Nannette Streicher was born the sixth child of the famous piano and organ maker, Johann Andreas Stein (1728–1792) and Maria Regina Stein (née Burkhart) in Augsburg on 2 January 1769. She was baptised as Anna Maria.

The family were members of the protestant church or the Augsburg Confession [Confessio Augustana], which was put in place on 25 June 1530, by the parliament of Emperor Karl V, according to the laws laid down by the imperial protestant authorities.

From 1774 the Stein home and business, which included a piano studio, was located at No. 10 Maximilianplatz (still standing today), close to the Ulrichskirche (Hertz, 1937, p.38 and Schmid, 1998, p.188).

Stein taught his daughter himself and allowed her to perform in public from an early age. He remarked in his notebook: “My seven-year-old little girl played a piano concert at the H. [erren] Geschlechter Stube last Thursday, and the following Wednesday at the Kaufleuth concert (it was public); she played the introduction to her Rondo with such feeling and enthusiasm that most of the audience shouted: aha, that’s Stein’s daughter.” (Hertz, 1937, pp.13–14)

In the summer of 1777, father and daughter made a trip to Vienna, where Stein presented his latest invention. Andreas Streicher wrote: “Some years later, when he [Stein] made a journey to Vienna to present the enthusiasts with his new pianoforte (a particularly ingeniously constructed instrument, which by means of three keyboards combined the piano and the pianoforte and could be played by two people sitting opposite each other), he took his eight-year-old daughter with him and trained her to freely and easily point out the advantages of her father’s latest work before the highest aristocracy, musicians and unknown observers alike.” ([Andreas Streicher], 1833, here Col. 374) There are only two remaining specimens of Stein’s so-called ‘Poli-Toni-Clavichordium’, in which a harpsichord and a fortepiano are built, facing each other, into one instrument.

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During his stay in Vienna, Stein wrote to Mozart in Salzburg announcing a visit: “To Mozart. My admiration for you and your musical family grows daily and, since I find

Profile
Nannette Streicher was one of the most important piano makers of her time and one of the few early bourgeois entrepreneurs to achieve great success. She was also known to be a close confidant of Beethoven.
myself in Vienna, so strongly that it is on the brink of becoming something exceptional.” (Schmid, 1998, p.188) It was on this memorable trip to Salzburg that Nannette first met the then 21-year-old Mozart.

Her father made a significant contribution to the development of the fortepiano. He was able to fit the 'Tangentenflügel' [tangent piano] (in which the hammers were rigidly attached to the key levers) with a so-called ‘trigger’ that allowed the hammers to draw back immediately following the attack. This ‘Prellzungenmechanik’ was later developed into the Wiener Mechanik [Viennese action]. Mozart tried out this major breakthrough for himself during a visit to Augsburg between 11 and 26 October, 1777. He wrote to his father that the Stein pianos “dampen much better” and, referring to Nannette, noted that “she could become something; she possesses genius” (Mozart “Briefe und Aufzeichnungen”, in Bauer, 1962, pp. 68 and 83). He gave a concert in Augsburg on 22 October in which he played a Stein piano.

Nannette’s father trained her as a piano maker from an early age: “Since none of the older sisters showed as much musical talent as little Nannette; she showed such sweet devotion to her father and teacher on every occasion, and became so valuable that she had to be his constant companion and, even at the age of ten, he began to teach her to make various parts of the mechanism and with the friendliest enthusiasm, trained her to construct the keyboard, to tune and eventually, in the utter perfection of his pianos. At the same time, lessons in singing and piano playing were carried out with uninterrupted zeal, so that her playing grew more and more accomplished and through the most thorough knowledge of the mechanism, she learned to unlock the most beautiful tone. In fact, even distinguished musicians were not permitted to trial pianos until Nannette herself had drawn out the sound that she or her father had built into their instruments. Since no traveller, and certainly no musician of importance, made the journey through Augsburg without visiting the famous Mr Stein (who knew well how to promote his daughter and multi-talented student with pride), she developed a widespread reputation from an early age, which was only strengthened by their own travels.” (“Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung”, 1833, here Col. 374–375)

On 26 April 1787, the young Beethoven came to Augsburg on his way back from his first trip to Vienna (“Augsburg Intelligenzblatt”, 1787, p.76). He visited the famous pianist and composer Nanette Schaden (1763–1834) along with Nanette Stein and her family. She later told the doctor Karl Bursy “how the 12-year-old [recte: 16-year-old] boy gave a concert on the organ and would often improvise so wonderfully on her father’s instruments.” (Kopitz, 2009, Vol. 1, p.171) Thus began a friendship that lasted until Beethoven’s death.

The composer and musicologist Johann Friedrich Reichardt (1752–1814), who stayed in Augsburg on his way to Italy in 1789, described the creative atmosphere that prevailed in the Steiner home. Stein had built an unusual instrument especially for his daughter, which she mastered with the aid of several knee levers. Reichardt writes in a letter from Augsburg: “I have spent my day very musically, between Ms von Schaden – who is by far the greatest piano player of all the musical women I know, including the Parisians; yes, in skill and security possibly unsurpassed by any virtuoso; she also sings with great expression and performance, and is in every respect a pleasant, interesting woman - and the famous instrument maker Stein and his family. He has made his 17 or 18-year-old daughter a very original and beautiful Crescendo fortepiano, which she plays masterfully. The Crescendo emits sounds from the slightest breath to a thunderstorm, all which of which she controls with her knees. She has a complete orchestra under her two hands.” (“Musikalisches Wochenblatt”, 1793, Vol. 1, p.30)

Following Stein’s death in 1792, the 23-year old Nanette Stein took over her father’s business along with her almost 16-year old brother Matthäus Andreas (1776–1842), naming it ‘Frère et Soeur Stein’. Shortly before this, she had met her future husband, Andreas Streicher (1761–1833), who had been a childhood friend of Friedrich Schiller’s and, at that time, was a pianist and teacher in Munich. Like Nanette Stein, he belonged to the protestant church and the two soon began making plans for the future. On 10 September 1793, Nanette and her brother set off for Vienna, where, at the beginning of the following month, she was received by Emperor Franz I, who issued her with a permit to open a piano factory in Vienna. As Streicher wrote on 9 October, the Emperor added: “Well, how wonderful that you are here. We can help – we have good instrument makers here but not famous ones.” (Goebl-Streicher, 1999, p.72)
On 23 December, 1793, Nannette Stein and Andreas Streicher were married in Augsburg (Augsburg City Archives, Wedding Register, Volume 28, p.467) with the church ceremony following on 7 January, 1794 (Barfüßer Parish Augsburg, Wedding Book 1794, p.526). In the same year, the couple moved to Vienna together with Nannette’s brothers Matthäus Andreas and Friedrich Stein (1784-1809).

The first workshop in Vienna (where Andreas Streicher also worked) was located in a building called ‘Zur Roten Rose’ at 301 Landstraße. Around 1797 more spacious quarters were found in the ‘Goldspinnerhaus’ at 376 Landstraße and in April 1802 the business moved into their own premises in a building called ‘Zum heiligen Florian’ at 334 Ungargasse, which had been purchased by Andreas Streicher. This became the so-called ‘Alten Streicherhof’ that was torn down in 1959 (Goebl-Streicher, 1999, p.13).

By 1795 pianos from ‘Frère et Sœur Stein d’Augsbourg à Vienne’, as they were now known, enjoyed an excellent reputation and were compared with those of Anton Walter (1752–1826) and Johann von Schanz (c. 1762–1828) – two of the leading names on European market at the time. The Prague music author and art collector Johann Ferdinand von Schönfeld (1750–1821) remarked: “their instruments do not have the volume of a Walter, but they are unparalleled in the evenness of their tone, purity, acoustic beat [Schwebung], grace and gentleness” (Schönfeld, 1796, p.90).

Beethoven also testified to the high quality of the instruments in a letter to Andreas Streicher from 18 November 1796, in which he thanked Streicher for sending him a piano “that is truly admirable. Others would try to keep it to themselves, but I – and you will laugh at this – I would be lying if I did not tell you that it is too good for me. And why? Because it allows me the freedom to create my own sound” (Beethoven, in Brandenburg, 1996, p.33). Streicher had sent Beethoven the instrument especially for a concert that the composer gave in Pressburg on 23 November.

In the summer of 1802 Nanette Streicher parted ways with her brother and started her own business ‘Nanette Streicher nee Stein’, in which Andreas Streicher continued to work.

She built up a large network of distributors for her instruments, including Breitkopf & Härtel, who had exclusive sales rights for the region of Saxony. Other representatives for her instruments were Johann Anton André (1775–1842) and Philipp Carl Hoffmann (1789–1842) in Offenbach, Franz Lauska (1764–1825) in Berlin, Heinrich Friedrich Schütz in Weimar and an organist by the name of Völker in Reval (today Tallinn) (Goebl-Streicher, 1999, p.15).

Many of the pianos produced by Nanette Streicher were, unlike today, custom-made to the buyers’ exact requirements. Beethoven’s friend Carl Amenda (1771–1836), for example, ordered an instrument in 1806 on behalf of an acquaintance, which was to be out of walnut and with a range from low F to C4 “just like my own, which catches everyone's eye” (ibid., p.81). The famous Viennese pianist Dorothea von Ertmann (1781–1849) was just as particular. In an undated letter to Nanette Streicher, she ordered a mahogany instrument with a six-and-a-half octave, adding that the hammers should be covered with fine English leather (Sotheby’s London, Auction Catalogue from 21/22 May, 1987, No. 324).

The close friendship with Beethoven eventually began to have an impact on the construction of the Streicher pianos. In a letter from Vienna on 7 February, 1809, Johann Friedrich Reichardt wrote: “Streicher has abandoned the softness, the light action and repercussive rolling of the other Viennese instruments and, following Beethoven’s advice and wishes, given his instruments greater resistance and elasticity so that the virtuoso, who plays with power and presence, is more able to control the instrument, halting and carrying phrases, and in the finest of touches and deductions. He has given his instruments a broader and more varied character, so that they are, to every virtuoso who seeks more than just the light and shiny way of playing, more satisfying than any other. All of his work is of rare quality, elegance and longevity.” (Kopitz, 2009, Vol. 2, p.671)

In 1811 the Streicher building in Ungargasse was extended to include a piano studio and a concert hall, for which the couple had several busts of famous musicians made. One of these was the well-known Beethoven bust by Franz Klein (1777–1840), for which the sculptor made a plaster mask of Beethoven’s face.

The concert hall, which held more than 300 people, was
inaugurated on Thursday, 12 April, 1812, with a charity concert at which Beethoven’s student Archduke Rudolph (1788–1831) also appeared. The Viennese magazine “Der Sammler” gave a comprehensive account of this important event in the city’s musical history:

“Vienna. On the 16th of the month, the concert hall that was newly built in the home of the most praiseworthy professor of piano, Mr A. Streicher, was opened with a concert, which aroused great interest in its choice, as well as in its execution. The society of noble women dedicated the proceeds of the concert to the health and betterment of those affected with eye disease. The hall is rectangular in shape, at the upper end of which is the elevated place for the orchestra. The excellent effect hereby produced is the most striking proof that this room, from the point of view of acoustics, serves its purpose entirely. The auditorium can comfortably hold more than three hundred people and the décor on the walls is just as fitting as it is tasteful. The concert, which, with the except of the wind instruments, was played by complete amateurs under direction of the excellent violinist, Mr [Iganz] Schuppanzigh, included: 1) The overture to the Colline tragedy ‘Coriolan’, composed by Herr van Beethoven. This spirited piece could scarcely have been played with more fire, such precision or with such ensemble. 2) A great Italian aria by Zingarelli, sung by Fräulein v. Traunwieser. A sweet voice and an exceedingly sensitive performance was met with loud acclamation. 3) A piano concerto by [Jan Ladislaus] Dussek, played by Fräulein [Magdalena] v. Kurzböck. The fame that this dilettante according to her profession, but master according to her playing, has acquired in the musical world is too great and too widely known to warrant saying something in her praise. The greatest clarity combined with the most refined taste, along with the gift of playing not just the melodic parts with emotion, but giving every passage meaning, earned her universal admiration. 4) The beloved scene with Romeo at Juliet’s graveside from the opera by the same name [Recitative and Rondo “Ombra adorata aspetta” from Niccolò Zingarelli’s opera “Giulietta e Romeo”] sung with tender expression by Fräulein von Coubeau. In this piece, as well as in the previous aria, the Hoftheater-Kapellmeister, Mr [Adalbert] Gyrowetz took over at the piano. 5) A concerto for two pianos, once again by Mr Dussek (who passed away to soon) and performed by Fräulein [Fanny] v. Han and Frau [Henriette] v. Pereira nee v. Arnstein. It is impossible to determine which of these two ladies distingushed herself more by the grace, purity, and precision of her playing; it seemed utterly balanced; the precision with which they had rehearsed the various passages and the high degree of ensemble they achieved cannot be praised highly enough. It did not just seem like a single person, but like a single hand. A splendid chorus by Schuly [probably Joseph Szuly], sung without accompaniment by forty amateur mixed voices, was the conclusion to this enjoyable musical entertainment, which showed once again the extent and perfection to which the musical culture here has advanced. His imperial highness and greatly respected connoisseur and protector of the art of music, the Archduke Rudolph, a great number of the local high nobility and numerous guests from the most educated houses in the city, as well as several of the most distinguished local composers and musical artists, came together at this most excellent concert, to the great pleasure and perfect satisfaction of all present.” ("Der Sammler", 1812, p.194)

A few months later, the Leipziger “Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung” read: “The concert given at the home of Herr Streicher on the 16th of April, the proceeds of which went towards the blind and those with eye diseases, ignited the fervent wish for the friends of the arts, for whom Vienna offers such a considerable number of clear merits, to come together and form an official society that reinvigorates musical activity and, furthermore, strives to regain the [musical] fame that the imperial city had attained so long ago.” (“Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung”, 1812, pp. 851–854) From this wish, the ‘Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde’ was born and remains in existence today. Their first concert was held for an audience of approximately 5000 listeners at the Hofreitschule on 29 November 1812.

At the same time, the Streicher [concert] hall quickly developed into a central feature in Vienna’s musical life, becoming a popular destination also for visitors to the city. Count Henrich zu Stolberg-Wernigerode (1772–1854) reported a remarkable matinee on Saturday, 3 September 1814, in which only compositions by Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia (1772–1806) were performed and where his brother-in-law, Prince Anton Radziwill (1775–1833), played the cello: At 11 o’clock I went to a musical academy at Herr Streicher’s, a very respected piano teacher, whose wife, Nanette Streicher, is the daughter of the famous instrument maker Stein and head of a famous instrument factory. The factory, which operates under her
name, produces some of the most prized pianofortes made here. The audience was made up of true music lovers and so there was the most magnificent silence. The hall was decorated with the busts of famous pianists. Archduke Rudolph, Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia, Fräulein [Magdalena] Kurzböck, Frau [Henriette] v. Pereira, Fräulein [Fanny] Haan, Countess [Franziska] Mejean nee Spielmann, Nanette Streicher etc. also Haydn & Beethoven. First, Nanette Streicher and Mde Stein, her sister-in-law, played a double sonata for two fortepianos [!], then Fräulein Hahn with Herr Streicher one of the same, arranged for quartet, and finally a quartet with Fräulein Hahn on the fortepiano, Prinz Radziwil the cello, Seidel [= Carl August Seidler] from Berlin the violin along with a good viola player – all music by Prince Louis Ferdinand. The last two pieces were performed with excellent virtuosity, as Fräulein Hahn plays quite admirably. Good piano playing is so much the order of the day here, foreign virtuosos are seldom found. How much I would have liked to share this delight for the ears with my beloved father. These music academies are free of charge and are given out of pure love for music.” (Stolberg-Wernigerode, in Derdey, 2004, p.109–110) Andreas Streicher edited several works for two pianos by Louis Ferdinand, including the piano quartet in F minor op. 6, which is regarded as the short-lived composer’s most important work.

When Beethoven began to fight for guardianship of his nephew Karl in 1816, Nannette Streicher became an important support for him, helping him to run a half decent household. More than 60 letters to her from Beethoven survive from the years 1816 to 1818, almost all of which centre around domestic issues. They also contain, however, Beethoven’s confession that since 1809, he had “always specially favoured” her pianos (Beethoven, in Brandenburg, 1998, p.77).

In 1823 the son, Johann Baptist Streicher (1796–1871), joined the company as a shareholder. Strangely, Andreas Streicher never held shares in the business.

Over the years, the Streicher household was a meeting point for all things musical. The composer and conductor Franz Lachner (1803–1890), who first met Beethoven in the summer of 1824, writes about it in his memoirs: “One day I was alone there and sat next to Nanette Streicher at the piano, who was studying Beethoven’s great B major trio op. 97. Just as we reached the beginning of the last movement, Beethoven, on whose house-
Research

Aspects of Nanette Streicher's life and work have been presented in numerous publications based on the surviving sources. Particular mention should be made of publications by Uta Goeb-Streicher, owner of the Streicher Archive, which holds many of the letters addressed to Nanette and Andreas Streicher. An extensive monograph on the Streicher family is currently being put together by the Klagenfurt piano maker Alexander Langer.

Need for Research

A complete analysis and indexing of sources is still outstanding. An analysis of Nanette Streicher's instruments in the context of other important European piano makers would be of particular interest. The report on the symposium "Das Wiener Klavier bis 1850" (see literature) provides important foundations for this.

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