

## BRASS INSTRUMENT MAKING IN BERLIN FROM THE 17TH TO THE 20TH CENTURY: A SURVEY

**Herbert Heyde**

translated by Steven Plank

**B**erlin, or more precisely the city of Cölln, which later merged with Berlin, became the residence of the Elector of Brandenburg in 1486. After the incorporation of the Duchy of Prussia in 1618 the land became known as Brandenburg-Prussia, although Prussia has been its official name since 1701. Berlin became the capital city of the German Reich when it was founded in 1871 under Prussian hegemony.

Apart from organ building, musical instrument making was modest in Berlin until the time of the Hohenzollern Elector, Friedrich III (crowned 1688), who assumed the title “King in Prussia” in 1701. Only one brass instrument maker, Hans Schreiber, can be authenticated in the Hohenzollern archives or Berlin church records. He was admitted to the Electoral Brandenburg Court Chapel as a wind player and as a “gross vnnnd klein Posaunen, vnnnd andere blasende Instrumentmacher” [maker of large and small trombones and other instruments] as one reads in his appointment contract of January 26, 1616.<sup>1</sup> Schreiber apparently made a contrabass trombone an octave below the tenor in 1615—the time of his application—as a demonstration of his ability. Michael Praetorius depicted such an instrument in 1619, noting that “this same style had been made four years ago by a *Kunst-Pfeiffer* named Hanss Schreiber, whose plans are in the *Sciagraph*. Col. VI.VII”.<sup>2</sup> Nothing else about Schreiber’s life and origins can be ascertained.

The sources are silent for decades following the meager references to Schreiber (who also built a contrabass dulzian<sup>3</sup>), doubtless because there were no true brass instrument makers residing in Brandenburg-Prussia. When in 1712 the Berlin economist Jacob Paul von Gundling examined the Brandenburg-Prussian trade he noted that in Berlin, especially in the Brandenburg electorate, trumpets, trombones, and [post-]horns as well as silver trumpets for the court trumpeters were imported from Nuremberg. He recommended to the King among others to get “a pair of trumpet makers from Nuremberg”<sup>4</sup> and settle them in Berlin.

However, Gundling was not completely accurate in his findings, because two coppersmiths, who also made brass and percussion instruments, had been active in the city since 1691. They were Abraham and Paul Blanvalet, Huguenots from Metz, who were forced, because of their beliefs, to flee from France in 1685 following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes; they travelled first to London and then to Berlin. In the Edict of Potsdam (1685), the “Great Elector” (Frederick William of Brandenburg, 1640-1688) for primarily economic reasons invited the Huguenots to establish businesses in the Electorate of Brandenburg, and offered them favorable conditions. Thus,

after 1685, around 20,000 Huguenots came into the country, bringing with them new trades, skills, and inventions. In the wake of these events, Abraham Blanvalet (c. 1663-1724) received the trade privilege, and his brother Paul (c. 1651-1729) probably did as well.<sup>5</sup> Their sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons ran the coppersmith and trumpet making business until the time of Carl Ludwig Blanvalet (1747-1803); they also enjoyed a monopoly on trumpet making in Brandenburg-Prussia until August Friedrich Krause took up residence in Potsdam in 1780.

A. F. Krause (1757-1806), who had come from Leipzig, first encountered the competition of Blanvalet upon moving from Potsdam to Berlin in 1791 and learning of his supplying trumpets to the *Oberkriegskollegium*. Krause alleged that Blanvalet, as a coppersmith, was in no way a learned trumpet maker and that in fact he was a bungler, a *Pfuscher*. Thus a vehement dispute arose between Krause and Blanvalet in 1792/93, which was finally taken before the King.<sup>6</sup> Krause accused Blanvalet of *Pfuscherei* and, claiming the traditional rights of Prussian craftsmen, demanded that he be forbidden the making of trumpets and trombones by royal decree. At that time the term *Pfuscher* signified two things: first, one who lacked a royal license to operate a workshop, even if he were an expert craftsman in the field; and second, derived from this, one whose work was bad by the standards of the trade.

Blanvalet was able to escape the onus of lacking a royal license by referring to the electoral privilege of 1691, which was purposefully and carefully renewed in 1780, the year in which Krause had set up shop in Potsdam. Thus, when Krause approached him, the King did not agree that Blanvalet should be forbidden his trade. When Carl August Struensee became Minister of the Factory, Customs, and Excise Departments of the *General Directorium* in 1791, Prussian trade policies experienced a significant turn toward economic liberalism, and with that a turning away from the trade protectionism which Krause espoused. In 1792, however, Minister Struensee obliged Krause when he raised the import tax on trumpets, waldhorns, and trombones to 33.3%, and thereby strangled the importation of instruments from Saxony.<sup>7</sup> In 1794, with the introduction of the *Allgemeine Landrecht* in Prussia, free trade became increasingly widespread until it obtained legal status in 1810.

A final word about Carl Ludwig Blanvalet before proceeding to this new era. He apparently withdrew more and more from trumpet making after 1792, chiefly because the quality of his instruments was not really satisfactory. However, it appears from the silver trumpets (1721) preserved in the *Heeresgeschichtlichen Museum* in Vienna and a parforce horn from the 1720's or 1730's in the Marienburg castle near Hannover with the inscription "FAIT A BERLIN PAR LES BLAN VALET," that at least the old Blanvalets built their instruments in a fully professional manner. The dispute between Krause and Blanvalet is thus interesting from the standpoint of the history of trade because it marks the transition to specialized brass instrument making in Berlin. If Blanvalet represented the old, all-purpose coppersmiths, then Krause represented the specialized workshops dedicated to high quality that had been in operation in Leipzig at least as early as Heinrich Pfeifer (1652-1718) and in Nuremberg since the 15th century.

In this as in many other areas of trade Prussia was, in the 18th century, still inferior to its southern and western neighbors.

As has already been noted, Krause had to face continual competition, especially after 1794, when a certain Elsner set himself up as an independent brass instrument maker, followed by his apprentice Johann Caspar Gabler (1770-1818), Christian Gottfried Eschenbach from Markneukirchen in 1804, and Johann Gottfried Moritz (1777-1840) from Leipzig in 1806 or 1808. Not everyone survived the competition, Elsner gave up his independence in 1805; Moritz did not really stand on his own feet until the 1820's. Before that time he had worked for Gabler and for Johann Wendelin Weisse, a woodwind instrument maker and distributor. In addition he had trained journeymen who were employed by the manufacturing firm of Griesling & Schlott, which had been producing brass instruments since 1808.

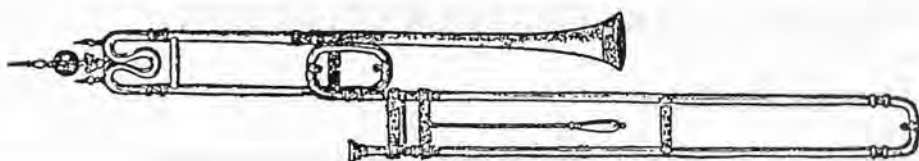
A new chapter in the history of brass instrument making in Berlin began in 1818 when Friedrich Blümel and Heinrich Stölzel came to the Prussian capital from Silesia to have their newly invented valved brass instruments built in the workshops of J. C. Gabler and Griesling & Schlott. Wilhelm Wieprecht, who came from Leipzig to Berlin in 1824, also had an impact. He continually worked to introduce these new instruments into military music, a sphere in which he had great influence. (In 1828 he was *Regimentskapellmeister* of the *Garde du Corps*; in 1835 he became the supervisor of many cavalry bands, in 1838 he became *Director der gesamten Musikchöre des Gardecorps*; and in 1843 he became the director of the entire Prussian military music establishment.) The new valved instruments provided an opportunity not only for the hereditary firms of J. C. Gabler (after 1818 *J. C. Gablers sel. Erben* and from 1858 until about 1874 under the direction of C. Lindenberg) and Griesling & Schott (until 1835), but also for J. G. Moritz. Moritz must have been an exceedingly careful and thorough worker, for the quality of his work stands above all others and was especially suited to the building of complicated valved instruments.

A tight bond developed between the Wieprecht and Moritz families, as shown by Wieprecht's acting as guardian for the sons of Carl Wilhelm Moritz (1811-1855) after their father's death. From the foundation of personal ties a professional collaboration thrived, out of which came the Prussian cornet in 1833 and the bass tuba in 1835, as well as an improved business situation for Moritz.<sup>8</sup> Although Moritz's enterprise developed into the most significant firm for the making of brass instruments, it never became a large factory. In the 1840's there were between 6 and 10 employees; by 1860 there were around 13; 15-20 were employed between 1890 and World War I; in 1933 there were only 12. There was competitive pressure from the efficient factories in Graslitz, Markneukirchen, and Königgrätz, but the firm's impressive standard of quality is sufficient to account for the fact that its production did not increase significantly in the 1870's. Later the firm, known after 1840 as "C. W. Moritz," was badly damaged in World War II and went out of business in 1953. Most of their instruments that one encounters today are extraordinarily good, solidly crafted, and with similarities to those made by the Gabler firm. The decorations were characterized by the fact that many in

the metal working trades in the 1820's in Berlin began to use German silver for ferrules, tubing, garlands, valve mechanisms, etc. The Leipzig construction methods were for the most part transplanted more or less unmodified to Berlin, generally by Krause and Moritz; traces of the Leipzig practices can be seen in the various garlands and oak leaf engravings. In addition to Moritz, Gabler, and the woodwind instrument firms, which as distributors also employed brass instrument makers, there were other smaller firms: Carl Friedrich Zetsche (founded in 1823 and taken over by C. and P. Hemesaat after 1893) and Julius Lemcke (founded in 1847). Lemcke's firm was taken over by Ernst Leberecht Paulus in 1866, followed by Arthur Sprinz (1878-1938), who in 1921 built an often used contrabass trombone after the model of Ernst Dehmel. Also to be named are Johann Friedrich Glass (founded 1849/50) and, above all, the firm of Gustav Eschenbach (founded 1877), which under Ernst and Fritz Eschenbach held a significant place until World War II.<sup>9</sup> In the first half of our century an average of 5 to 7 brass instrument makers were operating in Berlin. Besides those already named are F. A. Schmidt, Jr. (1886-1917), Albert Kley, who was active between the two world wars, Leopold Renz (founded 1927) and Max Martin (c. 1940).

One can survey the development of brass instrument making in Berlin as a reflection of other trades and arts as well as of the development of the Prussian state. In the 17th and 18th centuries the Prussian state was behind western European countries like England, France, and the Netherlands as well as Saxony, Bavaria, and the Rhineland in the economic development of a broad, bourgeois culture; however, it attempted to catch up with these countries. Thus the Berlin court strove to attract artists from both foreign countries and neighboring states to Berlin and was successful with this policy. Brass instrument making in Berlin, therefore, bore into the 19th century the stamp of non-Prussians, essentially that of the French (Blanvalet) and the Saxons (Krause, Moritz, Eschenbach). Gabler as a Prussian was completely trained in the Krause school.

With the new valved instruments, truly distinctive and unmistakably arising in Berlin, the Prussian metropolis exerted an international influence. Valved instruments came to the Tsar's court in St. Petersburg from Berlin in 1824 and from there to London in 1827. They went from Berlin to Paris in 1826 and also in 1828, this time via the trumpet maker Wilhelm Schuster of Karlsruhe (Baden). After the founding of the German Reich in 1871, the brilliance of Berlin brass instrument making began to fade, especially because the Bohemian-Austrian models became increasingly important in Germany. The decline of Berlin as an important location for brass instrument making, at first gradual, accelerated after the world-wide economic crisis (1929-32/33), although the building of high quality instruments there has continued until today.



*Theatrum Instrumentorum, Wolfenbüttel 1620, from plate VI.  
Contrabass trombone in the same style as that made by Hans Schreiber.*

#### NOTES

1. Central State Archive, Merseburg, Rep. 9, N, No. 19.
2. Michael Praetorius, *De Organographia*, Wolfenbüttel 1619, p. 32.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
4. J.P. Gundling, *Nachricht von den Commerciën und Manufacturen in der Churmark Brandenburg, in den Herzogthümern Magdeburg, Pommern, dem Fürstenthum Halberstadt in dem Jahre 1712*, ed. J.G. Hoche, Halle, 1795, p. 61.
5. The dates of these and the following persons are taken from Herbert Heyde, *Musikinstrumentenbau in Preussen* (ms.); publication forthcoming. The hitherto unknown birth and death dates were taken from the church records of Berlin parishes.
6. *Ibid.* Main source: Potsdam State Archive, Pr. Br. Rep. 19, Steuerrat Potsdam, No. 2782.
7. *Ibid.*
8. For details of the invention and improvement of brass instruments by Berlin makers and Wieprecht, see: Herbert Heyde, *Das Ventilblasinstrument. Seine Entwicklung im deutschen Sprachraum von den Ansängen bis zur Gegenwart*, Leipzig/Wiesbaden 1987.
9. Friedrich Ernst, "Die Blasinstrumentenbauerfamilie Eschenbach," in *Glareana XVI/1*, Zürich, 1967. See also: Linsesay G. Langwill, *An Index of Musical Wind Instrument Makers*, Edinburgh 1980.

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