

# C. Bechstein Pianoforte

**B**echstein is one of the great German piano builders founded in the era of the Romantic virtuoso. The company was established in 1853 by Carl Bechstein, who spent a year learning his craft in France before setting up shop in Berlin. He built powerful instruments that met the needs of artists such as Liszt, whose B minor Sonata was premiered on the first Bechstein grand by Hans von Bülow.

By the 1870s, Bechstein was producing nearly 5,000 pianos a year, and had become the instrument of choice for leading composers such as Grieg, Brahms and Debussy. As Jeremy Nicholas writes in *The Great Piano Makers*, 'from the 1870s until the outbreak of the First World War, a Bechstein was, arguably, the finest piano in the world'. The roll call of Bechstein devotees from this era includes Busoni, Scriabin, Bartók, Ravel, Richard Strauss, Edwin Fischer, Wilhelm Backhaus and Tobias Matthay.

The company's fortunes were badly affected by the two world wars. Bechstein Hall in London was confiscated in 1917 and subsequently renamed Wigmore Hall, while Allied bombing of Berlin towards the end the Second World War left the Bechstein factory in ruins. Stringent denazification measures prompted by the family's friendship with Hitler saw the company pass into US government hands until 1951. Postwar production fell to a low ebb and Bechstein was acquired by America's Baldwin company in 1963.

German entrepreneur and master piano-maker Karl Schulze took the helm when Baldwin filed for bankruptcy in 1986. He immediately embarked on an expansion programme with the opening of a new Berlin factory in 1988. Four years later Bechstein acquired the Zimmermann and W Hoffmann brands along with their factory in Seiffhennersdorf, Saxony. The company's third European factory was opened in 2007 in the Czech Republic.

Under Schulze's leadership, Bechstein invested heavily in new technology and quality control, updating their designs and manufacturing methods across the board. They now boast dozens of retail outlets around the world, including dedicated C. Bechstein Centres in Paris and Beijing. Schulze was replaced as CEO by Stefan Freymuth in 2017 but continues to serve the company in an advisory capacity.

Bechstein works with many of today's leading artists on a non-exclusive basis. Pianists who have performed or recorded on Bechstein instruments include Pierre Laurent-Aimard, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Jonathan Biss, Federico Colli, Lise de la Salle, Benjamin Grosvenor, Pavel Kolesnikov, Igor Levit and Steven Osborne.

## CURRENT INSTRUMENTS

### Acoustic pianos

Bechstein pianos have long been admired for their smooth touch and warm, mellow sound. Significant research and development have gone into retaining these qualities while increasing the power of C. Bechstein instruments for today's artists and venues. The resulting range features two strands – C. Bechstein Concert and C. Bechstein Academy – with a total of 10 grand and 11 upright models manufactured in Germany. C. Bechstein models B, C and D have a cast iron bell fixed under the treble register, generating harmonic partials that enhance the timbre of these instruments.



*C Bechstein Concert series models D282 grand and Concert 8 upright*