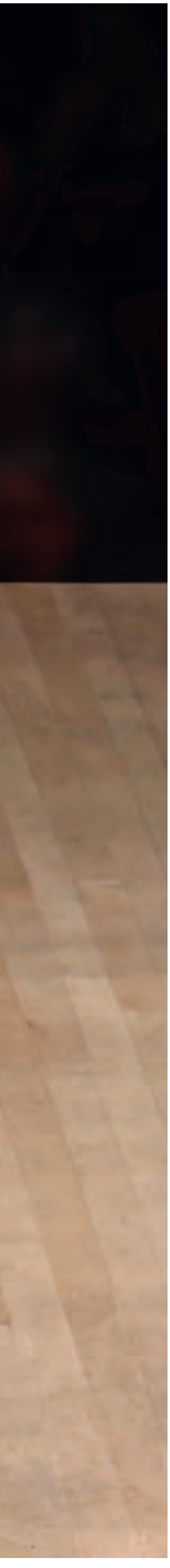

STEINWAY & SONS
OWNERS' MAGAZINE
2024/25



YUJA WANG

On stage, she has the dazzling presence of a classical soloist. She likes to challenge convention, but mostly she likes to challenge herself. And the piano. She incessantly explores the globe as one of the world's most sought-after performers – she never stays in her comfort zone, always expanding her repertoire. Pushing herself to do justice to the music. Liberating the soul of the composer. **In her own peerless way.**

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Editor in Chief Ben Finane
Art Director Jackie Fugere
Associate Art Director Kristen Male
Contributing Writers Gerrit Glaner, Heather R. Johnson, Laura Lee Smith

Publisher Eric Feidner
CEO Ben Steiner

European & RoW Advertising Sales
AXEEON
Email marketing@axeeon.com

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IMPROVEMENT

THE STEINWAY & SONS NOÉ Limited Edition that graces our cover stands as a symphony of design and craftsmanship (page 60). The curved lines of designer Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance's instrument yield a dynamic silhouette and embody a sublime marriage of aesthetic and artisanal.

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Regular practice is a fundamental aspect of becoming a proficient pianist. But how do great artists, both living and immortal, tackle this time-consuming and physically demanding necessity while performing, touring, recording, and teaching? We surveyed Steinway Artists to find out (page 72).

For deeper dives with artists, our Editor in Chief was in residence at the Big Ears Festival in Knoxville, Tennessee, where Steinway is the official piano. Share in his gleaned wisdom from Steinway Artists John Paul Jones (page 44) and Jason Moran (page 30), as well as bassist Christian McBride (page 38), whose wife Melissa Walker directs the Steinway–sponsored organization Jazz House Kids.

Elsewhere in this issue, we peer in on the William Steinway diary, a time capsule for the ages (page 66), and discover a pianist who recovered from a stroke with the help of Beethoven (page 20). Víkingur Ólfasson delivers a live Spiriocast from Elbphilharmonie Hamburg. We revisit Leonard Bernstein's connection to the company (page 78), and we bid adieu to legendary Steinway Artist Maurizio Pollini (page 84).

Steinway Owners' Magazine is published annually, but if you would like to hear from us more often, visit Steinway.com and register to receive our monthly newsletter.

Best,

BEN STEINER
CEO

CHRIS LEE

LISTEN UP

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A CELEBRATION OF LIGHT AND SOUND

The Noé Limited Edition is the result of the collaboration with the French designer Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance and features elegant, flowing shapes and an extraordinary colour concept.

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In the European culture, flowers stand for the expression of friendliness, warmth, trust and affection. Our MEISSEN artist Lena Hensel also dealt with the great importance of flowers for her decor development "Giant Bloom". Together with our porcelain painters, a wide variety of floral decors were created, which bring spring and summer to the home table with their colours.

Flowers have always been an important expression of friendliness, warmth, trust and affection in the European culture. Thus, they are magnificently decorated on the table for a wide variety of occasions, given away with meaningful gestures or placed in the home interior as statement pieces - and always trigger positive emotions on the viewer.

Our MEISSEN artist Lena Hensel also has a great passion for flowers and therefore dealt with the meaning of flowers in her decor development "Giant Bloom". She was able to skillfully combine her great enthusiasm and expertise for colours and their numerous symbols and effects with the world of flowers.

Together with our porcelain painters in a period of almost 12 months, a wide variety of floral decors were created, which bring spring and summer to the home table with their colours. The painting style, colour scheme and composition on the porcelain were discussed and tried again and again, until the traditional genre of flower painting at MEISSEN was continued in bright colours and a modern way with "Giant Bloom".

The model was the "Giant Bloom" vase of the Limited Masterpieces, which with its large-scale paintings is already causing great enthusiasm among lovers and collectors of Meissen porcelain. The new interpretation for table and dining, experiences space for free development on the modern service form "MEISSEN® Cosmopolitan". The various types of flowers are skillfully staged by hand painting on the wide "MEISSEN® Cosmopolitan" plate rim. Complementary Home Deco vases make the table arrangement perfect.

As a complement to the flowering hand painting, two new mesh decors have been developed especially for "Giant Bloom", pastel green and blue, which can also be combined with other decors from the "MEISSEN® Cosmopolitan" series. For our designer Lena Hensel, the "Giant Bloom" service once again stands for the valuable collaboration and constant exchange with the manufactories experienced porcelain painters. From the large-scale and expressive painting of the Limited Masterpieces vase "Giant Bloom" to the spring-like and pastel-coloured service of the same name, the interdisciplinary interaction of various departments and experts was essential. The new development of a decor, based on the traditional flower painting of MEISSEN, shows the decor evolution from the imposing lidded vase to the table service. An experience that Lena repeatedly shows the unique craftsmanship and innovative strength MEISSEN embodies with all of its artists. Go on a very personal journey with the new "Giant Bloom" service and bring spring and the exquisite handicrafts of the manufactory to your home table.

From tiger lily and Iceland poppy, to gerbera and hibiscus, to peony and peach blossom - Not only the style of flower painting, the delicate colouring and inspiring detailed views break new ground, but also the selection of the 11 motifs was based on extraordinary blossoms. What they all have in common is the depth of colour, liveliness and expressiveness, which is the result of an elaborate painting technique with a perforated plate that has been perfected over many years. This demonstrates once again hand painting as a special cultural asset and the meticulous craftsmanship of the Meissen manufactory.

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Variations of Healing

With Diabelli Variations as his North Star, pianist Haskell Small fully recovered from stroke.

HEATHER R. JOHNSON

BEETHOVEN'S DIABELLI VARIATIONS, Op. 120, is a professional goal for many classical pianists. Technically demanding, with a full range of dynamics, tempos, and emotions, it ranks with Bach's Goldberg Variations as one of the more admired piano works written.

In 2023, Washington, D.C.–based pianist and composer Haskell Small crossed the magnum opus off his bucket list, playing a series of house concerts and small venues around the northeast. Small potatoes compared to other grand stages he had graced throughout his fifty-year career. But for Small, these intimate performances trumped any marquee event. They marked a profound comeback that surprised nearly everyone but the performer himself.

Two years prior in February 2021, Small had suffered a severe hemorrhagic stroke that paralyzed his left side. About forty percent of people who suffer this type of stroke die within a month. "Within a week, he was determined to learn one of the most difficult pieces in all of the repertoire," said his wife, Betsy Small, in the forthcoming documentary *Small Steps* by Christopher McGuiness. And yet, "in the hospital, we applauded when he was able to move one finger of his left hand. It was a moment of victory," she said.

"It was a lifelong dream of his to play the Diabelli Variations," said his daughter Sarah Small, a creative professional who lives in Brooklyn, New York. "This became his focus and motivation for recovery."

Haskell Small is one of a few professional pianists to experience a major stroke. *JAMA Neurology* published a case study of a sixty-three-year-old pianist who regained use of his left hand six months post-stroke.

Among celebrated pianists, both Anton Kuerti and Stephen Kovacevich suffered near-fatal strokes, according to a *Washington Post* article. Kuerti has not performed publicly since. Kovacevich, however, "could hardly speak" after his 2008 stroke, but played a Beethoven piece two weeks later. "It wasn't perfect, but it was good," he said. "And then I played an extremely good recital in New York a few months later."

In between the major stroke and a presumed transient ischemic attack (TIA), aka mini stroke, which he experienced about a year later, Kovacevich performed Diabelli Variations — his first recording of the piece since 1969. What is it about this late-Beethoven composition that prompted Kovacevich to record the piece a second time, and prompted Small to use it as a goal for recovery?

"It's an amazing piece of piano writing," said Kovacevich. "It goes from a very loud and very thunderous fugue to — in three or four bars — a series of chords that transitions into what I call a celestial minuet. It's one of the great pieces in piano literature. And one of the incentives to play the piece is because, if you pull it off, you really give and do something that isn't often the case."

STARTING AT STEP ONE

Small would need both hands to achieve his goal. He was only halfway there. In hopes of regaining use of his upper-left limb, he sought out Jan Dommerholt, PT, DPT, MPS, president and owner of Bethesda Physiocare in Maryland.

Dommerholt is a former clarinet and saxophone player who specializes in diagnosing and treating musicians

‘THERE IS HOPE AS LONG AS YOU ARE WILLING TO WORK, TO BE POSITIVE, TO EXERCISE THE POSSIBILITIES THAT EXIST.’ —HASKELL SMALL

with musculoskeletal problems. He has completed coursework in performing artist disorders and biomechanical trauma and is considered an expert in myofascial and chronic pain.

Haskell had limited use of his left leg and no left-hand function when he showed up to Dommerholt’s office. With Betsy steadying him, Haskell asked, “can you help me play piano again?”

Dommerholt said his first thought was “No way.”

But education taught him of the brain’s untapped potential and the body’s capacity to heal. Experience showed him that musicians tend to understand the value of practice, of working on a problem for hours until it’s solved. In other words, they’re good students. And they don’t give up easily.

“Piano was his life,” said Sarah Small. “He loved his family for sure, but his piano, this was a very specific kind of love. He cared about every single note — every note, and the spaces in between.”

Dommerholt recognized that passion in Haskell Small. The stroke may have damaged some brain connections, but it didn’t erode his love for music. “I saw the desperate look in his eyes, and said, ‘let’s go to the piano.’ He had to pick up his left hand and put it on the keyboard,” said Dommerholt. “And then it fell off. That’s where we started.”

BUILDING A REPERTOIRE

A concert pianist and composer since the 1970s, Small’s experience ran deep and wide.

His repertoire ranged from Baroque to contemporary music. His discography includes about a dozen of his own compositions as well as J.S. Bach’s Goldberg Variations, Federico Mompou’s Musica Callada, and a George Gershwin collection titled *In Black and White.*

Small developed his skills at San Francisco Conservatory of Music and Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh. That’s where he met Betsy, a creative writing major who played acoustic guitar. She would go on to become an accomplished lutenist and author. “I loved his playing, and so did other people,” she said. “But it never occurred to me that he would have such a successful career as a concert pianist.”

At Carnegie Mellon, Small studied piano with Harry Franklin and composition with Roland Leich. He also studied with William Masselos and Steinway Immortal Leon Fleisher — who, at age thirty-six, lost use of his right hand due to a neurological condition called focal dystonia (and ultimately would heroically return to two-handed concert repertoire in 1995).

Small told *The Beacon* that Fleisher’s drive to continue playing and composing inspired him to keep playing. “I had no interest in becoming known as a right-hand pianist!” he told the paper in 2022. He did, however, compose and perform some right-hand pieces. He transcribed Scarlatti’s Keyboard Sonata in C Major (K. 159, Longo 104), Schubert’s Impromptu in G-flat (Op. 90, No. 3), and Bach’s Cello Suite No. 6, for the right hand. In 2023, he performed these pieces live on a tour titled “A Celebration of Healing.”

The spaces in between.
‘Can you help me play piano again?’ Haskell asked.

He also performed an original composition, “Diary of a Stroke: The Adventures of Herb and Pete.” Titled after pet names he gave his left hand and foot, the piece aims to recreate the mood swings and fatigue that followed Small’s stroke. In the “rehab” portion, he expresses the anger and frustration of a slow recovery, while Herb and Pete interject a playful tone throughout.

In 1984, Small joined then-new Washington Conservatory of Music to teach piano and composition. Sarah Small described him as a present, patient instructor, who supported his students’ creative visions.

PHOTOS OF HASKELL BY SARAH SMALL

"I've heard from his students that he was pretty amazing in this way, very present," she said. "When he critiqued my compositions, he inspired new ideas in me and helped my music and confidence flourish, while having fun and openly exploring within my intended musical language."

PLAYING WITH MIRRORS

Haskell Small's therapy was "unusual" compared to standard physical therapy exercises, like isometrics and stretching, Dommerholt said. Rather than strengthen weak muscles or break up adhesions, Dommerholt's goal was to get new parts of Haskell Small's brain to assume control of his left hand and foot.

During their first therapy session, Dommerholt taught Small a technique called mirror therapy. Originally designed for amputees with phantom limb pain, the technique involves placing an angled mirror beside the functioning limb. In this case, Small would watch his working right hand in the mirror, keeping his left hand out of sight.

"As he sees his right hand moving, the brain gets tricked into believing the left hand is moving," said Dommerholt. "The idea is that by seeing a replica of his left hand, the brain cells rewire and develop new pathways that make the hand function."

By the second visit, he could move his left hand — only a little at first, but he improved dramatically by each visit. Dommerholt credits the improvement to his dogged persistence and the ingrained habit of practice, practice, practice.

"He was willing to study hard, and he never gave up," he said. "Every time I saw him, he could do more."

Within two months, Small was playing fairly well. Dommerholt made the mirror therapy more challenging by incorporating a type of symmetrical


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inversion. He asked Small to play C–E–G with his right hand and name what he would play with his left. "He could do it without much difficulty," Dommerholt said.

Dommerholt also used lateralization, a technique that helps the brain regain the concept of left and right. For this, Small used an app that presented various hand images. The app timed how long it took Small to identify whether the image was of a right hand or left. "He walked out of the clinic energized," Dommerholt said. "He never stopped."

Within a matter of months, Small progressed to piano exercises. First, Small played the same measures with his right and left hands; next, the left played the opposite of what the right hand played. These tasks helped improve control and function, as well as helped strengthen the mind-body-instrument connection.

When he advanced to playing full compositions, Dommerholt recommended Small play new works. "Learning a repertoire is a high-level activity that creates deep patterns in the brain," he said. "After Hal's stroke, those patterns no longer existed." Small's new works included his one-handed compositions and the Diabelli Variations.

RETURN TO THE STAGE

On November 4, 2023 at the American Philosophical Society's Benjamin Franklin Hall Philadelphia, Small gave his public debut of Diabelli Variations. It wasn't perfect, but the arc — from delicate to forceful — was there.

A few missed notes aside, his playing marked a 360–degree turn from two-and-a-half years prior, when only five fingers cooperated.

As he performed around the DC area; Chicago; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Small's skills continued to improve. In May 2024, he performed at the Washington Conservatory Recital Room in Glen Echo, Maryland.

"That was one of his best concerts," said his daughter Rachel Small, PhD, a therapist and clinical psychologist who recently relocated from New York to DC. "It was so full emotionally. The music was moving through him, and he was amplifying the piece through his emotions. There were a lot of tears in the room. He was crying as he was bowing. It was a beautiful occasion."

"He still lacked some sensation in his left side, but he was able to train his fingers to do what they needed to do," said Betsy Small. "I hung in there with him and he got there."

THE POWER OF BELIEF

Dommerholt attended one of Haskell Small's first post-recovery house concerts, in DC. Not long before, the skilled therapist doubted whether his patient would achieve his desired outcome. But sitting in the audience, he saw the result of Small's vision, tenacity, and faith.

"Before the show, he said, 'What helped me the most is you believed in me,'" Dommerholt said. "That was such a strong message for me, that that was what he needed."

On June 5, 2024, Haskell Small was scheduled to perform Diabelli Variations at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall. It was not to be. A few days prior, Small died due to complications from prostate cancer surgery. He was seventy-five. He leaves a legacy of music; a creative and loving family; and inspiration for stroke survivors and anyone faced with adversity.

"Do not give up hope," he said at the end of *Small Steps*. "There is life after life. There is hope as long as you are willing to work, to be positive, to exercise the possibilities that exist. You are capable of getting through this — not just getting through it, but of becoming a better person." ▬

GOLDBERG VARIATIONS MAKE HISTORY… *AGAIN*

Víkingur Ólafsson closes out season with a Bach Spiriocast.

Bach for all. Víkingur Ólafsson performs Bach's Goldberg Varaio a live Spiriocast from the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg.

IN AN UNPRECEDENTED global event that transcended both time and place, Steinway Artist Víkingur Ólafsson recently performed J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations* live in front of a rapt audience in Elbphilharmonie Hamburg. And in London. And in New York, Amsterdam, Madrid, and countless other places in the world.

This through the magic of Steinway Spiriocast, a revolutionary software that allows the broadcast of live performances, both music and video, from one Steinway & Sons Spirio piano to one or numerous Spirio pianos in real time — no matter where in the world this might be.

The *Goldberg Variations* performance, the penultimate concert in Ólafsson's ten-month concert tour, marked the first-ever live Spiriocast concert from the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, and it also marked the end of a long journey for Ólafsson, who dedicated an entire season to the *Variations*, performing this monumental work eighty-eight times over ten months across the globe.

Ólafsson explains the goals of his work, the discoveries he made, and how it feels to make history with Spiriocast.

Why Bach? Why the *Goldberg Variations*? And how has the work been received on tour?

It's been a privilege to witness how people respond to Bach. At the start of the tour, I said this was the greatest keyboard work of all time. Now, I'd refine that to say it's the greatest musical work of all time. There is no end. There are only new beginnings. The cyclical nature of the *Goldberg Variations* is fascinating; after finishing one performance, you're ready for the next cycle. To stop that cycle feels almost unnatural.

Bach demonstrated how much can be created from so little. For example, the simple chords that form the foundation of the *Aria* allow for boundless creativity. I envision this music as a solar system, where the *Aria* is the sun, and each of the thirty variations represents a planet, each with its own logic. They all gravitate towards the *Aria*, but what Bach reveals is not just their interconnection, but the imaginative possibilities within a framework.

It's astonishing that this piece was written for two people: a man who wanted to fall asleep and a fourteen-year-old student, Goldberg. Today, I've performed it for over two hundred thousand people, and the demand for Bach has never been greater.

Can there still be new discoveries in Bach?

When you embark on a project like performing the *Goldberg Variations* for ten months straight, traveling the world, you go into the unexpected. Before the tour, I wondered how I would feel at its

ns in

end. Would I grow tired of the material? Is it possible to continue discovering new things in the *Goldberg Variations* with each performance? My goal was to remain curious and inventive, avoiding repetition. I aimed to create variations on the variations through interpretation and performance, and to get to know the world in a different way. Since I was travelling all the time, I needed one piece to bring to all these great venues and different pianos, to have the same yardstick to understand the acoustics and connect with different cultures and see the way people from all over would react to Bach.

The composer's voice has crossed the centuries. And now we find it can cross the oceans, as well, with the new technology in Spirio. What do you think Bach would have thought of these advances?

Bach left much unsaid about how to play his music, making it a profoundly personal endeavor. Playing Bach becomes a dialogue — not only with him but also with oneself. It's like looking into a mirror; he reveals aspects of our identities and teaches us things we didn't know about ourselves and life.

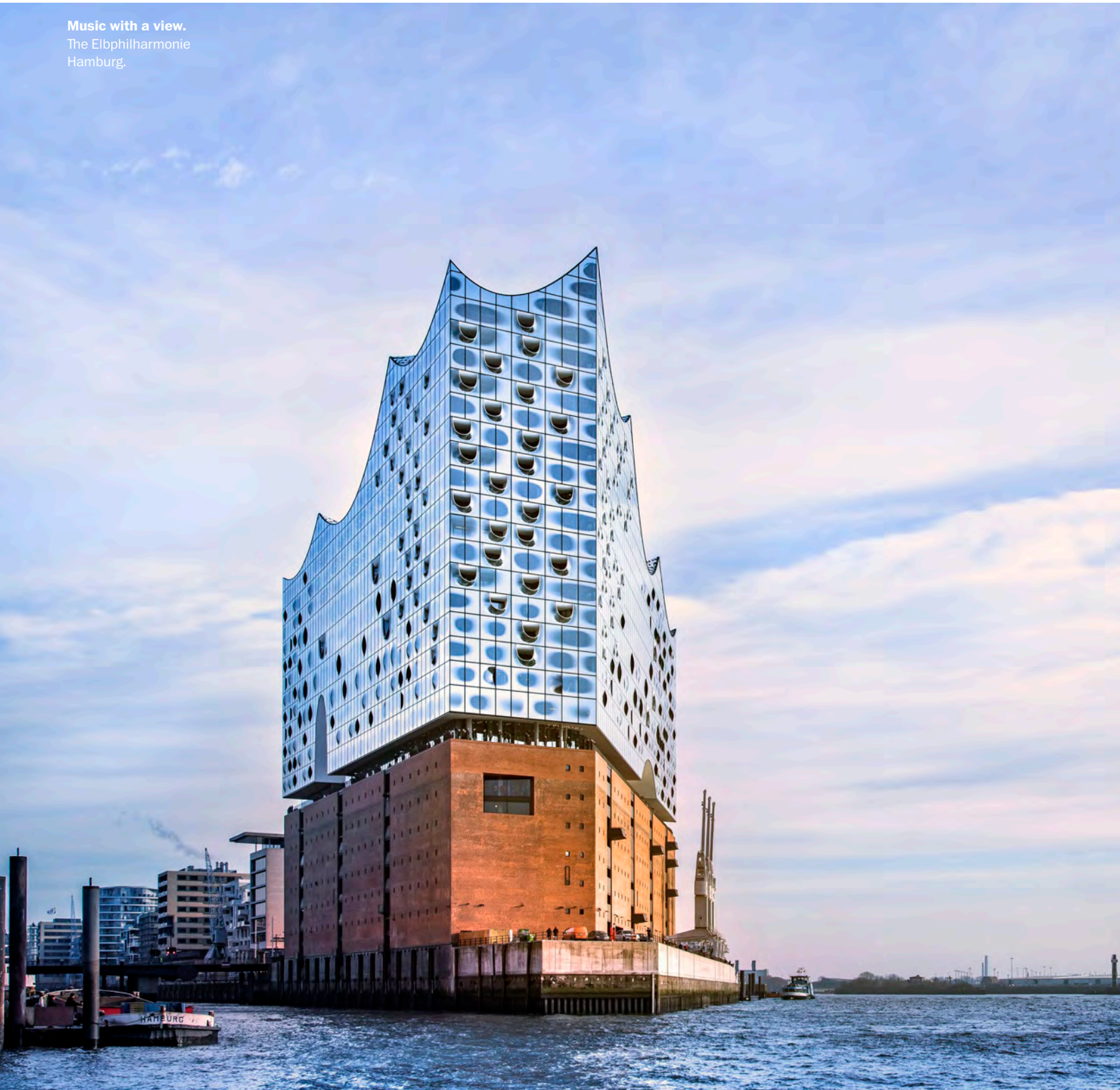
Bach experienced immense loss, having lost ten of his twenty children, which informs the emotional scope of his music. While some might think people were accustomed to such loss in his time, I believe they never truly got used to it. The emotional depth of Bach's music is shaped by his life's difficulties

SPIRIOCAST

The Steinway-patented proprietary sensor system in Spirio | *r* captures the movements of the piano's hammers and pedaling, and Spiriocast transfers the high resolution data to recreate an identical, perfectly in-sync, unfiltered audio, video and acoustical experience on any number of connected Spirios receiving the 'cast. A Spirio host can easily invite listeners to a broadcast from the Spirio iPad app. Once the performer goes live, video and audio from the pianist's iPad will be transmitted to the listener's iPad, or any connected device, such as an external monitor. When the artist plays, the listening Spirios perform along in real time.

"The live SPIRIOCAST *concert where we listened, watched, and experienced* VÍKINGUR ÓLAFSSON PLAYING THE GOLDBERG VARIATIONS *in Hamburg whilst being in London was an experience like no other. I was amazed at how real and present the performance felt, not just aurally and visually on screen. Watching the keys on the* STEINWAY PIANO *move in time to Víkingur's fingers took the remote concert experience to another level, one step closer to feeling the magic of being in the concert hall with him."*

—PIANIST YUKI NEGISIHI ON THE OCCASION OF EXPERIENCING ÓLAFSSON'S SPIRIOCAST FROM STEINWAY HALL LONDON.



Music with a view.
The Elbphilharmonie Hamburg.

Timeless. Ólafsson calls Bach's Goldberg Variations 'a letter to the future.'

and misunderstandings, despite being considered one of the greatest artists in history.

I sometimes think about how lonely Bach might have felt, creating what I believe is history's greatest keyboard work without an audience. This music acts as a letter to the future, resonating with us today as it reflects our experiences.

The abstract nature of Bach's work beautifully translates into various human experiences, and I'm deeply grateful for that. My relationship with the music has evolved, much like the music itself, which undergoes phases and gains new meanings. Tempos change, articulations shift… everything is open to reinterpretation.

I believe Bach is timeless, and the modern grand piano is the ideal vehicle for his music. It combines the clarity of the harpsichord, the grandeur of the organ, and the dynamic range of a chamber orchestra. If presented with a Steinway Model D Spirio today, I have no doubt he would be absolutely intoxicated with it.

What do you think of closing out your tour with Spiriocast?

It's wonderful that the first major live broadcast of a concert featuring the *Goldberg Variations* coincides with the end of my tour. This broadcast represents the house concert of the 21st century, leveraging technology to bring the essence of a live performance into homes worldwide. It is the most human of technologies, getting us as close to human touch as possible.

With tools like Spiriocast, music students of all ages can gain a unique perspective on their art, allowing them to listen to their playing from a distance. I wish I had that capability when I was a student — being able to hear my own performance and reflect on it would have been invaluable. To play something and have the piano play it back exactly the same? This has unbelievable potential for the future.

I'm also thrilled by the fact that people were listening to the *Goldberg Variations* throughout the whole world, and the fact that we chose this serious, some would say *heavy*, masterpiece and it kept the attention of people. There was just a "ghost" playing the piano with me on a picture on a screen. It touched my heart that technology can have an impact like that and take on that human quality.

Think about this: I grew up in Iceland in the 1990s, a time when major pianists seldom visited. It might happen once every two or three years that we'd have a great pianist perform. Today, access to concerts is much improved, yet many places still lack this exposure. The potential for live Spiriocasts to reach students in remote locations, who crave the live experience but might not be able to travel to New York, Hamburg, London, or wherever, is truly exciting. ▬

‘The *Magic* is the Dedication’

Jazz pianist and Steinway Artist Jason Moran, live from Big Ears Festival, talks hip hop, the next generation, the algorithm, Monk & Duke, visual art, and creative approach.

BY BEN FINANE

I came across your Afrika Bambaataa cover from 2002. This made me wonder what was the first hip hop album that you know every track, every beat?
Wow. That’s tough to say because there were a lot. Growing up in the Eighties, everything felt brand new. And I’d say the one that maybe had the most impact — Run-D.M.C.’s first record just hearing the beats on it — but the record that changed me was Public Enemy’s *Yo! Bum Rush the Show*. And they had a song called ‘My Uzi Weighs a Ton.’ And this is how when you get to a certain age, you start talking about stuff that doesn’t happen anymore. They used to play the song on the radio and you just had to catch it. [*Laughs*.] That took effort. But that song was the top song of that time in Houston, and I remember my brothers and I listening to it in the kitchen while my older brother did the dishes. I was freaking out. And Public Enemy over the next few years became so central. They had this incredible music, but also tied it to all this history. So it was not empty music. A lot of music was really built and full of stuff, but PE particularly put a lot of gems in the lyrics. I felt like I could learn as much about history as I was learning in school from just listening to their songs. And that definitely set me on a path.

‘The shootin’ of Huey Newton. . . .’
Yeah! ‘They used to treat me like Coltrane, *in*sane. . . .’ All these things that he talked about were reflected in my parents’ bookshelf. So just as Black Power and radicalism was collected in these books and texts, and everybody in that generation was reading it, PE are kind of like the children of that generation. So that’s what you hear in those songs. And I know it amplified my relationship to the music I play today because when you’re playing a certain style of music, particularly Black music, it is coming with a lot of relationships that may not be only written in those notes. And they may be ancestral, they may be about community, they may be about struggle, they may be about joy, about spirituality, but they are in there. They’re not separate. And that made learning music a lot more fun and meaningful.

I think that’s a theme for you: wedding the past and the present into the future.
Yeah. Look, no one that I really love has been able to divorce themselves from relating to history. And it’s not that any of them showed up saying, ‘I’m a history major.’ I show up as an artist. Part of the artist’s job is to not only to understand where they are, but also, just because you’re studying techniques of the past even to make what you do, you have to study the anatomy or the harmony and the rhythm. These are just things you can’t get around — and they’ll endlessly be fascinating from every century to the ones coming up: it’s endlessly fascinating for us. So, it’s not what I thought I’d become when I was at Manhattan School of Music as a student — ‘Yeah, I’m going to be the guy digging into the past.’ [*Laughs*.] No, I did not, but I sure enjoy it.

Since we started with hip hop, I was thinking about that Afrika Bambaataa song, and how they took a sample from ‘Trans Europe Express’ by Kraftwerk. There was already this globalism and the sources of sampling — before the WhoSampled

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website and app—you had to know. You had to know that Wu Tang was sampling 'Black and Tan Fantasy' because you knew the Duke Ellington record. And then you could be like, 'Yeah, that's this.'
That's this.

And that was a voyage of discovery.
It was. And I also know that the voyage of discovery for a young musician today is still as fruitful. It's still difficult to find these things: just because the information is given to you doesn't mean the search is over. Just because you type it in doesn't mean now you understand it. No. If you really want to know, you're going to have to do a little bit more work. I've only recently been feeling less anxiety about the future generations because I work now with so many of the artists of the generation coming up on the side and I can watch how they do their investigations and, my God, am I thankful! Even my son the other day, he said, 'Dad, when you're going through the turnstile on the subway, you don't have to open it up to your wallet. You can just tap the button on the side.' I said, 'What?!' Sometimes just hang out with somebody younger just so they can teach you to do stuff a bit more efficiently. [*Laughs.*] It may not solve all the riddles of the world, but I got to say, they know some things.

But you've touched on an important distinction here, which is that Googling is not research.
No, it's not.

And I don't want to say back in my day, but back in my day, you had to go to the library, you had to go through the card catalog, you had to get your microfiche and take pictures of that microfiche and Xerox it like you were a spy. Like you were pulling together a dossier. And that was research, because that card catalog, while I was on my way looking for whatever, I was going to

CORA WAGONER

Down south. Jason Moran at Big Ears 2024.

run into other things.
That's right. That's true.

And Google is so great and so targeted, maybe you don't get those happy accidents of, 'Oh, what's this?'
I think now the accident is the algorithm. People think, 'Oh my God, how did you know I was thinking about that?' 'Well, we monitored all your emails and all your text messages, and we listened to every conversation you had, so we know what you're thinking about.' [*Laughs.*]

Your fate is decided.
So I think sometimes we think, 'Oh my God, how did they know?' It's not a mystery, bro. The young musicians who have that curiosity and desire, I feel like they do the same amount of work to figure out really what's on the inside of the stuff. When I come into contact with it, I feel and hear it as something very real.

Quantify what you wean when you say 'When I come into contact with it.'
There's a young musician, Emanuel Wilkins. He's a saxophonist from Philadelphia. He's mid-twenties now and I met him when he was fifteen. He was like, 'When are we going to play?' And I was like, 'Okay, first of all, you're like a teenager, so whatever, kid.' But we stayed in contact. And then the next thing I knew he was at Juilliard. And then I needed an alto player for a concert. and I said, 'Let me call that kid.' And that kid showed up and he was probably twenty and he played this very big concert I had dedicated to Thelonious Monk, and the saxophonist has the first solo alone by themselves. The band is not playing. And here came that moment in the concert, beginning the show, and that saxophone solo happens — and he's playing solo and he's tearing the roof off of the place. And it's no lie. Everybody in the band is like, 'Oh snap!' It's very real. Meaning he played and cut the air in a way that we weren't accustomed to. Everybody had to level up to the kid. [*Laughs.*] Everybody's posture changed and everybody could feel it in his intensity and his intention. Did he get everything right? No, I didn't care because, my goodness, did he awaken the band in that moment! When I came back to New England Conservatory to work again with my students of the same age, I told them the story. I said, 'Just so you know, guys, there's a kid out here wrecking shop — just like you can.' You know what I mean? I don't mean to put pressure on them, but I was letting them know that you all can really come out here and change people's lives. You can not only change the audience, but you can change the musicians who you might even admire. You could really shift their path by really showing up with your full self, intact, and sharing it wholly and openly. It's very difficult to get to that moment, but that's what I heard in him, and I've heard it with other musicians as well. It's always welcoming and gratifying.

It's probably not coincidental that this was part of your Thelonious Monk show. We've talked before about Monk. Let's touch on him one more time for the people. Your Thelonious Monk epiphany came when you first heard "Round Midnight' and you continued to explore his sound world. I had a similar experience in that when I heard him, it changed how I heard things. Things that weren't as sharp or angular as Monk or as dissonant as Monk for a while fell flat for me.
Right.

What did you take from Monk? How has your relationship changed with Monk as you move forward in your jazz journey?
One of the aspects of Monk that keeps him interesting to me is that there's so much space in the music. So I always say his music is perforated — and it has enough space for *you* in it. You have sometimes these very simple melodies that simply repeat over and over again. So you can latch onto it. You can actually learn it pretty easily, too. It doesn't mean you're going to play it well [*laughs*], but you will know the melody. And that for me is a great thing that he teaches in his music, that melody leads. And when he's comping for another soloist, he's often playing parts of the melody. He keeps singing it in his head, and it's a thing that I know that I've learned from him. But for now, I've been focusing on Duke Ellington to celebrate his 125th birthday: a series of concerts around the world playing his repertoire, mostly solo piano. Now Monk cannot get to his sound if there is no Duke Ellington. Because

Music & art. Moran performing [below] in collaboration with artist Joan Jonas. At Big Ears, he also played with legendary saxophonist Charles Lloyd [opposite].

when you hear Duke Ellington's sound, his piano sound specifically, the way he uses range from the bottom to the top of the instrument, the way he choreographs moves, the way he uses articulation, the punch he has with the attack, much of that Thelonious Monk has also taken into his tonal repertoire with his hands, his touch at the piano. Those things, they're tied together. Monk is the son of Ellington, really: it's that clear.

We talk about melodies, Ellington is the king of the melody.
King of the melody. Wrote the melody, Sang the melody until he died. In the way that Monk was like, 'No, my songs are the ones that rule.' Ellington said 'My songs are the songs that rule.' For Louis Armstrong, not necessarily the case. He's sang other people's songs.

An interpreter.
Right? But for Ellington and for Monk, they led through composition; they led through attack of the instrument. And that makes them very different kinds of leaders, I think, because they really do try to champion their language. And we hear in the way Monk uses, what people might call dissonance — I still call it harmony — the way he uses his harmony is what I always hear as the Southern slang.

You're making a minor second with your hand.
That's right, minor second formation of my two fingers next to one another. That's the slang from North Carolina that Monk brings up to New York. Ellington is the slang of D.C. that he brings to the city and to the world. And these are the things that I feel when I'm studying them, that's what I start to understand. How much slang they put in their playing.

I like these as dialects: Rocky Mount. D.C.
Yeah! It's very real.

Another way that I think you wed the past and present into the future is this expansion. People call it multimedia. I don't like that because it makes me think of bad presentations with music, right? Like a slideshow with music. That's not what you do. You expanded into the visual arts. That's a big part of what you do now.
Yes.

How did that transpire for you? I was talking to your brother Steinway Artist Robert Glasper, and he said 'Sometimes I have to put text on top of the music, because you can *say* that music is a universal language, but if you really want to let people know what you're saying, sometimes words are necessary.'
They are.

So, his use of spoken word in those groove-based, flow-based post–Coltrane loops that he does are very important. I think for you, this expansion into the visual has been a crucial turn.
Yes. Visual artists have been an important part of my development for years, and I'd say since 2005, for the past twenty years, the collaborations with visual artists were

LEFT: COURTESY OF THE WHITNEY MUSEUM, RIGHT: MUSICLIVE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

as important to me as the collaboration that I've had with other musicians, maybe more important. Because they layered in intentionality, which I'm not sure I was was always learning just playing music.

I need you to explain what 'intentionality' means.
Intentionality means 'So why are you playing this song?' Intentionality means you have to ask yourself why. The way the conservatory teaches music is they rarely ask you why. You say, 'Oh, I play G7 chord here.' 'Oh? Why?' 'Because that's what it says on the page. And that says I got to go to C7 next, and those are the chord changes, so I have to do that.'

But that's classical—
Nah, it's the same in jazz. People are just are teaching you the music with not necessarily saying, 'Okay, so Coltrane wrote this song for Alabama because he's talking about the girls who were killed in that bombing of the church.' 'Okay, so do you know why those children were killed in that bombing in that church? Do you know what songs that church was singing? Do you know what songs those girls knew and heard of? Do you know the conversations those girls were having right before that happened? Can you imagine what those girls' conversations would be like today? Okay, so now *that's* why we're learning the song 'Alabama' by John Coltrane.' And it's rarely opening up that far. We're learning the song and learning how to play it. And the artists I knew, especially in 2005, two artists in particular, Joan Jonas and Adrian Piper, I ended up putting them on my Blue Note album called 'Artist in Residence,' because they were speaking very specifically about what their intention was as artists, and I was challenging myself to do the same.

This intentionality that you're talking about, I think it's also just good performance practice. You're talking about it in music, but it made me think back to my community theater days, where it's not enough to know the lines.
It's not enough to know the lines.

You have to speak the lines from the script while actually thinking thoughts that your character might think. Right?
Yeah. Yeah.

And you have to be plugged in for the whole scene. It's not like I'm waiting for my turn to play, just as in jazz, you're not waiting out this sax solo. You have to be deeply involved in what the saxophone is doing.
And that's tiring.

Sure, sure.
You know what I mean? It's emotionally draining to work that way. But, as with all things, if you build up the muscle, then you'll have stamina, and you can exist and not be exhausted by every quarter note that happens to go by whether or not the world depends on it. And those are the things that I was asking myself as a person who was dealing with grief. My mother had just died. So I was asking

myself just in that moment, 'Okay, so why am I playing piano? Continuing to play piano?' I mean, I know why. I think I like it. Right? But those artists helped me get through that grief to start to demand something more of my own music, even though it may have been there, but now I would really say, 'No, it's *really* here, and let's keep making music that can stand the test of time, because it stands on more than just the sound.

So the visual is bringing in another dimension.

The visual brings in at least the part I feel is missing. As a musician the frustration is you don't know what it looks like — or there is nothing. And that's actually the beauty of it, too. But working with enough artists, the artists also show me that there are more ways to understand your craft than simply by doing the part that everyone expects you to do. And working specifically with the artist Joan Jonas, she makes drawings during her performance pieces and those pieces become, to a degree, the artifacts of the performance. And so, what are all these concerts that happen at Carnegie Hall or here at Big Ears? What is the residue of that performance? Does it exist in the dust or the spit from the trombone valve, you know what I mean? Or the foot next to the bass drum pedal? Or on the piano, for me? Then, how does the piano *register* my attack at the instrument? And fortunately, working with Steinway all these years, I would go to the factory and ask for Steinway to give me a manual that they would separate from an instrument. And I use these piano keyboard manuals as my place to make these drawings, place a piece of paper over the piano keys, dump dry pigment onto the paper, and then play. And then I take the paper away from it, dust off the pigment, and what remains is a register of my attack on this paper. And over the years — I guess it's been nine years now — those works continue to grow and I'm thankful for the relationship, that Steinway can send me these manuals when I break them [*laughs*], that I keep having these manuals show up. I'm onto the third manual now to have another opportunity to see what can come from registering these attacks.

We're live. We're live right now from Big Ears. This is not a Zoom. We're here in my unnamed hotel suite. Tell me about what you're here to do.

Sure. I'm here to play with legendary saxophonist Charles Lloyd, whom I've worked with for the past thirteen years. He just put out a new record called 'The Sky Will Be There Tomorrow' on Blue Note Records. It came out last week. He just turned eighty-seven. He's still playing incredible saxophone and flute. The band is with Eric Harland and Larry Grenadier. It's a really great ensemble. So we play it tonight and then tomorrow I'm playing a piece that I just played at Carnegie Hall last week called 'From the Dance Hall to the Battlefield,' which is dedicated to World War I pioneer, bandleader and composer James Reese Europe. A record that I put out last year, but it's been music I've been playing for the past five years, animating his legacy as the first idea of the big band that Duke Ellington takes over. So James Reese Europe is there right at the beginning of this big change in American sound.

You've been sitting with that music for five years now. What has the evolution been?

Oh, gosh. You play it enough then people come up to you after the show and they say things like, 'My grandfather was in the 369th Harlem Hellfighters.' That happened at Carnegie Hall. One of the things that also happened there is we sang a song. Some of these songs have lyrics, but I, because of my lack of singing ability, was not putting that part in the show. But I started singing the song 'All Of No Man's Land Is Ours' at the request of Terry Gross. She asked me to sing it in an interview, and then I pulled up enough courage to do that on a national platform. And then another artist, Ellen Gallagher, a great painter who's living in Rotterdam, she made an exhibition called 'All Of No Man's Land is Ours' because she heard that interview. And then I went to Amsterdam and played and sang that song there. Then I came back to the band. I said, 'Okay, so look, we got to start singing this song.' So now it's a moment where you hear these men's voices sing this song about No Man's Land, and for African-American men coming back from war, the line was not pushing the Germans back, but No Man's Land continued to be you cross the wrong side of Fifth Avenue when you returned to New York City. No Man's Land existed in the neighborhoods they called home. That's the question that you have to say that out loud for people. It continues to evolve, and that's one of the ways.

As an untrained singer singing you're not the first Black band leader to do that. You know what I mean? There's a rich history of jazzmen who play while also singing — and it's not their first instrument or even their second. And there's an important, I think, pathos that comes with that, because there's a vulnerability there, and there's also a real humanism. Even if I think of Ella and Duke singing 'It Don't Mean A Thing,' right? It's humorous, but it's also real.

Yes, very. Or even Louis Armstrong with the great way that he sings, or Tom Waits, or Nina Simone. Then you understand that the vocalists who you love, they allow their character to be heard. And then there are people like Aretha Franklin who become the epitome of both piano playing and a really incredible voice. All these voices! Then you say, 'Oh, they're not just out here.' Meaning I should muster the courage to also say the thing. And that does take courage to share publicly. And so, like I said, I've been working up the courage to do this every time. So I just wrote my band this morning and said, 'Practice, practice, practice.' [*Laughs.*]

In the wake of what you just said about intentionality, talk to me about the process with Charles Lloyd and this band. When you guys are approaching a new tune, whether it's a new tune or a new tune for you, or a new tune for that group, can you talk to me about the process

SCIENCE HISTORY IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

of sitting down with that music?
Charles Lloyd, as a band leader, he only wants you to explore. So he's not asking for you to repeat anything that he heard you do before. He just wants to hear what happens. Many times, even today during the sound check when we were looking at a piece of music that we were all learning together, when he hears just enough that it's going to be really great, he says, 'Stop. Save it. Save it for the show.' Part of playing music with him specifically is around the mystery and letting the mystery unfold for the first time on the stage.

So the mission becomes let's create the conditions where that can happen.
Yes.

Is that also your approach?
Yes, to a degree. I think we all have, as musicians, a sense of what we think the sound will be, and then hopefully you have musicians with you who can exceed what you have in your mind. So I always try to have musicians who are going to do that. So therefore, I won't ever say, 'I more want it to sound like what I have here in my head,' because that's not —

Because who cares?
Right. It is also not as interesting. The things that I hear —

This [*taps forehead*] can't be real.
Yes, the mind can't be real! [*Laughs.*] And also I could never come up with the kind of bass line that Tarus Mateen would play, or write down the rhythms that Nasheet Waits plays on the drums. I never could imagine that stuff! So you hire people for a reason. You work with them and collaborate with them because they can excel and push an idea past where you had just a thought to pull it together to put onto the table. But then you watch them really work the magic around it. And the magic is dedication. ▬

Steinway & Sons is the official piano of Big Ears Festival.

All of no man's land is ours. Moran's 'From the Dance Hall to the Battlefield' is dedicated to World War I pioneer, bandleader and composer James Reese Europe [below].

To hear this interview and many more, listen to Soundboard, the Steinway & Sons podcast on artistry and craftsmanship, at **steinway.com/soundboard** or wherever you podcast.

The craftsman. Christian McBride remains a man in demand.

‘JAZZ GIVES THE THINKING PERSON A PLACE TO GO’

Jazz bassist Christian McBride, live from Big Ears Festival, talks post-bop, remaining a bass-player-for-hire, bass-on-bass action, preparation, and jazz as democracy.

BY BEN FINANE

I listened to two of your albums yesterday: ‘New Jawn,’ and then ‘Gettin’ To It,’ back-to-back.
You bookended them.

Listen, ‘Gettin’ To It’ was like putting on an old pair of jeans. I was like, ‘Oh yeah, I remember this!’
I sure wish I could wear my jeans from the ‘Gettin’ To It’ days….

Gettin’ to it, I heard more set pieces. I heard more —
Yeah.

If people are playing unison in jazz, then that’s prearranged, right?
Right.

I heard a little more chaos in ‘New Jawn.’ So let’s talk about what happened in between your first and most recent album.
Oh, that’s like, what, twenty-five years?

Yeah.
No, maybe thirty years!

I’m forty-seven. Are you fifty?
I’ll be fifty-two in May.

Okay, fifty-two. You’re all over the place stylistically. Everyone always talks about you, saying ‘Oh, he’s post-bop.’ I’m not quite sure if that quantifies what’s happening with you, though.
Well, most of the time people tend to place you where they might need you in their internal stylistic box, as well as in the industry, so to speak. Because from the time I moved to New York, which was the end of 1989, I recorded ‘Gettin’ To It’ in 1994. So if you take that four-and-a-half year span, most of the people who I cut my teeth with were post-bop legends: Freddie Hubbard, Joe Henderson, McCoy Tyner, Bobby Hutchinson, Bobby Watson, Roy Hargrove, Joshua Redmond. Okay, so that’s fair. Especially if you’re looking at it in 1995, when ‘Gettin’ To It’ came out. I had a chance to be mentored by the late great Ray Brown. But from 1995 up until I released ‘Prime,’ the second New Jawn album, I can’t even begin to put my finger on the different styles of music. I’ve had a chance to play with so many people. John Zorn and Laurie Anderson to Sting and Billie Eilish. And Edgar Meyer, our new album comes out tomorrow. So even with all of that, I think I still get defaulted as a post-bop guy, mostly because of my beginnings. And again, I get it. I’m not sure it’s accurate, but I get it. [*Laughs.*] And I’m glad you’re listening. Thank you. I appreciate that.

LEEFT; © EBRU YILDIZ 2021, RIGHT; STEWART MEYER

Bass for two. Christian McBride and Edgar Meyer's latest release is 'But Who's Gonna Play the Melody?'

You say you're not sure it's accurate. Give me a more accurate description for what you do, if you care to.
I feel like I'm overly pragmatic, meaning that I am a working bass player. As a professional musician, what I was trained to do is find work. You give your number out to musicians as a professional and they hire you. It's almost like being a craftsman: somebody hires you to fix their house, and professionals say, 'Okay, what do you need done?' Whereas as an artist, you might be able to get away with saying, 'Oh no, I only work on craftsmen houses.' But as a working bass player, I've been trained to play with everybody, to do what the situation calls for. We're at Big Ears right now, and I'm playing with my regular band. I'm playing with Rhiannon Giddens and Francesco Turrisi. I'm playing with Edger Meyer, and I'm playing with Brad Mehldau. Four completely different hats that I have to wear in forty-eight hours. Is it difficult? No, because I'm a bass player that plays to the situation.

Is the preparation —
Now, that's different!

The preparation for each of these gigs. How is it different?
Well, it's specifically different here because I'm playing four different sets in two days, so I'm not going to get a real opportunity to really let any of these instances settle in. It's like, 'Okay, this gig is over. Boom, now I got to change up.' That part is actually not that fun, you know what I mean? Because you want to be able to soak it in and absorb it and realize how much fun it was, maybe what you would've done different or what we'll do the next time. But you ain't got time for that! You gotta get ready for the next show. So my regular band, we play together all the time, so I'm not really worried about that. But Rhiannon: she has her own thing that she does. I have my own thing that I do. We did a couple of dates together in Europe last summer, and they were wonderful, but we haven't played together since. It's been almost a year. So we will need to get together and figure out what we did last year, and I'm sure it'll be simple. But then Edgar, from my standpoint, he's the world's greatest bass player, you know what I mean? Especially holding that bow, he's unsurpassed. So now I got to get myself mentally prepared to go one-on-one against Jordan. And then after that's over, I play a duet set with my old friend Brad Mehldau. Now, that's not going to really take a lot of energy to figure out what we're going to do, but Brad and I haven't played a duet set together in over a year. So we need time to just at least talk down what we might want to do. And knowing Brad, he might bring a couple of sheets for me to read and vice versa. It's not so much the stylistic changes, but it's the time you have to prepare for these stylistic changes — that's going to be a trip.

Okay. So let's stay with Steinway Artist Brad Mehldau. When you're in with him, is it a question of finding a flow together? Are you in a passenger seat with Brad? Are you co-pilots?
I think any duet is a co-pilot. There's only two people. Brad and I have so much history together. Yeah, I don't think it's a matter of me waiting for him to tell me where to go. We navigate each other, and that's the beauty of jazz, and that's the beauty of having history with someone. You know where they're going to go.

You know the dance moves with him.
Yeah.

What about with Edgar? You're both bassists, this is an unusual situation. It's not often —
Supposedly. [*Laughs.*]

Okay. Tell me why it's not unusual?
Well, I had 'SuperBass' with Ray Brown. That was three bassists. Oh, man. I've played so many multi-bass gigs with so many people, it shouldn't be considered unusual. If you go to electric bass, Stanley Clark, Victor Wooten and Marcus Miller had their tour a few years back. Gosh, there's so many multi-bass…. Ornette Coleman had his band with three bass players. Right after Ray Brown died, we had a tribute to Ray at the Monterey Jazz Festival, where I played a set with Charlie Haden and Percy Heath. And a

GERRY WALDEN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

couple of years after, I think it was 2019, John Patitucci, myself and John Clayton did a three bass thing. And Patitucci and I did some duo concerts in Europe a few years back. So yeah, the whole multi-bass thing, that happens a lot more than people notice, I guess.

What's the appeal?
What is more than one bass player going to do that would be able to sustain a certain level of musical interest? Because a bass is more felt than heard. At least I feel the really successful bass players are more felt than they are heard. So when you have two instruments that are putting out more vibration than most, how do you make that sustainable? And that's not that hard of a challenge if you're standing next to a really, really great bass player, somebody who can get up and down the neck in a very musical way. And so everybody I named, Patitucci, Clayton….

Victor Lemonte Wooten.
Victor, all of them.

How do you not step on each other's toes?

Because you're occupying the same sonic space.
Right, right.

And that's unlike in, say, a jazz trio where everyone has their own hertz.
Well, you do step on each other's toes every once in a blue moon. But you only step on each other's toes if you are trying to do the same thing at the same time. If I'm walking, the other bass player's not walking. If they're walking, I'm not walking. Now, if we're both soloing simultaneously, the so-called stepping on each other's toes is not a bad thing. It

was supposed to be that way. So this is all about what happens in the big picture. But most of the time you don't get a lot of simultaneous soloing. Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't.

When you sit down with a new tune, what are the priorities for approaching a new piece of music?

I think it varies depending on the group, the situation. No matter who it is, somebody hands me a piece of sheet music, my first thing is to look for the trouble spots. I'm looking for passages that might seem rhythmically difficult. I think most musicians do that, they just do a quick scan, like, 'Okay, what's that?'

'What's the landscape? Where are my potholes?'

Exactly, exactly. Where are the potholes? And then once you do that, you run it down, you really follow the lead of the composer. I mean, that's what *I* always do. In jazz, you get a piece of sheet music, you are allowed to bring your own groove, your own feel to that.

'We navigate each other.' Christian McBride and Steinway Artist Brad Mehldau are longtime collaborators.

But if they say, 'No, I had more like this in mind,' then you do that. Again, I'm more pragmatic, I just look for the trouble spots on the paper. And then I just follow the orders of the composer. Now, if this is my piece, I usually have in mind who's playing it. So I know what I'm dealing with. But the same thing, if a person's playing whatever, generally speaking it's going to be okay. And if it's not, I'll just say, 'Hey, could you do a little more something like this?' And they tend to do it.

What role does the bass play in jazz?
Well, again, the bass is more felt than heard. The drums play rhythm. They will argue with you and tell you that they can play melody and harmony, but they can't. [*Laughs*.]

Some cats tune their drums though, right?
Yeah.

'I got the fifth here. I got the —'
Yeah, yeah, whatever. [*Laughs*.] But the drums, I believe, are the personality of any group. However the drummer plays, that tends to be the vibe of the whole band. But the bass player really is the gravity, it's the central force, it's the central nervous system of the band, because both the drums and the piano and the guitar go through the bass. Sting always came up with this great statement, which is true, he always said, 'If the entire band plays a C–major chord, and the bass player doesn't play a C, it's not a C chord. If the bass player plays an A, it's A–minor chord.' So the bass has that kind of harmonic power in any band.

I'm glad you brought up Sting, because we'll hear some moves from him, even in old Police songs, those subtle shifts that just turn the tune on a dime.
That's right.

While singing. How does he do it?
Yeah, yeah. I love to go back and listen to some of those old Police songs: they're pretty brilliant. When I first started playing with Sting in 2001, he used to say, 'Man, it's so awkward trying to just sing. I don't usually do that. I'm used to having my electric bass.'

He's not grounded.
Right. So we first started having rehearsals, he's standing there, he's like, 'I feel awkward.' So he finally would just hold his bass, because that's the muscle he's used to, doing both things. I think that's pretty incredible. I think most people can't wait to put their instrument down, so they can just concentrate on singing. Sting is like, 'Nah, I gotta do both.'

Tell me about what's happening these days with Jazz House Kids.
Man, Steinway has been so kind and wonderful with Jazz House kids. Of course, Steinway is one of those iconic names that people know, even if they know nothing about music. It's like Rolex, people just know what it is. So yes, I'm very proud of what my wife, Melissa Walker, started with Jazz House kids, and what we've been able to build over the last twenty-plus years. When Steinway came on as a supporter, we just couldn't be any more grateful.

What do you hope to see long-term with Jazz House kids? What's the goal?
I would just like to see us keep doing what we're doing, and that is teaching young people democracy through music — specifically through jazz music.

Unpack 'democracy through music.'
What we think the world should be, or what the world is supposed to be, actually *happens* in a jazz group. Meaning that you have a leader, but you have people making their own decisions inside of that. And you have to listen to each other, you have to respond to each other. You have to pay attention to what's going on while serving the leader's vision. And if you ultimately can't get with the leader's vision, you can always leave the band and find another band that fits you a little better. But the other thing is, most great musicians think about serving first rather than receiving. And when you play in a jazz group, particularly a big band, you have the leader of the big band, but you also have the saxophone section, the trombone section, the trumpet section. There are leaders inside of those sections. So the leader of the saxophone section has to check with the actual leader of the band. And then everyone in the saxophone section has to check with the saxophone leader. So everybody's following somebody. But if the leader of the saxophone section says, "Hey, this part right here, we should phrase it like this," one of those four remaining saxophone players will say, "Well, what if we phrase it like this?" Even the leader can say, "Hey, that's not a bad idea." Now what happens is, maybe somebody might get jealous and say, "Well, if they get to do this phrase, I want to phrase it like this." Now it starts to unravel. Now the leader has to say, "Hey, hey, hey. Hey. We're going to do it like this, okay? Because if we waste time having all four of you saying, 'Hey, we should do it like this, do it like that. No, let's do it like this' hey, I got to make a decision so we can make music: Time's a-wasting." So I think what happens in a jazz group is actually a utopian, democratic world.

What about jazz's role in the larger musical universe, which has certainly changed since seventy-five years ago?
Jazz gives people who take time to develop their ideas and their thoughts and their intellect a place to go, because we are so surrounded by pop culture, which is basically imagery more than anything else. Testosterone. We get to the common denominator. Jazz gives the thinking person a place to go.

Steinway & Sons is the official piano of Big Ears Festival. Steinway & Sons is a proud sponsor of Jazz House Kids. ▬

CTK / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

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‘THAT LOVE AND CURIOSITY OF MUSIC....’

Steinway Artist John Paul Jones, live from Big Ears Festival, talks about his influences, his sound, his process and his myriad music projects beyond Led Zeppelin.

BY BEN FINANE

John, your musical fluency extends across myriad instruments. I know you got your start as an organist and choir master, but you're known primarily — at least to me — for your warm round tone on bass combined with lyrical melodic lines. For me, yours is a singing tone: it reminds me of the optimal effect I was trying to achieve as a baritone to spin notes into space. Can you speak to your bass tone and sound and what led you there? What led you to develop it?

To develop it? Well my parents were in variety, in vaudeville, in the States. And so I got to listen to a huge amount of different musical influences because every act came from all over the world — and they would bring their own music. And so I suppose my bass sound — [*laughs*] I know it's a bit of a stretch to link the two — but my bass sound is probably a standard, classical bottom-of-the-band sound. That nice round tone. I never really liked the guitar-y sounding tone. But when I was doing sessions, in those days you used to have to play with a pick quite a bit, which I didn't really like, but it was okay. And certain things are quite famous of my pick style, like Cat Stevens' "Matthew and Son," "I'm Gonna to Get Me a Gun," and then Tom Jones' "Delilah" — they all had a sharp sound with the attack. But I really liked playing finger style. But to bring it back to my parents, I told my father I wanted to play the bass guitar. I heard a record when I was about fourteen by an English band called Johnny Kidd and the Pirates: "Shakin' All Over." And the sound of this being played, when I was on tour with my parents, on those jukeboxes in the seaside towns with these big Wurlitzer jukeboxes, was this *enormous* bass sound. And I just went, 'Oh, I want to do *that*.' And I told my father I really want to play bass guitar, and he went, 'Nah, the bass guitar's a novelty instrument. Two years from now you'll never hear of one. Play the saxophone, you'll always work it.' I went, 'No, no. I want to do bass guitar.' So he guarantored me for what we call 'higher purchase.' By that time I was already an organist. The money I got paid twenty-five pounds a year, a *year*, and that went to buy my first bass guitar. And then of course, as soon as he heard me playing it and practicing it, he went, "Right, come with me son." And we would just go and do weddings, bar mitzvahs, everything: we'd do the lot. And I would have a regular bass sound. That informed my tone really. I didn't go really any further. I never used effects with Zeppelin or anything like that. I just wanted that nice big-bottom sound. I had to fill out a lot of space, because basically Zeppelin was like a trio with a singer. And when Jimmy's soloing, there's only me and John Bonham. So I've got to cover all the harmony as well as all the bass parts.

And so that rich tone allowed you to cover that.

Exactly.

So let's talk about space in, say, a rock quartet, which you were famously in. What's the difference between the space that a keyboard and a bass occupy respectively? Does your approach change with the keyboard and with the bass in terms of where you're occupying space? Does that make sense?

Yeah, but obviously if you're just on the bass, I got *busier* [*laughs*], especially in the solo parts. But otherwise, I would try and be as close to the guitar as possible so that it felt as one thing, because it's all about the song: You're backing the voice when they're singing. But Zeppelin of course did a lot of improvising, which was instrumental. And so I got a lot busier. With keyboards of course I had bass pedals. Having been an organist, that was easy, rather than having people say, who's playing bass?

PREVIOUS SPREAD; ELI JOHNSON, THIS SPREAD; ZUMA PRESS, INC. / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

We're gonna groove. Led Zeppelin at rest.

It was great to see you rising out of the floor, playing 'Your Time is Going to Come' with the silver shoes and all. And I thought, 'Oh yeah, he's an organist!'
That's right [*laughs*]. Yeah, so with Zeppelin I used to have sets of bass pedals literally littered over the stage. So if I was playing guitar or pretty much anything, I'd have a set of bass pedals.

Sticking with Zeppelin for a minute. The first two albums were very blues-based and by 'III' and beyond, other elements were creeping in. Beyond genre, form was expanding as well. There are a lot of things I love about Led Zeppelin, but high among them is eschewing, or unbalancing, or even exploding this verse–chorus–bridge–coda form. Can you tell me a bit about that expansion, both in musical genre and in form, with that group?
Well in musical genre I suppose it was the rise of prog — prog rock. I had always thought that Zeppelin was a progressive blues band originally, but then soon I started using the word 'progressive,' everybody went, 'Oh no, no, that's Pink Floyd and King Crimson and all that.' And I go, 'Okay, all right, I'll have to lose that one,' which was a shame because we *were*! We were progressive! And it was blues–based, Robert and Jimmy were more about the blues. I mean, I liked the blues, but I wasn't an aficionado. I didn't know all the old guys. I knew a couple of them. My dad used to say, 'This is Sonny Boy Williamson and this is Big Bill Broonzy,' and those people. And he got me interested in that. But yeah, the verse–chorus thing, everybody was doing it, so why do what everybody else does? We all had good musical influences and we wanted to use them. It made it interesting for *us*, apart from anything else. And that was a thing about that band: we were allowed to do whatever we wanted.

What sparked your instrument evolution? For example, you played this beautiful three-necked mandolin at your solo concert in Big Ears. How did you branch out into these other instruments and what necessity or idea drove you to commission the creation of these special instruments for your arsenal?

Well, there are two brothers: one makes my electric instruments and one makes my acoustic instruments. And he saw me at a Zeppelin show running about the stage changing instruments. And he went, 'I could make you an instrument that you could just sit down on.' And that was the first: a twelve-string guitar on the bottom, six-string in the middle, and a mandolin on the top. And we used to use it for the acoustic set and it was great. I would still have bass pedals, of course. And so that's how that sort of thing came out. My father was a multi-instrumentalist: he played great piano, trumpet.… There's a story where he was in a music shop and somebody said, 'We need a bass player for tonight. Does anybody here play bass?' And he went, 'Yeah, I do' never having touched the instrument in his life before, rented a bass, and put chalk marks all the way up at the fingerboard [*laughs*] — and did the gig. And I sort of come a bit from that.

So this polymath tradition runs in the family?

It does. It does.

On this three-neck mandolin, you did a lovely loop-build of "Down in the Valley to

The king of skiffle. Lonnie Donegan

LEFET; TRINITY MIRROR / MIRRORPIX / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO, RIGHT; COURTESY OF BBCPHOTOARCHIVE

The thunderthief. The career of John Paul Jones spans genres and generations.

‘[MY FATHER] WAS A VERY OPEN-MINDED MUSICIAN, AND I JUST FOLLOWED ON.... HE JUST PASSED IT ALL ON TO ME.’

Pray,” which I knew even before “O Brother, Where Art Thou?” as an old Doc Watson song.

Well, yes, I realize it was *since* then, but that was the first time I’d heard it, funnily enough, in that film.

Well, that’s fantastic that that was your entrée. In Watson’s, it’s this a cappella tune and very hypnotic, in its repetition. I used to sing it to my daughter as a lullaby.

Since we’re in East Tennessee here, tell me about your history of exposure to bluegrass. Was “O Brother, Where Art Thou?” revelatory?

No, no. There was an artist way back years ago in England, Lonnie Donegan. He did bluegrass and had hits with “Freight Train” and “Battle of New Orleans.” He had that high voice, that high mountain voice, which I just love the sound of. And years later, I got a mandolin having seen, I think Fairport Convention. And I got a mandolin, and then I started playing Celtic folk songs. And then I heard Bill Monroe and I heard The Del McCoury Band. I haven’t been recently, but I used to go to Nashville, I would always go to the picking parties and play mandolin. So I just followed the music, I suppose. A few years ago, I toured with the Dave Rawlings Machine, with Dave and Gillian Welch. In the Escalade, I carried two mandolins and a fiddle. Our stage set-up was five microphones, and that was it. It was just like, this is *so* good.

It’s very Grand Ole Opry. I like that.

We *played* the Grand Ole Opry! I played fiddle in the Grand Ole Opry. Second fiddle I played. I was so proud.

John Paul Jones, second fiddle.
The simplicity of it. Of course, a lot of the music comes from Europe.

Scotch–Irish.
Scotch Irish. Scandinavian. There's a well-known bluegrass song called "Jack of Diamonds."

'Jack of Diamonds is a hard card to play.'
I was on tour with Supersilent, which is an avant-garde Norwegian band, and one of the guys played with me. I was playing "Jack of Diamonds," and he went, "That's a Norwegian song." I went, "Really?" And he played me this guy singing it with the fiddle, the same fiddle, and it's exactly the same. So there's —

These old songs that we've carried through the years.
All these old songs….

So speaking of through the years, what have you gleaned playing with the new generation of rockers as you have? I'm thinking specifically of Josh Homme and Dave Grohl and your Them Crooked Vultures venture.
Yeah, yeah, the Vultures! It's just great. It was just such a nice tour as well. It was good fun making the record. They're fun people. They just enjoyed doing different things and just making music. That was a nice band because nobody had to be the band leader. Everybody had sort of different jobs. Dave would sign the autographs — Decoy Dave we used to call him. We'd push him out the bus [*laughs*].

He *talks.*
He does. And we'd run in behind him. It was great. It's just willingness to do different things and not be bound by what you've done before or what you're expected to be doing or any of that, which is kind of what I like to do generally, as you might have noticed!

Use all twelve.
Arnold Schoenberg.

Yes, and I admire it, and I sensed it in your solo show here at Big Ears, this intellectual curiosity—
Musical curiosity.

—Musical curiosity to go elsewhere. I see it with your bandmates as well. You've all gone on your own paths to pursue new and exciting territory. At your solo show you talked about stumbling upon your isolated bass online and played us a lovely solo version of "Ramble On." It's one of your most melodic lines. Getting back to your bass lines, that's always something I feel when John Paul Jones is on bass is this sense of melody. You said it goes back to that ground bass in music and music theory even, but is that something you consciously think about as you're playing?
No, I just like melody. You know, bass could be a pretty boring instrument if you make it.

You can just sit on the one.
Again, with Zeppelin, there's plenty of room. And in "Ramble On," there was just that strumming guitar part, and I thought it just needs a nice line to go with it underneath, and then the vocal melody went over the top and it just seemed to work.

John, I notice that you had your Steinway Frankensteined through some —
[*Laughs.*] The Franken–Steinway. That's pretty cool.

— Through some loops and Midi at the concert. Can you tell me about that process?
Yes! Processing the piano with electronics is notoriously difficult because you're using mainly air microphones and they pick up what's being processed and everything else. I found a Japanese pickup by a little chap called Yamahiko. He builds these little pickups and puts them in these beautiful little wooden boxes — it's gorgeous. Basically, you attach it not with any tape or anything like that but with pressure between one of the struts underneath to the soundboard and just tighten it up a little bit. So it's just a little contact mic on the soundboard. And that then goes through a Symbolic Sound Kyma system, which is made up in Champagne Illinois, which I've been using since 1989 and I use it for all my processing; I actually used it this afternoon with Thurston Moore on bass and I used it for mandolin. But especially with this pickup, you can get a really convincing piano sound, but process it, and so I can loop those processes. And it really does sound like looped pianos, which is very, very hard to do. But then I've got the Steinway littered with controllers, little Midi controllers and little keyboardy things and buttons and stuff. So once I get the loops going, once I get it into the process, I can then manipulate the pitch, the panning, the positioning, the location of the sound between the speakers. I can reverse all the loops, but I can individually get at each loop and go back and redo them. So it's very, very versatile. It's great fun to do!

You looked like you were having fun up there. It was also really nice because "No Quarter" as a studio track is such a magical sound world, and it was great to watch you splash around in that.
Yes, yes. That was actually meant to have some loops in it.

'IT'S JUST A WILLINGNESS TO DO DIFFERENT THINGS AND NOT BE BOUND BY WHAT YOU'VE DONE BEFORE OR WHAT YOU'RE EXPECTED TO BE DOING....'

Sure, but no worries!
Somebody had stepped on my volume pedal before and I hadn't realized it, and I tried to put in a loop and nothing happened. I went, it put me off a little bit.

The live factor.
But that's all part of it.

Again, I'm astounded by your experimentalism and curiosity. It's a joy to watch.
Well, thank you.

When you're working on a tune, do you write things down? Are you taking notes? Are you taking notation?
No.

Is there an instrument in hand or under hand in the case of your Steinway? Tell me a bit about your process for writing something new.
Well it depends on what I'm doing. If it's a classical-based work — I used to be an arranger before Zeppelin as well — and the first thing I learned: never arrange at an instrument, especially piano. If you write string parts while sitting at a piano, it sounds like a piano transcribed for strings.

Because your hand falls into old patterns?
Exactly. And the voicings are completely different. And so I would test out harmony on an instrument, now and

Shakin' all over. Johnny Kidd and the Pirates

LEFT: IANDAGNALL COMPUTING / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO, RIGHT: CREDIT: PA IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Dead end friends.
Them Crooked Vultures

again, see if a chord would work, but I would always sit with manuscript paper — score paper — and do it longhand, do it properly. And nowadays, if I'm writing a classical piece, I do it onscreen. I do it in Finale, because it's easy. If you want to insert a bar—

Drag and drop, baby.
Yeah, exactly. And so all that is much easier. The old days, you had to have arrows pointing: 'go to page 25 and then come back to this…', and it's like, 'why?' So yes, I do everything on a computer. But longhand: I have a pen in one hand on a tablet, and then I have a number pad on my left hand, so I can put in the values and then put in the pitches with my right hand. So literally I'm just writing it onto the computer screen. And I can do it quite quick, too!

Did you ever do full arrangements in Zeppelin for the band?
For most of the stuff we would work it out.

What does 'working it out' look like? Someone comes in with....
Yeah, you come in with ideas, you go, 'This will go there, and could it go here? No, it's not so good. We should go around another time and then maybe do that, and do that, and that.' And we'd work it out. And I would direct quite a lot of that. Then obviously if there were strings, like "Kashmir," and whenever anything else was needed, I would take care of all that.

On "In Through the Out Door" maybe, keyboard heavy.
Oh yeah, that was keyboard heavy, yeah. Robert and I got to the rehearsals first and nobody showed up, so we pretty much wrote the album [*laughs*].

It can happen that way.
It can!

Tell me about your Steinway.
I think I bought my Steinway in 1970. We went to Steinway in London and I saw one of the old books, one of the old ledgers, although the sale of that particular Steinway, it's an 1898 B perhaps, they looked up the serial number.... I had it completely refurbished in 1973. I lived out in Sussex at the time, south

of London, and we were playing five nights at Earl's Court Arena with Zeppelin, and I thought, 'This is my chance!' And so I had my Steinway at Earl's Court for those five shows, and then it went straight into Steinway in London for a complete restring and everything. But that was my Steinway on stage in the Earl's Court shows, and I've just loved it ever since.

Is it a go-to relaxation instrument for you at home?
Go-to everything, yeah!

Tell me about this classical song cycle you're working on at the moment.
It's song cycle for Dame Sarah Connolly, who is one of the finest mezzo-sopranos in the world. And it's for Pierrot Ensemble, which is [Arnold Schoenberg's] "Pierrot Lunaire" orchestration, which is piano, flute, clarinet, violin, and cello.

Are you a "Pierrot Lunaire" guy? It's wild.
It is still, to these days, wild. But mine is nothing like that piece. The people that commissioned it said, 'Well, you can add instruments.' And I thought, 'Well, maybe I could add another violin, which would give me a string trio.' But then that makes it a bit too easy, you know?

It's a very dark orchestration. I would even say Mozartian.
Yes! Everybody's got to do something, but the clarinet can double bass clarinet, which I've got them doing, and the flute can double piccolo. And so you've really got quite a good range there.

Are you writing your own texts for this song cycle?
I've used poems. I've got four poems from some American poets and some British poets.

Let's talk about the process, because it's a very specific thing. You have these poems.
You *search* for these poems. That's the hardest part.

Is finding a poem that fits?
Is finding a poem that fits and they have to be related to each other slightly, these poems. And they are, there is a common theme, which again, I won't reveal just yet.

Do you sit with the poem and then see what sort of music that poem suggests? Does the text come first and that generates musical ideas?
Yes. For me, yes. And in fact, as I'm looking for the poem, I see something there and it'll just suggest a line, or it'll suggest an atmosphere. If people come to me with a project, or I go to a meeting and somebody says, 'We want you to do this,' if I can't think of what it sounds like by the time I've driven home, then it's not on. The project, the poems, the text: they all have to tell me what it's going to sound like.

And then the orchestration comes as sort of a cloud of support?
Well, yes. Normally for a larger work, I've written an opera called 'The Ghost Sonata,' the Strindberg Play, and I did it the classical way. Which is start on the short score with all the words, lay it all out, and then orchestrate it later.

Was this in Finale or were you using your quill pen and parchment?
No, no, it was just Finale. I did it in various parts of the world. I had a little MacBook and a couple of speakers and my tablets and all that. But actually I'm finding that with the chamber group, it's just as easy. I started doing a short score, which is just on piano, but then I thought, 'Well, wait a minute, I've got a little flute line here. Rather than write it in as flute plays this, why don't I just put it in on the full score? And it's working quite nicely that, because you're not dealing with what does the third piccolo have to play, and this part? That you can worry about later, but as there's only those instruments, it's actually quite nice writing it in orchestration. It kind of frees you up again. You're not writing it for piano and then, okay, this now has to be played by clarinet.

You must have developed new appreciation for "Pierrot Lunaire" as well.
Well, yes. Funny enough, again, back to my dad, somebody gave him a book, which he passed along to me, which was "A Challenge to Musical Tradition" by Schoenberg. And he taught me tone rows and inversion and retrograde and all that sort of stuff. So I knew how to do that when I was fifteen. He, again, was a very open-minded musician, and I just followed on. He was into Basie, Stan Kenton, blues, flamenco, everything. He just loved it all, and he passed that love and curiosity of music, he just passed it all onto me. ▬

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The Noé behind the Noé. Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance drew inspiration from the natural world.

The Steinway & Sons

NOÉ

Limited Edition

DESIGNED IN COLLABORATION WITH THE visionary French designer Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance, Steinway's newest Limited Edition is a celebration of music, nature, and art. Duchaufour-Lawrance, known for his iconic contributions to furniture and interior design, drew inspiration from the serene sights and sounds of the natural world. The piano's graceful curves and dynamic silhouette reflect his commitment to crafting pieces that resonate with both aesthetic beauty and functional excellence.

"Noé had a clear vision for Steinway & Sons, one that resonated on an emotional level, inspired by nature," notes Guido Zimmerman, President of Steinway & Sons Europe. "His vision complemented the original design, modernizing and elegantly softening it. We are very proud of the finished instrument. Our craftswomen and men at the Hamburg factory have done an exceptional job of marrying Noé's creative artistry with our own time-honored craft skills."

Handcrafted in Steinway's renowned Hamburg factory, the Noé Limited Edition comprises only 18 Model D-274 concert grands and 88 Model B-211 pianos.

We sat down with the designer to learn more about the new Noé Limited Edition — and how it feels to take a seat in the hallowed halls of Steinway & Sons history.

The Noé Limited Edition is one of the most visually unique piano designs we have seen in quite some time. How did the project begin?

I received an invitation from my friend Luca Nichetto, who designed a limited edition piano for Steinway a few years ago. That piano was very well received, and Luca was in discussions with Steinway & Sons about creating another design concept. Luca proposed my name, and I visited the New York factory. The partnership fell into place quickly. From that point, I began to immerse myself in the project. I will admit, I was incredibly enthusiastic. It felt like a dream. It's a fantastic surprise to project yourself into history, to be part of such a beautiful craft and adventure. It was a powerful experience.

Can you describe your work as an artist and designer?

It's hard to define. I'm quite versatile in my approach. I'm drawn to organic and free shapes — that's my design language. However, I also enjoy stepping into unfamiliar environments and experimenting. I love challenging myself. If I find I'm repeating the same ideas

RICHARD WRIGHT

An unmistakable composition. The curved lines and sleek, dynamic silhouette of the Noé Limited Edition embody a sublime marriage of aesthetic and artisanal.

without depth, the project becomes less interesting to me.

About five years ago, I started a project that I kept in mind while working on the new limited edition Steinway. I'd been working with artisan crafts and natural materials globally, and I thought it was time to connect these rooted elements in a meaningful way. I moved to Portugal to discover its crafts and materials, leading to a project called Made in Situ, which opened in 2020.

What was it like translating your vision to the Steinway craftspeople at the factory? How did you communicate your ideas? Well, first of all, I had to fully immerse myself in the context and understand the process of creating a piano, the many steps that the instrument goes through as it's being constructed. And there was a challenge, because when I arrived at Steinway, I found everything was *perfect* — every step in the production process.

'MY CHALLENGE WAS TO WORK ON THE SHAPE OF THE STEINWAY PIANO WITHOUT ALTERING ITS PERFECTION.'

My challenge was to work on the shape of the Steinway piano without altering its perfection. So instead of removing elements, I decided to *add* materials, which is the reverse of typical design practice. The plate and soundboard remain the same as on other Steinway pianos, but I augmented the rim's shape, making it more radical and fluid. From above, you can see how I changed the perception of the curve while preserving the original essence. This addition ultimately changed the profile of the piano, creating a new shape while maintaining the integrity of the original design.

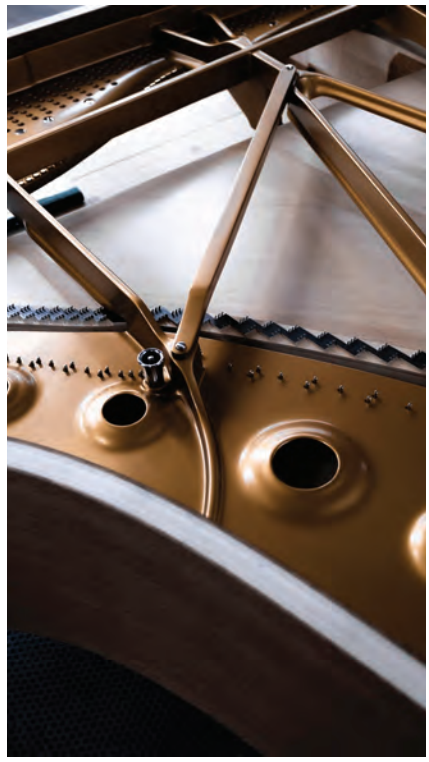
I kept the shape pure and organic, knowing this limited edition piano would primarily be used in homes rather than concert stages. This allowed me to simplify the lateral view. Unlike concert pianos, which often have cutaways to showcase the pianist's hands, I opted for a straight line to maintain the piano's purity. In a way, it creates a more private

FAR RIGHT; (2) NOÉ+DUCHAUFOUR-LAWRANCE+STUDIO

LIMITED EDITION STEINWAYS

Steinway Limited Edition pianos have a rich history marked by innovative design and craftsmanship. The concept began in the 1990s, with an eye toward creating unique, artistically inspired pianos that reflect the individuality of renowned designers and musicians. Each Limited Edition piano is a collaboration between Steinway and a selected artist or designer, resulting in distinct aesthetics and features while maintaining Steinway's renowned sound quality.

Over the years, notable designers like Luca Nichetto and Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance have contributed to these editions, introducing unique materials, colors, and shapes. These pianos are not only instruments but also collectible works of art, often featuring intricate designs and custom elements that celebrate both music and visual creativity.



celebration of music for the pianist.

Regarding the legs, I wanted them to seamlessly integrate with the curves of the piano, creating a cohesive form that invites the eye to follow the lines.

I had a fantastic collaboration with Steinway, which was crucial. They were supportive and had the right tools to make this vision a reality. Luca also provided valuable insights that helped streamline the process.

Can you discuss the color choices for the piano?

Initially, I envisioned a classic black piano, but I also had a midnight blue color in mind. During discussions with Steinway, we explored additional colors, leading to a rich deep red and ivory white. Matching the woods, like sycamore and mahogany, was also a part of the conversation.

Do you have a favorite color?

It changes daily! The context influences my preference. The deep blue shifts in appearance depending on light and angles, enhancing the curves. In bright light, the blue can appear quite vibrant, while the red has a luxurious, velvety finish. The white feels pure, and surprisingly, it has become my favorite. But I love the interplay of all the colors.

Will the opportunity to design a Steinway piano have an impact on your work going forward?

As a designer, I aimed for the lightest expression of creativity with minimal symbols; I didn't want to create mere decoration or ornamentation. Never was this clearer to me than when working on the piano. So in a way, it underscored and emphasized a vision I already held.

Also, this project helped me break free from my everyday design routine, allowing me to take risks and create in ways I wasn't accustomed to, and I think that had direct impact on the vision for the new Steinway. Keep in mind, the Steinway piano is well known for quality craftsmanship and superior materials. I draw inspiration from materials and the

NOÉ LIMITED EDITION COLORS

IVORY WHITE.
The radiant ivory white finish is artfully paired with the exquisite figured sycamore, known for its characteristic fine grain, resulting in a light, delicate, and even playful instrument. The silver-colored cast-iron plate adds a luxurious contrast to the gleaming chrome of the lyre and fittings.

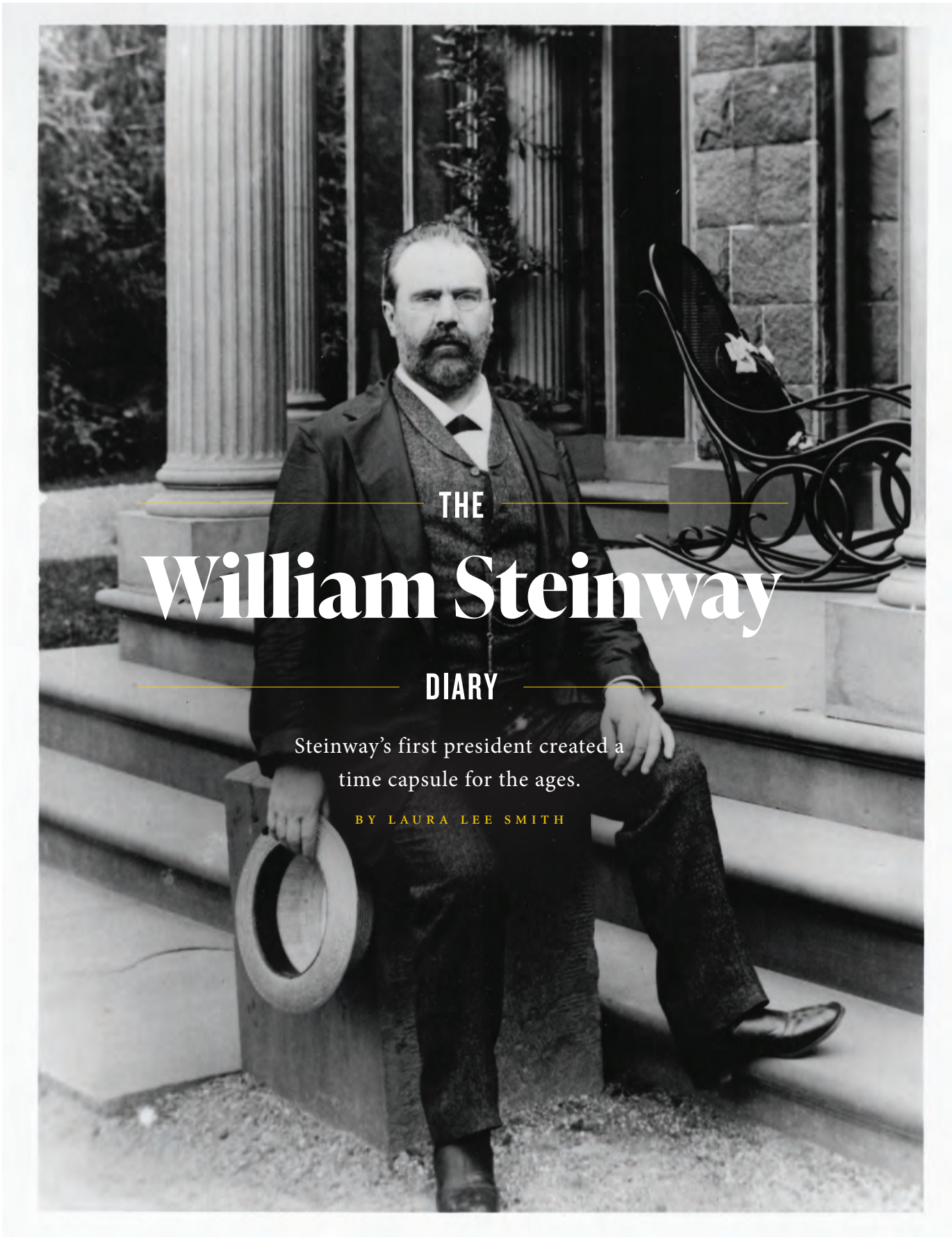
DEEP BURGANDY RED.
In this instrument, a rich, glowing burgundy red harmoniously combines with the red stained Indian apple, creating a warm and elegant aesthetic. The subtle gold hue of the cast-iron plate and lyre is gracefully complemented by satin brass fittings, adding to the overall sophistication of the piece.

MIDNIGHT BLUE.
The instrument features a striking, glossy midnight blue finish coupled with the subtlest blue-stain mahogany wood grain, ensuring it stands out as a true eye-catcher. The addition of a discreet silver-colored cast-iron plate, an elegant lyre, and dazzling chrome fittings completes its sophisticated and captivating look.

Aggraziato. The Steinway & Sons Noé Limited Edition is a celebration of light and sound.

people working with them, rather than just from my own ideas. This process brings humility to a designer, by the way, which is essential. For a designer, the temptation to be egocentric is always there. We always think our work will change the world! But we don't truly change the world. We enhance its beauty, and that contribution is subjective. ▬

Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance is a French designer known for his creating pieces rooted in nature. Born in 1974 in southern France, he studied sculpture at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Appliqués et des Métiers d'Art and furniture design at Les Arts Décoratifs. His projects reflect a respect for the past combined with simplicity and lasting quality. Now based in Portugal, he focuses on collectible design furniture and his project, Made in Situ, which launched in 2020. His design philosophy celebrates the interplay of heritage, materials, and craftsmanship.



THE William Steinway DIARY

Steinway's first president created a time capsule for the ages.

BY LAURA LEE SMITH

All in the family: William Steinway [left] (1835–1896), son of the founder, was one of the most Americanized members of the nineteenth-century Steinway family. He embraced the business and social cultures of New York City, and he kept a remarkable chronicle of his life in a meticulously executed diary. Willliam's first wife Regina Roos [below], was an architect of immense heartache for Steinway's first president.

IN 1996, HENRY ZIEGLER Steinway — the last member of the Steinway family to run Steinway & Sons — made a donation to the Smithsonian Institution that would lead to a remarkable digitization project. He gifted the museum with nine volumes of the personal diary of his grandfather, William Steinway, who was the fourth son of Steinway & Sons' founder and the company's first president. In twenty-five hundred pages of handwritten entries, William recorded the events of his life from 1861 through 1896, beginning with his first marriage at age twenty-seven and ending just a few weeks before his death at age sixty-one.

The diary is now on display at the Smithsonian's American History Museum. It has also been completely digitized and annotated, and in 2010 it became available as a free, searchable online resource through the Smithsonian's Online William Steinway Diary Project. The project is one of the Smithsonian's largest and longest-running volunteer research efforts.

As the diary reveals, William Steinway was a passionate man — about his personal relationships, about his business, about the development of New York City, about music — and his daily notes provide a fascinating window into the life of a wealthy businessman during the second half of the nineteenth century. His entries capture the unrest of the Civil War, the development of the New York City Rapid Transit system (a project of which he was an integral part), Steinway & Sons' role in the growth of Queens, and his struggle with organized labor. Through it all, he also recorded with painstaking precision the highs and lows of his personal life, even meticulously tracking his ongoing

struggles with gout and "rheumatism" (in his case, likely osteoarthritis), the frequency of his own sexual encounters, and the eviscerating heartbreak of his first wife's betrayal.

The full diary and a wealth of visual resources documenting the history of Steinway & Sons can be viewed at americanhistory.si.edu/steinwaydiary.

» April 23, 1861

Marriage takes place at the residence of my wife's father, Jacob Roos, Pastor Burger performing ceremony. Bridegrooms and witnesses, Andrew Brunn and Hugo Stammann, bridesmaids Hermine Weisser and Louise Goetz. Pleasant evening, dancing, singing, eating, and drinking until retiring. Wedding night.

William's marriage to his first wife, Regina Roos, would last until 1876, when he discovered one of his children was actually fathered by another man. Heartbroken, he divorced Regina. She and the child, a little boy William affectionately called "Little Ditz," moved to Germany. William was able to discover the boy's paternity by examining the meticulous records he kept of his own sex life. He wrote tally marks in the margins of his diary to track his sexual encounters.

» March 15, 1862

Very foggy and wet weather. To my horror find that the officers of steamer City of New York will not receive the two pianos for London. I immediately run to Pier 44 N.R. where she lies, and after a good deal of trouble and giving the stevedore $5 and his men 50 cts., succeed to get the pianos on board. Henry goes to England with this steamer, which departs at 12:30 p.m.

With Steinway & Sons in its ninth year of operation, William was a savvy enough businessman to know how to grease the wheels of industry with cash incentives. When the Civil War brought turmoil to his doorsteps a year later, he might have wished for the mundane problems of a shipping snafu.

» July 13, 1863

Terrible excitement throughout the City, resistance to the draft. Row of buildings on Third Ave. burning down, also on Lexington Ave. Various other buildings fired by the mob. About 5 p.m. they appear before our factory. Charles speaks to them and with the aid of Rev. Father Mahon they draw off towards Yorkville, where late in the eve. many buildings are fired. Father, Charles, and I stay in the factory office 'til 1 a.m., then go to bed. It rains heavily all night. During his stay with the mob, Charles gave the ringleaders $30-40

inc/ money and one a check for $30. It was a terrible scene, and we were of course all much exercised at the prospect of having the factory destroyed.

» July 14, 1863

Early in the morning the trouble recommences, Soldiers with cannon marching down Third Ave. An immense concourse of people assembling near 34th extending from 2nd to 5th Ave. Terrible fighting between the soldiers and the mob. Col. O. Brien killed, heavy fires in the eve., factory stopped work yesterday and today. All business in the upper part of the City suspended, Negroes chased everywhere and killed when caught.

» July 15, 1863

Fighting on 2nd Ave near 21st street, the 7th and 71st Regts arrive in the City, more fighting on 2nd and 1st Aves. Stores broken into and plundered. Citizens organizing for defending private property, patrolling all night, burning of an Irish shanty near Central Park. During the day, I have walked down to the store and back again in the eve. and watch all night 'til nearly 5 a.m. in the shop. Find to my horror that all the knapsacks of the 5th Regt have been moved to our basements in the store. I have been unable to eat for the last 3 days except bread and drinking water for excitement.

» April 15, 1865

Terrible news that at 9.30 p.m. President Lincoln has been assassinated at Ford's Theatre in Washington. Secretary Seward and his sons dangerously injured and stabbed. Great excitement and grief throughout the City. Closing of the stores.

» January 3, 1870

All bellymen leave at 12 p.m. Committee of four of them call on me. I tell them that unless they go at once to work they may all consider themselves discharged.

» January 4, 1870

All bellymen at work at 7 a.m. I go to factory towards evening and talk over matter.

Ripples of labor unrest began during William's presidency. The threats of unionized workers and frequent strikes would plague William throughout most of his career. The situation was largely responsible for his decision to move Steinway & Sons' manufacturing out of Manhattan and into Astoria, where he hoped (unrealistically) that the influence of unions would be mitigated.

» February 7, 1871

In the morning, watchman from factory comes and informs me that father died at 2:30 a.m. during the night. Wife and I hurry up town. I see him and mother, who is crying all the time. After a short consultation, we decide to have him buried from Steinway Hall, Thursday morning at 10 o'clock. I go to store which, like factory, is closed, write the funeral notices and send Geilfuss and Darcie downtown to attend to obituary editorial notices. Home in evening. Albert and wife spend evening with us. The weather has moderated and is not so intensely cold.

William matter-of-factly recorded the death of Henry E. Steinway, founder of Steinway & Sons. Upon his father's death, William assumed company leadership.

» April 23, 1876

The 15th anniversary of my marriage, the saddest and most terrible I have ever lived through. On getting up can barely stand, having gout in body of left foot, and around the ankle at right foot. Paint both with colorless iodine and manage to get to Steinway Hall at 10 a.m. Writing this and getting material to work all day.… I work 'til 10 p.m. rubbing my left foot with colorless iodine, taking gout pills. Thus ends the 15th anniversary of my marriage, I having spent nearly all day with bleeding heart to extract from my daily diary points for my complaint and suit for a divorce.

The end of his first marriage hit William hard. When Regina returned her wedding ring to him, with "a few affectionate and poignant words," he wrote, "I again break down and sob as though my heart would break."

» June 20, 1886

Immense crowds of respectable people at Bowery Bay Beach, and my R.R. is unable to carry half the people. At 5 p.m. all the beer is gone, and people overflow Steinway village and drink all the beer there.

» July 5, 1886

Again take swimbath, hot day and immense crowds throng bathing pavilion and B. B. Beach. Some young men attempt to force their way from Rikers over our beach but I drive them off with my revolver. Learn that the Central Labor Union unanimously boycotted George Ehrets beer. Fearful articles in Volkszeitung yesterday and today as well as Saturday.

By the 1880s, the Steinway family — and William in particular — were part of the fabric of Astoria, Queens, where William had founded a company town known as "Steinway Village." William would even open an amusement park located on land that is now beneath the runways of LaGuardia Airport.

» November 17, 1891

Rapid Transit Session, called also on Chas. Unger. Paderewski first concert at Music Hall, grand success, he is a most wonderful player. At L.K. afterwards.

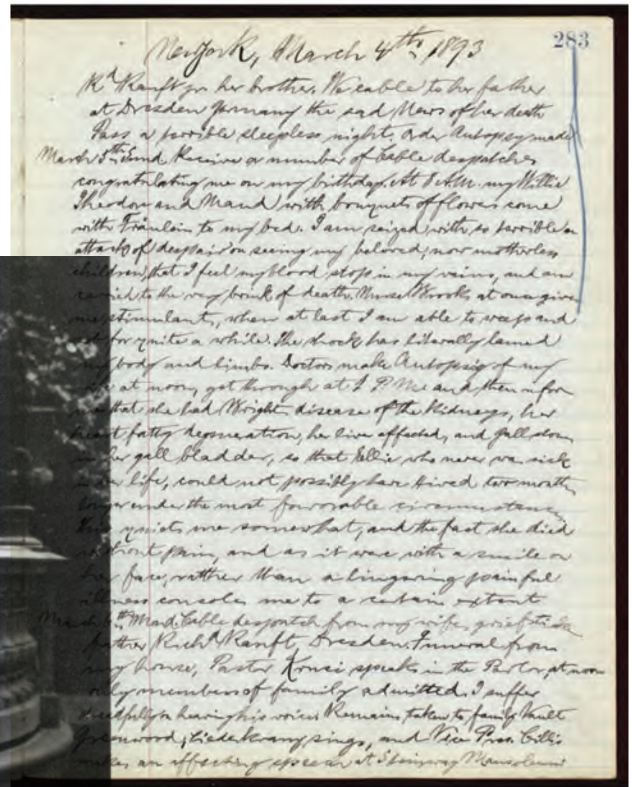
» March 26, 1892

Paderewski matinee immense, receipts $6,530.30. Osterheld, Moulton, and White meet me, talking electrifying my road from 92nd Street to Riker Ave. RR. N. Dickson, M. W. Beckel, J. Bach. and others called and plagued me. Work home in evening, drawing Paderewski contract.

A harried William Steinway juggled the demands of his business associates, involvement in New York's fledgling rapid

Through the years. Polish virtuoso Ignacy Jan Paderewski [left], was one of William Steinway's first artist–endorsers. The drama of the Civil War draft riots [bottom left] unfolded at the gates of the Steinway factory in Manhattan. By the early 1870s [below], William had moved his operations to Astoria.

Heartbreak. William Steinway's second wife Elizabeth Ranft along with the diary entry describing the circumstances of her death, upon which William mourned the plight of his 'motherless children.'



New York, March 4th 1893 283

transit project, and the thrilling experience of sponsoring Ignacy Jan Paderewski on an American tour that launched the young pianist into international celebrity. "L.K." was the Deutscher Liederkranz, a German singing society in New York City. William joined the Liederkranz in 1858 at age twenty-three and remained active in the organization for the rest of his life — the society sang at his funeral in December 1896.

» March 5, 1893

Receive a number of cable dispatches congratulating me on my birthday. At 8 a.m. my Willie, Theodore, and Maud with bouquets of flowers come with Fräulein to my bed. I am seized with so terrible an attack of despair on seeing my beloved, now motherless children that I feel my blood stop in my veins, and am carried to the very brink of death. Nurse Brooks at once gives me stimulants, when at last I am able to weep and sob for quite a while. The shock has literally lamed my body and limbs. Doctors make autopsy of my wife at noon, get through at 1 p.m. and then inform me that she had Bright's disease of the kidneys, her heart fatty degeneration, her liver affected, and gallstones in her gall bladder, so that Ellie who never was sick in her life, could not possibly have lived two months longer under the most favorable circumstances. This quiets me somewhat, and the fact that she died without pain, and as it were with a smile on her face, rather than a lingering painful illness consoles me to a certain extent.

Upon the death of his second wife Elizabeth Ranft, William was the widowed father of five children. His oldest daughter Paula and her husband would move in with him to help run his household.

» May 1, 1895

Lovely cool day. Tretbar and Stetson call early as to doing Steinway Hall Chicago Opening, Joseffy being burnt out, and Bloomfield Zeissler sick. Stetson shows me a magnificent testimonial signed by the Reszke brothers…. Morris Steinert and his lawyer Beach call and finally settle their lawsuit in an honorable way, in my

library.… Police census gives the population of the City of New York at 1,849,466. Sexes almost alike, as there are about 750 more males than females. In Wiesbaden yesterday died Gustav Freytag, the great writer aged nearly 79 years.

A typical day in the life of William Steinway provides a remarkable snapshot of the late nineteenth century. Tretbar and Stetson were longtime colleagues. M. Steinert was an early Steinway dealer whose business is still in operation today in Boston. The Reszke brothers were prominent opera singers: early on, William recognized the importance of artist endorsements for Steinway pianos.

» November 3, 1896

Ideal day, walk to poll at Third Ave. L.v.B. and myself voting at 10 a.m. We both vote the straight Republican ticket simply marking same in the circle and marking X opposite the "No" in the Adirondack Forest bill. This is the first time in my life that I voted any but the Democratic ticket, but this year the danger of Democratic candidature of Wm. J. Bryan and the unlimited free coinage of silver is so great, that no true Democrat can act otherwise than to vote for McKinley and sound money.… The latest election returns come in and are received with cheers, drive home after midnight. McKinley and Hobart have been elected.

Weeks before his passing, William maintained strong opinions about politics and the economy. Louis Hugo Johannes von Bernuth, often abbreviated "L.v.B" in William Steinway's diary, was married to William's oldest daughter Paula. The three were close until William's death. Note Paula was not present for voting.

» November 8, 1896

Drive in forenoon to L.K. where Jubilee Committee is assembled. I still feel tired and jaded and let Julius Hoffmann preside. Return to Steinway Hall at 1 p.m.… Work till 9 p.m. then drive home. I still eat little, having no appetite.

William Steinway's last diary entry. He died on November 30, 1896, and is buried at Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn. ▬

'Must I Really Die?'

William Steinway died of typhoid fever at the age of sixty-one on November 30, 1896. His death was described in a letter written five days later by William's nephew, Frederick T. Steinway, who would later assume the presidency of Steinway & Sons.

Last Friday after three good days, the fever started to rise again and a set-back was obvious, and as Uncle was very weak, his heart had difficulty keeping going despite injections of strong potions like strychnine.

On Sunday morning at last consultation, Uncle's condition was recognized as hopeless, and despite all stimulations and other helps, we were called to the bedside about 9 p.m. Charles was the last one he recognized, and from then 'til the next morning at 3:30 he was restless and fantasizing. At 3:45 before drawing his last breath, he became calm, and sunk without pain into eternal rest with a smile on his face.

His fantasies were pleasant and showed his sunny personality, which never left him despite all the many cruel blows of fate he had suffered. At 8 o'clock in the evening he said very sadly, "Must I really die?" before he sunk into his fantasies.

What we the family have lost is hard now to understand, and cannot be even rationally thought about, with our present pain. And the hundreds of unfortunate people whom he secretly supported feel it as deeply as we do. Such a man comes only once a century to a family.

I can write no more.

—Fritz

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Steinway Artists on the Rewards of Routine

BY LAURA LEE SMITH

A PEDESTRIAN ON 57TH STREET *sees a musician getting out of a cab and asks, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" Without pause, the artist replies wearily, "Practice."*

The punch line is often attributed to Jascha Heifetz or Artur Rubinstein, sometimes to an anonymous musician or taxi driver, and once even to a beatnik, who, in a 1960 telling, replied "Practice, man, practice." At some point, the line was given a triple flourish: "Practice, practice, practice."
— The Joke *by Matt Carlson, for Carnegie Hall*

There's no way around it: regular practice is a fundamental aspect of becoming a proficient pianist. But how do great artists, both living and immortal, tackle this time-consuming and physically demanding necessity while performing, touring, recording, and teaching? We surveyed Steinway Artists to find out.

HUNG-KUAN CHEN

"Some teachers believe you don't need to practice much and that you only need to use your brain. I don't agree, unless someone has extraordinary technical ability from a young age, before age ten, perhaps. I haven't met a pianist who fits that description, with the exception of Yuja Wang, who was my student for three years while she was in Calgary. But even Yuja practiced consistently. She practiced ten hours a day or more. I've never met anyone as methodical as Yuja, who would practice with a metronome, step by step.

"When I was young, I didn't attend summer festivals. Instead, I would practice at home and often pushed myself to twelve hours a day. It was enlightening; long hours allowed me to dive deep into the music, making it a part of me. When teachers suggested three hours of practice, I just laughed: I never believed it was enough.

"Music-making isn't just about knowledge or technique, it's about forging a deep connection that has to be cultivated daily. This journey isn't like going to school where you follow a bell schedule. It's a spiritual practice, a connection to oneself and one's soul. I often questioned myself, wondering why I spent so much time on seemingly small details. Then I realized that practice involves listening and waiting for your own response to the sound, not just moving your fingers and hitting the right notes. Initially, it takes a long time to develop a connection to the music, but eventually, the response becomes intuitive.

"Now, I typically wake up early and head to my studio by eight o'clock. I practice for two hours until ten, treating this time as a form of meditation or devotion. It clears my mind and prepares me for teaching. I also make time for practice after lunch, and if I have a concert coming up, I'll extend my sessions into the evening. I believe the study of piano, and practice in particular, is the most comprehensive exercise because it involves physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual elements."

HAYATO SUMINO

"When I wake up in the morning, I sit down at the piano. I practice for around three hours with a cup of iced coffee, then practice for another three hours in the afternoon. Other than that, I sometimes work on composing and arranging music, or I sometimes record videos for YouTube. When you practice, it is important to understand the overall picture of the piece by analyzing its structure and harmony, before reading the score. This will allow you to learn the piece faster and allow you to spend more time on the musical interpretation.

"Recording yourself and listening back is very good practice. By listening to your own performance objectively, you will be able to correctly judge what you should improve."

ISAIAH THOMPSON

"My practice routine has changed at different points in my life, which is important to acknowledge. Forcing a practice method when your circumstances change doesn't make sense. When I was a student, I had much more time. I remember waking up early to practice for three hours, then getting another three hours in later. At one point, I was practicing about six hours a day, but that was just my life at that time. In high school, though, that wasn't always possible due to school commitments. And being at Juilliard was different too: I had to take the bus and wasn't living in the dorms, so everything changed. Now that I'm married, practicing while traveling can be almost impossible for me.

"One thing someone told me a long time ago is that you can practice without your instrument. It doesn't replace actual practice, but it's a way to stay engaged when you're away from your piano. For example, when I was commuting, I often asked myself how I could be more *serious* about my practice. I'd think about the pieces I was working on while on the train. I'd run through songs in my head to build confidence. I'd also focus on timing, how to improve my rhythm, by really concentrating during those moments. Also, remember this: When you're practicing, you're not supposed to sound good. If you sound good, you're not practicing."

JOEY ALEXANDER

"It is always a good thing to spend more time with the piano. I focus on specific things on certain days and non-specific things, like free playing (composing freely) on other days. I find that I accomplish a lot when I play free, working on coordination of both hands, starting slow and simple. I start with fingering, working on specific technique, and close the session with songs or my compositions. But the main focus is the sound I create out of the piano and the accuracy of my playing.

"The most important thing is to enjoy the step-by-step process and at the same time be analytical about everything. It's not how long you practice but how efficient and effective the practice is. We have to have a clear goal every time and make sure we accomplish it.

"The biggest challenge is that when I'm on the road, I can't find time to work on specific things. But on the other hand, I can experiment stuff with the band and discover new things. Every practice is a step toward getting better from yesterday. The best tool is patience."

TOP: PAOLO SORIANI

WYNONA WANG

"People often think that Chinese children practice a lot. I had a different experience. I started playing at age four, but I didn't receive professional training right away. My first experience was in a small room with three pianos and three kids at each piano, practicing simultaneously. It was a bit competitive to get your time at the piano. I believe it's better not to practice too long. For important competitions or concerts, I find that four to five hours is optimal; otherwise, it's easy to get injured or lose concentration. I typically focus for about forty minutes at a time. I've heard from professors that taking a five-minute break every fifteen minutes is helpful, but when I'm really in the zone, I can lose track of time.

"A good piano really helps with inspiration. I enjoy practicing at school because each day brings a different piano sound. It really depends on inspiration. I don't believe in forcing yourself to practice if you really don't want to. I suggest sitting at the piano for just ten minutes to see how you feel. Often, once I start, I end up practicing for an hour or more. I travel on weekends to perform, so during the week, I practice when I can. When I travel, I ask for a practice room for a few hours a day if possible."

Practice Styles of the Immortals

Vladimir Horowitz preferred intense practice sessions of three to four hours, often interspersed with breaks. He would focus on a limited number of pieces, playing them repeatedly until they were deeply ingrained.

Sergei Rachmaninoff reportedly practiced for up to ten hours a day, particularly during his early years. He placed a strong emphasis on technical drills, such as scales and arpeggios, to build strength and agility.

Glenn Gould was known for practicing late at night and often recorded his sessions to review later. He would spend time analyzing scores and experimenting with interpretations. Gould believed in the power of mental rehearsal.

Arthur Rubinstein's practice was known to be flexible and often dictated by his inspiration rather than a strict schedule. He also enjoyed playing with other musicians, often incorporating social elements into his practice routine.

FAR RIGHT, BOTTOM: EUGENE COOK

CONNIE HAN

"I don't really follow a warm-up routine anymore. I also don't think too much about technique. Instead, I think about how to achieve the most natural and powerful sound effortlessly, using the laws of gravity and my natural intuition. I begin my practice with a meditative approach, often starting with a Bach piece. In fact, I did that today, using a metronome. Starting with Bach helps get my brain going, and once I'm warmed up, I feel inspired to compose, regardless of my mood. Bach provides a foundation for much of the syntax and language in both jazz and classical music. I usually spend about half an hour on Bach, and by that time, I'm ready to start improvising. I record my improvisations, transcribe them into score software, or write them down — and then I compose.

"Practicing is amazing because it's closely linked to movement. I've learned these concepts autodidactically, and while I'm sure there are methods that address this, understanding the laws of physics is crucial when trying to produce a powerful sound without forcing it. This philosophy, of practicing with an awareness of gravity, is vital. If you play incorrectly or use your arm or shoulder improperly, you risk strain and injury, and you won't sound very good.

"Horowitz was fascinating; he had a completely different physiology as a large man, yet he exemplified what I'm talking about. The best in the world understand this. I don't focus on technique in a conventional sense; rather, I consider how I can use my body holistically to achieve freedom and control in the right way. As for practice advice, start slow, but also make sure you truly love what you're pursuing. If you don't have that passion, your attention span will suffer. I also recommend taking technique seriously. Too often, I see students with raw talent who don't take classical music seriously because it's sometimes considered unfashionable. They end up sounding unrefined, like someone who can't fluently speak English. This theme resonates in both my personal philosophy and my musical approach: having fluency in language and expressing ideas clearly, with sophistication and simplicity when necessary, and complexity when appropriate. You can't achieve that without a solid foundation."

LEFT: MICHARL R. POOL

The Dangers of Over-Practicing

Many artists warn of the dangers of over-practicing, which can lead to physical issues such as tendonitis or focal dystonia. The latter is a particularly career-damaging neurological condition that affects specific muscle groups, leading to involuntary contractions or abnormal postures. In the context of piano practice, it often manifests as difficulty in controlling finger movements, which can disrupt technique and performance. This condition can develop due to repetitive strain, overuse, or the intense focus required during practice. Treatment options often include physical therapy, relaxation techniques, and sometimes adjustments in practice routines to help alleviate symptoms and regain control.

MARILYN NONKEN

"For me, starting the morning with music is vital; it reminds me of why I do what I do and keeps me connected to my inspirations. Staying in touch with my musical motivations is a top priority. As I've progressed in my career, efficiency in practice has become crucial. I often see wonderful students in school who have six or eight hours a day to practice. For someone at my level, that's not always realistic. I've learned to work efficiently, identify technical problems, and stay organized in my approach to upcoming performances. Using time wisely is a valuable skill for any performer.

"One of the big challenges we see, especially with young musicians, is the habit of over-practicing, which can lead to physical problems. It's important to develop the ability to work efficiently, stay inspired, and make progress quickly, both as a student and as a professional. Typically, I focus on whatever I'll be recording or performing. Prioritizing tasks with deadlines helps me make meaningful progress. Even if I have ongoing recordings, I set deadlines for myself, so I'm not just going through the motions.

"Many young students are exposed to incredible recordings and videos, which can lead to a desire to emulate their idols. But practicing to become someone else can be unfulfilling. Instead, I encourage them to focus on their own sound, interpretation, and identity as musicians. That's a much more exciting and attainable goal than simply trying to replicate another artist's style. Ultimately, no matter how much we admire historical figures, we will always sound like ourselves, which is a good thing. Embracing that uniqueness is what makes our musical journeys special."

RAJA RAHMAN

"When artists are still in school, they have the luxury of several hours a day to practice, anywhere from three to six hours, which allows them to prepare for lessons, rehearsals, and concerts. But after graduation, as we take on jobs or other responsibilities, those hours shrink significantly. Typically, I plan my practice schedule either the night before or first thing in the morning. I try to carve out blocks of time, which can vary. Some pianists prefer shorter blocks with breaks in between, but I personally like longer stretches. This allows me to focus deeply on specific passages. However, most of the time, I have limited hours, so I have to be strategic about my approach, almost like a military operation. I set clear goals for each practice session, which requires a lot of planning and mental preparation throughout the day.

"Even when I'm engaged in other responsibilities, thoughts about my music are always present. For instance, while in meetings or teaching, I'm often thinking about transitions or specific sections I need to work on. This constant mental engagement allows me to maximize my practice time when I finally sit at the piano. It's often less about technical execution and more about conceptualizing passages and their relationship with the orchestra or other instruments. When you prepare mentally, you're in a better position when you finally get to the piano.

"Another important aspect is the value of slow practice, as emphasized by artists like Itzhak Perlman. Practicing slowly helps solidify techniques and develop deeper understanding. It's crucial to balance rigorous practice with mindfulness of your body. For instance, I had a moment recently where I felt discomfort in my elbows, which was a wake-up call. It's vital to recognize our physical limitations and not push ourselves to one-hundred percent every day. During rehearsals, yes, we give our all, but in practice, we need to be mindful." ▬

FROM TOP; VENTIKO 2018, KEVIN DYER 2018

A Harmonious Connection

On Leonard Bernstein and Steinway & Sons

IN THE OPENING scene of the Academy Award–nominated 2023 film *Maestro*, Leonard Bernstein (played by Bradley Cooper) sits at a well-worn Steinway grand inside his Connecticut home. Bernstein, one of the most celebrated composers and conductors of the twentieth century, is well into his seventies, and as he picks at the notes of *A Quiet Place*, he is overcome with grief for his late wife, Felicia Montealegre. To steady himself, he focuses on the keys. "It always sounds better on the piano," he murmurs. "I don't know why."

THE COATES STEINWAY

The piano featured in *Maestro* was Bernstein's real Steinway, on loan from the Bernstein family for the making of the film. And it is an Easter egg of sorts, a clue to the ardent admiration Bernstein had for Steinway & Sons, despite his longstanding business agreement to endorse a competing piano brand.

That piano was gifted to him by a woman named Helen Coates, who was once his childhood music teacher and who later served as his personal professional secretary for many years. Before it was moved to Connecticut, Bernstein kept the piano at his Manhattan home: a grand apartment on the second floor of the famous Dakota building, on the corner of West 72nd Street and Central Park West, where the composer lived from 1975 until his death in 1990. He also owned a one-bedroom apartment on the Dakota's top floor, and the Steinway piano spent time in both spaces. It was kept in the main residence for a while and later made its way up to the smaller apartment, which the Bernstein family used as a music studio.

In her 2018 book *Famous Father Girl*, Bernstein's daughter Jamie recalls a solemn moment in 1980 that occurred, for her, at the keys of this very Steinway.

"I was upstairs in apartment 92 that evening, working out a new song. I liked the Steinway piano up there that Helen Coates had passed along to her former pupil. . . . As I played, I faintly heard something outside that sounded like gunshots. My hands froze over the keys: What was *that*? A gun going off on Central Park West seemed like a preposterously melodramatic explanation. It must be a truck backfiring, I told myself, and I resumed playing the piano." It wasn't a truck, as it turned out. It was the shooting of John Lennon.

THE CRANBROOK STEINWAY

There was at least one other notable Steinway in Leonard Bernstein's life, and this one was located, oddly, in a Detroit suburb some six hundred miles from Manhattan, on the grounds of

BETTMANN/GETTY

‘IT ALWAYS SOUNDS BETTER ON THE PIANO.’

the historic Cranbrook estate. The Cranbrook House Steinway, an imposing Model D, was built in 1929 in New York, purchased by a piano dealer in Detroit, and later acquired by the Colony Town Club, a local women’s organization. But after a few years, the club sold the piano back to the dealer, who in turn found it a new home when it was purchased by newspaper mogul George Booth and installed in the main hall of the Cranbrook Pavilion.

In the spring of 1964, Leonard Bernstein completed a residency at Cranbrook. And here, at the keys of this Model D, he almost certainly composed his Symphony No. 2, *The Age of Anxiety*. There’s also a theory that he may have been dabbling in sketches which would later become *West Side Story* at this same piano.

“There’s a mystique to this piano,” said Gregory Wittkopp, Director of the Cranbrook Center for Collections and Research. “There’s debate and perhaps some mythology surrounding what, exactly, Leonard Bernstein was writing on this Steinway during his stay at Cranbrook. But what we do know is that he spent an intensive three-week period at this keyboard during an important stage of his writing career.”

After decades of use, with this historic piano feeling the effects, Cranbrook had it shipped to the Steinway restoration center at the factory in New York City. “They offered us a choice,” Wittkopp remembered. “They said, ‘We can restore this piano’s sound to the way it was in the 1930s, in its infancy, or we can bring it to the standards and the sound characteristics that would be expected by any professional musician today.’ And we talked about it and decided that we weren’t interested in a period piece. What we really want is a Steinway piano that today’s artists can play and that will appeal to a wide range of pianists and listeners. So they restored the piano beautifully with a new soundboard, and we couldn’t be happier.”

Leonard Bernstein, a man buried with a copy of Gustav Mahler’s Fifth Symphony laying across his heart, lived his entire life surrounded by pianos. And while he was famously connected to another brand, it’s clear that he had great fondness for the integrity of the Steinway piano.

Not to mention: the maestro appreciated the utility of the Steinway family name. Forever correcting those who would mispronounce “Bernstein” (last syllable rhymes with “fine”), he always told people that it should be easy to remember how to pronounce his name. After all, he’d point out, nobody ever calls it a “*Steen*-way.” ▬

Bernstein, in miniature

The Complete Solo Piano Works of Leonard Bernstein, by Steinway Artist Leann Osterkamp, is a two-disc album celebrating Leonard Bernstein’s career. The collection, released under the Steinway & Sons record label, includes all of the maestro’s works for piano, both unpublished and previously unrecorded pieces. Among them are numerous miniatures created as tributes, gifts, and memorials to friends and family.

Osterkamp’s profound appreciation for Bernstein’s music began when she performed a new arrangement of his *Songfest*. This experience led to lasting friendships with Bernstein’s daughter, Jamie, and his protégé, Michael Barrett. Jamie introduced Osterkamp to some of Bernstein’s unpublished piano works, while Barrett showed her various manuscripts of these previously unheard pieces.

Her work caught the attention of the Leonard Bernstein Office, which granted her permission to undertake the complete recording. This album is the culmination of extensive research and countless hours of work, including in-depth exploration at the Library of Congress, where Osterkamp gained valuable insights into Bernstein’s life and creative process.

For more information on *The Complete Solo Piano Works of Leonard Bernstein*, visit Steinway.com/complete-bernstein.

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PETER LYNGDORF

Founder, Steinway Lyngdorf

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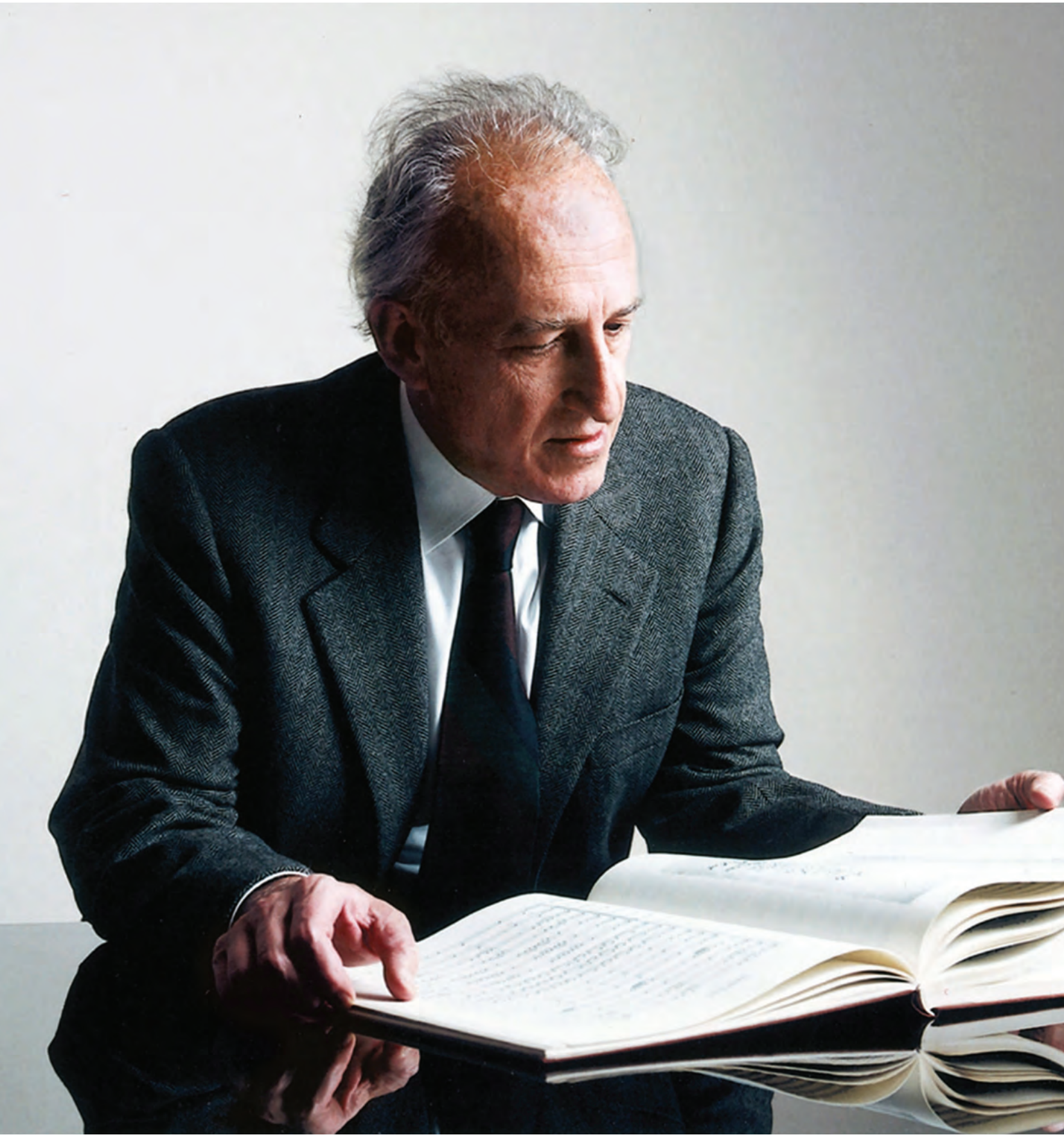

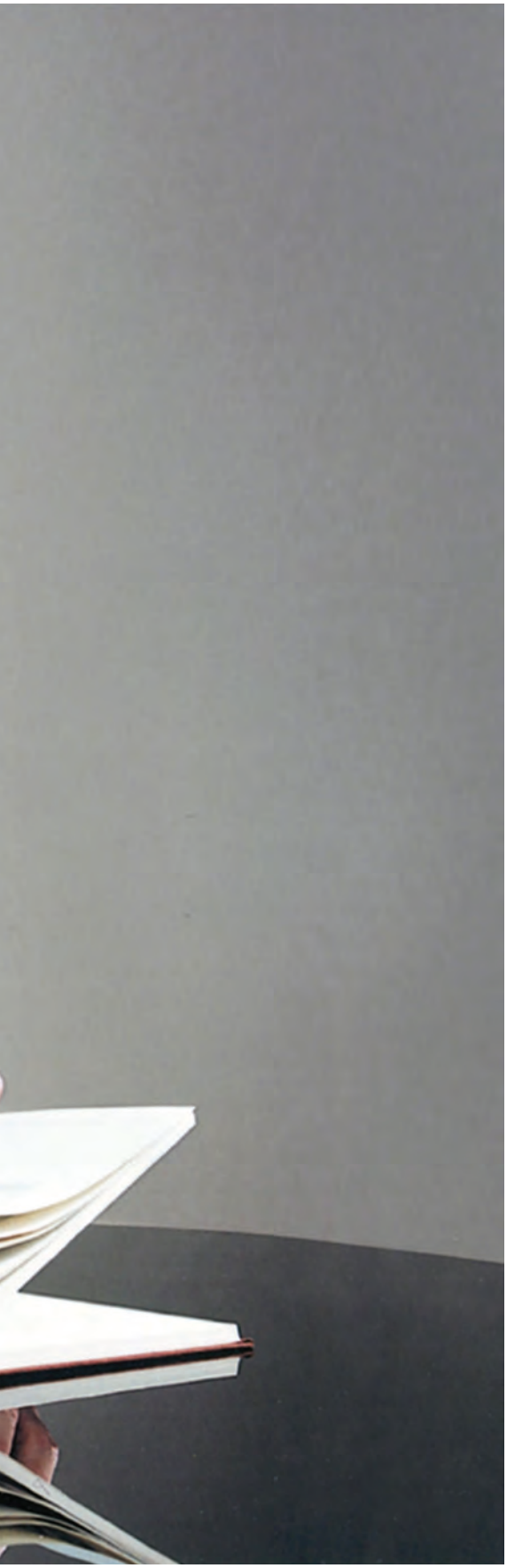

REMEMBERING MAURIZIO POLLINI

(1942–2024)

It is a different world without the Steinway Immortal in it.

BY GERRIT GLANER

LIKE ALL PIANISTS, Maurizio Pollini longed for the ideal instrument. He had very clear ideas about how his grand piano should be: at concerts, in the studio, and at home. Since every Steinway is unique, the question of the ideal instrument was always asked anew. It was an honor to work with the late maestro, but also a recurring challenge. Pollini's ideas and demands were high. His motivation was not vanity, but rather responsibility. He was concerned with music, with meeting the expectation of composer and audience. He was a cautious artist, sometimes scrupulous and often ruminating before finding a musical solution. We had the utmost respect for his approach and kept ourselves prepared with time, flexibility, empathy — and with strong espresso!

Pollini's wishes as to how his Steinway grand should feel and sound in concert were already reflected in the positioning of the instrument on stage, which required a great deal of attention and time. When he came to the Laeiszhalle in Hamburg, for example, we placed the grand piano exactly where the optimal position had already been determined years ago: the right foot of the grand piano stood on the seventh row of wood on the stage floor, with the propstick at the exact hight height of seat 16 of the stalls. Everything was always in place when he arrived — but calibration was always needed. The grand piano was moved several times at small intervals, sometimes only ten centimeters forward, sideways, backward, and the sound in the hall was always checked. In the end, the Steinway was usually back in its original position. This procedure was a typical and necessary preparation for Pollini and gave him confidence on the eve of his concert. The preparation could lead to transcendent moments.

Maurizio Pollini was aware that he was one of the world's most eminent pianists, but he was never arrogant. He had at least one pianist idol: Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli. This was not because they were both Italian and had their birthdays on January 5, but because of Michelangeli's pianistic genius and incorruptible quality standards. Pollini admired these traits in his role model.

When he had written his dedication for the gallery of pictures and autographs by Steinway Artists at Steinway Hamburg, he asked whether there was a picture of Michelangeli there. Upon confirmation, he asked with all humility whether it might be possible to place his picture near it. Of course! When we showed him that we had placed them right next to each other, he was overjoyed. There they are together, side by side, each at the piano and looking at a score. And in pianist heaven, they can now play four-handed. What an image to contemplate.

The piano world is a different place without Maurizio Pollini. The bond between him and the Steinway Family continues. We are sad and grateful. Our sympathies go out to his wife Marilisa, his son Daniele, his friends, and to music lovers everywhere. ▬

MILLER MOBLEY

How to CLEAN YOUR PIANO

Tips to keep your instrument looking pristine

DISINFECTING PIANO KEYS

To disinfect your piano, the keys are the most important part. Over-the-counter hydrogen peroxide available from any pharmacy is safe for piano keys.

Dampen a cotton pad with hydrogen peroxide and use the pad to wipe down the piano keytops (back to front) between players.

Use diluted alcohol-based disinfectants. Do *not* use bleach-based disinfectants or any product containing citrus.

If using a spray or liquid bottle, use disposable pads or soft cloths. Put the disinfectant on the towel and not the piano.

Always follow up with a dry towel and never leave any liquids on the piano or keys.

GENERAL CLEANING

The exterior of your piano is actually quite easy to keep clean. A clean piece of fine-knit cloth, lightly dampened with plain water, is the most convenient and safe method for removing dust and finger marks that occur during normal use and play. High-polish finishes should be wiped lightly with the use of a microfiber polishing cloth.

Due to the wide range of cleaning products available, it is advisable to test on an small unexposed area of the finish to ensure that the product will not damage the finish prior to using on visible surfaces.

Waxing and polishing is not recommended, as this can lead to build-up that can only be safely removed by trained professionals. Wipe your piano's keyboard frequently with a clean piece of soft cloth, very lightly dampened with water.

Never allow dampness to seep between the keys or down into the keybed: this can cause swelling and hamper the free play of the keys.

Never use solvents of any kind to clean either the black or the white keys of your piano: they can damage the fine finish of the keys.

Don't put pots, vases, pictures, drinks or objects of any kind on top of a piano. The finish can be damaged by any foreign objects placed upon it — and they can have a ruinous effect on the piano's sound. ▬

Opening night. Pianists Carlos Pascual Cippelletti and A Bu perform at the Mannes School's All–Steinway Institution celebration concert.

GOING STEINWAY

New York City's renowned Mannes School of Music achieves All–Steinway status.

THE MANNES SCHOOL of Music at The New School's College of Performing Arts is one of the world's foremost classical music conservatories and has been a staple of New York musical culture for well over a century, since spouses David and Clara Mannes founded the school in 1916 with the goal of cultivating a genuine love and passion for music among students. Now, The Mannes School has been named an All–Steinway Institution in recognition of Mannes's investment in the finest instruments for its piano students and ensembles.

The attainment of the All–Steinway Institution designation was years in the making, said Steinway Artist and Piano Department Chair Pavlina Dokovska, who has taught at Mannes since 1995. In 1999, Dokovska founded the Mannes Sounds Festival, a year-long student music festival that engages pianists, chamber musicians, and singers in public concerts around New York City. The Festival soon became a conduit for the formation of a tight-knit group of Mannes friends and benefactors who, for twenty-five years, have remained committed to helping the school maintain the finest standards in facilities, equipment, and instruments.

"Mannes Sounds is unique," Dokovska said. "People simply love it. It is not limited to one venue. Our performances take audiences to some of the most beautiful venues in New York City, places you wouldn't ordinarily have the opportunity to see unless you were invited. Over the years, these experiences have raised the profile of Mannes and have highlighted the promise of our students."

As the Festival grew, Dokovska

NATHANIEL JOHNSTON

All together now. Bethany Rose, Steinway & Sons Sr. Director of Retail Sales; Pavlina Dokovska, Steinway Artist and Mannes Piano Department Chair; Dr. Donna E. Shalala, Interim President of The New School; and Dr. Richard Kessler, Executive Dean, College of Performing Arts and Dean, Mannes School of Music.

said, so did the enthusiasm of Mannes benefactors, who were eager to support the school's innovative, multidisciplinary approach to piano education. When Mannes moved from West 85th Street to its current location in Greenwich Village in 2015, Dokovska saw an opportunity to direct some of this enthusiasm toward a fundraising initiative that would ultimately lead to All–Steinway institution status.

As a Steinway Artist herself, Dokovska always knew that "Steinway is without a doubt consistently the very best piano. I wanted to give that gift to our students," she said. "I strongly believe that as educators, we have a responsibility to improve the lives of these young musicians in any way we can, and having the best pianos for learning, practice, and performance is a key to this. We owe it to the young. We owe it to the future. Our patrons fully understand and support our mission, and we do not have enough words to express our profound gratitude to them for their generosity."

Dokovska is quick to point out that her efforts received great support from Richard Kessler, Mannes's Executive Dean of the College of Performing Arts. "Any conservatory needs funds for many things," she said. "But he understood how important the All-Steinway Institution designation is. He was on board from the beginning and provided our team and our donors with the administrative support we needed to succeed."

The reaction among faculty and students to the 51 new pianos on campus has been most enthusiastic. Mannes senior piano major Jiwon Yong, third-prize winner of the 2019 Van Cliburn International Junior Piano Competition, notes that while string and wind players can bring their own instruments to the school or to the concert halls, the pianists cannot do that.

"It's so important to have access to good pianos," she said. "And Steinway pianos are outstanding. They have a very clear sound in the high register and a great resonance in the low register. The Steinway specialty is to create a multi-dimensional sound, and everyone at Mannes, not just the piano majors, benefits from these new pianos."

"Mannes is a big fan of Steinway & Sons," Dean Kessler said. "We have been connected for a very long time. Our founders David and Clara Mannes had a close friendship with Frederick T. Steinway, nephew of the founder, back in the early part of the century. When Mannes opened its doors in 1916, Steinway was the piano of choice. We are very happy to be designated an All–Steinway Institution. It seems to be a natural fit. It's very prestigious. It means a lot to pianists, and it will do a lot of good things for us." ▬

Two Steinways are better than one. Pianists Jacob Kelly and Congyu Xue perform at the Mannes School's All–Steinway Institution celebration concert.

SOUND | BOARD

The official Steinway & Sons podcast at 70+ episodes strong, Soundboard is Steinway's ongoing ad-free masterclass on artistry and craftsmanship — featuring distinguished Steinway Artists, musicians, artists, writers, and creatives. Soundboard seeks out inspiration, hones in on the creative process, parses influences, and attempts to diagnose artistic greatness.

Soundboard is produced and hosted by music journalist Ben Finane, Steinway & Sons' Director of Content and Publisher/Editor in Chief of Steinway's award-winning web magazine listenmusicculture.com.

Listen to Soundboard wherever you pod your 'casts or visit steinway.com/soundboard.

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HEARD ON SOUNDBOARD:

"I would refer to Beethoven as 'God.'"
STEINWAY ARTIST **BILLY JOEL**

'I've got myself in a situation where a certain amount of success affords you a way of living where you can fail to examine, fail to question.'
BILL MURRAY

'Because of the craftsmanship Cole Porter used to write these songs, not only will they last forever, but they're perfect for interpretation.'
STEINWAY ARTIST **HARRY CONNICK JR.**

'My dad was a very open-minded musician. I just followed on. He loved it all and he passed that love and curiosity of music on to me.'
STEINWAY ARTIST **JOHN PAUL JONES**

"My rule was: 'You've already written a song like this. You can't anymore.'"
STEINWAY ARTIST **REGINA SPEKTOR**

'Music is physical and is also emotional — more than anything. That's one of the main reasons we keep it in our lives.'
STEINWAY ARTIST **VIJAY IYER**

'If you're not enjoying what you're doing, how can you project to others?'
STEINWAY IMMORTAL **AHMAD JAMAL**

'I've learned never to close your mind and your ears to what could be — to what can be.'
STEINWAY ARTIST **RAMSEY LEWIS**

'I want to be the soundtrack to your thoughts, and I want to leave room for your thoughts.'
STEINWAY ARTIST **ROBERT GLASPER**

'It was in my late twenties the first time I decided that the power in music was how it sounded — not what it was.'
BRANFORD MARSALIS

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THE STEINWAY COLOR Collection offers a fresh take on the classic Steinway. Vibrantly colorful accents breathe character into an ebony grand. Bold and bright, Steinway custom colors add a flash of color to any space: bright blue, vibrant red… a rainbow of fully customizable colors make this special collection Steinway an exciting choice to express personality, individuality and style. You can customize your Steinway to match the design of any room. Custom colors can be fully customized and special ordered.

To learn more about The Steinway Color Collection, eu.steinway.com/colours.


STEINWAY & SONS

SERVICE & MAINTENANCE

Prolonging the lifespan and musical enjoyment of your Steinway depends on proper service and regular maintenance performed by Steinway–authorized technicians. Learn more about the maintenance process and our recommended service plans below.

TUNING

Tuning is the adjustment of tension on the strings to affect the sound of upright and grand pianos. Tunings should be scheduled at a minimum of six-month intervals, though more tunings may be recommended depending on usage and environment (see service plans below). For pianos that have not been tuned at recommended intervals, it may be necessary to tune the piano more than once in the same visit to ensure tuning stability. If a perfectly-tuned piano has a deficiency in tone, the finer settings of the mechanism or the firmness of the hammers may need maintenance.

MECHANISM AND KEYBOARD REGULATION

The more than 7,500 moving parts in your piano must be periodically adjusted to help them synchronize with each other. These adjustments are referred to as regulation. Frequency of play and climate will influence how frequently a piano needs regulation. Regulation adjustments include calibrating travel of keys, distance of hammers to strings, and strength of repetition, as well as adjustments to damper and pedal systems.

HAMMER VOICING

The piano is a percussion instrument, creating sound as hammers strike strings. Each hammer is covered with felt, and the density of that felt alters sound dynamics, sound development, and overall tonal quality. When necessary, a Steinway–authorized technician will voice the hammerheads to meet your personal tastes through a variety of factory-specified techniques. In newer pianos, voicing maintains the tonal standard you fell in love with when you bought the piano; in older pianos, voicing provides tonal rejuvenation.

CLEANING

Dust and impurities in the environment get into places on a piano — such as the soundboard, strings, frame, and keyboard — that only a technician can reach. When these impurities build up, they have a negative impact on your piano's function and can shorten the lifespan of your piano's inner workings.

FINISH REPAIR AND REFURBISHMENT

Cabinets can become scratched or damaged. Our expert cabinet technician has been trained to provide the correct Steinway materials and processes to repair damage, rub out scratches, and help make your piano look beautiful again.

CLIMATE CONTROL

Your piano should be protected from the path of sunlight and direct air from heating or cooling vents, and it should not be in direct proximity to a humidifier. A climate of 40%–60% relative humidity and 68–78 degrees Fahrenheit is recommended. A Steinway technician can monitor climate with a hygrometer.

Please visit service.steinway.com to be connected with a qualified technician in your area.

SERVICE PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

The many natural components — wood, felt, and leather — of your piano are subject to wear and tear. A regular schedule of expert examinations by our service technicians is necessary for both preventative and ongoing maintenance and will ensure a long, productive lifespan for your piano. We recommend service plans that match your instrument's usage.

RECREATIONAL

USAGE OF 1 HOUR PER DAY

Tuning: 2–4 times per year
Spirio tuning and system calibration: 4 times per year
Mechanism regulation and voicing: every 5 years
Hammer replacement: every 18–20 years
Key refurbishing: every 15–30 years
Cabinet repair/maintenance: every 5 years

PROFESSIONAL & SPIRIO

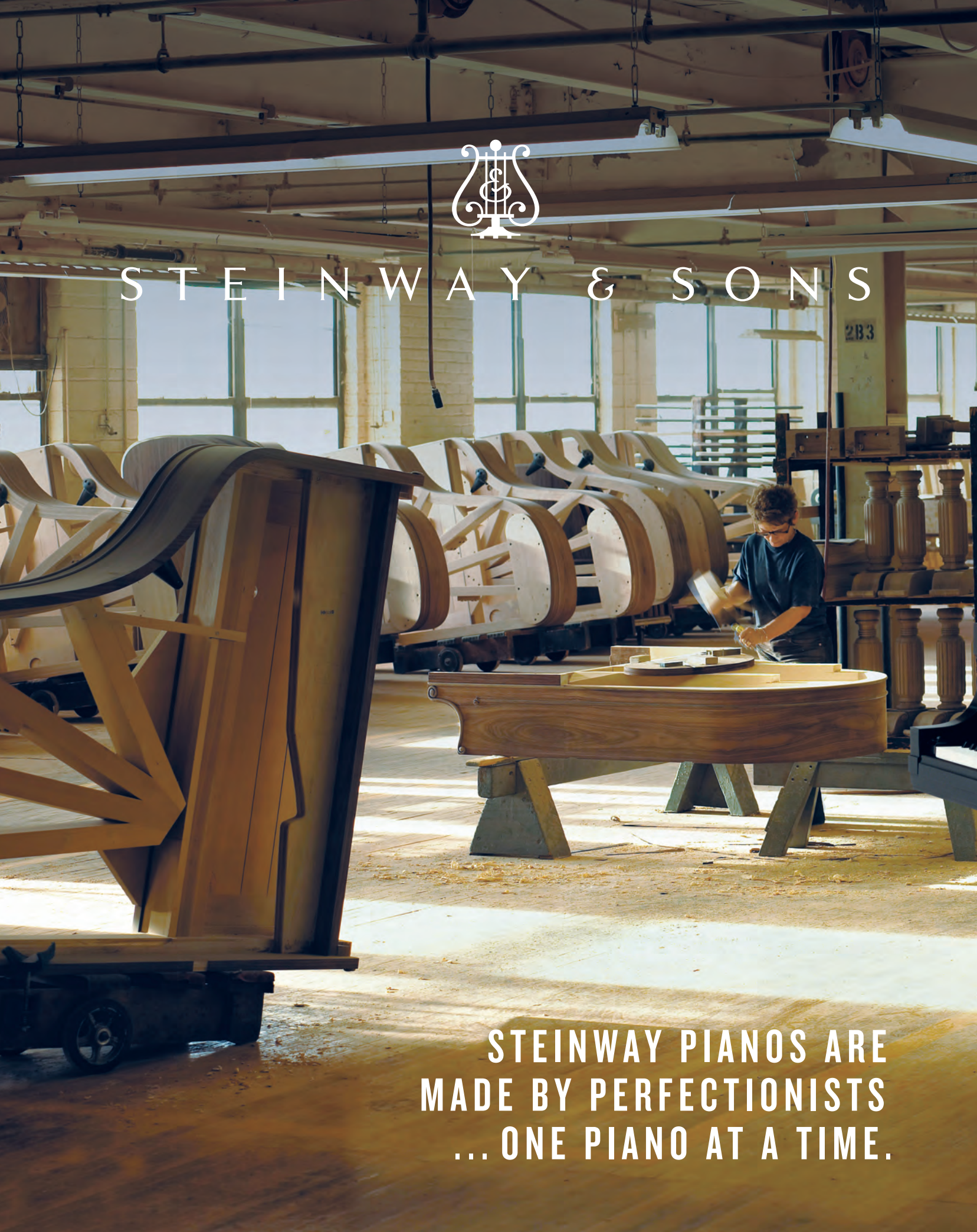
USAGE OF 3–6 HOURS PER DAY

Spirio tuning and system calibration: 4 times per year
Mechanism regulation and voicing: every 3 years
Hammer replacement: every 6–12 years
Key refurbishing: every 10–15 years
Cabinet repair/maintenance: every 3 years

UNIVERSITY & CONSERVATORY

USAGE OF 6+ HOURS PER DAY

Tuning: 12 times per year
Spirio tuning and system calibration: 12 times per year
Mechanism regulation and voicing: annually
Hammer replacement: every 4–7 years
Key refurbishing: every 5–10 years
Cabinet repair/maintenance: annually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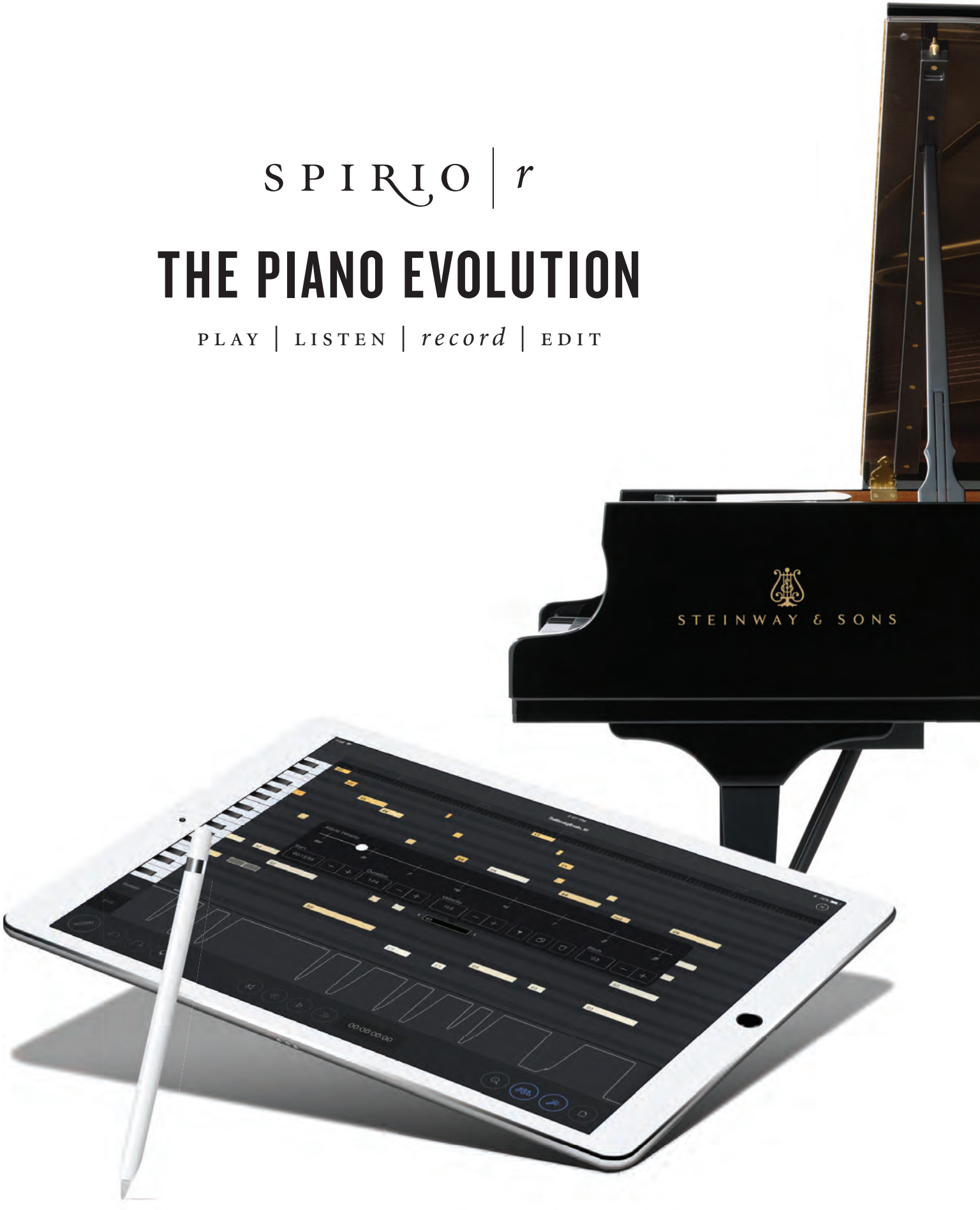

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