

The Rück Collection – a View onto the Whole

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Abstract

When the Rück Collection was sold to the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg (GNM) at the beginning of the 1960s, it was the last sizeable collection of musical instruments within Germany to pass from private to public ownership. Comprising more than 17,000 documents on the acquisition, trade, and restoration of historical musical instruments, this part of the collection in itself constitutes a unique treasure for research and museum work.

At the same time these written documents can become an essential part of the history of the musical instruments – their meaning beyond their musical function – by constituting a part of a collection as well as building blocks within the historical development of instrument making. Considered as a whole, the Rück collection provides the opportunity of understanding a collection of musical instruments as a semiotic sign that represents historical progress, cultural memory, and – ultimately – music.

Die Sammlung Rück – ein Blick aufs Ganze

Beim Verkauf der Sammlung Rück an das Germanische Nationalmuseum in Nürnberg (GNM) Anfang der 1960er Jahre ging in Deutschland letztmals eine Musikinstrumentensammlung dieser Größe aus Privatbesitz in die öffentliche Hand über. Mit mehr als 17.000 Dokumenten zu Ankauf, Handel und Restaurierung historischer Musikinstrumente bietet allein dieser Sammlungsteil einen einmaligen Schatz für Forschung und Museumsarbeit.

Gleichzeitig können diese Dokumente zum wesentlichen Bestandteil der Geschichte der Musikinstrumente werden – für deren Bedeutung über ihre musikalische Funktion hinaus –, indem sie einerseits Teil einer Sammlung und andererseits Gegenstand organologischer Entwicklung sind. Die Sammlung Rück in ihrer Gesamtheit bietet die Möglichkeit, eine Musikinstrumentensammlung als semiotisches Zeichen zu verstehen, das historischen Fortschritt ebenso repräsentiert wie das kulturelle Gedächtnis, und letztlich auch die Musik.

1. Of Collecting and Progress

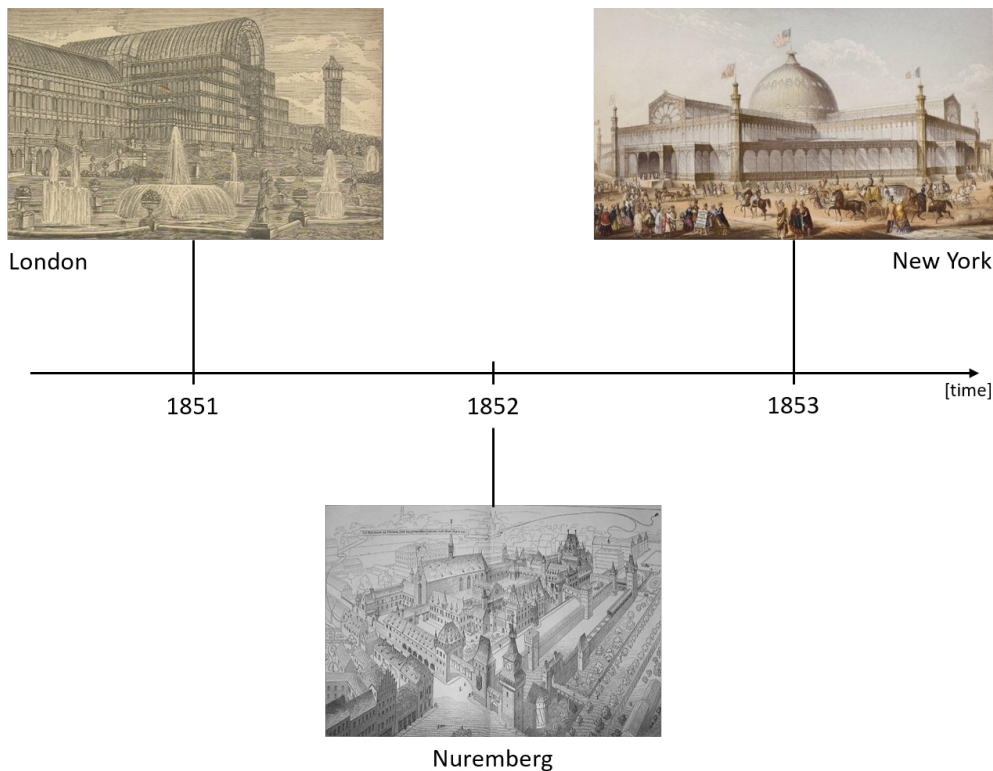
Regarding the development of Western cultural history over the last 200 years and taking into view the year 1852, in which the Germanisches Nationalmuseum was founded, it seems in any way logical that the Rück collection is now owned by this institution. For with this museum the nobleman Hans Freiherr von und zu Aufseß (1801-1872) had sought to establish a »well-ordered general repertory of the entire source material for German history, literature and art«. ¹ At the same time, German composers and music critics were

working through similar ideas and pursued the creation of a German national opera which followed exactly the same intention: to unify the German-speaking regions to one German nation by the unadulterated power of culture and art.

Seen in this light, the connection between the Rück collection and the GNM seems to be logic for two reasons – one international, one national. Only one year before the GNM was founded, the Great Exhibition was held in London in 1851, and the year following the GNM's foundation saw the Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations in New York in 1853 (fig. 1).

These gargantuan events are worth mentioning not only because of their chronological proximity to the foundation of the GNM. Indeed, they are of highest importance to understand the general spirit of internationality that pervaded the Western world during that time. In addition to most of the academic reflections about the history of Wunderkammern (cabi-

¹ <http://www.gnm.de/en/museum/history-and-architecture/> [11.10.2017]. See also Bernward Deneke, Rainer Kahsnitz (Eds.): Das Germanische Nationalmuseum 1852-1977. Beiträge zu seiner Geschichte. Munich, Berlin 1978.



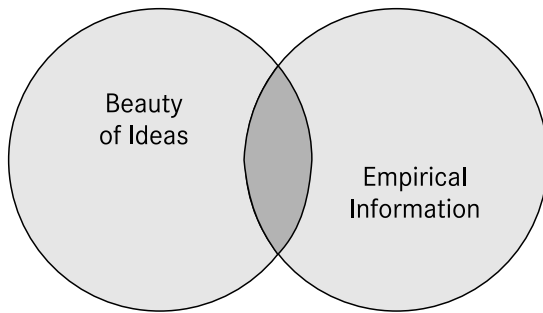
1 Timeline including images of the Crystal Palaces in London (unknown artist, 1851) and New York (George Baxter, 1853), and of the former Carthusian monastery – home to the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg (August von Essenwein and Lorenz Ritter, 1877). Figure: Dominik von Roth

nets of curiosities) and their significance as the origin of many museums, these so-called world expositions can also help to understand some of the foundational ideals of museums and musealization – then and now. (Post)colonial intentions notwithstanding, world expositions were, and certainly still are, influential demonstrations of skill, intelligence, and power. In other words: they are a succinct representation of progress.

Besides changes in the global climate or religious missions, internationality is a frequent indicator, or even the result of, politically motivated migration, entailing not only the dislocation of physical human beings, but also whatever is connected to these people, the migration of their objects as well as their ideas. Even if, at first glance, such a statement might seem contradictory, the insistence on national statehood and internationality are two sides of one and the same coin called migration, in the 19th century as well as today. The tense, delicate balancing act between the two concepts still builds the perfect playground for museums, curators, and collectors – and especially for national museums like the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, which even bears its mission statement in its name.

Museums try to capture the many ideological traces of migration in memory in the form of artefacts, and to fill these with coherent meaning by collecting and conserving any object that has the potential to reveal any idea of interest or step of progress during a certain point in history. Museums set out to put these ideas in a logical order, and by doing so, they play an active role in creating history. The so-called logic of historical order and the idea of Western progress are connected to each other inseparably and lead directly to the chief proponent of German idealism: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and his philosophy of history.

Hegel's concept of historical progress – accompanied by a pessimistic estimation of contemporary epigonism and decay, and combined with the great disappointment and the deep intellectual depression caused by the failed German revolution of 1848/49 – led not only to the foundation of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum. Also, it gives expression to the massive shift of philosophical thought during that time: from the aesthetical beauty of ideas to the belief in empirical information (and with it, the loss of significance of Hegel's theory).



Music criticism since the 1850s embodies this shift in paradigmatic manner, for example in a statement by Franz Brendel, chief editor of the most influential German music journal of the time, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (NZfM). Strikingly, the following claim was printed not in his music journal, but in his journal »Anregungen für Kunst, Leben und Wissenschaft«, founded in 1856, that aimed at a broader readership than the NZfM, reaching beyond the reader with specifically musical interests:

»Jetzt hat sich die Philosophie überlebt, sie ist nicht mehr die bewegende Macht der Zeit, und die speculative Kraft scheint gebrochen. Die neue naturwissenschaftliche Schule ist der naturgemäße Fortschritt.«² (Now philosophy has outlived itself, it is no longer the moving force of the day, the power of speculation seems to be broken. The new school of natural sciences constitutes natural progress.)

Broadly speaking, these two poles of thought are the two main columns that bear the ideological building in which not only museums continue to remain trapped unto this day. These poles, as well as their intersection – the liminal space in which meaning is made – are very decisive for the existence of museums both private and public, or to go further: they are the foundations of the need for and the act of musealization.

An essential precondition is provided by the phenomenon of *Erinnerungskultur* (cultural memory)³ that arose around 1800, and of which Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) as a writer, collector, and as an individual, is one of the most famous representatives. To mention a single person as an example is to lay emphasis on the crucial segment that

is represented by the overlapping section in the graph above. The way in which history is written, thereby creating history, can hardly ever be free from subjective influence. – *Erinnerungskultur* and history have had a very ambivalent relationship with each other ever since. By generating cultural memory (which is, in addition to conservation, the purpose of museums), and by creating a narrative for the visitors, historical facts are often placed into a sequence of logical order. This process might also entail filling up the tiny, blind spots with whatever the logic of narration demands in order to make the information more comprehensible.

The Rück ensemble with its approximately 1,500 musical instruments gave the GNM ownership not only of a collection that had the aspiration to represent an encyclopedic development of all kinds of European musical instruments; but of an additional collection of correspondence – the so-called *Nachlass Rück*⁴ with more than 17,000 documents – which in itself seems to provide a logical order and fill in the blanks. Yet being confronted with a total of c. 35,000 handwritten papers, postcards, typescripts, carbons, sketches, forms, and photographs from more than 1,000 correspondent persons and institutions, there can hardly be one single logical order, one single logical system that can encapsulate everything.⁵

2. A Merchant's Passion

Leidenschaft, passion, or even collecting mania are the words that are associated with private collecting most frequently. Ulrich Rück (1882–1962) was definitely not the typical passionate collector from the beginning, nor was he an intellectual. Together with his brother Hans (1876–1940) he took over a collection of nearly 500 musical instruments which had been begun by their father Wilhelm (1849–1912). During the time between their father's death and the year 1926, in which their mother Margarete (1854–1926) passed away, the future of the father's collection was completely unclear (fig. 2). As late as 1930, there were plans to disband the collection and to sell it as a whole – an idea that becomes evi-

2 Fr. Br. [Franz Brendel]: *Wissenschaft und Sittenlehre. Briefe an Jacob Moleschott von Mathilde Reichardt*. In: *Anregungen für Kunst, Leben und Wissenschaft* 1, 1856, pp. 295–301, esp. p. 298.

3 Cf. Aleida Assmann: *Cultural memory and western civilization. Functions, media, archives*. Cambridge 2011.

4 GNM, Historisches Archiv, *Nachlass Rück* (hereinafter NL Rück).

5 Cf. Wolfgang Müller-Funk: *Die Kultur und ihre Narrative. Eine Einführung*. Vienna 2002. – Anna Babka, Marlen Bidwell-Steiner, Wolfgang Müller-Funk (Eds.): *Narrative im Bruch. Theoretische Positionen und Anwendungen* (Broken narratives 1). Göttingen 2016.



2 The Rück family: Wilhelm, Margarete, Ulrich, Hans, photograph, before 1912. Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, NL Rück, I, A-001

dent through a remark made by the North American flute collector Dayton Miller in 1930: »I know that you [Rück] have said you did not wish to sell your instruments except for the collection as a whole.«⁶

There is only very sparse information about the original motivation behind the Rück collection, and hardly anything is known before the mid-1930s about the brothers' motivation for maintaining the collection. The few known facts are that Hans was a studied teacher and pianist, while his younger brother Ulrich obtained a doctorate in chemistry in 1911.⁷ It is striking that both Hans and Ulrich never worked in their professions, but started to work in their father's piano shop immediately after they had graduated. One is drawn to the conclusion that their respective education was no more than a means to an end: to be a teacher and pianist (exactly like the father Wilhelm) can, of course, be helpful for selling modern pianos in several ways, for example by playing and presenting pianos professionally to customers or to make contact with professional musicians. But what about becoming a chemist? Was studying chemistry once the easiest way to earn a doctorate? Was the doctoral degree meant to serve the shop's reputation because it was to be found on every business letter from then on?⁸

With music (Hans) and natural science (Ulrich), the combination of the brothers' education is very similar to the two poles outlined in the beginning: the beauty of ideas and the belief in empirical information, even the overlapping intersection representing their cooperation. In the early years of the collection, it was Hans, the pianist, who often made the first personal, face to face contact with sellers, and it was the empirical, systematically trained Ulrich who managed the technical and financial parts of a transaction. One of the most significant systematic features in the brothers' collecting can also be attributed to Ulrich: he issued checklists for musical objects of interest, especially for historical pianofortes (fig. 3).

The checklist is reminiscent of a multiple choice question-

naire, as most of the possible answers are already given. That suggests, on the one hand, that Rück wanted to make it as easy as possible for the person who was hoping to sell an old instrument. On the other, it outlines Rück's horizon of expectation very precisely at a certain moment in time and reveals what he considered to be decisive for any given acquisition and, by implication, for the collection. In fig. 4, Edith Streicher-Thorndike, wife of the great grandson of the Viennese piano maker Nannette Streicher, provided an almost ideal reply, answering Rück point-by-point (fig. 4).

In this particular case Ulrich Rück was certainly interested in buying the piano, but in the first instance he was acting as an expert because he had not been the one to make the first step. Edith Streicher-Thorndike herself wanted to buy the piano for the »Villa Streicher« in the Austrian village of Krumpendorf (Wörthersee), for decorative purposes, and she needed Rück to provide a financial estimate:

»Wenn Sie den Nanette-Streicher-Flügel nur als Dekorationsstück kaufen, würde ich an Ihrer Stelle eine Preisbemessung von RM 100.– bis 200.– zugrundelegen. Denn wenn Sie das Stück wieder verkaufen, spielt natürlich der innere Zustand des Flügels eine ganz massgebliche Rolle. [...] Im allgemeinen bezahlten wir in den letzten Jahren für derartige Flügel Beträge von RM 100.– bis 250.–, gingen allerdings in vereinzelt Fällen auch bis 300.–.«⁹ (If you are buying the Nanette Streicher piano for decorative purposes alone, I would reckon with a price between RM 100.– and 200.–. For if you resell the item, the piano's inner condition will play an important role, of course. [...] In recent years we generally paid prices ranging between RM 100.– and 250.– for such pianos, in several cases we even went up to 300.–.)

Rück's reply provides several aspects that could be of interest to researchers: the distinction between decorative purposes and playable condition, the consideration of a resale and its respective price range, the information on the average price that Rück had paid for comparable instruments in recent years, and not least the aura of expertise and credibility Rück must have asserted.

Spending so much time writing letters, offering advice and expert information for an external acquisition which does not profit Rück himself, seems highly altruistic – and, in some re-

6 Letter Dayton Miller to Ulrich Rück, 25 Nov. 1930. NL Rück, I, C-0594.

7 Ulrich Rück: Über die Darstellung von reinem, wasserfreiem Rhodanwasserstoff. Erlangen 1911.

8 In April 1915 Ulrich volunteered for war service and received a position as a chemist in the Hauptlaboratorium Ingolstadt (defense industry). As a higher military official he was also responsible for the promotion of war bonds and the organization of rations for c. 10,000 persons. Because of the importance of the latter function he was not demobilized until April 1920.

9 Letter Ulrich Rück to Edith Streicher-Thorndike, 17 June 1941. NL Rück, I, C-0897.

spects, Rück definitely was that kind of person. In business matters and regarding his collection, however, Rück mostly followed the principle of give and take. And this particular case is no exception, even less so given that Rück was very eager to acquire the Streicher piano himself. The very moment he found out that the then-owner, Agathe Gröbner of Klagenfurt, had decided (unexpectedly) to charge RM 500 – far too high a price for Streicher-Thorndike – Rück paid the sum to Gröbner directly and instantly. Even an alarming letter by Streicher-Thorndike, informing Rück that her daughter, a pianist, now wanted to buy the piano to keep it within the Streicher family, did not impress Rück all too much. He must have succeeded: today, the instrument is part of the GNM collection (Nannette Streicher née Stein, Vienna 1808, GNM inv. no. MIR 1117).

Besides the aspects discussed above, this acquisition gives insight into Rück's strategic thinking. By telling Streicher-Thorndike that an exceptional, maximum price would be around RM 300, this price automatically becomes a limit for her. The fact that Rück buys the instrument for RM 500 – even without having seen it! –, offers a different perspective on the matter.

Was it crazy passion or shrewd calculation? In Rück's case both might be true but, in conclusion, an important statement is to be made: collecting musical instruments is not possible without money, and the Rück collection is inconceivable without the piano shop. Run by the two brothers and founded by their father in 1892, the Pianohaus Rück provided the necessary backdrop not only regarding finances. What once might have begun for Wilhelm Rück as a mere fancy became a well thought out enterprise after the foundation of the piano shop. Probably from the beginning, the old instruments were used as decorative objects in the shop's show rooms. What began as a matter of decorating and advertising evolved into a highly developed and sophisticated habit of collecting musical instruments that, at the same time, was a professional marketing tool that enabled promotional activities such as concerts, recordings, guided tours, radio reports, and journal articles.

The connection between the piano shop and the collection of historical instruments, as well as Ulrich Rück's work habits, can be illustrated by another example. A letter dated to 1934 and addressed to Albert Rudolf Ibach (1873-1940) documents Rück's intention to buy from Ibach a so-called Näh-tischklavier, made by Joseph Klein around 1830, but the price of which Rück considered to be slightly too high:

»Sie [Ibach] kennen uns persönlich ja gut genug, um zu verstehen, dass es uns ganz fern liegt, Ihnen das Instrument wie man sagt »abdrücken« zu wollen. Aber leider müssen wir heute, bei dem darniederliegenden Umsatz, auch sehr stark sparen, weil unser Umsatz wie jeder stark zurück ging, trotz wie Sie wissen enormer Anstrengungen in Reklame. Letzten Endes dient unsere Sammlung historischer Instrumente auch nur der Reklame für unser Haus und um uns neue Kunden zu bringen.«¹⁰ (You [Ibach] know us personally and well enough to understand that it is far from us – as they say – to »extort« the instrument from you. But unfortunately we have to economize very much, due to the low turnover these days and because our sales are falling off just like everyone else's, even though we are putting enormous effort into promotion, as you know. In the end, our collection of historical instruments serves only to promote our shop and to win new customers.)

Ibach, the piano company, was an important business partner for Rück, and his relationship with Albert Rudolf Ibach could even be called friendly. As soon as it comes to money in the letter, Rück discloses important facts regarding the current business situation: around 1934, the Pianohaus Rück seems to have been under much economic pressure, and the letter also reveals that the collection of historic musical instruments served only as advertising, to attract new customers.

This short passage in the letter supplies interesting and important information, and the statements are true and false at the same time. On the one hand, the letter offers relevant information about the purchase of an old instrument, about the price of that instrument, the ways in which a price is negotiated, and also about the instrument's provenance.¹¹ In this case the letter even offers further support for other historic evidence: the difficult economic situation in Germany around 1934 is well known and was one of the main reasons for the success of the Nazi party and, consequently, the Second World War that followed. Yet there is even more information available and this is brought to light as a result of the digitization strategy pursued by the Rück research project.

10 Letter Ulrich Rück to Albert Rudolf Ibach, 26 Sept. 1934. NL Rück, I, C-0399.

11 See Linda Escherich: Provenance research beyond looted art and restitution – the RückPortal, in the present publication.

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Fragebogen für historische Klaviere. Dr. U. u. H. Rück, Nürnberg, S.,
Tafelfeldstr. 22.

246 128 cm 30 85

Gesamt
mit stark
Rückfall
Nur
möglich

1. Genaue Maße nach Länge - Breite - Tiefe und Höhe des Instrumentes.
2. Farbe des Holzes sussen, obbraun, rot oder andersfarben. *mit Messing weiß*
3. Form des Instrumentes skizzieren oder Foto beilegen. *m. abgegriffen*
4. Wieviel Füße hat es? - 3
5. Sind die Füße rund, viereckig oder 6- oder achteckig im Querschnitt? *viereckig*
6. Sind sie zierlich oder ziemlich dick?
7. Wie sieht der Flügel von der langen Seite von vorne aus gesehen aus? Skizze erbeten, ob abgedacht wie ein früheres Schreibpult oder gerade rechteckig wie ein Kommodekasten?

elfenbein
u.
Kiafbrunn

8. Ist vorne über der Klaviatur ein Firmenschild angebracht? Oder ist im Innern eine Inschrift auf der Holzplatte unterhalb der Saiten? Wenn ja,
9. wie lautet diese Inschrift? Wörtlich genau abschreiben!! Wichtig!
10. Wieviele Oktaven hat die Klaviatur? 4 $\frac{1}{2}$, 5, 5 $\frac{1}{2}$, 6, 6 $\frac{1}{2}$, 6 $\frac{3}{4}$, 7? *6 1/2 46 Taster*
11. Welche Farben haben die Untertasten, welche die Obertasten?
12. Auf welcher Tonhöhe steht das Instrument gegenüber einer A-Stimmgabel oder Stimmpeife in A? *46 Ganz übereinst.*
13. Um wieviele Töne ist es zu tief stehend?
14. Liegen die Saiten innen alle parallel? *ja*
15. Wieviele Töne haben 3, wieviele 2 und wieviele 1 Saite?
16. Liegen eiserne Spreizen zwischen den Saiten? - *nein*
17. Haben die eisernen Wirbel, die die Saiten halten und an denen man die Saiten bei einer Zither stimmt, Löcher oder keine Löcher? - *nein*
18. Ist der Deckel des Instrumentes ein glattes Brett oder ist er getäfelt, also mit Füllungen versehen?
19. Hat der Flügel Pedale? Sind diese an einer Lyra befestigt?
20. Wieviele Pedale hat er noch? Fehlen Pedale, was man an der Breite des unteren Querholzes der Lyra ersieht? Wieviele fehlen? *Minimales 2*
21. Läuft von der Lyra rechts und links ein Steg zu dem rechten und linken Fuss heraus? *nein*
22. Wenn keine Lyra vorhanden ist, sind dann Kniehebel unterhalb der Klaviatur vorhanden? Sie liegen auf der unteren Seite und sind oft nur zu sehen, wenn man sich bückt und das Instrument von unten besichtigt. *nein*
23. Wenn Kniehebel, dann wieviele?
24. Sind vielleicht Kniehebel und Pedale vorhanden? *nein*
25. Möglichst eine Skizze der Lyra erbeten.
26. Farbe der Untertasten: sind sie weiss, schwarz oder braun? Wenn sie schwarz sind, haben sie eingeritzte Querlinien und wieviele?
27. Ist der Flügel schwer oder leicht? Vorsicht beim Heben, weil oft die Füße ganz wackelig sind, deshalb vorher an der Vorderseite und rechten Seite je einen Stuhl unterstellen, damit nichts passieren kann.


Nicht vergessen: Maass des Flügels nach der Tiefe. also von der Klaviatur an bis zur hinteren Ecke. Ist bei histor. Flügeln meist um 2 Meter 20 cm herum liegend. *2.46 m.*

Fragebogen möglichst genau beantworten!!

Verhältnis möglichst leicht

Zürich: Fragebogen für historische Klaviere:

- 1.) Länge: 2.46 - Breite: 1.22 - Tiefe (Kasten, seitwärts gemessen) 30 - Höhe: 85. -
- 2.) Farbe des Holzes außen: echt Mahagoni, rot-lichter Tau.
- 3.) Foto.
- 4.) Drei runde Füße, mit eichigen Sohlen.
- 5.)
- 6.) gar Zierlich in der Gesamtrichtung.
- 7.) "Gerade rechteckig" siehe Foto (wird aber in Wirklichkeit wellförmig
"u. schmaler wie Querschnitt d. Foto!")
- 8.) Über der Klaviatur ein Firmenbild (unterhalb der Saiten keine!):
"Nunette Streicher, née Stau, à Triume", daneben (s. Foto) rechts
u. links: Bruce - Auflagen, Weintrauben - Motiv, Empire.
- 9.)
- 10.) 64, 2 Oktaven. Untertasten: elfenbein, Obertasten: tiefbraun.
- 11.) 4 6 untere (lange) Tasten, 3 2 obere (kurze) Tasten.
- 12.) Ganz und gar verträumt!
- 13.) Gar nicht mehr feststellbar!
- 14.) Ja.
- 15.) Es haben 68 Töne: 3. Saiten (davor einige gesprungen),
" 13 " : 2 " ; 1. Saiten keine Töne.
- 16.) nein.
- 17.) keine.
- 18.) ein glattes Brett; innen hat der Flügeldeckel ein sehr
schönes geflammtes Goldgelb.
- 19.) Zwei Pedale, und an der Lyra befestigt sonst keine
- 20.) Pedale. Lyra ist stark beschädigt, durch seinen zeitigen Einbruch
der Farben.
- 21.) kein Key.
- 22.) keine Streichebel.
- 23.) —
- 24.) Nein

2.) Schildform: 

3. The Rück Project

The two main purposes of the Rück research project¹² are: 1) to explore and publish the history of the Rück collection in book form¹³, and 2) to gather as much information as possible, entering and editing it systematically into the »intelligent« WissKI¹⁴ system that will be freely available via the so called RückPortal, searchable by persons, objects, institutions, general categories of musical instruments, or any keyword of interest. All kind of similarities in the correspondence – be it a name, location, time, object, or any kind of specific reference linked to these categories, references to sound, restoration, concerts, photographs, acquisitions, and so on – are linked to each other digitally within semantic fields. Making these cross references available affords the opportunity of a real content-related contextualization that can offer an idea of the big picture, even by following a single and very focused question.

In the case of the letter to Ibach mentioned above, the RückPortal would show – among other things – letters of the same time that contain references to similar institutions, objects, or people. Given their temporal proximity as well as the hierarchy of hits, letters that have nothing to do with the offered Nähtischklavier would also appear. By presenting the letters on a digital timeline researchers will automatically become visually aware of the quantity of letters written around a given day, a factor that »may« indicate similar or corresponding content, as is the case in this example.

Directly after Margarete Rück's death in 1926 there must have been a remarkable change in thinking and the way of running the Rück piano business. One of the biggest changes certainly took hold in 1927 when the Pianohaus Rück was granted the exclusive rights to represent Steinway & Sons in the majority of Franconia (fig. 5).

In 1934 there is even a letter from Steinway & Sons Hamburg which acclaims Rück's procurator Hugo Haid (1904-1992) for being one of the top sellers for Steinway & Sons

in Germany. In 1934, Rück also wrote to his academic consultant, Rudolf Steglich (1886-1976) in Erlangen, noting that he was very proud (finally) to have obtained the exclusive rights for representing all of the four big piano companies, once referred to as BIBS: Blüthner, Ibach, Bechstein, and Steinway & Sons.

This additional information sheds another light on the price negotiations with Ibach and on Rück's complaint about the difficult economic situation in his piano shop (Rück did, in the end, buy the instrument, today in the GNM, inv. no. MIR 1174), once more raising the conundrum of passionate collecting versus shrewd calculation.

Both within the history of the Rück collection and with regard to Ulrich as its main proponent, this kind of information provides the possibility of a more detailed and precise understanding how things developed and proceeded. For researchers who do not know all of the 17,000 letters by heart, the RückPortal offers cross-referenced information at a fingertip as well as letters that were written in close proximity (and their content). These tools go together with a further feature, an interactive price comparison list that is searchable by categories of musical instruments that are linked with information on time, persons / institutions, and price categories such as offer price, market value, and actual purchase prices.

4. Sustain and Perspectives

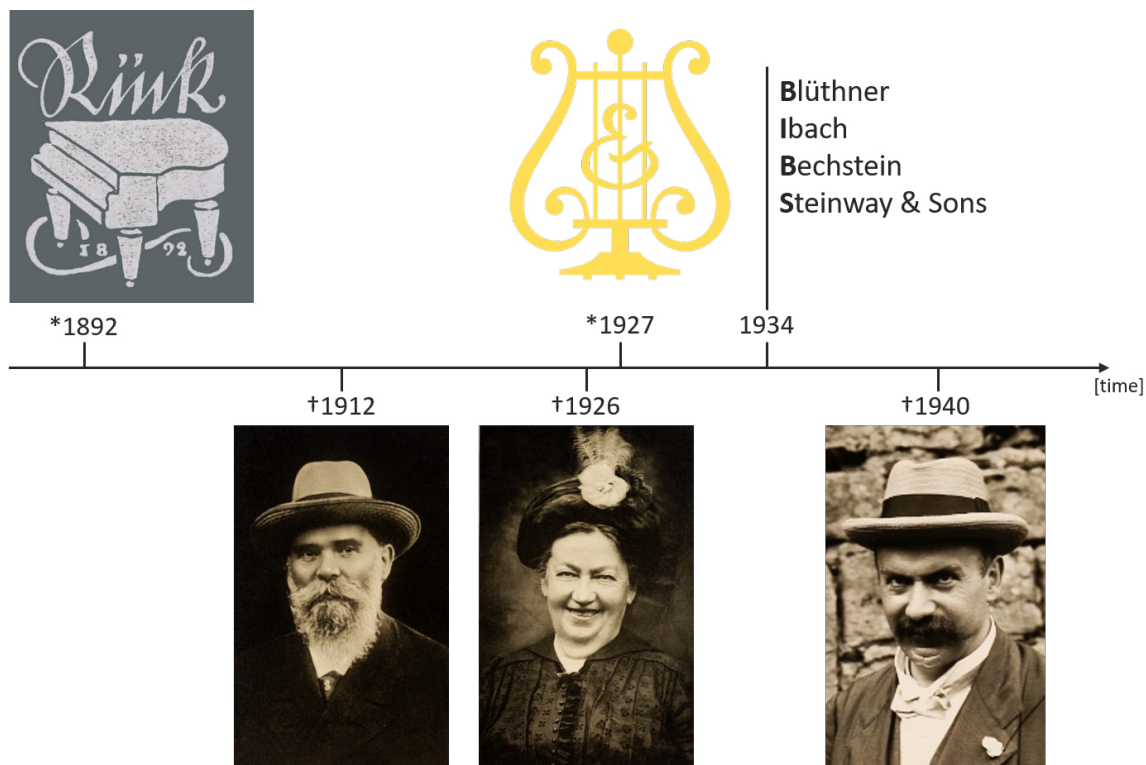
Passion and economic calculation are not contradictions,¹⁵ as becomes apparent – at the very latest – when Ulrich Rück's beloved brother Hans dies following an accident in December 1940. Increasing war-related events, the death of his only brother, and Ulrich's own suffering from severe physical and mental illness let the collection become an even more personal matter for him. From then on, Rück occasionally refers to his collection items as his »children«, and collecting is done in remembrance of his father and brother. Nevertheless, future acquisitions were still made economically and displays, as well as the donation of musical instruments to the University of Erlangen, continued to serve the piano and restoration business.

¹⁵ For another telling example, see the collectors Heiko and Ralf Hansjosten, especially Heiko Hansjosten's contribution in this publication.

¹² DFG research project at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum »Musikinstrumente sammeln – das Beispiel Rück« (Collecting musical instruments – the Rück example).

¹³ Dominik von Roth, Linda Escherich: Musikinstrumente sammeln – Leidenschaft eines Geschäftsmanns. Nuremberg 2018 [in preparation].

¹⁴ Wissenschaftliche Kommunikationsinfrastruktur (Scientific Communication Infrastructure), URL: <http://wiss-ki.eu/> [16. 10. 2017].



5 Timeline of the Rück Pianohaus and family
Figure: Dominik von Roth

It cannot be claimed that Ulrich Rück intended to create a culture of remembrance, of historical memory – as well as a personal monument – from the beginning, even if there are many suggestions that might corroborate such a theory. The earliest extant carbon copies of outgoing letters concerning the collection date from 1924. The simple idea to make carbons and to file them is a very significant step, for it already bears witness to an essential element of collecting in a modern museal sense. This possibly conscious act of creating history is – in Rück's case – necessarily to be regarded alongside business matters like legal requirements, as well as the simple idea of keeping order within the huge amount of objects that had to be stored. Another business matter directly related to the collection was the ever evolving idea of a unique selling point for his shop: the ability to offer the highly professionalized skill of restoring and copying historic musical instruments at an international level. As mentioned above, the display of the old instruments in the show rooms of the piano shop likewise served to attract new customers and to sell modern pianos – a business strategy that used to be quite common.¹⁶

The general Western spirit of progress, as reflected in the mere existence of world expositions, here finds its manifestation in the form of a small day-to-day business that is inseparably related to the historic and the cultural sphere, embracing the economic aspects of the modern piano market, concert life, the growing movement of historical performance practice, and the musealization of old musical instruments (including restoring and copying objects). A fresh, detailed consideration of the notion of creating history notwithstanding the difficult and maybe unrewarding question of intentionality remains and reveals a twofold process of musealization: the present-day academic musealization of the Rück's one-time musealization. At this point, the semiotic openness of musical instruments and the act of collecting them becomes obvious. The assertion of openness with regard to writing history, however, is not to be equated with arbitrariness. To the contrary, the complexity of relations increases. Collecting is not a profession. Museums professionalize collecting, and they

¹⁶ For the piano companies Pfeiffer (Stuttgart) and Neupert (Bamberg) and their idea of »product placement«, see Markus Zepf's contribution in this publication.

make it an institution. Rück inverts this path, as did many private collectors;¹⁷ indeed, most of the current public museum's objects are heirs or donations from private collectors.¹⁸

In spite of his intentional and passionate habit of collecting, Rück worked almost like a public museum. The decisive difference, however, became apparent at the moment that Rück gave his private collection to a public museum. It can be considered as an act that is marked by a loss of ›spirit‹ – of anything beyond economic calculation which might once have moved Rück to become that kind of ardent person to gather together more than one thousand five hundred (!) musical instruments and related items. While still in Rück's possession, his ›children‹ – every instrument a personal treasure – were surrounded by this personal spirit that cannot be measured and that can hardly be preserved within the possibilities afforded by a public museum. Within the context of a professionalized museum this spirit becomes detached from a collector individual and sometimes acquires a new livery – the so-called aura of authenticity – a phenomenon that unfortunately depends less on the object than on the effort and the expense a museum can or wants to afford.

In preparation for the transmission of Rück's collection to the GNM, a contract¹⁹ was drawn up that specified a commitment to the formation of an independent section for musical instruments, the employment of an administrator with a musicological qualification, as well as a restorer specialized in historical musical instruments. These obligations of the Rück contract resulted in the appointment of excellent personnel, with John Henry van der Meer (1920-2008) as the first administrator/curator of the newly formed section for musical instruments, and Friedemann Hellwig (b. 1938) as the first restorer for musical instruments at the GNM. They laid the foundation for the present standards of the GNM's music instruments collection.

Over the past ten years, ordinary museum displays and their accompanying popular/academic publications and guided visitor tours have been enhanced more and more by the still barely exhausted possibilities of digitization. Comparable to the fear, that conventional books would sooner or later die out when e-book readers came onto the market (in fact, the opposite happened), many museums still seem to fear digitization. Walter Benjamin's verdict on the devaluation or even the loss of an art object's aura in the act of ›mechanical reproduction‹²⁰ still seems to determine the thinking of many museum directors and curators.

The creation of the RückPortal intends to offer more than a research tool for scholars. First and foremost the platform is designed to become a comprehensive online application that provides a further dimension to the permanent exhibition, an invisible second surface to the museum objects, by aiming at the idea of a digital museum. With reference to the two poles outlined at the beginning of the present contribution – the beauty of the actual object surrounded by all the information available, including the resulting tension in between – this tool allows at least some of the dynamic spirit of the collection's former private ownership to be rekindled. Or, to rethink Benjamin's groundbreaking: by no means does this digitization constitute a devaluation or a substitution of the aura, rather it generates a new and additional *digital aura* that frames and elevates the actual physical object, albeit creating an ›aura of the digital‹²¹ at the same time. Technological progress offers opportunities that must not remain unused. Like the ontology of musical sound – a cloud of information and knowledge, including images and audio-visual material – an auratic moment surrounds the musical instruments that sleep in the museal silence of the visitor's visual admiration. In this way, the intangible essence of music as such can be grasped in the best possible manner while preserving the original artefact at the same time.

17 For the current situation of private collectors and the art market see the contribution of Gerda Ridler in this publication.

18 For the amount of former private collections within the total stock of the GNM musical instruments collection see Frank P. Bär's contribution in this publication.

19 Contract between the GNM and Ulrich Rück, 28 Sept. 1962. GNM, Historisches Archiv, Ordner Beihilfe Sammlung Rück; preliminary version: NL Rück, I, B-002.

20 The German title ›Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit‹ (Walter Benjamin 1935) refers to reproduction as ›technical‹ instead of ›mechanical‹ as given by the English translation, and as ›mécânisée‹ by the first published edition in French.

21 For a critical view see Michael Betancourt: The aura of the digital. In: CTheory (2006), URL: <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=519> [27. 10. 2017].

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