

## THE RAMSEY STEINWAY GRAND

Henry Englehard Steinway founded Steinway & Sons in New York City in 1853. He was an immigrant from Germany who had made 482 pianos by the time the company was founded. Working with his six sons, Mr. Steinway filed over fifty patents toward the development of the modern piano. In 1867, the company became the first of American origin to be awarded the prestigious "Grand Gold Medal of Honor" for excellence in manufacturing and engineering at the Paris Exhibition. Steinways became the piano of choice for royalty.

The Ramseys' Steinway was purchased June 4, 1872 through A.T. Stewart. The receipt from the company lists the piano as: "One new Rosewood Overstrung Concert Grand Pianoforte No. 24478. seven 1/3 Octaves with full Metallic Frame patent resonator handsome ornaments Style no. 3." Mr. Ramsey paid \$1400 for the piano and his daughter Marion was, needless-to-say, quite excited to have this piano.

### ANGELS: BIRDS, BABIES, OR BABES?

Why must angels have wings? The Greek goddess of victory, Nike, was famously winged to remind us that victory is fleeting. She brandished her whip as she drove her chariot during times of war. In the Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament, angels either look human (and are therefore unrecognized until a crucial moment) or so terrifying that they must begin their speeches, "Fear not!" Only in Isaiah's and Ezekiel's accounts are angels described as winged, and these winged seraphim and cherubim seem to fall into the terrifying category (to begin with, they might purify you with hot coals).

Because the Hebrews were chary about visual

representations of the divine, Christian angel iconography is more indebted to Greek depictions of Nike (which were in turn influenced by Egyptian depictions of the goddess Isis) than Jewish visual traditions. In its efforts to bring pagans into the fold, the early church drew on Greek and Roman imagery for the new Christian works of art. Putti (babies with wings) were first depicted on children's graves but often engaged in fighting and bacchic rites. All of these angels are quite different from the images that Victorians used as Christmas decorations.

Some of the earliest manufactured Christmas tree ornaments were wax angels cast in molds by German toy makers. Before the 1870s, Christmas trees had been primarily decorated with homemade edibles and paper ornaments. The new commercial ornaments were meant to be kept from year to year, and wax and tin ornaments quickly became cheap enough that most people could afford them. Elaborate homemade ornaments fell out of fashion.

Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, did much to popularize Christmas trees after a picture appeared in the *Illustrated London News* in 1848 of his Christmas tree and the royal family. This picture was reproduced in America in *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1850 with a few details changed. Both pictures show the tree topped by an angel, arms and wings outstretched, holding a wreath in each hand.

The angels the Victorians frequently suspended over their trees sported crinkled gold gowns, spun glass wings, and a profusion of golden ringlets. Victorians loved children and depictions of chubby, rosy-cheeked, innocent cherubs (no bacchic rites for these kids). But best of all were the delicate, ethereal angels in prayer, representing the ideal Victorian woman. She'd never stick a hot coal on your tongue.

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