

Press Release**Beethoven's last grand piano to be reconstructed**

Replica to be completed by the end of 2026 and played in concerts during Beethoven's anniversary year in 2027. Collaborative project between the Beethoven-Haus in Bonn, the Orpheus Instituut in Ghent, and KU Leuven University. Start-up funding from Rotary Club Bonn Süd – Bad Godesberg

The Beethoven anniversary year 2027, which commemorates the 200th anniversary of the composer's death, is already slowly becoming apparent. One of the special projects of the Beethoven-Haus in Bonn for the anniversary year is the reconstruction of Beethoven's last fortepiano. The original instrument is one of the outstanding objects in the museum's permanent exhibition. "It has long been our desire to restore the original form of the instrument and revive the sound of this special instrument, which unfortunately can no longer be played. We are very pleased that a replica is now being created on a scientific basis in cooperation with Tom Beghin from Belgian Orpheus Instituut and the Catholic University of Leuven (KU Leuven). Once completed, the reconstructed instrument will be used for concert and research purposes and will find its permanent home in the Beethoven-Haus," says Malte Boecker, director of the Beethoven-Haus. The project is being jointly financed by all cooperation partners. The Beethoven-Haus's participation is made possible by generous start-up funding from the Rotary Club Bonn Süd – Bad Godesberg.

Almost exactly 200 years ago, on January 24, 1826, Beethoven received the hammer piano made by Conrad Graf, the accomplished Viennese piano maker, as a loan instrument. "We think this is exactly the right time to announce our project for the first time," says Belgian fortepiano player and researcher Tom Beghin, who initiated the project. After Beethoven's death in 1827, the piano was returned to Graf, who then marked it with a nameplate

reading “L. van Beethoven.” In 1889, the newly founded Beethoven House Association (Verein Beethoven-Haus) in Bonn acquired the instrument as one of the first objects for its collection.

The piano has a range of 6.5 octaves (CC to f^4) and a Viennese action; from D onwards, it has four strings per key (instead of the three strings per key that are still common today). In keeping with the spirit of the times, new legs were made for the instrument in the mid-19th century, and the grand piano was given a new lyre with only three pedals (shift, piano, damping). The Janissary slide, which had probably been present before and could be used to create special sound effects, was removed. In the 1960s, the instrument was once again overhauled using the hardly reversible methods common at the time. Today, the grand piano is no longer playable, and all experts advise against further restoration.

Instead, it is now to be reconstructed in its original form from Beethoven's time and its background regarding piano manufacturing should be researched. Not only does the restoration of the original design play a role here, but the question of the effects of the four-string system with a string tension of approx. 7600 kg on the piano body is also being investigated. Graf had only made a few attempts with this stringing and eventually abandoned it.

The accomplished piano builder Chris Maene in Ruiselede (Belgium) was commissioned with the reconstruction. Maene has extensive experience with historical grand pianos from Beethoven's time and has already carried out two similar projects with Tom Beghin to reconstruct the Erard and Broadwood grand pianos that belonged to Beethoven.

Curator Julia Ronge is delighted: “Our aim is to make our collection, which includes Beethoven's last grand piano, accessible to people today in a lively way. The reconstructed replica of the Graf grand piano enables us to use the instrument regularly in the museum to give visitors an idea of the sound of this special piano from Beethoven's time.”

The replica is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2026 so that it can be used for concert tours, research, and lectures in the anniversary year 2027 and beyond. There are also plans to incorporate it into the Beethoven-Haus's anniversary celebrations in 2027. In about five years, the instrument will finally find its permanent home in the museum's music room.

Press photos can be downloaded here: www.beethoven.de/presse/projekt/graf

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About the Beethoven-Haus Bonn:

Founded in 1889, the Beethoven-Haus Bonn Association is regarded as the leading international Beethoven centre. It has set itself the task of keeping Beethoven's life, work and influence alive. The cultural institution includes the world's most important Beethoven collection, the museum in Beethoven's birthplace with over 100,000 visitors per year (before corona), a musicological research department, library and publishing house as well as the Hermann J. Abs Chamber Music Hall. Supported by over 700 friends, sponsors and members from over 20 countries, supported by the federal government, the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the Rhineland Regional Association and the federal city of Bonn, the Beethoven-Haus fulfils a cultural mission of national and international importance. The violinist Daniel Hope has been President since March 2020.

About Orpheus Instituut, Ghent:

Orpheus Instituut is an independent, internationally oriented centre for artistic research in music, supported by the Flemish Government. It pioneers research that transforms the making and understanding of music, placing the artist's voice at the heart of knowledge creation. Bringing together excellent artist-researchers, Orpheus Instituut explores new musical practices shaping the future of artistic research.

About KU Leuven:

KU Leuven is Europe's most innovative university (Reuters) and ranks 45th in the Times Higher Education World University rankings (2024). As Belgium's largest university, KU Leuven welcomes 65,000 students from over 140 countries. Its 8,000 researchers are active in a comprehensive range of disciplines. KU Leuven is a founding member of the League of European Research Universities (LERU) and has a strong European and international orientation.