



Press Release

Bayreuth, August 2, 2013

Parsifal bells for Richard Wagner

Experience history: Restored 1927 Parsifal bells on display during tours of the Steingraeber factory through the end of the Bayreuth Festival

This summer, the Bayreuth piano manufacturer Steingraeber & Söhne restored the historic 1927 Parsifal bells. The bells are part of an original, grand-piano-like instrument from the Bayreuth Festival. Thanks to advances in manufacturing methods, you can now hear them for the first time in many years. In conjunction with regular tours of the Steingraeber workshops, the bells will ring every Thursday starting at 4 pm until the end of the 2013 Bayreuth Festival.

As far back as spring 1879, Wagner asked Eduard Steingraeber if it would be possible to produce the four pitches of the ringing bells in Parsifal on a piano-like instrument with large hammers and wide keys. And he informed the piano maker that they were C, G, A, E in the lower bass register. Steingraeber drew up plans for an instrument with a tall, narrow case in the shape of a piano. At 220 centimetres, the extraordinarily long strings were to be struck by four, 8 cm wide hammers, and the keys were 7 centimetres wide. In August 1881, Wagner gave the contract to Steingraeber.

The 'Parsifal' bells are a classic example of Wagner's special instruments. Richard Wagner stipulated four bells up to twenty steps lower than the lowest bell at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna. They had a diameter of more than 3 metres and weighed over 20 tonnes. To produce his contra low E bell, Wagner would have needed over 260 tonnes of cast iron and a diameter of about 8 metres.

Eduard's son, Burkhard Steingraeber, built what was called the "hammer dulcimer" for Siegfried Wagner and Karl Muck in 1927. In combination with tone barrels, it provided a kind of "double action": The hammer dulcimer and the original 1882 Parsifal bell instrument produced the fundamentals in the deep bass register. All kinds of secondary instruments, such as tone barrels with hanging saw blades, were used for the brighter overtones, and tam-tams were used at the 1882 premiere. From 1975-1981, Wolfgang Wagner used the 1882 Eduard Steingraeber Parsifal bell in combination with a Moog synthesizer.

More information is available at www.steingraeber.de.

Steingraeber tours:

The first Thursday of every month at 4 pm. Every Thursday at 4 pm during the Wagner Festival. Tickets: 3 euros. No charge for children up to age 14 when accompanied by parents. Reservations are not required.



Press photo:

Burkhard Steingraeber's 1927 "BSt" Parsifal bells, also called the "hammer dulcimer". The Parsifal bells were restored at the Steingraeber workshops during June and July 2013. "Double Action": The Parsifal bells produced the fundamentals in the contra bass register, while barrels with hanging saw blades produced the higher overtones. Photo arranged by Karl Muck and taken backstage at the Festspielhaus in 1936.

A 1927 recording is available and will be sent to press representatives upon request.