

HURSTWOOD FARM PIANO STUDIOS

Introduction

Hurstwood Farm Piano Studios near Sevenoaks in Kent is the place where pianists and piano music lovers can find the ultimate in piano quality and excellence. Recitals are given in our own recital hall by some of the World's leading artists on a selection of concert grand's selected from the finest available of their make.

There is a display of some thirty new and used pianos, which include Bosendorfer Pianos, Blüthner Pianos, Steinway Pianos, Bechstein Pianos and other famous brands. All these instruments are honed to perfection by our appointed technician Geoffrey Sapsford whose has a reputation as one of the UK's lead technicians. Under his guidance Hurstwood Farm Piano Studios has won a remarkable reputation for reliable and superb workmanship in every detail.

We pride ourselves that:-

- We offer some of the lowest prices in Europe for some of the finest quality pianos available. We do this by combining a large turnover with highly efficient management methods and top quality technical skills.
- We can give the highest possible standard of piano presentation and after sales service.
- Informed, open, reliable and experienced advice and assistance is always available for visitors whether they be top professional, serious amateur or learner pianists.
- We offer superb and modestly priced recital and recording facilities where some of the best technology in the World for piano recording on several makes of concert instrument is available at below market rates. For young pianists, recording may be offered at no cost under sponsorship arrangements.
- We are open for business 12 hours per day, seven days per week.

About us

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We aim to provide a centre where piano enthusiasts can visit to share the joy of hearing Grand Masters from around the World play some of the World's finest pianos: where young maestros can take the stage alongside top artists and play to informed audiences: where amateur or professional artists can sample and compare the finest makes of pianos currently available and maintained to ultimate standards.

Hurstwood Farm is a working agricultural business located near Sevenoaks in the High Weald of Kent. It is an area of natural beauty with its own secluded woodlands, nature reserve and fine orchards. There are panoramic views of the Weald of Kent extending up to 25 miles over a wide arc.

Visitors will not be pressed to buy. We invite them to share the atmosphere of enthusiasm for seeking perfection of pianos and piano music, and, at recitals, to meet and be as close to great artists as was the case in the days of the founders of present classical music who played in the great palaces of Central Europe.

Our mission is to strive for perfection in everything we do irrespective of cost and effort, and to demonstrate that the best need not be the most costly.

All the profits from our piano recitals, and significantly more monies are devoted to assistance and encouragement for young artists in the form of promotional recitals at the Farm alongside grand masters and at other venues. As sponsorship we offer free recordings, assistance with the cost of studies, and on occasions help with the loan or gift of pianos. Our Patron for the Hurstwood Farm Music Society, Andr as Schiff, has himself made immense contribution to this part of our work as have many others, including Stephen Hough, Radu Lupu, Nikolai Demidenko, Mark Andr e Hammerlin, Alfredo Perl, Katherine Stott, Fou T'song, Bernard D'Ascoli and many dozens of other famous artists. We recently loaned the specially modified Bosendorfer Imperial piano used by 11 year old Benjamin Grosvenor on which he won the keyboard section of the BBC Young Musician of the Year competition as well lending him a piano for his own home for over a year so he could prepare for this prestigious event.

Our Origins

Hurstwood Farm has been in family ownership for about sixty years. The main product is cobnuts (hazelnuts). The Farm is amongst the largest and most technically advanced nut production unit in Europe. Sainsbury Supermarkets who take much of the produce have partnered us for many years in developing the UK nut market. It is their high standards of hygiene, quality and building standards that has as a by product enabled us to adapt our packhouse as a 200 seat concert hall when it is not in seasonal farm use. The recital hall is one of the first in the Country to install closed circuit television to enable the whole audience to see a close up of the piano keyboard. Two of the three house pianos are fitted with an upgraded version of the Stahnke computer reproducing / recording equipment. The Farm now possesses a unique archive of around a hundred top artists who have allowed us to retain their performance for private use. Recent developments have enabled us to extend the capability of these pianos to reproduce "live" performances recreated from archive audio recordings, including piano concertos with the computer piano accompanied by an orchestral recording or a live orchestra.

Concert Hall

Hurstwood Farm is a working agricultural holding of some 45 hectares. The Farm lies at the West of one of the largest remaining wooded areas in Kent.

The Concert Barn was originally built as a pack-house for fruit, and is still used principally for this purpose.

Those parts of the woodland belonging to the Farm have for many years been kept as a private nature reserve. The area has an amazing wealth of flora and fauna. Some 40 species of bird can be seen regularly. The Farm has one of the very few remaining breeding sites for nightjars. Wild orchids can be found in the woodlands, and there are many mammals as permanent residents. In the spring the wooded areas display a fantastic showing of bluebells. The woodland is managed as chestnut coppice producing fencing, pulp wood and tree stakes. This system encourages a high insect population, which attracts birds and other wildlife.

The farmland is mainly cobnut (hazelnut) and walnut orchards. The cobnut catkins are at their spectacular best in February. The cover of our Young Maestro series recordings is a photo of the catkins in full display.

The stringent requirements of supermarkets, Sainsburys especially, in hygiene, construction and decoration of buildings where food is processed led to a mutually beneficial association with Sainsbury for production processing and packing of cobnuts for all their stores in the UK. We found ourselves with high grade buildings used for only a part of the year. Tests on the acoustics of the pack-house showed a great potential for using it for piano recitals. We made some adjustments to the surface of the walls to optimize acoustics and began our recitals there in 1993. During 1998 we experimented with television cameras to show a view of the artists at the keyboard. This season we have installed full closed circuit television so that all the audience have a clear view of the piano keyboard during recitals. We believe we are the first recital venue to have used this technique in the UK. The same equipment, with additions, is also be used for making promotional video recordings for young artists.

As well as the Concert Barn, we have Hurricane Barn built from fallen oak trees after the 1987 hurricane when winds up to 130 mph destroyed over ten thousand trees on the Farm. The barn Houses our display of pianos.

Visitors to the Farm are welcome to explore the woodland and orchards, to picnic and enjoy the panoramic views of the Weald of Kent and the North Downs.

The Music Society

Patron: Andras Schiff

The Music Society recital season at Hurstwood Farm runs from February until July. In the autumn, until Christmas, the Concert Hall reverts to its main use as a pack-house for fruit, and the Hurricane barn (built from oak trees blown down in the hurricane of 1987) which can be used as a restaurant building for patrons, again becomes the living quarters and staff rooms for student fruit pickers who harvest the crops.

The concerts are always beautifully decorated with flowers and shrubs by Hazel Faux from the environs of Hurstwood Farm. The hazelnut catkins have become our horticultural mascot.

Five piano recitals are held each year. Many are given by the world's top artists. Amongst those who have played at Hurstwood Farm are Radu Lupu, Donohoe, Piers Lane, Alfred Perl, Rudy, Pascal Rogé, Michael Roll, d' Ascoli, Bax, Fou T'song, Demidenko, Alexeev, Schiff, Frankl, Katin, Stott, Badura Skoda, Sokolov, Kendall Taylor, Hamelin, Isserlis ('cello), Hough, Elias-José, Macawley and dozens of the new generation of talented young pianists. Each event is enhanced by a meal of gourmet excellence prepared and presented by Mrs Dieta van Es - herself a music lover and dedicated to the running of the Music Society.

Sponsorship

Many of the great pianists who now perform at Hurstwood Farm Piano Studios do so at reduced, or sometimes without, fee. This enables us to devote surplus funds to sponsorship of young artists. Sponsorship is given in many ways. We offer free recording facilities to some. We arrange and sponsor recitals for others, and on occasions we present young artists ourselves alongside the famous grand masters - always giving a generous fee to the young artist even though most would play for nothing. We have established our own "Young Maestro's label" which has received great acclaim. To do this we have purchased some of the finest recording equipment for piano that is available anywhere. It is, however, very specific to piano recording.

Amongst those, who once played here as Young Maestros are:-

Anthony Zerpa-Falcon	Spain/UK
Olga Dudnik	Russia/Israel
Joseph Long	Scotland
Joseph Tong	UK
Tanya Bannister	UK
Christoph Berner	Austria
Denes Varjeon	Hungary
Endré Hegedus	Hungary
Rustem Hayroudinoff	Russia
Ian Fountain	UK
Tai Hang Du	
Egli Januleviciute	Lithuania
Mark Gasser	UK
Alon Goldstein	Israel
Daniel Grimwood	UK
Florian Uhlig	Germany
George Lazaridus	Greece
Patryk Jablonski	Poland/Sweden
Ashley Wass	UK
Andrew Zolinsky	Yugoslavia
Christopher Schuringa	Holland
Momo Kodama	Japan
Vanessa Benelli	Italy

Calendar of Events

Concert programme for 2005:

February	12th	Bernard d'Ascoli
March	12th	Alfredo Perl
April	16th	Paul Roberts
May	?	Peter Jablonski
June	18th	Michael Roll
July	23rd	Benjamin Grosvenor (piano)
		Daniel de Gruchy Lambert (trumpet)
		Adam Walker (flute)
		BBC Young Musicians of the Year 2004

Tickets

Tickets £30.00 p including refreshments. £20 without refreshments. No reduction for one recital only.

Will Members whenever possible, please be kind enough to use our booking form and also send an addressed envelope for ticket return, to save errors and secretarial time.

The Music Society is a Club. In order to join the Club, you can register with our booking office. Members of the Club may request postal advice in the form of a newsletter, programme and booking form about two weeks before each recital. There is no charge for membership.

Most available tickets for the recitals plus meal sell early in the season. We can sometimes accommodate patrons who come for the recitals only without long time advance bookings.

Our Booking office address is:-
Hurstwood Farm Music Society,
2 Simone Close
Bickley
Kent BR1 2PY.
Fax/ Answerphone +44 (0)20 8290 5990

Young Maestros Label

Young Maestro recordings are one of the means by which we sponsor talented artists. We provide all the equipment and funds to produce 500 CDs. The artist is allowed to buy from us at cost (about £3.50 each) as many copies as he wishes for selling at his recitals. The initial cost is high because of artwork and glass mastering charges but the cost falls after that. In one case distribution has exceeded 5,000 Cds.

This unique collection of recordings, listed below, is available from Hurstwood Farm Music. The proceeds go to the sponsorship of the musicians.

The CDs are offered at £6 each. To buy them please send cash to our mailing address and they will be dispatched to you immediately.

We have published CD records of many of our musicians. The recordings were made at the concert venue on the 290 Imperial SE piano which has computer recording facilities. After the artist has completed the recordings in peace and quiet, alone, the recording engineers replay the pieces on the Imperial and make high quality digital acoustic recordings for the CDs.

The CD tracks marked with Clip (size-kb) are .mp3 - 56kbs stereo digital audio clips varying in length from about 30 seconds to just over a minute which you can download for a taste of these superb recordings. Each CD has two clips. If you just left-click the clips they download and play. If you right-click the clips you can save the mp3 file onto your computer with 'Save target as.'

<p>Joseph Long CD Recorded Jan 1997 Balakirev</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Islamey Clip (266kb) 2. Sonata in Bb Min 1st Mov 3. Sonata in Bb Min 2nd Mov 4. Sonata in Bb Min 3rd Mov 5. Sonata in Bb Min 4th Mov 6. Chant de Pêcheur 7. Polka 8. Au Jardin 9. Scherzo in Bb min 10. Scherzo in F# min 11. The Lark 12. Toccata Clip (290kb) 	<p>Joseph Long CD Recorded Sept 1998 Chopin Sonata No 3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 1st movement, Allegro maestoso Clip (277kb) 2. 2nd movement, Scherzo, Molto vivace 3. 3rd movement, Largo 4. 4th movement, Finale, Presto non tanto Chopin Scherzos 5. No 1 Op 20 B minor, Presto con fuoco 6. No2 Op 31 Bb minor, Presto Clip (384kb) 7. No3 Op 39 C# minor, Presto con fuoco 8. No 4 Op 54 E major, Presto
<p>Neil Crossland CD Recorded Sept 1998 Poulenc Trois Mouvements Perpétuels</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No 1 2. No 2 3. No 3 Haydn Piano Sonata in Bb HOBXVI:2 4. Moderato Clip (206kb) 5. Largo 6. Minuetto e Trio Schumann Fantasiestücke 7. Des Abends – Evenings 8. Aufschwung – Soaring 9. Warum? – Why 10. Grillen – Whims 11. In der Nacht – Night 12. Fabel – Fable 13. Traumes Wirren – Dream Visions 14. Ende vom Lied – Epilogue Liszt 15. Ballade No 2 in B min 16. Concert study, Un Sospire Clip (304kb) 17. Harmonies Poétique 	<p>Neil Crossland CD Recorded Aug 1996 Bach-Busoni</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chaconne in D minor Clip (437kb) Bachmanin off 2. Allegro agitato 3. Non Allegro 4. Allegro Molto Clip (285kb) Liszt 5. Chapelle de Guillaume Tell 6. Funerailles

Olga Dudnic CD recorded May 1999
Rachmaninoff 6 moments Musicaux

1. Bb minor Andantino
2. Eb minor Allegretto Clip (266kb)
3. B minor Andante cantabile
4. E minor Presto
5. Db major Adagio sostenuto
6. C major Maestoso Scriabin 4 studies
7. Study in C# minor Op 2 No 1
8. Study in C# minor Op 42 No 5
9. Study in B minor Op 8 No 11
10. Study in D# minor Op 8 No 12 Clip (250kb) Prokofiev Sonata No 7 in Bb Op 83
11. Allegro inquieto
12. Andante caloroso
13. Precipitato

Egle Januleviciute CD Recorded Sept 1998 Gabriel Fauré

1. Nocturne Op 33 No 1 César Frank Prelude, Chorale et Fugue
2. Prelude Clip (227 kb)
3. Chorale
4. Fugue Claude Debussy Pour le Piano
5. Prelude
6. Sarabande
7. Toccata Maurice Ravel
8. Pavanne pour une infante defunte Clip (250kb)
9. Noctuelles
10. Oiseaux triste
11. Alborado grazioso

Joseph Tong CD Recorded Oct 1997

1. Chopin Fantasie in F minor Clip (309kb) Schumann Fantasie in C minor
2. 1st movement
3. 2nd movement
4. 3rd movement Schubert Fantasie in C major.. Wanderer
5. 1st movement Clip (273kb)
6. 2nd movement
7. 3rd movement
8. 4th movement

Vanya Elias-José CD Recorded Oct 1993

1. Schumann Kinderscenen Op 15
Of Foreign Lands and Peoples
Strange story
Catch-me-if-you-can
Pleading Child
Contented
Important Event
Dreaming
By the Fireside
Knight of the Hobby-Horse Clip (257 kb)
Almost Too Serious
Frightening
Child Falling Asleep
The Poet Speaks
2. Chopin Nocturne Op27 No1
3. Chopin Nocturne Op 27 No2
4. Chopin Ballade Op 52 No 4 Clip (432 kb)César Frank Prélude, Chorale et Fugue
5. Debussy L'Isle Joyeuse
6. Debussy La Cathédrale Engloutie

Alexander Ardakov CD Recorded Oct 1997
Scriabin Sonatas

1. Sonata No 1 1st Movement Clip (354kb)
2. Sonata No 1 2nd Movement
3. Sonata No 1 3rd Movement
4. Sonata No 1 4th Movement
5. Sonata No 2 1st Movement
6. Sonata No 2 2nd Movement
7. Sonata No 3 1st Movement
8. Sonata No 3 2nd Movement
9. Sonata No 3 3rd Movement Clip (242kb)
10. Sonata No 3 4th Movement
11. Sonata No 4 1st Movement
12. Sonata No 4 2nd Movement
13. Sonata No 5 1st Movement

Piano Recording

Bosendorfer UK offers piano recording facilities of a unique kind and has produced CD records, and lately, video recordings for many of its musicians. Some of these are for promotional purposes or for candidates entry to international competitions, but others are additions to our Young Maestros Label. Young Maestro recordings is one of the means by which we sponsor talented artists.

Artists using our Bosendorfer S.E. Imperial may make recordings, alone in the concert hall, without engineers or managers after a minimal briefing. When the desired works are 'recorded', and after their own listening tests, the artist leaves. The sound recordings are made later by the recording engineers without the artist having to return, using the computer reproducing facility of the piano.

This unique methodology is more economical to operate because each specialty devotes time only to their essential contribution. Traditional methods also tend to pressurize the artist.

Most of the famous artists who play here permit us to retain the computer record of all or part of their recital. There is a big element of trust in this. We hold a unique collection of nearly fifty such performances by these grand masters plus many more by Young Maestros who themselves will one day be "Grand Masters". If artists withhold permission, the computer records are destroyed immediately. The archive is kept under electronic surveillance protection and never leaves the control of Hurstwood Farm Piano Studios. In the distant future it could well become an archive of great historic interest.

Sales & Sales Policy

Our piano display is open to welcome visitors 12 hours per day 7 days per week. We invite serious buyers to come by appointment. This enables us to ensure that they can try pianos without interruption. We can if required provide demonstrators, but our normal practice is to spend a few minutes showing clients the available instruments and describing their features. We then leave them to play and experiment without the pressure of a salesman in attendance.

We do not stock mass produced or cheap imported pianos. We aim to offer only fine instruments, prepared to high standards, but at competitive prices well below those sought almost anywhere else in Europe. This is not inconsistent with viable trading because by doing this and thus gaining trust and respect in the market we have been able to achieve a high turnover and are able to run a modestly profitable company with our resources focussed on giving efficient and professional service rather than spending on a flashy façade in expensive premises. The fact we are located out of town enables us to attract top grade staff who would be unwilling to work in the rat race of urban business.

Unlike most other piano outlets we have fixed and published prices, which are reviewed monthly to take account of currency fluctuation. Visitors to Hurstwood Farm Pianos Studios know what they will be asked to pay. We do not give discounts (except for multiple sales). All our clients pay the same for the same product. Hurstwood Farm Piano Studios may on occasion give small introductory commissions for genuine business opportunity which would not otherwise be open to us, but in contrast to most other piano dealer's practices, this is paid from margins and is not offset by hidden subsidy from clients.

Selection, set-up and maintenance are three key aspects in achieving performance from any piano. Set-up is the process in which each instrument is adjusted to its optimum performance within the artists preferred feel and to the environment in which it will be played. All new pianos which come to us from the factory are only partially voiced and may sound a little harsh or strident. The reason for this is that it is possible to soften the tone of a piano but it is difficult to restore brightness once this is done. Final voicing is therefore always done in the place where the piano will be kept after sale. Voicing is a highly skilled job.

The best pianos are not necessarily the most expensive. The ex factory cost of the leading quality makers is roughly the same. Trading practice generally is such that there are wide differences in the relationship between factory cost and the recommended retail price. Retail price is often inflated to allow for "subsidy" or other sales promotion devices at the expense of the private buyer. We set our prices by the same margin on factory cost for all makes. Special build pianos such as Stuart and Phoenix are produced in small numbers and are craftsman made from traditional materials of exceptional specification. Exclusive production of this kind is costly, but in our opinion these pianos are even better value for money for the most discerning client who seeks the ultimate piano.

Renovation & Repair

We take pride that when we renovate a piano we attend to everything that is wrong, but in addition we also have experience to know what may later require attention of a kind which would mean earlier work would be wasted. We will never agree to undertake partial renovation because this in the long term is wasteful of clients' money. When our clients get their piano back it looks and sounds is as good as or better than it was when new.

Piano owners should be vigilant in seeking repair and renovation work. To repair a piano properly requires skill, patience dedication to excellence, resources and facilities, knowledge of piano design and above all integrity not to cut corners. Most pianos over 60 years old will be prone to progressive failure of the wrest plank (the wood block into which the tuning pins go). With the right equipment and knowledge this is not a difficult job, but it is beyond the competence of all but a handful of repairers in the UK. They will bodge the job by using oversize pins or useless chemicals tuning pin fixes. After such treatment economically viable repair of the piano is rarely an option. Older pianos usually suffer collapse of the doming of the sound board and/ or fracture of the joints in the sound board and micro cracking of the bridge cap. To re-string a piano without attending to these matters is total waste of money. It is not uncommon to find plastic wood filler covered with a liberal layer of varnish in a cracked soundboard to disguise the fact this work has not been done.

The message is that if you intend to have your piano renovated, be certain you have appointed the right person to carry out all the necessary work whether it shows or not. To rely on the name of the restorer is not always a safeguard –even if it the original builder's own repair shop. There is much more to renovating a piano than polishing and cleaning the case and fitting bright new strings.

Generally it is only possible to justify total renovation of selected models of premier makes such as Bosendorfer (except those with Vienna action and Model 213), Steinway models O, B, and D, some Bechsteins prior to 1940 and Bluthner up to 7 foot size. Most other makes and models cost more to renovate than the value of the finished instrument. There are however exceptions and it is important to take advice before scrapping any piano. Historical pianos or those of sentimental value may also be lovingly restored.

The age of the piano is not critical providing the frame is not cracked. Although a cracked frame can be mended it is rarely wise to do this. Quality, well designed instruments of 100 years old and more can be restored to look and sound as they were when new. Some professionally restored craftsman built old pianos we consider significantly better than their modern new factory mass produced counterparts.

Full renovation of a grand piano to as new condition costs typically around £7500 including VAT. The work takes about three months.

On completion of restoration the piano will need the same attention as a new instrument in terms of regulation and stabilisation tuning. New strings need time under tension before the metal crystal structure develops to give long term tuning stability.

The photos show two pianos recently restored by us. Both are over 100 years old. Both sound and feel wonderful to play. Both were destined for the scrap heap when we gave them reprieve.

In addition to full renovation we can arrange to veneer pianos in any chosen wood finish. Within bounds we can also alter case styling and add monographs or other special features. A re-veneer typically cost about £5000 including VAT.

As well as full renovation we undertake hammer replacement, hammer re-shaping, keyboard and action repair. After such work the action will need key leveling, re-weighting, and facing of the new hammers to the strings. The latter operations are time consuming but vital work which many technicians "overlook" because the average client will be unable to make visual check it has been done. If it is not done the piano will feel "lumpy" and have uneven response.

Location

We are located in open country about 1 ½ miles from Borough Green. In Kent. Trains from London leave Victoria at half hourly intervals throughout most of the day. (Hourly on Sundays and late at night).

Train time enquiries: 08457 48 49 50, or click here to visit the National Rail website.

Borough Green Taxis operate a good service at the station. Phone (01732) 882020

Sunday services to Borough Green may be unreliable. On Sundays, we recommend you use Sevenoaks Station, which is about 6 miles from the Farm. Trains to Sevenoaks leave Charing Cross at frequent intervals. Bee line operate a good taxi service at Sevenoaks. Phone (01732) 456214

There is no convenient bus service in the Crouch area.

We can usually arrange to meet visitors who travel by train.

Contact Us

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