



August Förster's 'Super Mondial' concert grand (above) and Model 134 K upright (opposite)

August Förster

August Förster may not be as well-known as some of the other brands in this guide, but they have a long history of making excellent handcrafted pianos that enjoy a loyal following. Leading composers who owned August Förster instruments include Richard Strauss, Prokofiev and Puccini, while among their more recent advocates are the British Messiaen specialist Peter Hill and Polish rising star Aleksandra Mikulska.

The company was founded by German cabinetmaker August Förster (1829-1897), who set up his first workshop in Löbau, Saxony on 1 April 1859. The business grew so quickly that within three years he was able to build a new factory on Jahnstrasse, near the edge of the old town. This site was refurbished in 2019 to mark the company's 160th anniversary.

Director Annekatrin Förster is part of the family's fifth generation at the helm of the company. She takes pride in the fact that their production methods have never changed, meaning that every August Förster piano is still entirely handmade. Today's workforce comprises 40 staff making 100 uprights and 60 grands per year.

The company has faced many ups and downs over the decades. Its first major challenge came in 1886 when a hike in Austrian sales duties prompted August Förster's son Cäsar to open a second factory in Bohemia. This branch was nationalised in 1945, resulting in the August Förster name being used by Czech piano maker Petrof for over half a century. Exclusive naming rights only returned to August Förster in 2005.

The early 20th century was a time of expansion and experimentation for the

company under the leadership of Cäsar's sons Gerhard and Manfred. They launched a quarter-tone grand piano with double keyboard in 1925, followed by a pioneering electric piano called the Elektrochord (1931-34).

Following the deaths of Manfred in 1952 and Gerhard in 1966, Manfred's son Wolfgang was unable to pay the necessary inheritance taxes, resulting in the East German government buying shares in August Förster. The company's Löbau plant was subsequently nationalised, making it very difficult to access foreign markets or purchase parts from abroad.

The fall of the Berlin Wall brought the return of private ownership, allowing Wolfgang to restructure and invest in the brand. His daughter Annekatrin took the reins in 2008 and says her aim is 'to preserve the location here in Löbau and retain the strong traditional environment of our factory, so our many