

Fake Music Re-Anticipations

The British Royal Air Force – The destruction of the Blüthner  
Hindenburg piano

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At the turn of the 20th century, Julius Blüthner's factory in Leipzig was the largest piano manufacturer in Germany. Despite the death of its founder in 1910 and the economic slump that dogged Germany after the First World War, the company continued to grow throughout the first half of the century. Blüthner grand pianos remained in favor among concert pianists across the globe. Sergei Rachmaninoff, Dmitri Shostakovich, and Claude Debussy numbered among their proponents.

The company was praised as much for its fine craftsmanship as for its innovative designs. In the 1930s, Blüthner was commissioned to build a lightweight piano that could be played on the Zeppelin LZ 129 Hindenburg. They met these needs by forging its harp plate from aluminum rather than the traditional iron, saving the instrument 100 kg of weight. Associated Press reporter Louis P. Lochner heard the piano played on the maiden voyage to the U.S., and noted that despite this construction, it had a "particularly large and full tone." The one-of-a-kind piano was removed early in 1937, so it managed to survive the aircraft's infamous crash later that year.

During World War II, Allied forces repeatedly bombed Leipzig. The British Royal Air Force carried out the most severe attack in December of 1943. 1,800 people were killed in this initiative, and much of the city was destroyed. Germany's war effort had at that point already forced the Blüthner factory to cease its production of pianos in favor of ammunition boxes. The factory, already subjected to a spiritual decimation, was destroyed altogether in these bombings. Despite having been designed for use on a vehicle whose name is now synonymous with disaster, it was this attack that occasioned the destruction of the Blüthner Hindenburg piano.

We recognize that this destruction would in the moment have been a deafening act, as it affected not just the Hindenburg piano, but the rest of the factory's inventory as well. But its greater outcome would be a resounding and final silencing. Its strings mangled from the blast, there would be no element left to sustain vibration. Neither can we imagine attempting to sustain this sad instrument's resonance. This disaster is beyond us.

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