

STEINGRAEBER & SÖHNE



Softly, softly

Steingraeber & Söhne is Germany's leading boutique piano brand, combining tradition and innovation in instruments that boast unique tonal qualities – particularly when it comes to playing pianissimo. **Owen Mortimer** travelled to Bayreuth to meet company director Udo Schmidt-Steingraeber

Steingraeber is a family business with deep roots in tradition. What core values have sustained the company through the ages?

The Steingraeber philosophy is quite simple: we are defined by our clients, our staff and our location – these give rise to our musical standards and specific ideas of what a top-notch piano should be in terms of touch and tone.

All generations of the Steingraeber family have maintained the very highest standards of craftsmanship. Since 1876, when Wagner launched his Bayreuther Festspiele, we have enjoyed close links with composers, chamber musicians, singers and pianists – including Franz Liszt. This makes Steingraeber different from other piano makers.

The succession plans put in place by my father came with a warning: 'In the piano business you'll have a lot of stress, very little free time and a lower income than

other professions.' As a result, I tried my hand at several other subjects when I was a student in Munich, finally graduating in law; but I never lost my love of the family business. When my father died unexpectedly in 1980, I left Munich and took over the company. I was in no doubt that we should continue producing instruments with our small group of brilliant master technicians, but I also wanted to add something new. I felt that it was not sufficient to be a top-notch manufacturer. As one of the smallest companies in this field we have to have our own character and offer something different.

Liszt and Wagner were both early patrons of the company. How important is this association to the Steingraeber brand today?

Liszt and Wagner are a part of the legacy of Bayreuth and both are extremely important for Steingraeber. Thanks to the Wagner festival, Bayreuth has become a centre for