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## ULRICH GERHARTZ MASTER PIANO TUNER, LONDON

Steinway's director of concert and artist services, master piano-tuner Ulrich Gerhartz has been hailed as "the most powerful man in classical music". He was set to study architecture and industrial design, but wanted to learn a handcraft before going to university, so took an apprenticeship at Steinway. He now travels the world preparing concert pianos for the world's top pianists.

### What makes a good piano tuner?

Patience, good tactile skills and a very good ear. A passion for people. Working with musicians, you have to get the combination right between a very complex instrument and a very complex human being.

### Did you have a childhood ambition?

I was caught between art school and doing something that earned a living.

### Can you play the piano?

I'm an amateur player, not a professional artist.

### Is it difficult to work with musical geniuses?

All artists are complex personalities, who have different ways of communicating what they want from a piano. My job is to improve the piano and make it more friendly to the person playing.

### How long does a Steinway last?

A family piano will last through three generations. Pianos on a concert platform are a different kettle of fish. They reach their peak aged three, and stay at that peak for five years. The maintenance is so intense it is that which wears the piano out.

### How would you describe yourself?

I am artistic. I am patient, and a perfectionist – if you don't want to get things right working on piano with 12,000 parts, then you're in the wrong job. I'm a tidy person who likes things in order. I'm Interested in people.

### Do you get nervous before a performance?

The pianist and the concert technician are a very close unit. If the pianist is nervous you can get nervous, but you have to disguise that, because they look for a friend and that's the technician. Do your homework, and use your experience to contain the nerves.

**State school or private; mixed or single sex; religious or secular?**



At 12, I moved from an all-boys Catholic school in Hamburg to a mixed high school in Vienna. Agonising about getting into certain schools, moving house just to get into a school – it just doesn't happen in Germany. We just looked to the nearest school, and that was where we went.

### You were in the German army.

When I was 18 years old, we moved back to Germany and I was drafted into national service. I got on with being a soldier, but I also found a place as an apprentice at Steinway. To bridge the gap between finishing the army and starting at Steinway, I studied philosophy at Hamburg University.

### What's your concept of being German?

Germans growing up in Germany after the war were not brought up to have a notion of nationality; that was before now. My first experience of my nationality was moving to Vienna. If you speak Hochdeutsch [standard German], you are immediately identified as an outsider.

### Describe yourself as a musical key.

Middle A. Because it is the reference point for all that we do.

### Have you a secret fondness for pop music?

If I listen to music, I listen with full concentration. I very often prefer quiet, because all my working hours I'm working with my ears. If I listened to pop music, it would just annoy me.

**Is there anything you hate about your job?**

The unpredictability of getting silence when you work. Even if it is your time on stage, if you ask people to stop making noise you often make it worse.

### What's your biggest indulgence?

A house we built in 2006 on Henley-on-Thames. At the centre of the house, around which it revolves, is the piano.

### Do you have one regret?

Not listening to my piano teacher more when I was at school.

### What did you have for breakfast?

I left home for London at 5.30am, and had a croissant and coffee at Pret à Manger at 6.30am before starting work.

### Rate your happiness from one to ten.

I'd put it up to nine – what would push it to ten would be to have more time. My diary is like a corset. I would like more time to simply play.

### Do you believe in an afterlife?

I do, yes, in some shape or form. Will there be pianos? There will certainly be music.

*Ulrich Gerhartz will be in Dublin to prepare the pianos for the 10th Dublin International Piano Competition 2015, from May 15-26. see [dipc.ie](http://dipc.ie)*

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