

'We wanted to stay true to the Bösendorfer tradition and its sound character on the one hand, but on the other hand we wanted to create an instrument that is ideal for today's artists and their demands,' Braeu continues. 'Often pianists don't have much time for preparation. Therefore, we wanted to create a concert grand which is easily accessible even for pianists who are not used to Bösendorfer, while also satisfying those pianists who have used them for many years.'

Sir Andrés Schiff is among these Bösendorfer stalwarts: in April 2016 he became the first pianist to perform in London on a 280VC, offering a series of concerts featuring the final sonatas by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert at Wigmore Hall on an instrument he had personally selected – apparently just the ninth that Bösendorfer had manufactured. Listening to his recital was a revelation: there seemed no limit to the colour and variety he could draw from the instrument. He created a subtly different soundworld for each composer: a lively yet mellow glitter for Haydn, operatic legato for Mozart, half-lit introversion for Schubert's B-flat Sonata D960 and a range for Beethoven's Sonata Op 111, traversing the entire spectrum from volcanic outbursts to the heights of ethereal purity.

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Schiff points out that Bösendorfer – which was founded in the year of Schubert's death, 1828 – is the sole survivor among Viennese piano makers of that time. 'The Bösendorfer 280VC concert grand piano is a magnificent instrument,' he declared in the programme for his Wigmore Hall series. 'It combines the quintessential Bösendorfer qualities – the singing tone, the rich bass and middle registers – with a very lively treble and reliable mechanics not usually associated with this brand. Thus it's a huge improvement on the earlier models.'

Louis Lortie also chose to perform on a 280VC for his spring 2016 recital at Wigmore Hall. 'I'm always very curious to try new pianos,' the Canadian pianist explains, 'because, as in every field, if there's no competition and one brand monopolises the market, I find that a very unhealthy situation.'

'I've always liked Bösendorfers,' he adds, 'but they often had issues with the action, which could be difficult. They were primarily made for the Germanic repertoire, so as soon as you tried to play fast repeated notes in, say, 20th-century French or Russian music, you could run into trouble. The action of their Vienna Concert instruments is much lighter and more multi-purpose, making them suited to a far wider range of repertoire.' **IP**

