

Grotrian

Grotrian is another German piano maker with an illustrious history stretching back to the mid-19th century. A notable admirer of the company's early instruments was Clara Schumann, who performed solely on her own Grotrian piano from 1879 until her last public concert in 1891. Other luminaries who have favoured Grotrian include composers Paul Hindemith, Jean Françaix and Hans Werner Henze, plus performers such as Walter Gieseking, Garrick Ohlsson and Ivo Pogorelich.

Friedrich Grotrian was born in Germany in 1803 and spent the bulk of his career as a piano merchant in Moscow. He returned home in 1855 to become a partner in the family-run firm of Steinweg, then based in Wolfenbüttel, Saxony.

Most members of the Steinweg family emigrated to New York during the early 1850s, founding Steinway & Sons there in 1853 under their anglicised name. The eldest of the

Steinweg sons, C F Theodore, initially stayed behind to run the factory in Germany, but joined his family in America in 1865.

Meanwhile, Friedrich Grotrian had died in 1860 and was succeeded by his son Wilhelm. Following C F Theodore's departure for America, Wilhelm purchased his former business partner's share of the company and relocated it to nearby Braunschweig (Brunswick).

Wilhelm Grotrian's sons joined the business in 1895. They had both studied piano-making overseas and led improvements in the company's systems and standards that saw productivity grow to around 1,600 instruments per year by 1913.

Grotrian continued to expand its operations during the 1920s. Innovative projects from this period include the creation of a three-manual microtonal piano for the Russian avantgarde composer Ivan Wyschnegradsky. The fourth generation of Grotrian family members became partners in the company in 1926, by which point the Braunschweig factory was turning out 3,000 pianos annually. Hereafter, the company switched to using the hyphenated marque 'Grotrian-Steinweg'.

Production fell by more than three-quarters during the Depression of the 1930s, then temporarily ceased after the Grotrian factory was destroyed by bombing towards the end of the Second World War. Recovery was swift, however, and in the late 1940s Wilhelm Kempff wrote: 'It seems to me that the Grotrian grand piano has arisen from the ashes with new splendour as far as sonority and exquisite execution are concerned.'



Grotrian's G-277 grand piano (above) and G-132 upright (opposite)