



EDITORIAL

THE STEINWAY STORY

One way to measure the brilliance of a musical instrument design is to count up how many times it's been copied. On that count, the Stradivarius violin represents the pinnacle of instrument making genius: the vast quantity of Strad knock-offs produced over the past three centuries are beyond quantification. The Steinway piano is a close second. In 1876, C.F. Theodore Steinway, with the aid of the renowned physicist Hermann von Helmholtz, designed what we now refer to as the grand piano. His "Centennial Grand" was the first to combine an overstrung scale and a full perimeter cast iron plate, with a ground breaking one-piece rim. The resulting instrument achieved the perfect balance between power and response, and every piano maker since has borrowed heavily from his original design.

The Centennial Grand received instantaneous acclaim. But, the worldwide prominence of Steinway derives from more than just a superlative product. Virtually everyone around the world knows Steinway is synonymous with fine pianos. Less well known is the company's role in pioneering marketing concepts that have shaped 20th century commerce. National advertising, "branding," endorsements, and dealer franchises—commonplace concepts today—were ground breaking innovations when Steinway & Sons first began implementing them over a hundred years ago.

Contrary to popular opinion, Nike and Michael Jordan did not invent the superstar endorsement. In the late 19th century, there were literally hundreds of piano makers, all claiming to build the "finest piano." William Steinway set his company apart from the competition by systematically using famous artists to proclaim the Steinway's superiority. In 1873, he invested an enormous sum in sponsoring a U.S. concert tour by Anton Rubinstein, the most famous pianist of the day. Simultaneously, N.W. Ayer, who went on to found one of the country's largest advertising agencies, coined the company slogan "Instrument of the Immortals." This combination of brilliant advertising and a high profile on the concert stage quickly gave the Steinway name a prominence that was the envy of the industry.

The Steinways were among the first to recognize the efficiencies that came with increased production and they quickly resolved to expand their output. However, at a time when almost all business was local, they faced two major obstacles to boosting production. First, the New York market could only absorb a finite number of pianos and secondly, the company lacked the capital or manpower to set up sales offices throughout the country. Their solution was the novel idea of authorizing independent "sales agents" to represent their product outside of New York. This network of agents soon delivered enough business to enable Steinway to build the world's largest piano factory in 1862.

In 1880 when William Steinway returned to Germany with the radical idea of opening a piano plant in Hamburg, few had grasped the importance of having a global presence. In retrospect though, his decision to open a European factory has been one of the most important strategic moves in the company's 150 year history. The plant gave the company a vital presence in influential musical circles and access to the European market.

Steinway's continued prominence rests on the foundation of these brilliant achievements. In addition to a trio of brilliant founders, the company has been fortunate over the past 150 years to have a succession of extremely capable stewards who remained focused on the simple goal of building the finest piano. In a world marked by the accelerating pace of change, Steinway's constancy is a rarity. We celebrate this remarkable tradition in a company history that begins on p. xx

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