that came due a little over a month later. N° inv. E.2009.5.101, folio 6.

FIGURE 4 A notation of non-payment in the Érard ledgers. Jean-Baptiste Érard wrote “complained about non-payment” (“protesté faute de paiement”) and added a penalty for overdue payment (“frais de protesté”) to the customer’s account. N° inv. E.2009.5.101, folio 17.

Occasionally this third party refused to honour the bill when it came due because they had not received the funds from the customer – similar to a ‘bounced cheque’ today. When this happened, Jean-Baptiste would write in the debit column “complained about non-payment” (“protesté faute de paiement”). He would often add a penalty for overdue payment (“frais de protesté”) to the customer’s account; in later ledgers, he would write “debt outstanding” (“créance”) in the debit column⁹ – see Figure 4. None of these notations for non-payment are present in the entry for Beethoven’s piano.

The Érard firm also had several ways of indicating gifts in the sales ledgers, two of which are present in the entry for piano No. 133 sent to Beethoven. The most common way of recording a gift was to note the theoretical price of the instrument in the debit column, leaving the credit column blank.¹⁰ As we have seen, normally, the credit column

- 9 The protêt (written “protest” by Jean-Baptiste) was the legal complaint for a non-payment of a bill of exchange.
- 10 For examples of gifts indicated by a credit column left empty, see: Érard sales ledger (1790–92), folios 2, 20, 21, 28, 29, 42, 51, 69 and 73, N° inv. E.2009.5.98, Musée de la musique, Paris; Érard sales ledger (1799–1802), folios 88, 112, 115, 119, 129, 134, 136, 139, 162 and 174, N° inv. E.2009.5.100, Musée de la musique, Paris; Érard sales ledger (1802–06), folios 223, 247 and 269, N° inv. E.2009.5.101, Musée de la musique, Paris. There are also many examples of this practice in the Érard sales ledger June 1787–May 1789, N° inv. D.2009.1.82, Gaveau-Érard-Pleyel archives, property of the AXA insurance group. On at least one occasion, Sébastien Érard gave a customer a handwritten “bon” (“gift certificate”) instructing his workers on the rue du Mail to give the customer a piano upon remittance of the paper, which was then glued in the sales ledger. See Érard sales ledger (1824–33), folios 119 and 134, N° inv. E.2009.5.106, Musée de la musique, Paris.

was filled in right away with the payment or the arrangements agreed upon for payments. An empty credit column thus meant that from the beginning the Érards were not expecting any payment for the instrument; in other words, it was a gift. One never finds the indication “complained about non-payment” paired with an empty credit column, only with prior payment agreements that went awry.¹¹

Indeed, when one makes a list of the customers with empty credit columns, the result is not a sort of rogues’ gallery of delinquent musicians who did not pay their bills. On the contrary, the result is a list of Érard family members, their close friends and certain highly respected figures; in other words, people deserving of gifts. For example, when the Érard firm sent pianos *gratis* to Jean-Baptiste Érard’s daughter Céleste (1790–1878) and her husband, the composer Gaspare Spontini (1774–1851) in Berlin, the ledger entries showed the theoretical price in the debit column and nothing in the credit column¹² – see Figures 5a and 5b. An identical procedure was followed for several pianos that the Érards gave to the family of Pierre Érard’s (1794–1855) closest childhood friend, the composer Louis-Joseph-Ferdinand Hérold (1791–1833)¹³ and for the pianos given to the pianist and composer Hélène de Montgeroult (1764–1836) and to Joachim Lebreton (1760–1819), *secrétaire perpétuel de la classe des Beaux-Arts* at the Institut de France¹⁴ – see Figure 5c. Perhaps the clearest example is the piano the Érards gave to Suzanne le Peletier de Saint-Fargeau (1782–1829), daughter of Louis-Michel le Peletier (1760–1793), who was elevated to the status of martyr of the Revolution after his assassination.¹⁵ The orphaned

- 11 Occasionally Jean-Baptiste created a new ledger entry to summarise several past refused bills of exchange for the same customer, and that new collective entry was sometimes paired with an empty credit column, but the original sales to which the grouped entry refers do not have empty credit columns. See for example, Érard sales ledger (1802–06), folio 235. N° inv. E.2009.5.101, Musée de la musique, Paris.
- 12 See, for example, Érard sales ledger (1824–33), folios 228 and 231. N° inv. E.2009.5.106, Musée de la musique, Paris. The Érard family correspondence contains numerous references to instruments sent as gifts to Céleste.
- 13 Érard sales ledger (1799–1802), folio 119. N° inv. E.2009.5.100. Sébastien was a close friend of the Alsatian-born pianist and composer François-Joseph Herold (1755–1802), father of Ferdinand. When François-Joseph died on 1 September 1802, the eleven-year-old Ferdinand was on holiday with the Érard family in Sèvres. See Arthur Pougin: *La Jeunesse d’Herold* [sic], in: *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 47 (1880), pp. 138–140 (2 May), 145f. (9 May), here pp. 140 and 146. The Érard family archives contain a touching series of letters from Ferdinand Hérold to various members of the Érard family, attesting to his close friendship with them over many years.
- 14 Érard sales ledger (1799–1802), folios 167 and 129. N° inv. E.2009.5.100, Musée de la musique, Paris.
- 15 Érard sales ledger (1799–1802), folio 88. N° inv. E.2009.5.100, Musée de la musique, Paris. For more on Suzanne le Peletier, see Jennifer Heuer: *Adopted Daughter of the French People. Suzanne Lepeletier and Her Father, the National Assembly*, in: *French Politics, Culture & Society* 17/3–4 (1999), pp. 31–51.



FIGURES 5A–C Grand pianos given as gifts to Érard family members and friends.
 From top to bottom: Céleste Érard, Gaspare Spontini and François-Joseph Herold.
 N° inv. E.2009.5.106, folios 228 and 231; N° inv. E.2009.5.100, folio 119.

Suzanne had become a *cause célèbre*, was officially adopted by the French nation and given the title “daughter of the state”. It would be difficult to believe that the empty credit column after her name indicates anything other than a gift bestowed upon this young woman who had become a famous object of national sympathy.

It should come as no surprise that in the above examples of ledger entries for gifts, we still find the theoretical price of the instrument given. The inclusion of this price, whether it be for gifts or sales, was essential for good bookkeeping in the event that the Érard firm would need to balance their accounts. Similarly, we also note the presence of the indications “owes” (the abbreviation “D.” for “doit”) and “for the sale of” (the abbreviation “p V.te” for “par vente”), even with respect to gifts. These words were part of the formulaic syntax of ledger entries, consisting of: date, name and location of customer, “owes”, price, “by sale of”, type and serial number. The words “owes” and “by sale of” were the fixed elements in the ledger entry, repeated mechanically line after line. They should not be taken literally, as the Érards did not bother changing them in the case of gifts.

Another kind of ‘gift’ offered by the Érard firm was a partial waiver of sums due. After entering one or more amounts in the credit column, Jean-Baptiste would often make a calculation of these payments in the margin, and when he determined that the amount paid was sufficiently close to the amount due, he would mark in the credit column a letter “N”, meaning “Néant” (void) or “Non-porté” (not charged against the corresponding entry

in the debit column).¹⁶ This “N” indicated that the customer had paid enough and that the remainder owed would be forgiven. For example, in 1801, the Érards sold to a Made-moiselle Nolette a square piano for 1,200 francs, for which she made an initial payment of 506 francs and 5 sous. After she made a second payment of 506 francs and 5 sous, Jean-Baptiste added up these two amounts in the margin of the ledger and decided that the remainder, which he calculated to be 188 francs, was small enough, so he added an “N” to indicate that he waived the balance due¹⁷ – see Figure 6.

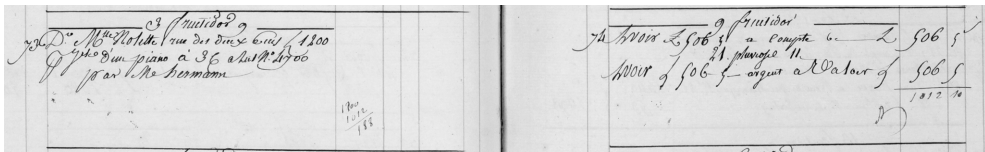


FIGURE 6 The “N” mark in the right-hand credit column used to indicate a partial payment waiver for M^{lle} Nolette. N° inv. E.2009.5.100, folio 112.

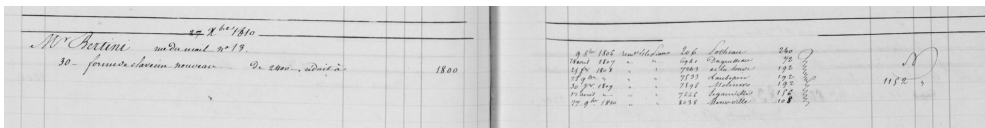


FIGURE 7 The “N” mark in the right-hand credit column used to indicate a partial payment waiver for Bertini. N° inv. E.2009.5.103, folio 84.

The Érards were often more generous when it came to writing off remaining debts owed by musicians. For example, in 1810 Clementi’s famous pupil Auguste Bertini (1780–1856) acquired a piano that was valued at 2,400 francs for the discounted price of 1,800 francs. In the credit column, Jean-Baptiste calculated the sum of seven commissions earned by Bertini on sales of Érad pianos over the four preceding years. As the sum of these commissions was 1,152 francs, Jean-Baptiste wrote an “N” to waive the balance of 648 francs¹⁸ – see Figure 7.

- 16 Jean-Baptiste began using the “N” in the ledgers in 1802 and continued until 1813. In his family correspondence and in the firm’s ledgers, Jean-Baptiste wrote the letter “N” in different ways: in a simpler style, or with a flourish (as in the ledger indications for gifts). See for example, the name “Nicodami” and the word “Novembre” in Érad sales ledger (1811–16), folio 83. N° inv. E.2009.5.105, Musée de la musique, Paris: <https://archivesmusee.philharmoniedeparis.fr/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/60/> (consulted on 25 June 2023). Jean-Baptiste probably did not use the “N” to signify “Nul” (annulled), as he usually wrote out this word in full in the rare instances where an entire transaction was annulled. See, for example, Érad sales ledger (1799–1802), folio 95. N° inv. E.2009.5.100, Musée de la musique, Paris.
- 17 Érad sales ledger (1799–1802), folio 112. N° inv. E.2009.5.100, Musée de la musique, Paris.

In 1812, when the composer Julie Candeille (1767–1834) paid for her grand piano, Jean-Baptiste realised that she still owed 1,008 francs for a square piano she had bought five years earlier. After rounding off her debt to 1,000 francs and totalling up partial payments and credits to her account, he wrote an “N” in the margins to waive the remaining 530 francs due.¹⁹

Sometimes gifts were given simply because the Érards realised that the customer was not able to pay and that initiating a recovery procedure would be fruitless. For example, in 1804, a customer with little means named Henrion purchased a square piano worth 1,200 francs. The Érards allowed him to take the instrument home after only paying a twenty percent cash down payment and agreeing to remit the remainder due in four bills of exchange dated one month apart. As time passed, however, each of Henrion's bills was returned unpaid, and Jean-Baptiste noted “complained about non-payment” and added late fees to his account. After the fourth and final bill was refused for payment, Jean-Baptiste accepted the fact that Henrion would not pay and that the small cash down payment was all they would ever collect from him. He therefore wrote an “N” on each returned bill to indicate that the matter was closed.²⁰ Henrion's case demonstrates that forgiven debts and gifts could be two sides of the same coin: in the first instance, it was the customer's failure to pay that resulted in the waiver of payment whereas in the second, it was the generosity of the seller.

In certain instances, Jean-Baptiste would reinforce the notion of a ‘gift’ by combining several different bookkeeping indications. In particular, for many gifts in the period 1802–13, he developed a habit of using the “N” for added emphasis in empty credit columns to indicate that he was not expecting any payment in return for the instrument. This practice was frequently used when giving instruments to musicians or music teachers. In these cases, he would usually note in the debit column the full price of the instrument, sometimes followed by the reduced price (as teachers and artists received discounts of up to twenty-five percent), and then in the otherwise empty credit column he would add the “N” to indicate a gift.²¹ For example, in 1804 the Érards gave a gift of a square piano to the pianist Friedrich Kalkbrenner (1785–1849), noting the full price of

18 Érard sales ledger (1809–16), folio 84. N° inv. E.2009.5.103, Musée de la musique, Paris.

19 Several months later, when Candeille recommended a customer for a piano, Jean-Baptiste added a theoretical 100 francs commission to her already settled account. Érard sales ledger (1809–16), folio 143. N° inv. E.2009.5.103, Musée de la musique, Paris.

20 Érard sales ledger (1802–06), folios 169, 173, 178, 184 and 190. N° inv. E.2009.5.101, Musée de la musique, Paris.

21 When the Érards gave instruments as gifts to foreign musicians, they often did not bother noting a discounted price; since these distant musicians were usually not aware of this practice, the discount would have been merely theoretical.

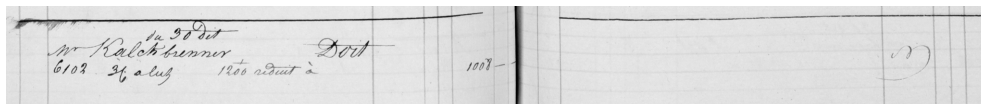


FIGURE 8 The “N” mark in an otherwise empty credit column used to underscore the nature of the gift for Kalkbrenner. N° inv. E.2009.5.101, folio 186.

1,200 francs, the reduced price of 1,008 francs and then indicating “N” in the empty credit column²² – see Figure 8.

In 1808, when the Érards gave gifts of a grand piano and a harp to their pianist friend Daniel Steibelt (1765–1823) and his wife Catherine Dale (1778–1825), Jean-Baptiste used the “N” mark, adding the word “given” (“donné”).²³ Jean-Baptiste sometimes used multiple gift notations when the Érards gave instruments to friends or notable figures who were not necessarily musicians. For example, when in 1802 Sébastien Érard (1752–1831) gave a square piano to his former benefactress, the Duchesse de Villeroy (1731–1816), Jean-Baptiste added the phrase “payment waived” (“avoir par abandon”) in the credit column.²⁴ Similarly, when in 1810 Sébastien gave a decorated square piano to his “excellent and worthy friend”, the watchmaker Abraham Louis Bréguet (1747–1823), Jean-Baptiste added the inscriptions “given” (“donné”) and “to Mr Bréguet out of general esteem” (“à Mr Bréguet par divers considération [sic]”).²⁵ In 1808, on the recommendation of the pianist Jan Ladislav Dussek (1760–1812), the Érards gave a grand piano to the Marquis de Guadalcázar (1771–1812) to be used during the exile of King Ferdinand VII of Spain at the Château de Valençay.²⁶ Jean-Baptiste marked the gift with an “N” in the empty credit column. The Érards also gave instruments in exchange for services rendered. For example, in 1806 and 1807, they gave pianos to Guichard and Robillard in Paris, adding marginal notes to explain that the payments were waived because of objets d’art the two men had given to

- ²² Érard sales ledger (1802–06), folio 186. N° inv. E.2009.5.101, Musée de la musique, Paris. In the corresponding production ledger, Jean-Baptiste qualifies this gift as a loan. Kalkbrenner was only nineteen years old at the time and had just completed his studies at the Paris Conservatory. Érard production ledger (1802–06), folio 69. N° inv. E.2009.5.41, Musée de la musique, Paris.
- ²³ Érard sales ledger (1806–09), folio 221. N° inv. E.2009.5.102, Musée de la musique, Paris.
- ²⁴ Érard sales ledger (1799–1802), folio 142. N° inv. E.2009.5.100, Musée de la musique, Paris.
- ²⁵ Érard sales ledger (1809–16), folio 23. N° inv. E.2009.5.103, Musée de la musique, Paris; *The History of the Erard Piano and Harp*, p. 547. Bréguet is also mentioned in a sales ledger in the context of a gift of a piano to a Madame d’Eymard. Érard sales ledger (1809–16), folio 172. N° inv. E.2009.5.103, Musée de la musique, Paris. Érard production ledger (1806–19), folio 43. N° inv. E.2009.5.42. Musée de la musique, Paris. For more on Sébastien’s friendship with Bréguet, see *The History of the Erard Piano and Harp*, pp. 95, 547, 549, 552 and 594. The after-death inventory of Sébastien shows that he owned several clocks made by Bréguet, so gifts might have been reciprocal between the two men.
- ²⁶ Érard sales ledger (1806–09), folio 209. N° inv. E.2009.5.102, Musée de la musique, Paris.

Sébastien.²⁷ There may be other such gifts of instruments to Érard friends that were not recorded in the ledgers. Madame de Genlis's niece Georgette Ducrest (1798–1882) recalled that Sébastien gave pianos to many French émigrés during the Revolutionary period: “All émigrés who played music received a piano from him, and he would become angry if they wanted to pay for it.”²⁸

In light of the Érards' gift practices, we can now better interpret the ledger entry for Beethoven's piano. To begin with, the mere presence of a price (1,500 francs) in the debit column is not an indication that the instrument was sold. Most importantly, the credit column for Beethoven's piano was left blank, and an “N” was added. This double indication underscored the fact that the Érards considered from the outset that the piano, worth 1,500 francs, was to be a gift and that they did not expect any payment in return from Beethoven. Beethoven's piano was one of four gifts given by the Érard firm in 1803. 1803 was an average year for Érard gifts: in 1801 they gave only one (to Haydn), but in 1802 they gave seven.

Historical evidence for the gift There is sufficient evidence to suggest that the Érard firm gave the piano to Beethoven as part of an arrangement to publish a French edition of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 13 (*Pathétique*). In addition to their musical-instrument-building activities, the Érard firm was one of the leading music publishers in early nineteenth-century Paris. In 1800, the publishing activity that had been founded by Sébastien and Jean-Baptiste was turned over to two of their nieces, Catherine Barbe Delahante (née Marcoux, 1779–1813) and Marie-Françoise Marcoux (1777–1851). From then on, the publishing imprint was known as the “demoiselles Érard”. However, the demoiselles Érard was not a separate entity; the extant correspondence in the Érard family archives attests to the close coordination between the instrument-making and publishing wings of the firm, both located on the same premises at the rue du Mail.

The Érards' motivations for giving a gift to Beethoven become apparent when one considers the list of musicians who also received gifts from them during this period. At first, they seem like a disparate group. Of the French musicians, some were close friends

27 “suspendu le règlement à cause d'un objet relatif à mr Sébastien” and “par v^{te} avec des objets d'art remis a mr Sébastien”. Érard sales ledger (1806–09), folios 60 and 96. N° inv. E.2009.5.102, Musée de la musique, Paris. In 1804, the Érards gave a decorated square piano to the art dealer Alexandre-Joseph Paillet (1743–1814). Given Sébastien's passion for art collecting, it is possible that this gift was also made in exchange for paintings. Érard sales ledger (1802–06), folio 136. N° inv. E.2009.5.101, Musée de la musique, Paris.

28 “Tous les émigrés s'occupant de musique recevaient de lui un piano, et il se fût fâché s'ils eussent voulu le payer.” Georgette Ducrest: *Mémoires sur l'impératrice Joséphine, sur la ville, la cour et les salons de Paris sous l'Empire*, Paris [1863], p. 3.

of the Érards, such as Hérold, Kalkbrenner and the Vicomte de Marin (1766 or 1769–1847).²⁹ Others were composers from outside the Érards' circle of friends, such as Louis-Emmanuel Jadin (1768–1853) and Spontini, who was only beginning to make a name for himself in Paris (he would not marry into the Érard family until years later).³⁰ There was also the relatively obscure Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari (1763–1842), an Italian composer working in Paris, and two foreign musicians with no obvious connections to the Érards: Beethoven in Vienna and Friedrich Heinrich Himmel (1765–1814) in Berlin.³¹ What all of these musicians have in common, however, is that they all had works published by the Érard firm during this same period.³²

The demoiselles Érard did not print pirated editions, even of works by foreign musicians.³³ They bought the rights from the composers, and on numerous occasions a gift of a piano was part of the publishing arrangement. Although no account books remain from the demoiselles Érard, there are scattered mentions in the Érard frères instrument sales ledgers from this period of instruments that were given to composers in exchange for manuscript music to publish. In 1801, Jadin was given a square piano

- 29 The Vicomte de Marin was responsible for numerous sales of Érard instruments. The Érards gave him gifts of two pianos and two harps, marking the transactions with an “N”. Érard sales ledger (1802–06), folio 170. N° inv. E.2009.5.101, Musée de la musique, Paris. For Marin’s friendship with the Érards, see letter of 15 August 1814 from Pierre Érard in London to Jean-Baptiste Érard in Paris. Archives de la famille Érard.
- 30 Érard sales ledger (1802–06), folio 244. N° inv. E.2009.5.101, Musée de la musique, Paris.
- 31 Érard sales ledger (1802–06), folio 74. N° inv. E.2009.5.101, Musée de la musique, Paris.
- 32 Anik Devriès-Lesure/François Lesure: *Dictionnaire des éditeurs de musique français*, Geneva 1979, Vol. 1, catalogues N° 77–82.
- 33 Griesinger alleged that the Érard edition of *The Creation* was sold without Haydn’s authorisation. See “Eben komme ich von Haydn ...”, p. 71. As the Vienna agent for the Leipzig publisher Breitkopf und Härtel, Griesinger was not an impartial observer and may have been upset to learn of French editions of Haydn’s music. Nevertheless, in 1799 a French court case determined that French music publishers were within their legal rights to print and sell French editions of foreign works. The Érard firm was neither the first nor the only Parisian publisher to print versions of Haydn’s *Creation*. Imbault, Leduc, Porro, Sieber and Pleyel all published scores of the work in the months before the Érard edition was released. Moreover, Érard published Haydn’s work both in full score and in piano arrangement by Steibelt, including vocal numbers sold as separate arias. It would not have been customary to pay the original composer of arranged works, only the arranger himself, and Steibelt was amply compensated for his work. See Anik Devriès-Lesure: *Un siècle d’implantation allemande en France dans l’édition musicale (1760–1860)*, in: *Le Concert et son public. Mutations de la vie musicale en Europe de 1780 à 1914 (France, Allemagne, Angleterre)*, ed. by Hans Erich Bøddeker, Patrice Veit and Michael Werner, Paris 2002, pp. 25–45, and Michel Noiray: *Die Schöpfung à Paris en 1800 – “von Steibelt castrirt”?*, in: *Musique, esthétique et société au XIXe siècle. Liber amicorum Joël-Marie Fauquet*, ed. by Damien Colas, Florence Gétreau and Malou Haine, Wavre 2007, pp. 137–160, here pp. 141 f.

Droit		Avoir	
29 Ventose	880	à Jadin	880
Le Jadin fait à son usage un piano de 2 ^e C. à son N ^o 1128		En manuscrit de musique de sa composition	

FIGURE 9 A gift of a piano for Jadin in return for “manuscript music of his composition”. N° inv. E.2009.5.100, folio 94.

Droit		Avoir	
11 Janvier 1803	1440	à Adam	1440
Le Jadin fait à son usage un piano de 2 ^e C. à son N ^o 1128		En manuscrit de musique de sa composition	

FIGURE 10 A gift of a piano for Adam in return “for the total value of the compositions for the publishing house over the course of 15 months, from 1 January 1802 until 1 April 1803, for arrangements of Italian arias for the Journal du Piano”. N° inv. E.2009.5.100, folio 99.

Droit		Avoir	
7 Janvier 1803	1180	à Himmel	1180
Le Jadin fait à son usage un piano de 2 ^e C. à son N ^o 1128		En manuscrit de musique de sa composition	

FIGURE 11 Ledger entry for the gift of two pianos for Himmel. Note the “N” mark in the otherwise empty credit column, and no mention of the publishing arrangement discussed in their correspondence. N° inv. E.2009.5.101, folio 74.

worth 840 francs for having provided the Érards with “manuscript music of his composition”³⁴ – see Figure 9.

In 1803 Jean-Louis Adam (1758–1848) was given a grand piano worth 1,440 francs “for the total value of the compositions for the publishing house over the course of 15 months, from 1 January 1802 until 1 April 1803, for arrangements of Italian arias for the Journal du Piano”³⁵ – see Figure 10.

Johann Georg Heinrich Backofen (1768–1839) was given a partial credit toward his piano purchase for an unspecified composition given to the Érard firm in 1800.³⁶ The

34 “En manuscrits de musique de sa composition”. Érard sales ledger (1799–1802), folio 94. N° inv. E.2009.5.100, Musée de la musique, Paris.

35 “par compte fait ce jour, d’ouvrages, fait pour le magasin de musique pendant 15 mois, du 1^{er} janvier 1802, au 1^{er} avril 1803, pr arrangements des airs Italiens du Journal pr le piano”. Érard sales ledger (1799–1802), folio 99. N° inv. E.2009.5.100, Musée de la musique, Paris.

36 Érard sales ledger (1799–1802), folio 48. N° inv. E.2009.5.110, Musée de la musique, Paris.

remuneration for musical works was not only in the form of instruments: Steibelt received several months' rent in an apartment on the rue du Mail in exchange for his compositions.³⁷ Other composers published by the demoiselles Érard received partial payment waivers for Érard instruments, marked with an "N" in the ledgers. These include Charles-Henri Plantade (1764–1839) and Felice Blangini (1781–1841).³⁸

Ledgers only tell part of the story as publication negotiations can also be found in correspondence with the Érard firm. A case in point is the composer Himmel, whose ledger entry (for the gift of two pianos, one square and one grand) is identical to the entry for Beethoven's gift: an empty credit column and the "N" mark – see Figure 11.

Corroborating evidence for the gifts is contained in three letters from Himmel to the Érard brothers in which Himmel discusses sonatas and his sextet that he gave to Érard to publish.³⁹ The Érard firm published these works and then gave Himmel two free pianos.

It appears that the Érard firm agreed on a period during which they would have the rights to publish music, after which time the composer would receive a free piano.⁴⁰ The time between Himmel's offering of his scores for publication (22 October 1801) and the sending of pianos as gifts (27 April 1803) is similar to the fifteen months that were mentioned above between Adam's offering scores and his receiving a free piano. In the case of Beethoven's gift, the period between his transfer of the publishing rights and the shipment of his free piano was considerably longer, but this may be due to the fact that Beethoven only offered one work whereas Himmel and Adam offered several. The terms of such a contract would have been negotiated in writing. A document in the Érard family archives reveals that a correspondence between Beethoven and Sébastien Érard did once

37 Devriès/Lesure: *Dictionnaire des éditeurs de musique français*, Vol. 1, p. 63.

38 One would need to read the Érard ledgers with the now lost demoiselles Érard ledgers to be able to interpret certain transactions. For example, in 1802, Jadin purchased a piano using a bill of exchange payable a year later. When the bill came due, Jean-Baptiste noted that the 912 francs were returned unpaid, but instead of adding penalties, he simply added an "N" in the credit column to indicate that he would not pursue the matter, essentially giving the piano as a gift. Jadin was one of the most prolific composers in the catalogues of the demoiselles Érard. It is therefore possible that he settled his later debt by giving the Érards additional compositions that were not noted in the ledgers. Érard sales ledger (1799–1802), folio 162. N° inv. E.2009.5.100, Musée de la musique, Paris.

39 Letters of 30 vendémiaire [an x?; 22 October 1801?], 7 frimaire an x [28 November 1801], and 12 nivôse an x [2 January 1802] from Friedrich Heinrich Himmel in Paris to Sébastien Érard in Paris. Archives de la famille Érard.

40 During this same period the Érards offered their workers similar contracts with built-in incentive measures, so it is not surprising that they would do the same with respect to publishing agreements. Letter of 15 April 1797 to M. Deodor, care of the French embassy in Huningue. *The History of the Erard Piano and Harp*, p. 188.

exist, but it was destroyed in a fire at the Érard family's château de la Muette in December 1855.⁴¹

Knowing that the Érard firm gave pianos to some of the composers whose works they published might help us to better understand the circumstances surrounding their gift to Haydn. It has always been assumed that they gave this gift in homage to the most respected composer of his time, but this motivation is not found in a single contemporaneous source. On the other hand, the Érard firm published Steibelt's domestic arrangements of Haydn's *Creation* and *The Seasons* approximately a year before sending the gift. The Érards may therefore have decided to offer Haydn a piano as an expression of gratitude for his music, which was so profitable to their publishing enterprise.

In light of the numerous gifts recorded in the Érard ledgers, we can now understand that, to be worthy of a gift of an Érard piano, it was not necessary to have the stature of the internationally renowned Haydn; the Érards also gave pianos to relatively obscure composers such as Vincenzo Focchi (1767–1843) and Louis Granier, fils (circa 1770–circa 1840).⁴² Nevertheless, the Érard firm's gifts to Haydn and Beethoven may also have been part of a plan to target figures in Viennese musical circles: they similarly gave harps to the music historian Grigori Vladimirovitch Orlov (1777–1826) and to Beethoven's friend and librettist Georg Friedrich Treitschke (1776–1842), then director of the Imperial Theatre.⁴³ The Érards had a longstanding practice of sending instruments to foreign customers in the hope of expanding the Érard instrument-building empire. Pierre Érard, for example, would later remark that every harp sent to a customer in India would result in four or five additional orders from the subcontinent.⁴⁴ In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the Érard brothers seemed to be making a conscious effort to expand their customer base in Germany, Austria, and central Europe. In addition to Himmel in Berlin, they gave a grand piano to the pianist Józef Elsner (1769–1854), who would later become famous as Chopin's teacher, but whom in 1806 Jean-Baptiste identified simply

41 "Les documents qui seraient aujourd'hui si intéressants à consulter et qui, certainement, existaient ont dû être transportés à l'orangerie de la Muette au moment où, en 1854 ou 1855 on a reconstruit une partie des bâtiments de la rue du Mail; il paraît que cette orangerie a brûlé et avec elle ont été détruites toutes ces archives y compris la correspondance que Sébastien Érard entretenait avec les plus grands musiciens de l'époque, Beethoven et autres." Letter of 11 September 1913 from Albert Blondel to Charles de Franqueville. Archives de la famille Érard.

42 Érard sales ledger (1806–09), folio 270, N° inv. E.2009.5.102, Musée de la musique, Paris; Érard sales ledger (1802–06), folio 83, N° inv. E.2009.5.101, Musée de la musique, Paris.

43 Érard sales ledger (1802–06), folio 216, N° inv. E.2009.5.101, Musée de la musique, Paris; Érard sales ledger (1809–16), folio 183, N° inv. E.2009.5.103, Musée de la musique, Paris.

44 Letter of 30 September 1814 from Pierre Érard in London to Thomas Henry in Paris. Archives de la famille Érard.

as “*maître de musique* at the Polish theatre in Warsaw”.⁴⁵ Although these many gifts may have helped to expand the Érard empire, they may have contributed – along with the frequent payment waivers – to the firm’s financial problems that came to a head when they officially declared bankruptcy in 1813.

The significance of the gift Knowing that Beethoven’s gift was part of a publishing arrangement alters our understanding of the chronology of events related to the acquisition of his piano. Until now, scholars have assumed that Beethoven’s desire to have an Érard piano dates to approximately November 1802, when he wrote a letter to Nikolaus Zmeskall about his favourable impressions of Haydn’s Érard piano.⁴⁶ However, the Érard firm advertised their edition of the *Pathétique* Sonata on 2 February 1801, which means that they would have received the score of the work and engaged in negotiations with Beethoven by mid to late 1800.⁴⁷ In other words, by the time that Haydn received the gift of his own Érard piano in early 1801, Beethoven was already involved in a publishing agreement with the Érard firm and probably knew that if all went well with the sales of his *Pathétique* Sonata in Paris, he too would receive his own Érard piano as a gift. Indeed, the *Pathétique* was apparently a profitable edition for the demoiselles Érard as it remained in their catalogue until at least 1804.⁴⁸

At some point during the three-year wait for his Érard piano, Beethoven appears to have taken steps to ensure the quality of the instrument. In particular, he probably arranged with the Érard firm that his piano would be tested and chosen by the pianist Jean-Louis Adam, then professor at the Paris Conservatoire. We know this because in a contemporaneous letter, the composer Ferdinand Ries (1784–1838) wrote that Beethoven had initially planned on dedicating his *Kreutzer* Sonata op. 47 to both the violinist Rodolphe Kreutzer (1766–1831) and Adam because “he owed Adam something because of

45 Érard sales ledger (1802–06), folio 74, N° inv. E.2009.5.101, Musée de la musique, Paris; Érard production ledger (1802–06), folio 119, N° inv. E.2009.5.41, Musée de la musique, Paris; and Érard sales ledger (1806–09), folio 32, N° inv. E.2009.5.102, Musée de la musique, Paris.

46 Letter of November 1802 from Ludwig van Beethoven to Nikolaus Zmeskall, in: Beethoven: Briefwechsel, Vol. 1, p. 137.

47 [Anon]: *Journal de Paris*, 13 pluviôse an IX [2 February 1801], p. 805. Rose erroneously states that this edition dated from 1802 and gives an incorrect date for the *Journal de Paris* advertisement. See Rose: Beethoven and his “French piano”, p. 113. The first extant catalogue of the demoiselles Érard reproduced by Devriès and Lesure is indeed from 1802, but the Érards’ music-publishing activity began several years earlier, so it is not surprising to find that an advertisement for the Érard edition of Beethoven’s sonata dates from early 1801. Devriès/Lesure: *Dictionnaire des éditeurs de musique français*, Vol. 1, p. 63.

48 *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, catalogues N° 78–82.

the Klavier from Paris".⁴⁹ In other words, Beethoven was most likely indebted to Adam for his services in selecting his piano a few months earlier. Adam had been one of the Érard firm's most frequent and famous piano testers since at least 1791.⁵⁰ Several pianos made in close chronological proximity to Beethoven's were sold with the help of Adam, including N° 132, the piano that immediately preceded Beethoven's N° 133.⁵¹

The gift debate has always hinged on whether Beethoven's acquisition of the piano was unsolicited (a gift) or solicited (an order) – the implication being that the former would have had little influence on his music. However, understanding that the gift was not an abstract homage to Beethoven's genius, but was rather related to the publication of the *Pathétique* Sonata, may indicate that the piano was a 'solicited gift'. In other words, Beethoven probably entered into the publication agreement with the knowledge that he would receive a free piano, and he may have even selected Érard over other Parisian publishers for that very reason.⁵² The long wait for his Érard piano to arrive would have naturally intensified his sense of expectation with respect to the instrument and its musical potential.⁵³

49 Letter of 22 October 1803 from Ferdinand Ries to Nikolaus Simrock, in: Beethoven: Briefwechsel, Vol. 1, p. 137.

50 See, for example, letters of 29 March 1791 to M. Sequin de Broin in Dijon, 29 March 1791 to M. Callias, chez Madame de Faudras, in Chalon-sur-Saône, and 29 March 1791 to M. Hemberger in Semur. *The History of the Erard Piano and Harp*, p. 66. It seems that Adam's taste in pianos was not always shared by customers, for twelve days later the Érards wrote to a different client, "I did not expect to receive complaints about the piano that I sent you, since it had been chosen by M. Adam, whom you had charged with this responsibility. As you do not find your instrument satisfactory, I will send you another one chosen and even signed by M. Adam." Letter of 9 May 1791 to M. Sequin de Broin in Dijon. *The History of the Erard Piano and Harp*, p. 74. Even as late as 1823, Adam was still active selecting pianos in Paris. See letter of 25 September 1823 from Pierre Érard in Paris to Céleste Érard in Berlin. Archives de la famille Érard.

51 Érard production ledger (1788–1802). N° inv. E.2009.5.40, Musée de la musique, Paris. Selectors of pianos are rarely named in the Érard ledgers. Adam's role as piano selector is only mentioned in the Érard correspondence.

52 Whether the publishing arrangement was initiated by the Érard firm or by Beethoven is not known, although only a few years later, Beethoven wrote directly to French publishers to propose printing some of his works in Paris. Letter of 26 April 1807 from Beethoven in Vienna to Ignaz and Camille Pleyel in Paris. Beethoven-Haus, Bonn, NE 161.

53 For a discussion of the influence of Beethoven's Érard piano on his compositions, see Robert Adelson: *Erard. A Passion for the Piano*, Oxford/New York 2021.

Content

Forewords 7

Preface 10

NOTATION AND PERFORMANCE

Clive Brown Czerny the Progressive 15

Barry Cooper Beethoven's Pedal Marks Revisited 40

Neal Peres Da Costa The Case for Un-Notated Arpeggiation in Beethoven's Compositions for or Involving the Piano 59

Siân Derry Beethoven's Tied-Note Notation. An Ongoing Debate 100

Marten Noorduyn Beethoven's Indicators of Expression in His Piano Works 118

Yew Choong Cheong A Historically Informed Perspective of Beethoven's Idiosyncratic Dynamics and Accents in His Piano Works 137

Leonardo Miucci Beethoven's Piano Quartets WoO 36. Conservatism and Evolution 156

FROM SKETCH TO PRINT

Sandra P. Rosenblum Publishers' Practices and Other Happenings in the Life of Beethoven's Quintet for Piano and Woodwinds Op. 16 177

Susanne Cox Beethoven's 'Concept'. Working Manuscripts Between Sketch and Fair Copy 188

Mario Aschauer Text, Context, and Creative Process in Diabelli's *Vaterländischer Künstlerverein* 210

Roberto Scocimarro Beethoven's Sketches for the Last Movement of the Sonata Op. 106. Thoughts on the Creative Process 228

Claudio Bacciagaluppi Hans Georg Nägeli as Publisher and Bookseller of Piano Music 295

INSTRUMENTS AND KEYBOARD PRACTICES

Michael Ladenburger Beethoven's Early Approach to Different Types of Keyboard Instruments in Bonn and Its Lifelong Aftermath 323

Tilman Skowronek Beethoven and the Split Damper Pedal 345

Robert Adelson Beethoven's Érard Piano: A Gift After All 358

Martin Skamletz A Gesture of Expansion. The Limited Enlargement of the Tessitura in Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 53 as a Further Development of Procedures Essayed in His Early Chamber Music 374

Index 400

Authors 412

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