

tastes in sound and music itself are still changing. Performance is also evolving, and I am sure that in the future we will see more digital and electronic elements, even in concert pianos. It already happens in the field of pop art, but there are a few classical musicians beginning to perform with 'MIDI-fied' pianos too.

In 2017 we introduced our digital *e*-volution system, which was a logical step that matured out of our digital piano division, namely a full digital piano built into a full acoustic piano. Amplification for the digital piano is through Bose speakers – we're not using a transducer on the soundboard, as we found that combining the two instruments produces soundwaves that cancel one another out.

**Do you also restore old Blüthner instruments?**

Restorations are a key part of our operations – it's a healthy business. The fact that we are able to maintain wonderful instruments built 100-plus years ago also plays an important role in affirming our brand credibility. For our staff, working with older instruments is an opportunity to learn about the development of Blüthner pianos. Sometimes we discover things that appear unnecessary, but removing them stops the piano from sounding right. In one instance, we discovered a tiny wooden nut screwed onto the bridge of an instrument.

Because the bridge had been glued, we decided to do away with the nut. The experiment wasn't a success when it came to playing the piano – so we had to replace the nut!

**What's the story behind your crystal piano series?**

There's a big demand for specially designed instruments. This is nothing new – it's something we've seen for centuries, from the earliest days of instrument-making. Piano cases can be an important feature of a living-room, and have always been considered something akin to a sculpture. While furniture comes and goes, the piano usually stays. If you buy a grand piano, you know it's likely that your grandchildren will inherit it. That's not generally something you would necessarily expect of a sofa!

**How many instruments do you build each year?**

Recent years have been very successful production-wise. For example, between 2016 and 2018 we increased production by 11 to 12 per cent. In 2017 we produced around 1,200 upright pianos and 600 grands.

Blüthner is one of the very few factories in Europe that has increased production in the past decade, mainly because we were quick to recognise the opportunities of globalisation. We entered

new markets in regions like Asia very early. We are also building concert halls, and have already opened three Blüthner halls in China – in Beijing, Qingdao and Guangzhou.

**When other factors prompted you to move into Asia?**

Germany used to have a very powerful piano industry, as did the UK. Now there are no piano manufacturers in Britain, nor in France, Switzerland, Poland or Russia. We have to ask ourselves

*Designer brand: Blüthner's white Rococo Louis XIV (below) and PH Grand (opposite, top right)*

