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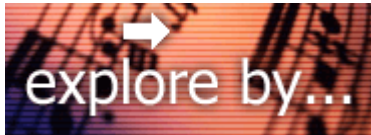
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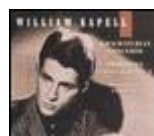
Instruments

Though for millions of American families pianos have carried overtones of European cultural roots, the modern piano is in many ways a product of good old American know-how. The piano, originally gravicembalo col piano e forte (harpichord with soft and loud) and later pianoforte (soft-loud), was invented in Italy in the last decade of the seventeenth century by Bartolomeo Cristofori, an instrument maker employed by the Medici family in Florence. Its distinguishing feature is that its strings are struck by hammers whose force the player can control, producing gradations between soft and loud, whereas the strings of its main predecessor, the harpsichord, are plucked. Through the eighteenth century, the piano gradually displaced the harpsichord and its smaller relative, the clavichord. The early nineteenth century saw the introduction of iron frames (they are cast in wet sand) and other structural reinforcements that permitted a bigger sound. But it was American factory methods, pioneered in part by the Steinway firm founded in 1853 by German immigrant Heinrich Steinweg, that put the piano in living rooms around the globe. American manufacturing cut the cost of pianos substantially, and the piano was one of the first items supported by what we would now call marketing, as extensive advertising campaigns (complete with the first-ever installment payment plans) promoted the piano as a family pleasure, technical marvel, and indispensable status symbol. Though Japanese manufacturers competed successfully with their American counterparts in the post-World War II era, the nineteenth-century Steinway was the true prototype for most of the grand pianos in use today. The first electric pianos to produce piano-like sound appeared in the U.S. and Germany in the 1930s.



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