

KALMUS PIANO SERIES

9841

# EARLY KEYBOARD MUSIC

A Collection of Pieces written for the  
Virginal, Spinet, Harpsichord and Clavichord

(OESTERLE)

Vol. II

**EARLY  
KEYBOARD MUSIC**

**Vol. II**

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# Introductory

The pieces in this collection were all written for those predecessors of the modern pianoforte known as the virginal, harpsichord, spinet, clavichord, clavier, clavecin, and by still other names. There are two classes of instruments included here. One is the type represented most distinctively by the spinet or harpsichord. In these the string was plucked or twanged by a little slip of crow-quill projecting from an upright wooden bar fixed upon the further end of the key, the depression of which raised it toward the string. The other class is exemplified by the clavichord, in which the string was struck full by a "tangent" or upright blade of brass attached to the further end of the key, and continuing its pressure on the string as long as the key was held down. The clavichord was a small instrument, very intimate in its character, and giving forth a delicate, sweet, expressive tone scarcely audible across the room—solely an instrument for the privacy of the home. The virginal, spinet and harpsichord were different forms of the same kind of instrument, the first two being small and portable, frequently without legs or supports, and rectangular or trapezoidal in shape. The harpsichord was larger in size, more powerful in tone, and was universally employed in public performance. The sound of the harpsichord had a certain silvery, shimmering quality, in a way brilliant, but entirely incapable of accent.

The earliest music for keyed instruments was intended indiscriminately for the organ or the clavier (to use a term applicable to all the instruments just described), and was, in the very beginning, but a transcription for them of vocal music. When composers began to write specifically for the keyed instruments, they followed closely the form and texture of the choral music of the church and the secular music based upon its style—the only kind of composition much considered by professional musicians till towards the end of the sixteenth century. By that time composers had begun to feel that the flowing vocal style with its long-sustained tones and intricate counterpoint was not one best adapted for instrumental use. There began a drift toward emancipating instrumental music from this dependence, and a groping for a style that should give play to the peculiar aptitudes and characteristic expression of the keyed instruments. It was a very gradual and tentative movement.

The first clavier-music that showed a characteristic physiognomy consisted of arrangements of song and dances. In this direction composers found the line of least resistance in developing rhythmic, melodic and formal elements, that constituted so small a part of the contrapuntal choral music. New effects of brilliancy in the use of scales, passage-work and repeated notes were devised, to which the mechanism of the clavier especially lent itself.

The earliest attempts in the newer forms, in Germany and Italy, even by men whose names are important in the history of music, are so archaic in manner that they possess little more than an historic interest at the present day. In their crudest shape, such attempts date from about the middle of the fifteenth century. By the middle of the sixteenth, there had been a remarkable development of virginal-music, especially, in England; and there we see this branch of instrumental composition first take on form and substance.

Dance-forms, and melodies with ornate variations, are the chief materials with which the clavier-composers of this period worked. A great number of dance-