

BOWED INSTRUMENT AND PIANO MANUFACTURING IN BERLIN IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES

The beginnings of the Berlin violin manufacturing, as documented in the Musikinstrumenten-Museum (Museum of Musical Instruments) by stringed instruments from the Bachmann family, go a little further back in time than that of the famous wind instrument manufacturing. The Berliner Anthony Bachmann (1716–1800) had at the age of 30 already earned recognition as the Royal Prussian Court instrument maker. However, in comparison with Italian violin makers his reputation couldn't quite be justified. Finding good wood for violin making in Berlin of the 18th century was certainly a problem, but his efforts in this branch of instrument making alone granted him a particularly privileged position. Some of his instruments were released as copies of Stradivari. However, there are legitimate doubts as to whether he ever held an original instrument from the famous Italian master in his own hands; the technical characteristics of his instruments don't hold up upon comparison in this direction. The curvature of the bouts of his violins are stiff and trail off abruptly at the edges; the wood is too thick, the varnish dull, and not of a particularly appealing colour. Despite these shortcomings, his violas (cat. no. 4278) and cellos (cat. no. 5161) are appreciated today by orchestral musicians for their strong tone.

Several inventions, usually attributed to his son Karl Ludwig (1748–1809) likely originated with him. For example, he made guitars with hammer keyboards that just didn't catch on. The 1778 invention of the screw mechanism on the head of the contrabass is still in use today. From 1794 to 1844, Berlin instrument makers had the opportunity every one to two years to participate in the exhibitions of the Royal Prussian Academy of Arts. Although only visual arts were taught at the academy itself, the connection between it and the higher craftsmen was closer than today. They succeeded in offering independent services above and beyond the average level and following the statute from 1790 were able to »matriculate as academic artists at the academy and have an interest in some prerogatives of the academy.« This regulation provided protection from unwelcome competition and plagiarism, but also required that the »artist« submit a finished specimen of his own creation to the Academy of Arts in Berlin.

A glance at the list of participants of exhibitions reveals that not all instrument makers working in Berlin were represented. The famous wind instrument makers from the first half of the 19th century are missing, including Griessling and Schlott, as well as Moritz. The violin industry of the Prussian capital was, as already mentioned,



Cello, Anton Bachmann, Berlin, 1773, cat. no. 5161
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quite insignificant. By contrast, the exhibitions give an insight into the development of the then fashionable instruments: guitar and piano. In these exhibitions, there was a struggle between the clavichord, square, grand, pyramid, and lyre pianos in all their modifications, until the victory of the uprights. The piano manufacturer Johann Gottlieb Conrad presented with his instruments in the years 1804 and 1806 to the Berliners. Our clavichord originating from his workshop (cat. no. 4001) was the first instrument purchased from the estate of the German musicologist Georg Schünemann after the Second World War. It is simply decorated and holds all the tradition of the late 18th century, the time during which the clavichord had its heyday as the »piano.« At the beginning of the 19th century, the pianoforte finally began its triumphal march and displaced the harpsichord as well as the clavichord. Not least on account of the emerging cities' ever increasing space shortage in apartments, attempts were made around 1800 to construct upright pianos. The piano makers resorted to an idea back from the 18th century, which had already led to the construction of the so-called pyramid piano in around 1750 in Middle German workshops.





Clavichord, Johann Gottlieb Conrad, Berlin, 1795/1805, cat. no. 4001 © MIM, photo: Antonia Weiß

The instrument makers created a variation on the idea and manufactured pyramid, closet, giraffe, and lyre pianos. The lyre as ornamentation had an unexpected renaissance through the work of the architects Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine (1801). One is reminded of images of ancient empires as they had been revived according to the opinion of contemporaries of Napoleon, and overlaid the interiors with palmettes, cornucopias, urns, sphinxes, griffins, but above all with lyres. No wonder that the fashionable ornamentation found its way to instrument making as well. J. G. Thielemann made guitars in the shape of lyres (cat. no. 4677) for the leading ladies of society; Johann Christian Schleip, who likely moved to Berlin from Thuringia in 1816, presented a lyre piano as early as 1820 at the academy's exhibition. Even though this kind of instrument didn't manage to last past the middle of the century, the lyre did live on as a model for the pedal attachment of the grand piano of the 20th century. The number of piano manufacturing companies founded in Berlin at this time was quite noticeable: they included Heinrich Kisting, Theodor Stöcker, and Wilhelm Biese (1822–1902) as well. Biese had his own business in Berlin in 1851 after having worked with Kisting and Stöcker. By 1878 he made his 10,000th instrument and by 1902 production had more than doubled. At this point in his workshop's operation, 20,500 instruments had been completed. Our upright (cat. no. 4971) was completed on January 13, 1863. It's the 1,000th instrument and is particularly ornate, featuring carvings according to tastes at the time.

At the same time some Berlin violin makers succeeded in gaining international attention thanks to the quality of their work. Among those from 1872 was the Hannover native August Riechers (1836–1893). Joseph Joachim brought him to Berlin. Riechers was the son of a musician and began mending old violins very early on in his career. He started a piano maker's apprenticeship against his will, which he soon abandoned. He went to Markneukirchen, the centre of the Central German violin manufacturing, where he received a thorough education with prestigious masters. After founding his own workshop, he worked almost exclusively accord-

ing to models of Stradivari. There he repeatedly made his own attempts to change the construction. One expression of these attempts, for example, are the various wood thicknesses. Thus the first violins were often too thick and the later ones too thin. Among connoisseurs, however, all of his violins had a reputation because his work was carried out very carefully. He made more than 1,600 violins. At the time there was probably no other violin maker who had repaired more Italian master instruments than he. Among them were said to be »at least 300« genuine Stradivarius violins. Riechers published a paper *Die Geige und ihr Bau* (The Violin and its Construction) (4th edition 1912). He was also a respected maker of bows.

This standing tradition of Berlin violin manufacturing continued well into the 20th century through the art of Otto Möckel. He was one of the greatest violin makers of the time. Born in 1869 in Berlin, he was introduced by his father Oswald Möckel to the art of violin making after completing school. He was also a student of the famous cellist Heinrich Grünfeld. After a short time as a journeyman in London, he began work in his father's workshop. In 1906 he left his father's business and founded his own workshop, which was continued after his death in 1937 by his colleague Curt Jung until 1961. Möckel's work comprises 500 to 600 instruments, some of which made their way into the hands of famous violinists. Möckel was also a researcher. In 1930 he published a collection of essays entitled *Die Kunst des Geigebauens* (The Art of Violin Making). This is largely based on substantial parts of Möckel's own experience. The book became a standard reference work, which was revised in new editions in 1954 and 1967 by Fritz Winckel and was expanded with descriptions of modern production methods. The museum has three instruments from Möckel: a violin (cat. no. 4947), a viola d'amore (cat. no. 4525), which was made by his collaborator Curt Jung, and a viola d'amore that was converted into an alto viol (cat. no. 4527).