

pianissimo – I am responsible for the forte.’ Without singing tones, which are made up of ‘shadows, colours and contrast’ (Horowitz), a musical interpretation is unimaginable. This does not mean Steingraeber pianos have no percussive registers, but we aim to offer a wider dynamic range than many of our colleagues.

For me, music should contain as much drama as theatre or opera: love can be expressed through all kinds of beautiful sounds, but there is also murder, which calls for contrast and harsh sounds. A good piano must therefore be capable of producing ugly and unpleasant sounds – not unexpectedly, but when the artist calls for them.

How would you describe the ‘Steingraeber sound’, and how does it differ from instruments made in other piano manufacturing centres?

Our colleagues in Hamburg, Berlin and Vienna are representatives of a great history in piano making. The roots of their design and construction date back to the late 19th century, and they are justifiably considered as top-notch. Yet they are copied by many other piano manufacturers today – so why should we join the club of the imitators? Steingraeber is even older than these colleagues, and we prefer to focus on renewing our own character. The thick orchestral tone of the late 19th century still dominates our colleagues’ pianos today, and that leaves a lot of space for us to think differently.

Our approach draws more from the epoch of Viennese Classicism, with the lightness and intensity that we hear

in instruments by Graf, Streicher or Schätzel. We also wish to include the colourful delights of an Erard, Pleyel or Boisselot from the Liszt-Chopin era in Paris. All these intimate qualities were lost in the ‘Think Big Period’ towards the end of the 19th century.

In 2006, the Paris Opera hosted an event at which 11 different grand pianos were tested and compared. The judges declared that ‘it is hard to find a better piano for the interpretation of Bach, Mozart and Beethoven than the Steingraeber E-272’. We are proud of this verdict, but would like to add that Steingraeber pianos are also capable of producing the percussive registers necessary for Stravinsky, Cage or Stockhausen!

Which well-known artists have performed and recorded on Steingraeber instruments? Is it important for you to have your own brand ambassadors?

Kit Armstrong owns a Steingraeber for concerts at his local church in Hirson, France, and Martin Stadtfeld has recorded several albums with a Steingraeber Sordino piano. I could mention many more young performers.

Among outstanding artists from the previous generation, Edith Fischer, Alfred Brendel and Cyprien Katsaris liked to perform on Steingraeber pianos. Earlier, we worked with Wilhelm Kempff, Alfred Cortot – and of course Franz Liszt, whose last piano was a Steingraeber.

In the old days, pianists would select different pianos that suited the repertoire they were playing. This open-minded approach to different brands is now returning: there are fewer and fewer artists who are focused on only one brand, because they realise that 300 years of piano history with hundreds of composers and thousands of works written in all kinds of styles need more than one kind of sound.

For us, as a small manufacturer, it is very important to have outstanding artists appraising our pianos and encouraging concert halls to offer Steingraeber & Söhne alongside other leading brands.

What is your vision for the future? Are there any new Steingraeber designs or technologies in the pipeline?

The first and most important vision for my wife Delia and myself is the next generation: our son Alban (26) has joined the company, and his sister Fanny (23) loves taking part in music fairs worldwide. They are already Steingraeber shareholders and have their own ideas for the future.

New technologies are *always* in our pipeline. One of our most recent projects was the creation of a Steingraeber D-232 Transducer Piano, developed in partnership with IRCAM in Paris, the SWR studio for experimental music, Freiburg, and the Music University of Vienna. Features of this computer-controlled instrument include alternative tunings, additional registers and stunning new sounds. Our aim is to renew the piano for each generation – again and again! **IP**

*Brand ambassadors:
Kit Armstrong and
Alfred Brendel at the
Mozartfest Würzburg*



FOTO: VAN LOON