

# ADRIAN ALAN

*Fine Art & Antiques*



**François Linke**

## **An Important Gilt-Bronze Mounted Parquetry Inlaid Piano, the Movement by Erard**

Circa: French, Circa 1902

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101 x 138 x 214 cm (39 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 54 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 84 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches)

gilt-bronze and marquetry

Signed 'F.Linke' on the Keyboard Cover

An Important Gilt-Bronze Mounted Parquetry Inlaid Piano, by François Linke, the Movement by Erard.

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Signed 'Erard - Paris' on the Keyboard Cover

The soundboard signed 'Par Brevet d'Invention Seb & Pre Erard 13&21 Rue du Mail Paris'

This elegant Piano à Queue is a rare example of a small number of 'Art-Case' pianos made by the important ebeniste François Linke.

The movement has been professionally overhauled and the piano is in fine playing condition.

French, Circa 1900.

The firm of Erard were one of the most highly regarded instrument makers of the late Eighteenth and

Nineteenth centuries, flourishing from 1788 to about 1900 with showrooms in both Paris and London.

Sebastian Erard was born in Strasbourg on April 5th 1752 and moved to Paris in 1768. He was the inventor both of the double action harp, and the double escapement mechanism for pianos. His success as an instrument maker, widely recognised as being a genius at finding solutions to mechanical problems, caused envy among his rivals who accused him of working outside the corporation without a licence. As a sign of the quality of his work Louis XVI protected him and granted him a licence on his own authority.

In 1792 he relocated from Paris, opening in Great Marlborough Street, London, to escape the French Revolution - his increasing fame and several commissions for the likes of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette having placed him at risk. He left his brother Jean-Baptist to carry on the business in Paris. In 1802 the business moved to 189 Regent Street, then in 1804 moved to 158a New Bond Street London.

Returning to Paris in 1796, he soon afterwards introduced grand pianofortes, made in the English fashion, with improvements of his own. In 1808 he again returned to London, where, two years later, he produced his first double-movement harp. He had previously made various improvements in the manufacture of harps, but the new instrument was an immense advance upon anything he had before produced, and obtained such a reputation that for some time he devoted himself exclusively to its manufacture. It has been said that in the year following this invention he made harps to the value of £25,000.

In 1812 he returned to Paris, and continued to devote himself to the further perfecting of the two instruments. In 1823 he crowned his work by producing his model grand pianoforte with the double escapement.

Erard's grand piano action (English patent no 4,631, 1821) is the predecessor to those used in modern grands today, the repetition lever in these "double escapement" actions allows notes to be repeated more easily than in single actions. It is just one of many Érad innovations still found on modern pianos. Another was when Erard became the first maker in Paris to fit pedals on the piano. There was the usual sustaining pedal, an action shift, a celeste, and a bassoon pedal (which put leather against the strings to make them buzz). A knee lever moved the action further than the action-shift pedal, making the hammers strike only one string. Other Érad piano patents deal mainly with technicalities of the keyboard action, sound board, and tuning mechanism; virtually all of these innovations are retained in modern piano design.

The quality of Erard's pianos were also widely appreciated by the foremost musicians of the time, with Charles-Valentin Alkan, Beethoven, Chopin, Fauré, Haydn, Herz, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Moscheles, Verdi and Ravel being just a few of the famous composers who owned Erard Pianos.

### **Literature:**

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### **Artist description:**

François Linke (1855 - 1946) was the most important Parisian cabinet maker of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and possibly the most sought after cabinet maker of his period.

He was born in 1855 in the small village of Pankraz, in what is now the Czech Republic. Records show that Linke served an apprenticeship with the master cabinetmaker Neumann, then in 1875 at the age of 20 he arrived in Paris where he lived until he died in 1946.

It is known that the fledgling Linke workshops were active in Paris in the Faubourg St. Antoine as early as 1881, and during this time he supplied furniture for other more established makers such as Jansen and Krieger.

The quality of Linke's craftsmanship was unsurpassed by any of his contemporaries and reached its peak with his spectacular stand at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900, where his Grand Bureau took the gold medal. He gambled his fortune and reputation on this stand, exhibiting several breathtaking items of furniture with sculptural mounts of the most exceptional quality and proportion. His gamble worked and his reputation was established to such an extent that Linke continued to be the pre-eminent furniture house in Paris until the Second World War.

As the Art Journal reported in 1900 on Linke's stand:

The work of M. Linke ... was an example of what can be done by seeking inspiration amongst the classic examples of Louis XV and XVI without in any great sense copying these great works. M. Linke's work was original in the true sense of the word, and as such commended itself to the intelligent seeker after the really artistic things of the Exhibition. Wonderful talent was employed in producing the magnificent pieces of furniture displayed....

The formation of Linke's distinctive style was made possible by his collaboration with the sculptor Léon Messagé.

Together Linke and Messagé designed furniture for Linke's 1900 exhibition stand, with exuberant allegorical figures cast in high relief, that exemplified Linke's ability to seamlessly merge the different mediums of wood carving, bronze and marquetry into a dynamic unified whole.

Today Linke is best known for the exceptionally high quality of his work, as well as his individualism and inventiveness. All of his work has the finest, most lavish mounts, very often applied to comparatively simple carcasses of quarter veneered kingwood or tulipwood. The technical brilliance of his work and the artistic change that it represented were never to be repeated.