

Kumaya Art Museum Piano

Considered the oldest piano in Japan, this English square piano was made by William Rolfe & Sons of London and is thought to have been completed sometime between 1819 and April 10, 1820. The German physician and naturalist Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796–1866) brought the piano with him when he came to Japan in August 1823. Siebold took up residence at Dejima, Nagasaki, where he was employed by the Dutch East India Company as a physician. In 1826, when he traveled as part of the Dutch procession from Nagasaki to Edo to pay his respects to the Tokugawa shogun, he took with him a number of technological wonders from the West, including a microscope, a thermometer, a globe, and this piano. Siebold and Kumaya Goemon Yoshikazu (1795–1860) met in 1825 when Kumaya traveled to the Dutch settlement in Nagasaki for medical treatment. The two became friends during Kumaya's stay, and the following year Kumaya met Siebold at the Straits of Shimonoseki to express his thanks.

In 1828, Siebold was found to be illegally in possession of a map of Japan, and he was expelled from the country on suspicion of being a spy. Before he left, he entrusted his beloved piano to Oka Kenkai (1799–1839), one of his students in Nagasaki, to give to Yoshikazu as a reminder of their friendship. Siebold wrote a message on the inside of the piano in Dutch, saying “Tot gedachtenis aan mynen vriend Koemaja—Dr. von Siebold 1828” which translates, “To the memory of my friend, Kumaya—Dr. von Siebold 1828.”

The Siebold Piano, as it is also known, was rediscovered in one of the Kumaya family's storehouses in 1955. The following year, it was featured in the Mozart 200th anniversary celebrations in Tokyo. Thereafter, it was carefully evaluated for damage and repaired. The piano was returned to the Kumaya family in 1959 and was put on public display in 1965 with the opening of the Kumaya Art Museum. In 2009, the piano was restored for a second time by the Japan Piano Technicians Association (JPTA) and the Ono Piano Workshop.