Landmarks Preservation Commission September 10, 2013, Designation List 466 LP-2551

STEINWAY & SONS RECEPTION ROOM AND HALLWAY, first floor, including the reception room's domed rotunda and balcony, the east foyer and stairs leading to the balcony; the hallway of the public corridor, up to the north glass doors, that adjoins the reception room; and the fixtures and components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, arches, pilasters, stairs, landings, ceiling murals, painted medallions, metal railings, metal grilles, chandeliers and lighting fixtures, door enframements, doors, windows, attached furnishings and decorative elements; Steinway Hall, 109-113 West 57th Street (aka 106-116 West 58th Street), Manhattan. Built 1924-25; Warren & Wetmore architects; Walter L. Hopkins, lead designer; Thompson-Starrett Co., builders.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1010, Lot 25, in part.

On July 23, 2013, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway and the proposed designation of the related landmark site. The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with provisions of law. Three people spoke in support of designation, including the owner and representatives of the Historic Districts Council and the Society for the Architecture of the City.

Summary

Commissioned by the prominent New York City piano manufacturer Steinway & Sons in 1924-25, the Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway is one of New York City's most impressive neo-Renaissance style interiors. Located in Steinway Hall, a designated New York City Landmark, on the north side of West 57th Street, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, the primary space is a double-height octagonal rotunda where visitors, musicians, and potential customers meet store representatives before entering various piano showrooms. Visible from the street through a large display window and from the adjoining hallway that leads to the building's elevator lobby, this lavishly-decorated room has a shallow domed ceiling with allegorical murals in the 18th century style of the celebrated Swiss-Austrian painter Angelika Kauffman, as well as a crystal chandelier. Walter L. Hopkins, of the architectural firm Warren & Wetmore, co-designers of Grand Central Terminal, planned the building and interiors, working with the decorative painters Paul Arndt and Cooper & Gentiluomo. Visitors enter from 57th Street, passing through a small foyer that mirrors the adjacent



hallway. Each side of the rotunda features a white marble arch that rests on fluted Ionic columns, flanked by green marble pilasters. Though a glass door and glazed infill separates the rotunda from the hallway, these spaces read as one due to the use of similar architectural elements and materials. At the time of the building's completion, the Reception Room garnered considerable attention in the press, appearing in the pages of the *Architectural Record*, *Architecture & Building* magazine, and *The Music Trade Review*. A seemingly timeless monument to classical music and architecture, as well as Steinway & Sons, this well-preserved interior remains one of the handsomest retail spaces in New York City.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Dedicated in October 1925, the Steinway & Sons Reception Room (and Hallway) is one of the handsomest retail spaces in New York City. For more than six decades, this prominent New York City piano manufacturer had been active on East 14th Street, near Union Square. In addition to providing space for offices and showrooms, the earlier Steinway Hall building incorporated two concert halls, seating 2,000 and 400 people. In moving to West 57th Street, near Carnegie Hall, the company followed a different program, in which its retail operation gained prominence. Expressed clearly on the lower part of the main facade and visible through a 15-by-10-foot display window, the Reception Room is a dramatic, double-height space decorated in the neo-Renaissance style. It is here that visitors, musicians, and potential customers meet Steinway representatives before moving to the various salesrooms, as the well as to a music salon on the third floor, and the famed piano depository on the lower level.¹

Steinway & Sons²

Steinway & Sons, a piano manufacturing firm that "has dominated the industry from the late 1860s to the present,"³ was founded in 1853 in New York City by Heinrich Engelhard Steinweg, Sr. (1797-1871), previously the owner of a piano and instrument shop in Seesen, Germany. Most of the Steinweg family, including sons Heinrich (Henry), Jr. (1830-1865); Wilhelm (William) (1835-1896); and Albert (1840-1877), immigrated to New York in 1850, while the eldest son, Christian Friedrich Theodor (Theodore) (1825-1889), remained in the piano business in Germany. The Steinwegs worked as journeymen in New York piano factories during the next three years. After embarking on their own in a rented building at 85 Varick Street, the firm moved in 1854 to larger quarters in several adjacent buildings at 82-88 Walker Street.⁴

In 1859-60, Steinway & Sons (the family name was legally changed in 1864) constructed a mechanized pianoforte manufactory (Louis Burger, architect), one of the world's largest, at Fourth (Park) Avenue and 52nd-53rd Streets (it was expanded in 1863) in Manhattan. To further assist in meeting the growing demand for its product, in 1864 Steinway opened a showroom, piano depository, and offices at 71-73 (later renumbered 109-111) East 14th Street. Steinway Hall was added to the rear of this building in 1866. By 1870, the neighborhood of the Steinway factory had developed and left no room for expansion, so Steinway & Sons began acquisition of some 400 acres of property in Long Island City (now Astoria), Queens. It developed the company town of Steinway in the 1870s with housing and a complex that included a lumberyard/sawmill, a foundry, a piano factory, and a piano case works. Steinway's Park Avenue facility then became the finishing manufactory. In London, Steinway also opened a showroom and Steinway Hall in 1875, followed by a branch factory and showroom in Hamburg in 1880.

Early in the firm's history, Steinway pianos were recognized for their superior craftsmanship and design and, by the 1860s, Steinway was in competition with Chickering & Sons for prominence among American piano makers.⁵ A recent account stated that "the firm quickly grew in size and esteem through a combination of technical developments, efficient and high-quality production, shrewd business practices, and successful promotion through artists' endorsements and advertising,"⁶ as well as direct management of artists. Noted for continual experimentation in the design and construction of pianos in the second half of the 19th century, Steinway & Sons acquired more than 100 technical patents. Steinway first concentrated on square pianos, designing in 1855 an overstrung square grand piano that employed a cast-iron plate. The Steinway grand piano was developed as a distinct type by the late 1860s. The Steinway upright piano, manufactured on a large scale by the early 1870s, emerged as the standard American home piano by the end of the century. The Steinway concert grand piano was patented by Theodore Steinway in 1875. Steinway & Sons aggressively marketed its pianos through the endorsements of composers and pianists, a policy developed by William Steinway. Not only was Steinway one of the world's leading piano makers, but its pianos were also popular in Europe and the firm gained renown as the purveyor of the pianos of choice for the greatest concert pianists.

After the death of Henry Steinway, Sr., in 1871, Steinway & Sons was incorporated in 1876, with its stock held solely within the family.⁷ By the early 20th century, the company's advertising slogan was "Steinway, the Instrument of the Immortals," and Steinway custom-made pianos became popular in the homes of the wealthy. The firm discontinued the management of artists, but "expanded its services as suppliers of concert and rehearsal instruments to scores of artists,"⁸ and created dealerships around the United States that handled sales, concert services, and repairs.⁹

After Steinway expanded its piano manufacturing plants in Long Island City, its Park Avenue facility was sold in 1910. Steinway & Sons closed its office/showroom on East 14th Street in 1925, and constructed new Steinway Halls in New York and London. With the stock market crash in 1929 and the resultant collapse in the market for luxury goods, Steinway in the 1930s focused on the sale of pianos to radio stations and the development of smaller "S" grand pianos for those of modest means.

"Steinway Hall" on East 14th-15th Streets (1864-1925)¹⁰

Steinway's building (1863-64, John Kellum)¹¹ on East 14th Street near Union Square housed offices, showrooms, and a piano depository.¹² The firm had also planned a musical venue, Steinway Hall, as part of the project; delayed by the Civil War, it was added to the rear of the property in 1866, facing onto East 15th Street. The complex became familiarly known as "Steinway Hall." It was within both New York's classical music center and the *Kleindeutschland* German-American neighborhood, ¹³ located near the Academy of Music (1853-54, Alexander Saeltzer), at East 14th Street and Irving Place, an opera house with the world's largest seating capacity at that time, Irving Hall, a ballroom and concert/lecture hall annex to the Academy, and, by the mid-1860s, a number of theaters . Most of the leading piano makers followed Steinway's lead and had showrooms in the area, including Decker Brothers (at 2 Union Square East in the 1860s, and at 33 Union Square West after 1870); Sohmer & Co. (founded 1872; Irving Place and East 14th Street in the 1860s, and at Fifth Avenue and 18th Street after 1875).¹⁴

Steinway Hall was New York City's largest musical venue (with around 2,000 seats in the main hall, a smaller hall with 400 seats, and studios and music lesson rooms), as well as one of the few large American concert halls devoted to classical music.¹⁵ For a quarter of a century Steinway Hall was one of America's most famous auditoriums, used for concerts, lectures, and political and civic gatherings. *King's Handbook* in 1892 noted that "Steinway Hall... has been the cradle of classical music in this country; every prominent orchestral organization has been heard within its walls, and so have the most eminent vocalists and instrumentalists."¹⁶

After the opening of Carnegie Hall (1889-91, William B. Tuthill), at West 57th Street and Seventh Avenue,¹⁷ and its ascension as the city's premier classical music venue, New York's classical music center (including the piano companies) gradually relocated uptown.¹⁸ Steinway Hall's main auditorium was closed in 1890 and converted for business use by the Steinway firm, though the smaller recital hall remained in use. The Steinway property was sold in 1923 to the S[amuel] Klein Union Square Realty Corp., and closed in 1925. The 14th Street portion was razed, but the altered Steinway Hall portion on 15th Street survived until the 1980s.

Steinway Hall on West 57th Street ¹⁹

For a number of years after the closing of the Steinway Hall auditorium, Steinway & Sons contemplated moving uptown to the music center developing on West 57th Street, near Carnegie Hall. In July 1916, Steinway announced its intention to construct a new ten-story building with the purchase, for nearly one million dollars, of adjacent town house properties on West 57th and 58th Streets²⁰. A total of eight lots (three on 57th Street and five on 58th Street) were officially conveyed to Steinway & Sons between August 1920 and January 1924.²¹

Steinway & Sons, with a revised project and larger site, selected the architectural firm of Warren & Wetmore, which filed for construction of a 16-story building in October 1923. Construction began in June 1924 and was completed in April 1925. "Steinway Hall,"²² an architectural success, was featured in 1925 in *Architectural Record* and *Architecture & Building*, the latter publication calling it a "much more glorified new home."²³

Designed in a restrained neo-Classical style, Steinway Hall is L-shaped in plan. Clad with Indiana limestone, the front 57th Street portion rises 12 stories before setting back with a four-story tower, ornamented with monumental Ionic colonnades, capped by a set-back penthouse story with a hipped roof. The 58th Street portion, clad with tan brick, limestone, and terra cotta, has setbacks above the 9th and 12th stories. The center of the building is terminated by a campanile-like mechanical/tank tower with a steep pyramidal roof and large lantern. Above the central showcase window, a round arch is decorated with a sculptural group by Italian-American sculptor Leo Lentelli,²⁴ depicting the Muse of Music placing a laurel wreath (or crown of musical triumph) upon the head of Apollo, the Greek god of Music, flanked by a mask and an infant, representing the range of music from dramatic to light. The large amount of ashlar wall on the third story reflected the location behind it of the windowless recital hall. The base is capped by a frieze bearing laurel festoons and medallions with portraits of distinguished classical composer-pianists (Brahms, Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Chopin, Liszt, and Grieg) flanking a central plaque originally bearing the name "STEINWAY." The classical style, materials, setbacks and massing, picturesque towers, and decorative elements add distinction to Steinway Hall and make it a monumental architectural presence along the cultural corridor of West 57th Street.

Steinway & Sons utilized space on the lower five levels of the building: the basement, with storage, shipping, and an area for artists' testing of concert grand pianos; the first story, with the Reception Room and salesrooms; the second story, with additional salesrooms; the third story, with Steinway Hall (a recital hall seating 240) and executive offices; and a portion of the rear fourth story, with space for piano adjustment and refinishing. The fourth and fifth stories held insulated rental music studios, while the rest of the building housed rental offices. Steinway Hall (the recital hall) was opened on October 25, 1925, with an invitation-only, society musical event that was attended by Steinway grandsons Frederick T., Theodore E., and William R., and Henry Ziegler.

Since its construction, Steinway Hall has been the sole sales location in New York City for Steinway pianos. In addition, "artists select their Steinway for concert performances from the company's unique 'piano bank,' an inventory of more than 300 pianos valued at over \$15 million," according to the Steinway firm, a large portion of which is stored in the "famed 'basement'" of the building.²⁵ Theodore E. Steinway, in his 1961 account of the company's history, called the building "a rendezvous for the many friends of the firm. There private studios may be visited by Leopold Stokowski, looking for a place to practice a concerto... Hardly a day goes by that a musician, professional or amateur, does not drop in to try a new piano, talk over developments in the concert field, or simply pass the time of day."²⁶ A recent article in *The New Yorker* stated that "almost every

twentieth-century virtuoso has passed through [the Reception] room en route to Steinway's Concert and Artists Department, housed in the basement, where he or she can select a concert grand for performances at Carnegie Hall, across the street."²⁷ Among these, for example, was "the legendary first meeting of Vladimir Horowitz and Sergei Rachmaninoff" ²⁸ in the basement. Since the closing of the recital hall after World War II, the Reception Room has also been used for recitals.

The Architects: Warren & Wetmore²⁹

Whitney Warren (1864-1943), born in New York City, studied architectural drawing privately, attended Columbia College for a time, and continued his studies at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris from 1885 to 1894. Upon his return to New York, he worked in the office of McKim, Mead & White. One of Warren's country house clients was Charles Delavan Wetmore. Born in Elmira, New York, Wetmore (1866-1941) was a graduate of Harvard University (1889) and Harvard Law School (1892), who had also studied architecture and designed three dormitory buildings (c. 1890) on that campus before joining a law firm. Impressed by his client's architectural ability, Warren persuaded Wetmore to leave law and establish Warren & Wetmore in 1898. While Warren was the principal designer of the firm and used his social connections to provide it with clients, Wetmore became the legal and financial specialist. Whitney Warren was also a founder of the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects and the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design.

Warren & Wetmore became a highly successful and prolific, largely commercial architectural firm, best known for its designs for hotels and for buildings commissioned by railroad companies. The firm's work was concentrated in New York City during the first three decades of the 20th century, but it also received projects across the United States and overseas. The designs were mainly variations of the neo-Classical idiom, including essays in the Beaux-Arts and neo-Renaissance styles. Warren & Wetmore's first major commission, the result of a competition, was the flamboyant New York Yacht Club (1899-1900), 37 West 44th Street. Early residences by the firm included town houses on the Upper East Side, such as the Marshall Orme Wilson House (1900-03), 3 East 64th Street; James A. and Florence S. Burden House (1902-05), 7 East 91st Street; and R. Livingston and Eleanor T. Beeckman House (1903-05), 854 Fifth Avenue.³⁰

Warren & Wetmore is most notably associated with the design of Grand Central Terminal (1903-13, with Reed & Stem and William J. Wilgus, engineer), East 42nd Street and Park Avenue, as well as a number of other projects in its vicinity. Whitney Warren was the cousin of William K. Vanderbilt, chairman of the board of the New York Central Railroad, who was responsible for the firm's selection as chief designers. Nearby development by the firm over the span of two decades included: Hotel Belmont (1905-06, demolished); Ritz-Carlton Hotel (1910, demolished); Biltmore Hotel (1912-14, significantly altered), Vanderbilt Avenue and East 43rd Street; Park Avenue Viaduct (designed 1912, built 1917-19); Commodore Hotel (1916-19, significantly altered), 125 East 42nd Street; Equitable Trust Co. Building (1917-18), 347-355 Madison Avenue; Hotel Ambassador (1921, demolished); and the New York Central Building (1927-29), 230 Park Avenue.³¹ With the firm's success with Grand Central Terminal came commissions for other railroad stations for the New York Central, Michigan Central, Canadian Northern, and Erie Railroads. Notable among these are the Fort Gary Station (1909), Winnepeg, Canada; Yonkers Railroad Station (1911); Union Station (1911-12), Houston; and Michigan Central Station (1913-14, with Reed & Stem), Detroit.

The firm's later work displayed an increased interest in the "composition of architectural mass."³² Prominent examples included the Heckscher Building (1920-21), 730 Fifth Avenue; Plaza Hotel addition (1921), 2 Central Park South; Steinway Hall (1924-25); Aeolian Building (1925), 689-691 Fifth Avenue, for Aeolian Organs and Pianola Pianos and for which the firm received a 1926

gold medal from the Fifth Avenue Association; Tower Building (1926), 200 Madison Avenue; Consolidated Edison Co. Building Tower (1926), 4 Irving Place; Erlanger Theater (1926-27), 246-256 West 44th Street;³³ and Stewart & Co. Building (1929, demolished), 721-725 Fifth Avenue. The Heckscher, Steinway, Aeolian, and Consolidated Edison Buildings, in particular, show the firm's success in its use of setbacks and picturesque towers.

Walter L. Hopkins

Walter L(ane) Hopkins (c. 1876-1926) worked for Warren & Wetmore for more than 20 years. According to the *Music Trade Review*, he was responsible for "the planning [of] both the exterior and interior of the building."³⁴ In September 1925, Hopkins published an illustrated essay on the "Steinway Building" in the *Architectural Record*. He briefly described the office and showroom structure's "dual purpose," as well as how its "home like appearance" expressed "the dignity and distinction befitting the traditions of its owners."³⁵

In New York City, Hopkins is said to have worked on such major Warren & Wetmore projects as the Vanderbilt Hotel (1910-13), Biltmore Hotel (1912-14), Commodore Hotel (1916-19), and the Hotel Ambassador (1919-21, demolished). He also played a role in the Providence Biltmore Hotel (1921-22) and the Royal Hawaiian Hotel (1926-27), his final project. Due to this type of expertise, he published "Architectural Design for Hotel Interiors," in the *Architectural Forum* in 1923. This essay focused on the importance of "public rooms" and the "limitless possibilities offered in the domain of painted decoration and ornament."³⁶

First Floor Plan and Decoration

Steinway Hall has twin entrances on West 57th Street. To reach the Reception Room, one uses the entrance on the east side.³⁷ From the domed semi-circular vestibule, one passes through a small vestibule into the entrance foyer, a vaulted rectangular space that provides access, via stairs, to the second floor, and the rotunda. The foyer is decorated with three small paintings, a circular illustration high on the east wall and fan-shaped images above the exit door and the entry to the stairs.

The rotunda is a double-height space (about 35 feet tall) that was designed to function as a circulation hub, receiving visitors, musicians, and potential customers who wished to access the piano showrooms, piano depository, or public hallway. Like a theater or hotel lobby, where Hopkins said "the incoming guest receives that first impression," the rotunda is a grand space of memorable proportions. Most observers describe the style as late or neo-Georgian because it features a shallow domed ceiling with four murals (and some low plaster relief) that recalls the work of the Swiss-Austrian painter Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807), who collaborated with architect Robert Adam, her English contemporary, during the 1760s and 1770s. This space also suggests interiors designed by William Kent for the English aristocracy, particularly the grand marble entry at Holkham Hall, built for Thomas Coke, the 1st Earl of Leicester (begun 1734).

Hopkins also drew inspiration from an earlier Warren & Wetmore commission. Built in 1912 for the Aeolian Company, a manufacturer of pianos and self-playing musical instruments, 33 East 42nd Street featured a similar neo-Classical style exterior and floor plan, with separate store and office entrances, as well as a central display window that not only provided views of the sales floor but also stairs to the recital hall. Like Steinway Hall, the company's name was inscribed directly above the window in large, highly visible, capital letters. Several rival piano manufacturers would adopt a similar arrangement, including Mehlin & Sons at 4 East 43rd Street (1916, altered), the Sohmer Piano Company at 31 West 57th Street, and Chickering Hall at 27-29 West 57th Street (Cross & Cross, 1924).

The rotunda is octagonal, with angled walls and open spaces of alternating width, linked by a continuous marble cornice. Each of the four open spaces has a white marble arch supported by fluted ionic columns, which are flanked by green fluted marble pilasters with egg and dart capitals. The white marble is said to have been quarried in northern Italy (Brescia Verde), while the pilasters and trim are from Tinos in the Cyclades archipelago of Greece. At the top of each arch is a ram's head, a motif long-associated with classical-style architecture. The walls carry plaster pendentives that rise up toward the dome. Each pendentive is decorated with hexagonal and diamond-shaped coffering.³⁸ The polished floor is yellow Kasota stone, an American limestone. It is embellished with small rectangles of Alps green marble.

A large crystal chandelier hangs from the center of the painted ceiling.³⁹ Paul Arndt is credited for the T-shaped allegorical scenes, set within elaborate painted frames. According to the Steinway website, these images illustrate "the influence of music on human relations."⁴⁰ Relatively little is known about Arndt's career. Born in Ohio, he is said to have trained in Paris in the studio of painter Jean Leon Gerome and later settled in Woodstock, New York, where he worked as a landscape painter and decorative artist. *Architecture & Building* reported:

The background of the ceiling is of old parchment effect with the figures and decorations in soft colors and mellow tones which seem to envelop the whole room in an atmosphere of intimate warmth.⁴¹

The decorators Cooper & Gentiluomo probably painted the surrounding images and grotesques, which include rows of small male and female heads, as well as winged putti playing instruments and oceanic gods. Inspired by imperial Roman and Italian Renaissance wall decorations, imagery of this type often appears in late 18th century English interiors. A. Lincoln Cooper and Giuseppe Gentiuomo were active in New York City in the 1920s, often working with Faustino Sampietro (c. 1882-1941) under the name Cooper, Sampietro & Gentiluomo. They worked on the Barrett Building (Warren & Wetmore, 1920-22) at 40 Rector Street, the Royal Hawaiian hotel (1925-27) at Waikiki Beach, and may have executed the ceiling murals in the Madison Belmont Building (Warren & Wetmore, 1924-25, a designated Landmark and Interior). Cooper headed the firm, which cleaned the famed Peacock Room at the Freer Gallery in Washington, D.C. in 1920 and produced murals for the Capitol Theatre (1920) on West 51st Street, Manhattan.⁴²

The south wall contains a large display window. Like the three other walls, it is framed by a marble arch but on the exterior the top part is filled by the Lentelli sculptural group. This interruption, which breaks the balance and symmetry, is usually hidden behind draperies. At the base of the window is one of the rotunda's most unusual features – a "shadow box" display window. Featuring a single piece of curved plate glass that projects deep inside the room, this novelty reduces reflections, and when viewed from the sidewalk, creates the impression that no glass was used. Though patented by Tron O. Peterson as early as 1913, it was not part of the building's original design and is likely to date from after the Second World War, when it appears in some historic views.⁴³

The north side of rotunda incorporates a marble arch that screens an alcove and curved balcony. Though the decorative metal railing is original to the room, the Steinway & Sons sign was added later, probably before 1965. Beneath the balcony are three arches, trimmed with green marble. The center arch opens to a corridor (not part of the designation) that leads to various first-floor piano showrooms, while the right (east) arch opens to the basement stairs, where the piano depository (not part of the designation) is located. To either side are green marble porticos, framing the private passenger elevator (east) and an office entrance (west). Above each portico is a white marble medallion. The relief above the office entrance depicts a female figure playing a harp.

To give the reception room a welcoming, almost residential, character, Hopkins chose furnishings associated with tastefully elegant homes. For instance, he used sofas and wing chairs, as well as free-standing desks modeled on pieces in the British Museum. While the display window had elaborate cascading draperies, the rotunda walls were hung with large theatrical portraits of the pianist-composers Berlioz, Mendelssohn, Rubinstein and Schubert, set in gilded frames.⁴⁴ These vibrant oil paintings were originally suspended by ribbons and lit by ornate projecting wall sconces. Centered below each portrait was a small marble plaque with its title. Lastly, an octagonal Czecho-Slovakian rug originally covered much of the floor.⁴⁵

From West 57th Street, the building's west entrance serves the elevator lobby. One passes through a semi-circular vestibule into a public hallway that leads to elevators at the rear. This short hallway, between the vestibule and the north glass doors, adjoins the reception room and is visible from the rotunda through an archway enclosed by glass and low-relief metalwork, painted green. Aligned with the entrance foyer on the opposite (east) side of the rotunda, the public corridor reads as part of the reception room due to the use of similar architectural elements and materials, particularly the decorative treatment of the west wall which mirrors, almost identically, the foyer's east wall. Two elements, however, distinguish this hallway as part of a public corridor: the black-and-white marble flooring that extends into the elevator corridor (not part of the designation) and the bronze plaques donated by "American merchants" and "friends in Europe" to mark the building's dedication.

At the center of the archway are glass doors that open into a low landing on the west side of the rotunda. Though this entrance is not currently used, it demonstrates that in planning Steinway Hall the owners wanted to provide convenient access between the Reception Room and the floors above, which contained rental offices and soundproof music studios.

Later History of Steinway Hall⁴⁶

The speculative investment of Steinway Hall never proved lucrative for Steinway & Sons, yielding only about two percent yearly, and as early as 1947 its sale was considered.⁴⁷ President Henry Z. Steinway finally decided that the building "was a luxury that the company could no longer afford."⁴⁸ The Manhattan Life Insurance Co. purchased Steinway Hall for three million dollars (about the same as the construction cost) in April 1958. The purchase was arranged by Thomas E. Lovejoy, Jr., president of Manhattan Life (1950-68 and 1971-73) whose wife was a cousin of Mr. Steinway.⁴⁹ Under a twenty-year leaseback agreement (renewed 1978), Steinway & Sons continued to occupy the first, second, and third floors, as well as part of the fourth floor and basement.

In 1972, Steinway & Sons entered a new phase of corporate ownership when it was taken over by CBS, under chairman William Paley. CBS sold Steinway & Sons in 1985 to Steinway Musical Properties, Inc., controlled by John R. and Robert M. Birmingham of Boston, who were investors and heirs to a fuel oil fortune. Steinway & Sons was acquired in April 1995 by a Los Angeles investment group and merged with Selmer Co., Inc. Steinway & Sons became a subsidiary of Steinway Musical Instruments, Inc., a holding company in Waltham, Massachusetts, whose entities specialize in the design, manufacture, and sale of musical instrument.⁵⁰ In August 2013, Steinway Musical Instruments was acquired by Paulson & Company, an investment management firm.

Steinway Hall was conveyed in 1980 by Manhattan Life to 111 West 57th Street Associates (Bernard Mendik, principal). Mendik sold his interests in 1985, but the ownership entity's name remained the same. The building was reacquired by Steinway & Sons for \$62 million in May 1999, including a 99-year lease on the land, which was retained by 111 West 57th Street Associates. Prior to the sale, an executive of Steinway Musical Instruments, Inc., described the 57th location as "the most

successful piano retail store in the world."⁵¹ Steinway Hall was purchased by the JDS Development Group in June 2013.

Description

The Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway are located in the front (south) part of the Steinway Hall building on the north side of West 57th Street, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues. The wall paint and carpet color are green, complementing the Tinos marble. The elevator cab and the adjacent bathroom are not part of the designation.

Historic: Reception Room, white marble columns, arches and entablature, green marble pilasters and wainscoting, metal radiator grilles with scalloped pattern, yellow limestone floor with green marble details and trim; east foyer: vestibule with brass doors and decorative trim, circular painting framed by draped garlands, fan-shaped paintings above vestibule doors and stairs, painted wood side table, marble archway with marble stairs and wainscoting to second floor, glass lighting fixture and spiral wood handrail on west and south side of stairs, second floor balcony; central rotunda: painted ceiling with some low-relief details, crystal chandelier, coffered walls, four metal wall sconces; south side: curved "shadow box" glass window with brass trim (possibly 1950s, replaced 1990s); north alcove: three arches, elevator and office door marble enframements, white marble medallion above elevator (east) and blind arch (west), right (east) arch frames stairs to lower level, center arch frames entrance to corridor and rear showrooms, "Steinway & Sons" sign in brass capital letters (prior to 1965), convex balcony level with decorative metal baluster and wood handrail, glass lighting fixtures in alcove and on mezzanine ceiling; west side: arched wall with metal mullions and glass infill, metal door to hallway with low decorative relief and broken pediment, decorative metal railing enclosing north and east side of black marble landing; Hallway, vaulted ceiling, glass and metal lighting fixture, white marble columns, arches and entablature, green marble pilasters, painted metal and glass doors; north (inner) doors have mirrored transoms; west wall, circular painted medallion framed by draped garlands, fan-shaped paintings above exit and entrance to elevator corridor, two brass plaques dedicated to Steinway & Sons on west wall, metal grille with scalloped pattern, white and black marble floor.

Alterations: East foyer: marble top on side table, exit sign above entrance doors, speaker, silver metal lighting fixture above entrance; *north alcove*: vertical air conditioning vents on upper wall, silver metal lighting fixtures, non-historic elevator doors; *south side*: silver metal lighting fixtures attached to marble columns.

Researched and written by Matthew A. Postal (2013) Jay Shockley (2001) Research Department

NOTES

¹ The Steinway & Sons salesrooms, music salon, and piano depository are not part of the designation. All sections of this report devoted to the history of Steinway & Sons and Steinway Hall are based on LPC, *Steinway Hall Designation Report*, prepared by Jay Shockley (LP-2100), (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2001).

² Moses King, *King's Handbook of New York* (Boston: M. King, 1892), 876; "Steinway & Sons," <u>www.steinway.com</u> website; Fiorello H. LaGuardia Archives, LaGuardia Community College, "Steinway: Family and Factory" calendar; "Steinway & Sons, Founders of Steinway, Long Island City;" Vincent F. Seyfried, "The Steinways and the 'Steinway Settlement'," in *300 Years of Long Island City 1630-1930* (N.Y.: Edgian Pr. Inc., 1984), 69-74; "Christian Friedrich Theodore, Henry Engelhard, and William Steinway," *Dictionary of American Biography* 9 (N.Y.: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1964), 566-569; Theodore E. Steinway, *People and Pianos: A Century of Service to Music* (N.Y.: Steinway & Sons, 1961); Steinway & Sons, "Steinway & Sons (San Francisco: Chronicle Bks., 1989); D.W. Fostle, *The Steinway Saga: An American Dynasty* (N.Y.: Scribner, 1995); Robert A.M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman, *New York 1880* (N.Y.: Monacelli Pr., 1999).

³ "Steinway," *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* 24, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Publrs. Ltd., 2001), 344.

⁴ The firm later leased space at 133 Walker Street, 91 and 109 Mercer Street, and 96 Crosby Street. Ratcliffe, 39.

⁵ Steinway's numerous awards included 35 first prizes at American industrial fairs (1855-62); first prize at the International Exhibition, London (1862); gold medals for its grand, square, and upright models at the Exposition Universelle, Paris (1867); and the top piano award at the Centennial Exhibition, Philadelphia (1876).

⁶ "Steinway," New Grove, 345.

⁷ The firm's presidents have been William Steinway, from 1876 to 1896; Charles H. Steinway (1857-1919), from 1896 to 1919; Frederick T. Steinway (1860-1927), from 1919 to 1927; Theodore E. Steinway (1883-1957), from 1927 to 1955; and Henry Z. Steinway (b. 1915), from 1955 to 1977.

⁸ Theodore E. Steinway, 63.

⁹ Perkins' office studio in the attic of Steinway Hall was shared at the turn of the century by some of the architects who created the Prairie School, including Frank Lloyd Wright, Irving and Allen Pond, Robert Spencer, Myron Hunt, Walter Burley Griffin, and Marion Mahony. Eric E. Davis, *Dwight Heald Perkins: Social Consciousness and Prairie School Architecture* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois, 1989), 4-6.

¹⁰ "Steinway Hall" in T. Allston Brown, *A History of the New York Stage* 2 (N.Y.: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1964), reprint of 1903 edit., 516-521; LPC, *East 17th Street/Irving Place Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1976)(N.Y.: City of New York, 1998), prepared by Jay Shockley and Gale Harris; "Transfer of Steinway Hall Will Mark Passing of World-Famous Piano Center," *The Music Trades*, July 15, 1916, 8-9; "Old Steinway Hall," *New York Times (NYT)*, Oct. 18, 1924, 26; "Old Steinway Hall, a Landmark, Passes," *NYT*, June 16, 1925, 13.

¹¹ "Messrs. Steinway & Sons' New Building," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, May 28, 1864, 157; Deborah S. Gardner, "The Architecture of Commercial Capitalism: John Kellum and the Development of New York, 1840-1875" (Columbia Univ. Ph.D. dissertation, 1974), 416, 418.

¹² Most accounts referred to it as a marble-fronted structure, but the *E. Robinson Atlas* of 1885 indicated cast-iron construction.

¹³ With the waves of German immigration to New York City in the 1840s and the 1870-80s, the German-American neighborhood stretched from the Lower East Side as far north as East 18th Street. Approximately one-third of the city's population was German or of German descent by 1880, and this was the leading German-American community in the United States. Germans dominated the production of music and musical instruments in the United States and, particularly, in New York City.

¹⁴ The Decker Building (1870, Leopold Eidlitz) was replaced by a later one (1892-93, John Edelmann), where the

company was located until 1913. It is a designated New York City Landmark. The Sohmer Building, 170 Fifth Avenue, is located within the Ladies Mile Historic District. Chickering Hall (1875; demolished) was designed by George B. Post.

¹⁵ Fostle, 157.

¹⁶ King, 563. The hall was the home of the Oratorio and Philharmonic Societies of New York. Conductor Theodore Thomas, backed financially by Steinway, was the most frequent performer at the hall; he conducted the American premiere of "The Damnation of Faust" here. A few of the prominent musicians sponsored by the firm (who played or were accompanied by Steinway pianos) were Christine Nilsson, "the Swedish Nightingale" in her American debut (1870); sopranos Adelina Patti and Lili Lehmann; pianist Anton Rubenstein (1872-73); Fritz Kreisler, in his New York debut (1888); Victor Herbert, in his American debut; Anton Seidl; and violinist Ole Bull. Famous persons giving readings at the hall included Charles Dickens (1867-68), Fanny Kemble, Edwin Forrest, Charlotte Cushman, Mark Twain, and Henry Ward Beecher. The National Woman Suffrage Convention took place here in 1872.

¹⁷ Carnegie Hall is a designated New York City Landmark.

¹⁸ Chickering Hall closed in 1898. "New York Concert Halls," NYT, Feb. 1, 1925, II, 6.

¹⁹ New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances; NYC, Dept. of Buildings, Manhattan, Plans, Permits and Dockets (NB 514-1923); Steinway Hall blueprints, courtesy of John C. Sweeney (111 West 57th Street Associates); Richard K. Lieberman, *Steinway & Sons* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 1998); "Steinways to Move," *Musical Courier*, July 13, 1916, 23-25; "Steinway & Sons to Move Uptown," *NYT*, July 4, 1916, 15; "New Uptown Fine Arts Center is Rapidly Being Created," *Real Estate Record & Guide (RERG)*, Oct. 6, 1923, 426; "The New Steinway Hall in New York is Formally Opened to Public," *The Music Trade Review*, June 20, 1925, 23-26; "Steinway Building, New York City," *Architecture & Building* (Aug. 1925), 69-71 and pl. 171-174; "W.L. Hopkins, "The Steinway Building, New York," *Architectural Record* (Sept. 1925), 201-210; Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930* (N.Y.: Rizzoli, 1987), 358-359.

²⁰ In July 1916, the City passed the Zoning Resolution, which in this instance prohibited businesses along that block of 58th Street because it was residential. After Steinway rescinded its purchase agreements, Biggs and Anderson filed suits. Among the first "encumbrance" test cases due to the Zoning Resolution, these lawsuits were not resolved until July 1920. Having lost, Steinway was obligated to proceed in taking title to the properties (the zoning was also amended to allow business on 58th Street). Plans for a new building were further delayed due to the company's finances after a piano workers strike in 1919.

²¹ The grantors were Dr. Hermann M. and Frances R. Biggs; Peachy J. (Mrs. Henry) Flagg; Estelle P. Anderson; Georgette deG. Fahnestock; Grace McCullagh; and the executors of Emeline Y. Danforth.

²² Following the historic familiar usage of the name of its 14th Street property, Steinway & Sons refers to the building on 57th Street as "Steinway Hall." Other sources [See: W.L. Hopkins] have historically called it the "Steinway Building," reflecting in part the fact that twelve of its sixteen stories have been rental offices not in use by Steinway & Sons.

²³ (Aug. 1925), 69.

²⁴ Leo Lentelli (1879-1961), born in Bologna, apprenticed in Rome prior to his immigrating to the United States in 1903. He assisted in the studios of John Massey Rhind, Henry Hudson Kitson, and others, before gaining his first major commission at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine: angels on the reredos (no longer extant). Lentelli came to be profoundly influenced by Rodin. He executed colossal works at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (1915), San Francisco, including "The Nations of the East and the West." Lentelli remained in San Francisco, where he provided the ornament for the Public Library (1915-17, George Kelham) and for the Memorial Museum (1921) in Golden Gate Park. At Rockefeller Center in New York, he was responsible for relief sculpture on the Palazzo d'Italia and International Building North (1935). "Leo Lentelli," LPC, *Rockefeller Center Designation Report* (LP-1446) (N.Y.: City of New York, 1985), prepared by Janet Adams, 120-121, 129-130, 262.

²⁵ <u>www.steinway.com.</u>

²⁶ Theodore E. Steinway, 95.

²⁷ James B. Stewart, "Matchmaker," *The New Yorker*, Aug. 20 and 27, 2001, 78.

²⁸ Steinway & Sons, "Steinway Hall at 70" (1995), 5.

²⁹ Dennis S. Francis, Architects in Practice, New York City 1840-1900 (N.Y.: Comm. for the Pres. of Archl. Recs., 1979), 80-81; James Ward, Architects in Practice, New York City 1900-1940 (N.Y.: Comm. for the Pres. of Archl. Recs., 1989), 82, 84; LPC, Architects files; Dennis McFadden, "Warren & Wetmore," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects 4 (N.Y.: Free Pr., 1982), 377; Warren obit., NYT and New York Herald-Tribune (NYHT), Jan. 25, 1943; Wetmore obit., NYT, May 9, 1941, and NYHT, May 10, 1941; "Whitney Warren" and "Charles D. Wetmore," National Cyclopaedia of American Biography 34 and 42 (N.Y.: James T. White & Co., 1947), 173-174 and 213-214; Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and John Massengale, New York 1900 (N.Y.: Rizzoli Intl. Publs., 1983); New York 1930; Janet G. Potter, Great American Railroad Stations (N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1996); "Fifth Avenue Association Makes Annual Medal Awards" [Aeolian Hall], RERG, Dec. 18, 1926, 7.

³⁰ The New York Yacht Club and Burden and Beeckman Houses are designated New York City Landmarks. The Wilson House is located within the Upper East Side Historic District.

³¹ Grand Central Terminal is a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark. Pershing Viaduct and the New York Central Building are also designated New York City Landmarks.

³² McFadden.

³³ The Della Robbia Bar is a designated New York City Interior Landmark. The Plaza Hotel is a designated New York City Landmark. The Erlanger Theater is a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark.

³⁴ Music Trade Review, 25.

³⁵ W.L. Hopkins, "The Steinway Building, New York," 201.

³⁶ "Architectural Design for Hotel Interiors (Architectural Forum) November 1923, 205-210.

³⁷ In the late 19th and early 20th century, these interiors were variously described as warerooms, showrooms, and demonstration rooms. See "The New Steinway Hall in New York Is Formally Opened to Public."

³⁸ According to the building specifications in the LaGuardia Wagner Archives, City University of New York, some details were intended to be "cast imitation Tinos marble, and the plasterwork was "finished wavy to imitate the antique English work." See "Specifications for New Building for Steinway & Sons: Plasterwork," October 11, 1923, sheet 2.

³⁹ While the current Steinway & Sons website says that the chandelier is 19th century Viennese, in 1925 the *Music Trade Review* claimed it was made by special order in England.

⁴⁰ Steinway website

⁴¹ Architecture and Building, 69.

⁴² Architecture and Building, 69.

⁴³ See "Preventing Show Windows From Being Mere Windows," *Motor World* (October 9, 1913), 36; "An Invisible Window," *Modern Mechanics* (February 6, 1915), 188. *Googlebooks*. Web, 2013. According to the owner, the glass in the "shadow box" window was replaced in the 1990s. Letter to Kate Daly, LPC, from Michael Stern, JDS Development Group, September 12, 2013.

⁴⁴ Some of these images appear in *The Steinway Collection: Portraits of Great Composes*, published 1919. According to *Architecture & Building* magazine, the four paintings were brought from the "old Steinway Hall." This has not been verified but the gilded frames are likely to have been designed to harmonize with the framing elements in the ceiling murals. Steinway & Sons retained ownership of these four paintings and the associated marble plaques when the building was sold in 2013.

⁴⁵ "Steinway Building," Architecture & Building, 69.

⁴⁶ NY County; Wendell Buck, *From Quill Pens to Computers: An Account of the First One Hundred and Twenty-five Years of the Manhattan Life Insurance Company of New York, N.Y.* (N.Y.: MLIC, 1975); *Directory of Manhattan Office Buildings* (1978); *Manhattan Office Buildings: Midtown* (1984 and 1985); "Steinway," *New Grove...*, 346; "Steinway Sells Home on 57th Street," *NYT*, Apr. 22, 1958, 57; "Steinway Changing Amid Tradition," *NYT*, Mar. 28, 1991; "Steinway & Sons/Steinway Musical Properties, Inc.," *International Directory of Company Histories* 19, Tina Grant, ed. (N.Y.: St. James Pr., 1998), 426-429; "Steinway Buys Its Building," *NYT*, May 30, 1999, XI, 1; "Steinway & Sons Factory Nears End of \$5 Million Makeover," *NYT*, July 12, 2000.

⁴⁷ Fostle, 483.

⁴⁸ Lieberman, 264.

⁴⁹ Susan Goldenberg, *Steinway, From Glory to Controversy: The Family, the Business, the Piano* (Buffalo: Mosaic Pr., 1996), 139. Mr. Steinway became a director of Manhattan Life in 1961. Buck, 84.

⁵⁰ "Steinway," *New Grove*, 346; <u>www.steinwaymusical.com</u> website.

⁵¹ www.steinwaymusical.com.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway have a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway were commissioned the prominent piano manufacturer Steinway & Sons in 1924-25; that this first floor interior is one of the most impressive in New York City, that it is located in Steinway Hall, a designated New York City Landmark, on the north side of West 57th Street, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, in Manhattan; that the primary space is a double-height octagonal rotunda where visitors, musicians and potential customers meet store representatives before entering various piano showrooms; that it is visible from the street through a large display window and from the adjoining hallway that leads to the building's elevator lobby; that this lavishly-decorated neo-Renaissance style room has a shallow domed ceiling with allegorical murals in the style of the celebrated Swiss-Austrian painter Angelika Kauffman, as well as a crystal chandelier; that Walter L. Hopkins, of the architectural firm Warren & Wetmore, the co-designers of Grand Central Terminal, planned the building and the interiors, working with the decorative painters Paul Arndt and Cooper & Gentiluomo; that visitors enter from the east part of the 57th Street facade, passing through a small fover that mirrors the adjacent hallway; that each side of the rotunda has a large white marble arch that rests of fluted Ionic columns, as well as green marble pilasters; that although a glass door and glazed infill separates the rotunda from the hallway, these spaces read as one due to the use of similar architectural elements and materials; that at the time of the building's completion, the Reception Room (and showrooms) garnered considerable attention in the press, appearing in the pages of the Architectural Record, Architecture & Building magazine, and The Music Trade Review; and that as a seemingly timeless monument to classical music and architecture, as well as Steinway & Sons, this well-preserved interior remains one of the handsomest retail spaces in New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway, consisting of the southeast section of the first floor interior, the domed rotunda and second floor balcony, the east foyer and stairs leading to the balcony; the hallway of the public corridor, up to the north glass doors, that adjoins the reception room; and the fixtures and components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, arches, pilasters, stairs, landings, ceiling murals, painted medallions, metal railings, metal grilles, chandeliers and lighting fixtures, door enframements, doors and windows, and attached furnishings and decorative elements; 109-113 West 57th Street (aka 106-116 West 58th Street), Borough of Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1010, Lot, 25, in part.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair Frederick Bland, Joan Gerner, Michael Goldblum, Christopher Moore, Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



STEINWAY & SONS RECEPTION ROOM AND HALLWAY, first floor, including the reception room's domed rotunda and balcony, the east foyer and stairs leading to the balcony; the hallway of the public corridor, up to the north glass doors, that adjoins the reception room; and the fixtures and components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, arches, pilasters, stairs, landings, ceiling murals, painted medallions, metal railings, metal grilles, chandeliers and lighting fixtures, door enframements, doors, windows, attached furnishings and decorative elements; Steinway Hall, 109-113 West 57th Street (aka 106-116 West 58th Street), Manhattan.



Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway Rotunda, looking east to showroom entrance, c. 1925 Photo: Steinway & Sons Collection, La Guardia and Wagner Archives LaGuardia Community College, The City University of New York



Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway First floor interior East foyer, entrance doors 109-113 West 57th Street (aka 106-116 West 58th Street0, Manhattan *Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2013*



Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway East foyer, stairs to second floor Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2013



Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway Rotunda, view toward 57th Street display window, south side *Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2013*



Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway Rotunda, view toward hallway from balcony, west side *Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2013*



Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway Rotunda-Balcony, north side Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2013



Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway Rotunda, view to east foyer Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2013



Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway Top: Rotunda, north arches Lower: Rotunda, view toward hallway, west side *Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2013*



Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway Top: Rotunda, ceiling Lower: Balcony, second floor, view southwest to hallway *Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2013*



Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway Hallway, view north, west side Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2013



Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway Hallway, view south, east side Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2013



Designated: September 10, 2013

the north glass doors, that adjoins the Reception Room; and the fixtures and components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, ceiling murals, arches, pilasters, stairs, landings, decorative medallions, metal railings, metal grilles, chandeliers and lighting fixtures, door enframents, doors and windows, and attached furnishings and decorative elements.