

HISTORY OF THE GROTRIAN PIANO COMPANY

Georg Friedrich Karl Grotrian, born in 1803 in Schöningen, Germany, was the founder of the piano building tradition of the Grotrian family. In 1830, he lived in Moscow and operated a successful music business which manufactured and sold pianos, a symbol of cultural status at the time. After twenty-five years, now a successful businessman, Friedrich returned to his homeland in 1854 to manage an inheritance he received from his uncle. He became a partner in a small manufacturing firm, founded nearby in 1835. This young partnership moved from Wolfenbüttel, just outside Braunschweig, to the old Patrician house on Bohlweg they had purchased in Braunschweig. The company and its staff grew quickly to meet the demand for their high-quality instruments. Friedrich Grotrian died in 1860, and his son Wilhelm took over his father's share of the business. In 1865 the Grotrian family became the sole proprietor of the business, and remains so to this day.

Because of the high standards of quality, which became a Grotrian trademark very early, many European dynasties appointed the Grotrian instruments as their official court suppliers. Medals and orders of merit bestowed upon Grotrian by royalty reflect these many honors, as do the family's guest books in which renowned artists, pianists and composers express their indebtedness to the family and their instruments.

In 1885, Wilhelm Grotrian welcomed his two sons Kurt and Willi into the business with the following words of advice: "Lads", he said, "build good pianos and everything else will take care of itself". The turn of the century brought with it a wealth of important innovations in the art of piano building. Most of these innovations were introduced and patented by the Grotrian family.

Examples of Grotrian's new designs were grand piano construction featuring an elegant cast-iron frame securely screwed to the outer edges of the rim, allowing the soundboard area within to freely vibrate. The homogenous soundboard, another Grotrian design breakthrough, enabled the individual pieces of wood which comprise the soundboard to be tonally matched, resulting in perfectly balanced sound production. And the legendary upright piano model 120, a Grotrian hallmark, featured a full-sized, U-shaped, cast-iron frame and radial-braced back construction, providing an instrument of more manageable proportions yet exceedingly stable in terms of tuning stability and overall durability. Dr. Kurt Grotrian's sons Erwin and Helmut maintained these traditions following Kurt's death in 1929. The results of these pioneering efforts extend to the present day, and account for Grotrian's consistent superiority in the field.

During the Second World War, almost the entire factory on Zimmerstrasse in Braunschweig, as well as the founding father's Patrician house on Bohlweg, fell victim to bombing raids. It was not until 1948 that production could be resumed and an attempt made to rekindle the embers of a noble tradition. A letter from the great pianist Wilhelm Kempff shows just how well this rebirth succeeded. In 1951, he wrote from Sao Paulo, Brazil: "It seems to me that the Grotrian grand piano has arisen from the ashes with new splendor as far as sonority and exquisite execution are concerned."

The Grotrian family assumes a responsibility for piano building that has both artistic and pedagogic dimensions. Not only content with manufacturing grand and upright pianos of the highest possible standards of quality and excellence, they pursue a further role involving the participation and encouragement of aspiring young musicians. In 1954, working in close cooperation with music pedagogues and many recognized music personalities, Grotrian held its first piano competition. This competition developed into an institution of the highest prestige and worldwide significance. Once again, Grotrian's pioneering spirit introduced and established new methods to attain excellence. In this example, emerging talent was given the opportunity to excel, and was encouraged to make the first steps toward a successful career in the field of music.

In 1974, under the general direction of Helmut's son Knut, the family moved into a new factory on Grotrianstrasse in Braunschweig, its present location. It is one of the most modern piano building facilities in the world, combining modern technology with the expertise that could only have been accrued through 170 years of experience in the handiwork of the true art of piano making. Today, it is in the hands of Erwin's daughters, the fifth generation of Friedrich Karl Grotrian, and is being managed by Mr. Burkhard Stem. This living tradition guarantees that Grotrian instruments will endure into the future and continue to belong to that very small circle of piano-makers who have achieved greatness in the art of piano making by transforming noble ideals of sound and quality into reality.

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