

Bösendorfer

Vienna was one of the great centres of piano making in the late 18th century. Instruments built in the Austrian capital during this period were celebrated for their light action and transparent sound, but developments in design and manufacturing during the 19th century saw many of the early Viennese makers fall by the wayside. Bösendorfer has deep roots in this tradition yet continues to thrive, admired for the painstaking workmanship and high-quality materials that go into their pianos.

Bösendorfer is among the oldest continuously operating piano brands in the world. The company was founded in 1828 by Ignaz Bösendorfer (1796-1859), who took over running the workshop of Joseph Brodmann after 14 years as his apprentice. Bösendorfer's pianos were soon being championed by the likes of Liszt and other leading composers of the day.

Ignaz was succeeded by his son Ludwig, whose business acumen took Bösendorfer to new heights. Under Ludwig's leadership, Bösendorfer introduced cross-stringing and heavier piano action technology at the end of the 19th century. He also opened Vienna's first Bösendorfer Hall, which played host to over 4,500 concerts between 1872 and 1913.

In 1900, Bösendorfer created a 97-key 'Imperial' concert grand for Ferruccio Busoni, who wanted an instrument with extended bass register for his arrangement of Bach's Passacaglia in C minor. This model is still manufactured today, along with the 92-key Bösendorfer 225 whose design dates from the same era.

Production was hit badly by the Great Depression and Second World War, resulting in the sale of Bösendorfer to the owner of American piano brand Kimball in 1966. The company briefly returned to Austrian ownership in 2002, when it was acquired by the country's fourth-largest bank, then sold to Yamaha in 2007.

Bösendorfer has benefitted significantly from Yamaha's expertise in design, technology, marketing and sales. In 2015, Bösendorfer

unveiled its 'next generation' Vienna Concert series that combines the company's traditional manufacturing methods with sophisticated scientific modelling. The 280VC has since been taken up by artists such as Sir Andrés Schiff, Daniil Trifonov and Louis Lortie. Other recent developments include the addition of Yamaha's Disklavier ENSPIRE player piano technology to the Bösendorfer range, plus a series of stunning art cases and collector's edition instruments.

CURRENT INSTRUMENTS

Acoustic pianos

The unique sound of Bösendorfer pianos still reflects the philosophy of the company's founder. As Jeremy Nicholas writes in *The Great Piano Makers: Ignaz Bösendorfer*

believed that the piano, usually categorised as a percussive instrument, was a member of the string family. He determined that every part of the piano should, like a violin, resonate to help produce the overall tone.' This is achieved in Bösendorfer grand pianos by connecting the soundboard to the rim, which emphasises the fundamentals of each string.

Since Yamaha's acquisition of the company, Bösendorfer's range has grown to encompass seven grand piano models and two uprights. Pricing starts at £33,236 for the Grand Upright 120, while the Vienna Concert instruments cost between £84,304 for the 170VC and £158,358 for the 280VC. The 290 Imperial has a price tag of £176,565. All models are available in a range of wood finishes to suit different interiors.



Bösendorfer's Concert Grand 290 Imperial (right) and Grand Upright 130 (opposite)