

By Stacey Thompson

Every business has to start somewhere, and J.D. Grandt Piano Supply is no exception. John Schienke's father, Walter, brought his passion for pianos and unique skill set over from Germany in the early 1950s and, over decades, built a company that continues to import European pianos and offer an extensive catalogue of accessories and services to this day.

J.D. Grandt was founded in 1995 as a division of Richmond Hill, ON-based piano retailer Grand Piano House and continues to operate as a family business. The company is currently the North American source for Lomence's line of crystal pianos as well as pianos from Germany's Steingraeber & Söhne and, in addition, manufactures its own line of piano bass strings for North American retailers, rebuilders, tuners, and institutions.

"He was a concert tuner and piano rebuilder," Schienke says of his family's patriarch, who learned the piano trade at the Heintzman factory in Toronto upon his move to Canada. Unsatisfied with the level of quality on offer from North American bass string manufacturers, Walter Schienke purchased and imported string-winding machinery from Germany in the late '60s.

Schienke says his father would order steel and copper wiring from Germany as he needed it. With his experience, two decades later he began a business as a piano bass string manufacturer for his peers in the Canadian trade. Then, he added wholesale piano and supply sales to the endeavor. The company has grown in strength since then and now handles string manufacturing for many companies.

"Today we are one of North America's leading piano bass string manufacturers," Schienke says proudly. "We handle all bass string-related warranty supply for [companies such as] Yamaha Corp. USA, Bosendorfer USA, and Yamaha Canada Music Ltd."

J.D. Grandt also services technicians, rebuilders, and institutions across North America with various other piano supplies, including Abel hammers from Germany, and is now additionally focusing on the instruments themselves. "With this ongoing business as our foundation, we have added piano distribution," Schienke says of the company's recent undertakings.

Steingraeber & Söhne instruments were not available in Canada prior to J.D. Grandt picking up the line. The boutique German operation has been crafting instruments since the 1850s. Schienke says that while there was interest from larger retail-oriented companies in representation, Steingraeber & Söhne chose the Schienke family business, attributing their interest to J.D. Grandt's reputation in the piano string and accessory market, not to mention its technical know-how.

The new and more modern Lomence line is a more recent acquisition, and one that is receiving plenty of Schienke's attention for the time being. "These are the pianos that come in black and white and also pink and orange and blue," he says. "They are really, really modern, and the Lomence line is really where I see a lot of my time being spent, now and into the future." He adds that the line was well-received during the company's second showing at the annual NAMM Show in January 2013.

Plenty of the company's poise and growth can be attributed to the Schienke family's retail experience with Grand Piano



ABOVE: CHRISTINA & JOHN SCHIENKE AT THE 2013 NAMM SHOW. LEFT: HAMMER BORING.



House. In 1982, Schienke's father moved the company to its current location in Richmond Hill, and it's there that both Grand Piano House and J.D. Grandt carry out operations.

In 2008, Grand Piano House was the first dealer to bring Gebr. Perzina pianos into Canada and a year later added Hailun to the show floor, acting as a warehouse depot for the brand's instruments shipped to Eastern Canada. Both opportunities led to experience in importing such significant wares.

But beyond experience, business is also based on a long-term vision for the future, and that's something J.D. Grandt

boasts in a big way.

"We don't have all the answers," Schienke begins, "but we do have great new strategies that don't quite fit into the traditional, failing distribution business model." He continues: "When we hear, 'Oh, it will turn around when the economy finally turns around,' or 'It's a cyclical industry the piano one is; it comes and goes in waves of a decade or two at a time,' that doesn't sit well with us." Such an attitude in any other business, he adds, would easily cause a dealer to walk away.

Currently, J.D. Grandt has three family members as full-time employees and two part-time workers. Says Schienke: "We're still pretty small," but being small doesn't stop him from setting goals and looking ahead with optimism and enthusiasm. He wants to run the business in a way that will have a positive impact on the North American industry and its future.

"We know that a long-term outlook is key to long-term success, but it needs to be organic," says Schienke. "We'll face changes along the way – today more than ever. Recognizing, accepting, and adapting to these changes is the key component to that long-term plan."

Stacey Thompson is an Editorial Assistant with Canadian Music Trade.