

# The Rück Collection from the Perspective of Restoration

Klaus Martius

## Abstract

»Their instruments are performance-ready, yet without having been spoiled by reckless conservators. Their restoration shows highest connoisseurship, exceptional accuracy and conscientious observation of the historic facts. In the whole museum there is not a single too strong string or false bridge! Hence, in this case, one does not need to fear the complete decay that is the destiny of other clumsily repaired, badly arranged and poorly maintained instruments«, noted Gustav Becking, 22 Aug. 1935).<sup>\*</sup> For the brothers Hans and Ulrich Rück the acquisition of new objects for their collection was inextricably linked with the desire for a »historic exact reconditioning« of their pieces. Work that could not be undertaken in their own »Kunstwerkstätte«, was commissioned from instrument technicians all over the country, who had been trained in conservation. For over three decades, the most important person was Otto Marx, conservator from Leipzig.

Besides attempting to make their collection of instruments playable and making them accessible for research, teaching, recordings and concerts, from the mid-1930s the Pianohaus Rück often accepted restoration jobs for public institutions like the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, the Museums for Musical Instruments in Stockholm, Salzburg, Prague etc., for private collectors, and musicians. The 1937 restoration of the Walter-Pianoforte at Mozart's birth house, together with the head of the department for musicology in Erlangen, Rudolf Steglich, is an outstanding example of this collaboration. Chosen examples from the Nuremberg collection are discussed in the following in order to illustrate the restoration work of the Rück firm.

## Die Sammlung Rück aus restauratorischer Sicht

»Ihre Instrumente sind spielfertig, ohne indessen von leichtfertigen Restauratoren verdorben zu sein. Ihre Wiederherstellung zeugt vielmehr von höchster Kennerschaft, ausnehmender Sorgfalt und gewissenhafter Beobachtung des historischen Tatbestandes. Im ganzen Museum findet sich nicht eine zu starke Saite und kein falscher Steg! Hier braucht man daher auch den baldigen völligen Verfall, dem ungeschickt reparierte, schlecht aufgestellt und mangelhaft unterhaltene Instrumente sonst ausgesetzt sind, nicht zu fürchten.«, so Gustav Becking am 22. Aug. 1935.<sup>\*</sup> Hand in Hand mit den Neuerwerbungen für ihre Sammlung ging für die Brüder Hans und Ulrich Rück das Bestreben einer »historisch getreue[n] Wiederinstandsetzung« ihrer Stücke. Was nicht in der eigenen »Kunstwerkstätte« ausgeführt werden konnte, wurde an restauratorisch geschulte Instrumententechniker im ganzen Land vergeben. Wichtigste Anlaufstation für viele Arbeiten und über drei Jahrzehnte hinweg war der Leipziger Restaurator Otto Marx.

Außer dem Bestreben, die eigenen Sammlungsstücke nach Möglichkeit spielbereit zu halten und für Forschung, Lehre, Tonaufnahmen und Konzerte zur Verfügung zu stellen, übernahm das Haus Rück seit Mitte der 1930er Jahre vermehrt auch Restaurierungsaufträge für öffentliche Institute, darunter die Schola Cantorum Basiliensis und die Instrumentenmuseen in Stockholm, Salzburg und Prag, sowie für private Sammler und Musiker. Herausragend wurde die 1937 zusammen mit dem Leiter des Erlanger Musikwissenschaftlichen Instituts, Rudolf Steglich, in Angriff genommene Restaurierung des Walter-Flügels in Mozarts Geburtshaus. An einigen Beispielen der Nürnberger Sammlung sollen Restaurierungsarbeiten des Hauses Rück schlaglichtartig vorgestellt werden.

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<sup>\*</sup> Letter Gustav Becking to Ulrich Rück, 22 August 1935. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Historisches Archiv, Nachlass Rück (hereafter NL Rück) I, C-0045b.

The title of my handout offers two different ways of looking at this subject:

- a) How did Rück plan his restorations of recently acquired instruments? Which methods did he use?
- b) What do we (from our modern point of view) think today about these measures?

Both questions are much too extensive to be answered, even in part. In the following, I concentrate on the first point.

## I. Restoration Principles of the Pianohaus Rück

### Sources:

- a) Surviving instruments in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum (GNM), the Stiftung Händel-Haus Halle, and the Institut für Musikforschung Würzburg.
- b) Rück's letters to his restorers (instrument technicians), e.g. Adolf Hartmann, Berlin; Otto Marx, Leipzig; Bruno Marx, Dresden; Wilhelm Heckel, Biebrich/Wiesbaden; Otto Frank, Munich, and many others.

Rück's restorations – in general – may have had the same aim that the painter and collector Fritz Wildhagen outlined in his article »Beauty and Value of Ancient Musical Instruments« in 1950:

»Ich sehe in alten Musikinstrumenten die allerschönsten Sammelobjekte. Es liegt ein ganz toller Zauber in ihnen: höchste, durch akustische Gesetze bedingte Zweckform eint sich mit einer dem Geschmacke der jeweiligen Epoche entsprechenden Schmuckform zu einem wundervollen Ganzen, dessen größte Bedeutung der Klang ist. [...] Zeiten werden mir durch Klänge lebendiger als durch Bilder, weil ich im Klingen alter Instrumente den Duft einer versunkenen Welt spüre, von der Bilder und Bücher sachliche Kunde geben.«<sup>2</sup>

(I regard old musical instruments as by far the most beautiful collectible items. There is a very special magic about them: supreme expediency of construction dictated by the laws of acoustics combines with decorative forms – in accordance with the relevant period – into a wonderful whole whose prime importance is sound. [...] History comes alive with music much more than through paintings

because I can sense the fragrance of a lost world in the sound of old instruments, of which paintings and books offer only content knowledge.)

Rück himself describes something similar with much less emphatic words: »[...] der Zweck meiner Stiftung und meiner Leihgaben war, durch den Klang der Instrumente wertvolle musikwissenschaftliche Erkenntnisse zu vermitteln.«<sup>3</sup> ([...] the aim of my donation and loans was to convey valuable musicological knowledge through the sound of the instruments.)

Ulrich Rück frequently acted as supervisor of restorations thanks to his intimate knowledge of the instruments' technical details. His intention was always a »historically faithful restoration«, both in working methods and the use of materials.

## II. Otto Marx (1871–1964)

Among many other instrument makers and restorers, Otto Marx was Rück's most important advisor in all problems concerning the authenticity of instrument parts and restoration problems. Trained in his father's workshop, Marx worked with piano manufacturer C. A. Pfeiffer in Stuttgart but, for most of his lifetime, was active in Wilhelm Heyer's enormous collection at Cologne and later in Leipzig. After his retirement, he worked for Rück until 1959. In 1952, he had to move from East Germany to the West, where Rück welcomed him in his home.

»Unser gemeinsamer Bekannter Marx lebt noch und arbeitet ausschliesslich für mich, worüber ich sehr glücklich bin. Denn seine Restaurierungskunst ist einmalig und wird leider auch für die Zukunft unersetzbar bleiben, weil jeglicher Nachwuchs an Restauratoren fehlt.«<sup>4</sup> (Our mutual friend Marx is still alive and is working exclusively for me, which makes me very happy. His artistry in restoration is unique and, sadly, will remain irreplaceable in the future because a young generation of restorers is lacking completely.)

»Herr Marx [...] ist wohl der beste Restaurator der Welt.«<sup>5</sup> (Otto Marx [...] is, it seems, the most experienced restorer of musical instruments in the world!)

2 Fritz Wildhagen: Von Schönheit und Wert alter Instrumente. In: Zeitschrift für Musik 111, 1950, p. 578.

3 Letter Ulrich Rück to Bruno Stäblein, 1959. NL Rück, I, C-0188.

4 Letter Ulrich Rück to Georg Kinsky, 23 May 1947. NL Rück, I, C-0444f.

5 Letter Ulrich Rück to Walter Nef, 27 Aug. 1952. NL Rück, I, C-0036.

### III. Some Examples of Restoration

#### Single-strung harpsichord, anonymous, Italy, before 1600 (GNM inv. no. MIR 1071)

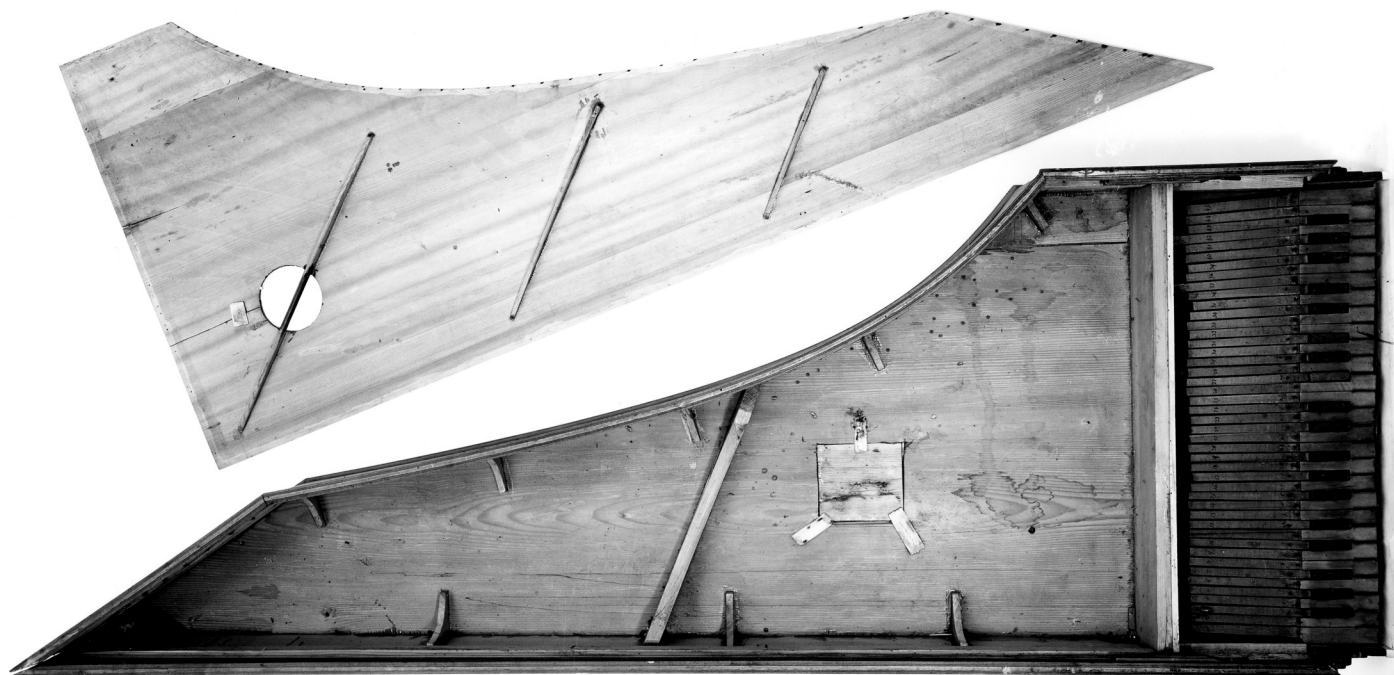
Acquired by the Rück brothers in Munich in 1939; its examination and restoration demonstrates the wide range of Rück's network:

Letters<sup>6</sup> regarding the (unexpected) wood species, the ribs of the soundboard, the dislocated bridge, the missing rose and its replacement, the embossed ornaments on the leather case.

The people and institutions addressed: Adolf Hartmann, Otto Marx, two antique dealers in Munich, curators of art at the GNM, the curator of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, the director of the Musikinstrumenten-Museum in Berlin, the director of the Deutsches Ledermuseum Offenbach, the former owner of the instrument Hans-Albrecht Graf von Harrach in Munich, and the piano manufacturer Maendler & Schramm in Munich.

Letter from	Addressed to	Date	Object of Discussion
Victor Karl Hammer	Ulrich Rück	10. 09. 1938	Informs about the instrument of »his friend Harrach«
Otto Marx	Ulrich Rück	10. 09. 1938	Harpsichord was offered
Ulrich Rück	Hans-Albrecht Graf von Harrach	10. 12. 1938	Single-strung? bridge position, announcement of Marx's visit
Ulrich Rück	Hans-Albrecht Graf von Harrach	09. 02. 1939	Who would restore the leathercase?
Ulrich Rück	Hans-Albrecht Graf von Harrach	15. 02. 1939	Maendler & Schramm will take on the instrument for Rück
Ulrich Rück	Ledermuseum Offenbach	15. 02. 1939	Searching for leather curator within »Großdeutschland«, Italy, France or Switzerland
Hugo Eberhardt (Ledermuseum)	Ulrich Rück	20. 02. 1939	Does not know of any leather curator, but offers to buy the leather case
Ulrich Rück	Otto Marx	01. 06. 1939	Information that the instrument now can be found at Maendler & Schramm's
Ulrich Rück	GNM (Eberhard Lutze)		Asking for expertise regarding the ornaments of leather case
Ulrich Rück	Adolf Hartmann	04. 09. 1940	Searching for an appropriate rose to be copied from the missing rose
Ulrich Rück	Adolf Hartmann	20. 09. 1940	Asking for expertise regarding the soundboard of coniferous wood
Adolf Hartmann	Ulrich Rück	03. 10. 1940	Does not trust the soundboard ribs
Ulrich Rück	Victor Luithlen	18. 06. 1941	Permission to copy the rose
Ulrich Rück	Otto Marx	24. 07. 1941	Photographs of rose
Ulrich Rück	Alfred Kreutz	25. 10. 1944	Case of maple, comparison to Leipzig inv. nos. 1 and 2

<sup>6</sup> Letters Ulrich Rück to Adolf Hartmann, 4 and 20 Sept. 1940. NL Rück, I, C-0327d.



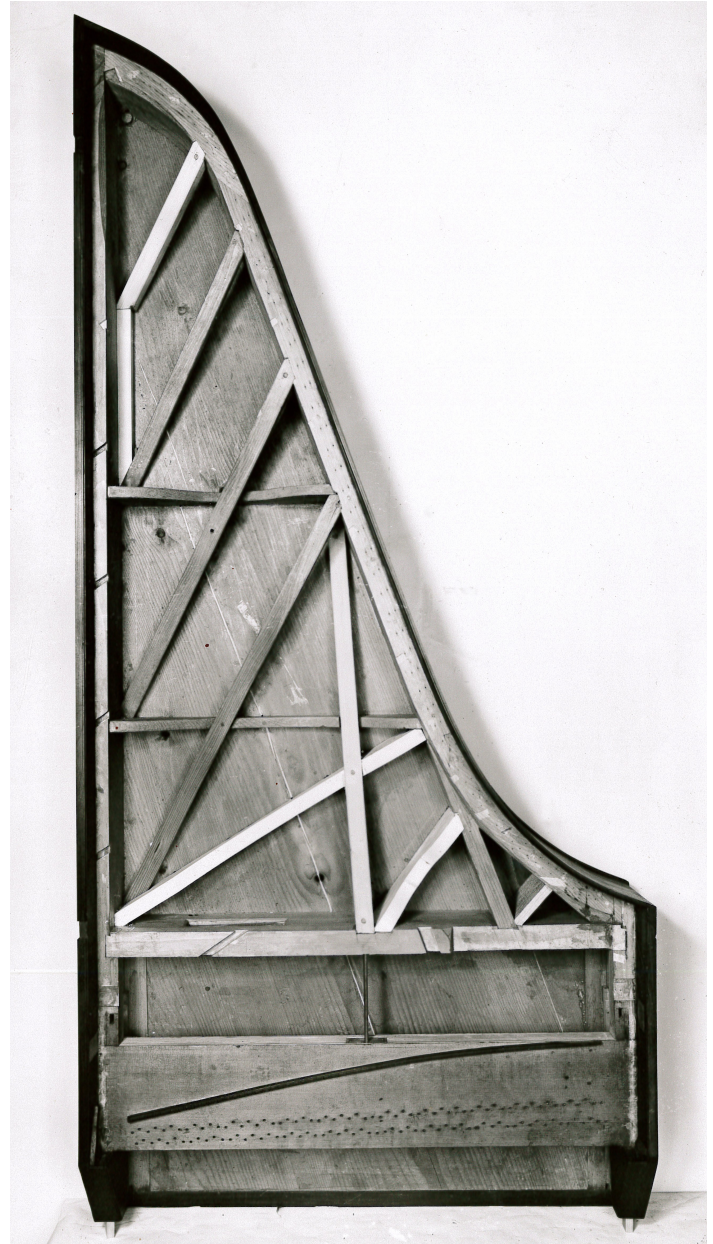
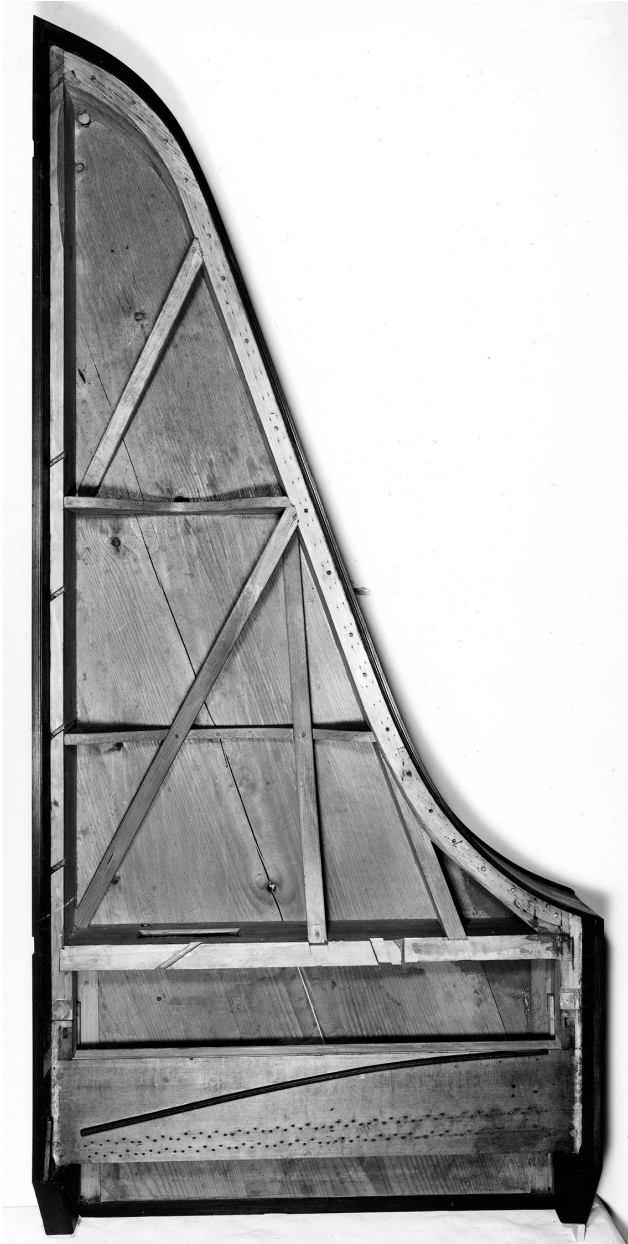
1, 2 Single-strung harpsichord, Italy, before 1600. Above: old ribs; below: after restoration by Otto Marx with new ribs and replaced rose. Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, inv. no. MIR 1071.  
All photographs (fig. 1-6) are part of the respective restoration documentation, © Germanisches Nationalmuseum



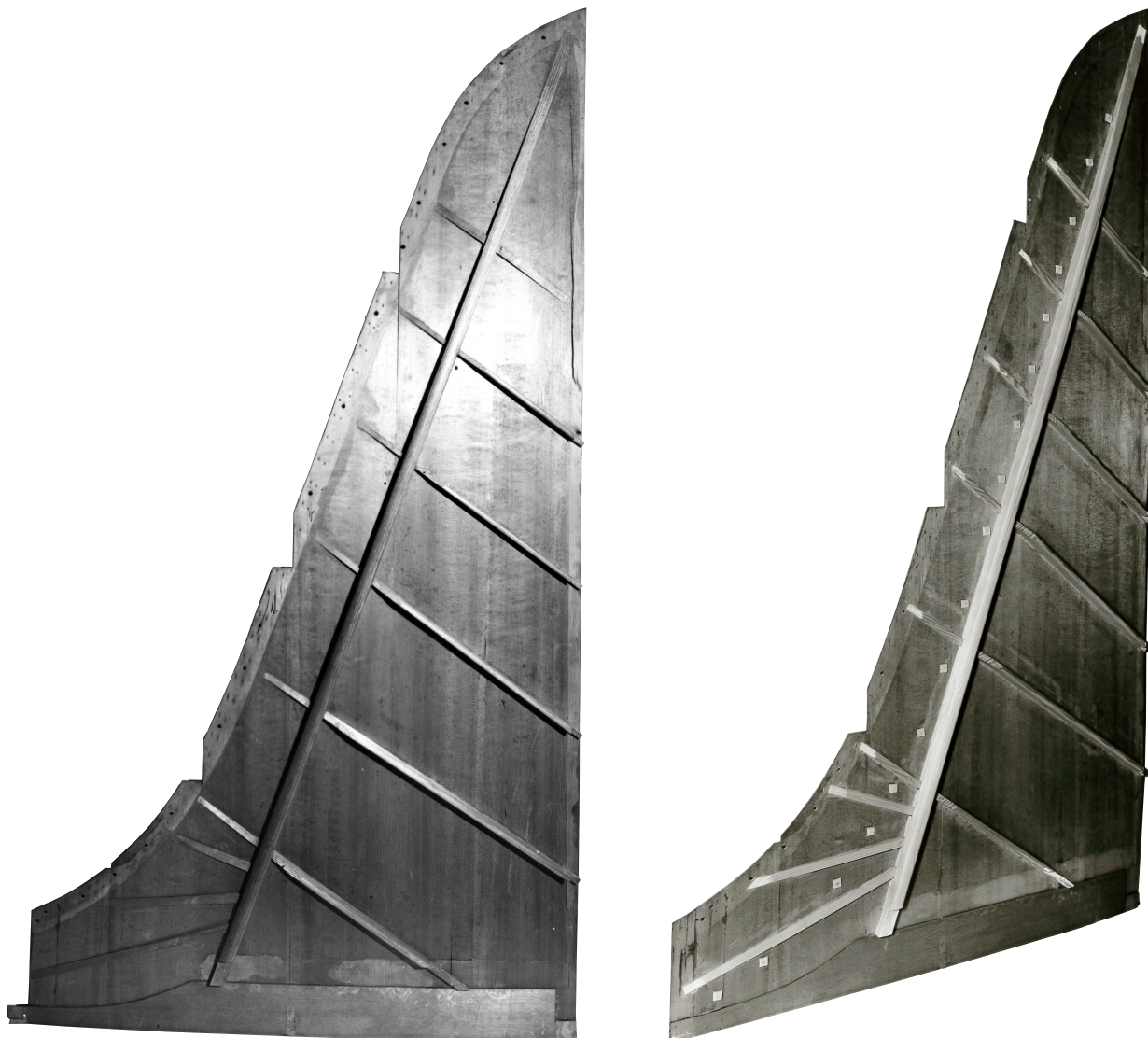
Pianoforte by Johann Andreas Stein, Augsburg,  
c. 1780 (GNM, inv. no. MIR 1097)

Most pianos were opened. In general, Rück was not afraid of replacing original soundboards, which – according to his opinion – would not affect its sound. In this case, Rück/Marx

used the old soundboard, but ribbing and bracing were reinforced or totally renewed. The instrument remains stable until today.



3, 4 Left: old inner construction; right: additions to inner construction and new gap-space by Otto Marx. Pianoforte by Johann Andreas Stein, Augsburg, c. 1780. Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, inv. no. MIR 1097, © Germanisches Nationalmuseum



5, 6 Left: old ribs; right: new ribs by Otto Marx. Pianoforte by Johann Andreas Stein, Augsburg, c. 1780. Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, inv. no. MIR 1097, © Germanisches Nationalmuseum

### The »Mozart-Flügel« by Anton Walter at the Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum Salzburg

The Pianohaus Rück also offered restoration work (mainly of pianos) for other institutions such as the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, the Musik Museet Stockholm, the Mozarteum Salzburg, the Museum Carolino Augusteum Salzburg, or the Colt Clavier Collection in Bethersden.

An extraordinary restoration was that of the Walter pianoforte at Mozart's birth house in Salzburg in 1937, a coopera-

tion with Friedrich Gehmacher, the head of the department for musicology Erlangen, Rudolf Steglich, and Otto Marx. The restoration took place in the rooms of the piano firm Julius Blüthner in Leipzig from February to July 1937. The way back to Salzburg is documented by several photographs in the Rück archive (fig. 7–13).<sup>7</sup>

7 NL Rück, I, B-018a.





7 The Mozart-Piano in a transport case, before its transportation to Salzburg, 7 July 1937. Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, NL Rück, I,B-018a\_0051, © Germanisches Nationalmuseum



8 Crossing the German-Austrian border at Saalbrücke. Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, NL Rück, I,B-018a\_0056, © Germanisches Nationalmuseum



9 Group photo on the way to Salzburg, from the right: Hans Rück, Karl Haber, Otto Marx (on the van). Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, NL Rück, I,B-018a\_0055, © Germanisches Nationalmuseum

## The Rück Collection from the Perspective of Restoration

10 Arrival at the Mozarteum, 8 July 1937: Karl Haber (left), pointing at the Garser-piano on top of the transportation case with the Mozart-piano, and Hans Rück (right). Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, NL Rück, I,B-0 18a\_0058, © Germanisches Nationalmuseum



11 The Garser-piano on its way to the Mozarteum. In the center, from left-to-right: Hans Rück (with hat), Otto Marx (with hat), Karl Haber, Alfred Heidl and Hans Schurich. Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, NL Rück, I,B-0 18a\_0065, © Germanisches Nationalmuseum



12 The Mozart-piano out of the box and on its way to the Mozarteum; from left-to-right: Hans Rück (with hat), the hauler Albert J. Giegl, Karl Haber; to the right of the car Otto Marx (with hat) and Alfred Heidl (with white stockings). Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, NL Rück, I,B-0 18a\_0062, © Germanisches Nationalmuseum







13 After the work was done: Karl Haber and Otto Marx. Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, NL Rück, I,B-018a\_0067, © Germanisches Nationalmuseum

#### IV. Conclusion

Rück was engaged in comprehensive research concerning all facts and circumstances connected with his collection: comparable instruments, biographies of the makers, all materials appearing in any kind of instrument (woods, metals, strings, leathers, fabrics, and cottons), climate control, methods of exhibition, education of technicians and restorers, playing techniques. In his letters, we find deliberations and ideas regarding almost all aspects of the conservation and restoration of musical instruments, all of which are still relevant to us today.

#### Acknowledgement

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