

Basic Detail Report



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Title

Upright yacht-style piano

Date

c 1880

Primary Maker

Aucher Freres

Medium

Wood; varnished walnut veneer, metal, cloth

Dimensions

Overall: 1380 x 1150 x 390 mm

Name

Piano

History

The invention of the piano has been attributed to Bartolomeo Cristofori in Florence, Italy around 1709. It quickly became very popular and by 1750 was the instrument of choice for many of Europe's great composers. Built in various shapes and sizes - grand, barrel, player, square and upright - the piano has undergone a number of significant changes since the early 1700s which reflect the piano's different uses. Square pianos were musical instruments that were popular for domestic music making from the time of its invention in the 1700s to about 1860 in Europe and 1880 in the United States. Over time the size of square piano increased, and by the mid-1850s they were often larger and heavier than comparable grand pianos. The increase in size and weight of the square and grand pianos made them quite impractical for many homes and a more compact piano - the upright or yacht piano - was perfected by Robert Wornum of London in 1829. The soundboard and plane of strings of an upright piano run vertically and perpendicular to the keyboard, taking up much less floor space than a square or grand piano. Based on a half or full iron frame, this type of piano was also more compact, lighter and had a larger soundboard, and extended range, was easier to tune, held its tune longer and was generally more robust than the square or grand piano. Their upright shape also meant that they could be more easily moved around - taken through doors, down companionways on ships and pushed up against the walls of houses and cabins alike. From 1788 to the late 1890s, every single immigrant to Australia - convict, assisted or free - had in common an experience none would ever forget: a passage under sail in a crowded ship lasting anywhere from 60 to 200 days. Between 200 and 400 people crammed into a small ship (sometimes less than 35 metres long) had to endure a very lengthy voyage surrounded by what appeared to be the same bit of ocean, day after day after day. Even though they sailed in an era when things moved at a far less hectic pace than now, the

length of the passage to Australia inflicted tedium beyond belief. The effect of monotonous long distance ocean travel can be read in the diaries of many of the immigrants coming to settle in Australia. Immigrant Anne Gratton said in 1858 "We are getting very tired of each other... We do indeed find it a tedious journey. No one could form any idea of it". So what did these reluctant travellers do to relieve the monotony of life onboard these ships? The diaries of emigrants from this period tell us that some of the passengers slept, drank, ate and slept again, others played cards, kept journals, wrote letters home, drew or painted, read books, caught fish, sharks and birds, gossiped, fought, consummated and ended relations, played backgammon, chess, draughts, and deck games, held prayer meetings, published ship board newspapers, visited other passengers, were caught up in traditional maritime ceremonies such as 'footing'; 'dead horse' and 'crossing the line', produced, directed and acted in plays, played musical instruments, danced and sang. On board some ships such as the Blackball Line out of Liverpool or those owned by the East India Company, the owners sometimes provided bands to entertain the various passengers. On board other vessels, passengers with the necessary skills were encouraged to play music on the ship's upright piano while others would sing or dance accompanied by the same piano: We were able to get up some music and dancing for the first time, which had a very exhilarating effect on our whole party, everyone appearing to forget his bilious miseries during the day to join in the reel (Trench, 1826) For many of the passengers the singing and dancing accompanied under the moon on a tropic night would have provided one of the more pleasant memories of the voyage, boosting morale, passing the time, and making the long trip out to Australia worthwhile.