The Orpheus Institute for Advanced Studies & Research in Music, located in the city of Ghent in Belgium, is a special place. Performers, composers, and scholars gather there from all parts of the world to discuss questions of artistic research in music. In January 2015 I joined the institute to direct a research cluster and immediately began working on a project around Beethoven’s French piano, made in Paris by Erard Frères in 1803. The structure of the institute is flexible: researchers can follow wherever they feel their research is leading them. This meant that my team just kept growing. Initially hand-picked to cover certain areas of expertise, it gradually expanded to include doctoral students who joined the institute’s docARTES program in affiliation with the University of Leuven.

Not knowing where our research would take us next led us to develop a remarkable methodology. The project taught us patience, as the drive to seek out new expertise for the team also meant bringing each new member up to speed. Further patience was required as we familiarized ourselves with new bodies of repertoire. The greatest accomplishment—which was also the generator of all subsequent research—was the making of a replica of Beethoven’s Erard. After it was finished in November 2016, it took a central place in a basement room of the institute. It was there that many of the hypotheses pursued throughout this book emerged, as enthusiastic practicing was followed by lively conversation with team members. The suggestion, “Let’s go down to the basement,” often resulted in new lines
of investigation and further sub-projects. There was frustration, too, when a team member left to resume their life elsewhere and questions arose that required that particular person’s expertise.

The larger research group that I direct at the Orpheus Institute is called “Declassifying the Classics: Rhetoric, Technology, and Performance, 1750–1850.” During the time of our Beethoven Erard research, it included the following members:

Robin Blanton, associate researcher, organologist
Prach Boondiskulchok, doctoral researcher, pianist, composer
Song Hui Chon, visiting associate researcher, music perception and cognition researcher
Robert Giglio, associate researcher, museum scientist
Camilla Köhnken, postdoctoral researcher, pianist
Chris Maene, associate researcher, piano maker, and owner of Pianos Maene
Luca Montebugnoli, doctoral researcher, pianist
Ellie Nimeroski, doctoral researcher, violinist
Michael Pecak, associate researcher, pianist
Charles Shrader, visiting doctoral researcher, musicologist
Tilman Skowroneck, associate researcher, keyboardist, musicologist
Eleanor Smith, associate researcher, organologist
Thomas Wulfrank, associate researcher, acoustics engineer
Sanae Zanane, doctoral researcher, pianist

When I employ the collective “we” in this book it is to acknowledge the collaborative origin of the research that has informed it. Sometimes I refer to a team member by their first name: doing otherwise would feel unnatural. This collaborative spirit also explains the book’s unusual structure. Twelve chapters follow my expanding and cumulative inquiries as a performing musician and researcher; they are interspersed with four “vignettes.” These short interventions represent contexts or voices from outside—some of them, indeed, were either written by or co-written with associate researchers, whose authorships are acknowledged accordingly.

In addition, Michael helped me with the first part of chapter 10; Eleanor provided the organological research for chapter 4, which Robin in turn
helped me write; Bobby created and helped interpret all data relating to our piano action experiments; Song Hui analyzed all acoustical data and produced corresponding graphs; Prach transcribed all the musical examples; Sanae assisted me with illustrations.

Originating from the same context of collaboration, individual essays by Hester Bell Jordan, Robin Blanton, Camilla Köhnken, Luca Montebugnoli, Michael Pecak, Charles Shrader, Tilman Skowroneck, and Eleonor Smith have made it into *Keyboard Perspectives* 13, the 2021 yearbook of the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies. This publication also includes essays by Erin Helyard, Jeanne Roudet, and Frédéric de La Grandville, who joined us during our 2018 Orpheus Summer Academy.

A lot of what I describe needs to be seen or heard. Therefore, *I ask the reader to consult the following website*, for it documents this book’s research in a more direct way than prose ever could:


The website also features an eighty-minute lecture-documentary with the same title as this book, a bonus video on the “Lure of *una corda*,” and a complete performance of Beethoven’s Sonata Op. 53, along with a video-lecture featuring my analysis of this piece. Last but not least, a double CD on the Evil Penguin Records label (EPRC 0036) is commercially available: it features both the instrument and the repertoire that are central to this book.

All translations are ours. I especially thank Tilman for his advice on all matters German; Michael’s Polish heritage led us to the remarkable Elsner passage in vignette 2. Original-language quotations may be found on the website, as well as a PDF document with a translation of Louis Adam’s 1804–5 method. To convert the republican French calendar, I have used the “Tableau de concordance des calendriers républicain et grégorien” from Raymond Monnier, *Le Faubourg Saint-Antoine (1789–1815)* (Paris: Société des Études Robespierristes, 1981).