

al hold out my phone with the QR code, the turnstile flashes green, I push through, and here I am again: in the main hall of the NCC Ost at the Messe in Nuremberg. The general assembly of the BDK took place here this year, as in 2024, within the framework of akustika, the music trade fair. Walking in, a certain energy in this musical space began, landing somewhere between trade fair, festival, and technical symposium, depending on where I stood and what I listened to.

Friday morning started with perhaps the most anticipated item of this year's meeting: the Duo Clave. It premiered as the first item on the seminar agenda. First came the lecture on its design and construction, then the unveiling, and finally an hour-long concert with its French builder, Paul Corbin, now based in Paris, together with Ashley Hribar, an Australian pianist with Slovenian roots based in Hannover.

I expected to hear a distinctive piano. But what all 108 keys and five pedals (doubled, of course) demonstrated was an instrument producing unprecedented sounds with the widest dynamic range I have ever experienced. At its quietest, it held near-total, almost breathless attention; at its loudest, it pushed far beyond my previous experiences of resonance. It is rare for music from a piano to feel genuinely new to the ear. In that sense, the sound felt to me like a gift.

Later that morning came another highlight: August Förster's new concert grand 275 Sovereign, presented within a seminar on significant changes to the cast-iron plate and action geometry. The two instruments stood in the grand piano salon among many other top-tier European concert grands, waiting quietly. The contrast of the salon is striking: no chaos, no competing noise—absolutely luxurious, especially compared to Frankfurt in previous years. The opportunity to sign up and play them in peace is not found elsewhere at this scale, and for us only possible when the convention is held at Akustika.

The Friday seminars continued: ear health, narrower keyboards, digital technician topics and AI, traditional work on hammers and key weighting, and more reflective discussions on the value of work and the path to becoming a publicly appointed and sworn expert. That last topic resurfaced again during the general assembly, where anyone interested was directly encouraged to contact the BDK office.

Toward evening, many helping hands moved the concert grands from the salon and placed them around the hall, transforming it into a four-floor concert space. All ten instruments featured in Strauss' *Also sprach Zarathustra*, two in Ravel's *Rapsodie espagnole*, followed by a percussion improvisation spanning all four floors—so that the building itself felt like an instrument, creating an acoustically immersive experience.

And then, almost comically, the exhibitors' evening. We all wandered over to a conference room with the promise of pizza. If the pizza existed, it was very well hidden. Thus a horde of

hungry piano builders wandered into Nuremberg in search of food. In hindsight, that may have been the real event.

On Saturday the seminars resumed with renewed vigor: tuning and regulation of the Viennese pianoforte, technical sessions from soundboard work to laser measurement systems and CNC usage, an introduction to the pilot one-year program for apprentices, and innovations such as a completely 3D-printed pinless action.

The tool committee presentations were, as usual, a highlight in their own right, full of ideas that make you want to return immediately to the workshop: ergonomic handles, an improved felt cutter, a refined soundboard router holder, a laser-cut wire box, and a 3D-printed marking jig—the kind of practical creativity that defines this field.

Here it is worth mentioning and applauding the BDK's efforts to make the seminars widely accessible to international participants, of whom there were many more this year due to Akustika. Seminars were either held in German one day and in English the next, or supported by simultaneous translation devices, which were constantly in use. One participant remarked to me, "You are so lucky, you have so many resources." I felt proud to be able to present them in that way and make them accessible to others.

In addition to the seminars, Saturday featured the BDK general assembly in the morning and the European Piano general assembly in the afternoon. The day ended with the Piano Builders' Gala at Parks Nürnberg, a venue reached via a literal stroll through the park. A generous buffet and selection of drinks left no wish unfulfilled. Due to time constraints during the BDK general assembly, the awarding of the Golden Tuning Hammer was moved to the gala. The stage was thus set for an unusually ceremonious presentation to this year's recipient, Matthias König, and for the laudatory speech by Matthias Kunze. A fantastic succession of energetic music and entertainment followed. Tables and chairs were pushed aside, the disco ball swirled to life, and we danced and sang "until the cows came home," as the expression goes where I come from. It is perennially fascinating to me how a room full of people who have been talking for days somehow still find more to say, more to laugh about, more to share.

Sunday, the final day, started rather early considering the end of the previous night, though participants remained impressively alert and motivated. It featured seminars partly repeated from earlier days but also new topics, including an interactive panel discussion on employee relations. The convention ended with the final concert on the Duo Clave, and the weekend closed the way it had begun: impressively resonant.

Stepping out of the NCC Ost shortly afterwards was a disorienting study in contrasts: mounted police, flashing lights, and thousands of football fans spilling out of the nearby stadium. I was stuck in traffic in the Messe parking lot for almost an hour.

Finally out of the parking lot and driving home, I felt exhausted in a rich, fulfilled way. I thought about all the conversations I had, the things I learned, the beauty I heard, the innovation I saw, and the ideas I took with me. I don't know about everyone else, but the pandemic left me with a lasting gratitude for times like this when we can be together, fortunate still to have the peace and opportunity to do so.

Many thanks to all who made it possible. Looking forward to seeing you all next year in Kassel!