

Music angle

The Musikwinkel is a historical region of musical instrument making, which today lies on the border between Germany and the Czech Republic. These include the towns of Markneukirchen (together with Erlbach and Wernitzgrün) and Klingenthal (together with Zwota, Sachsenberg-Georgenthal and Brunndöbra) as well as Schöneck, Adorf and Bad Brambach in Vogtland in Saxony. The settlement of musical instrument makers there dates back to the Bohemian exile movement in the middle of the 17th century. Until the Second World War and the subsequent expulsion of the Germans from Czechoslovakia, the region, together with Graslitz (now Kraslice) and Schönbach (now Luby) on the West Bohemian Egerland side, formed one of the world's largest centers of musical instrument making.

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Designations

The term "music corner" for this area goes back to the Zwota local poet Max Schmerler, who described it as the Saxon music corner in two publications in 1914 and 1923. In a new edition of the book From the Music Angle (1914), Schmerler wrote in 1938: "My Büchel goes out for the second time. Many years have passed over this. – But the name that the booklet first coined has now become a symbol of the area and is on everyone's lips." [1] Today the German-Czech region is also referred to as the Saxon-Bohemian music corner or the (Upper) Vogtland-West Bohemian music corner . The term "sounding Vogtland" has also been in use since the end of the 19th century.

Vogtland part

Violin maker monument by Franz Matuska in the garden of the Markneukirchen Musical Instrument Museum, erected in 1970

The history of musical instrument making in Vogtland begins in the town of Markneukirchen. Bohemian exiles from the border town of Graslitz, who had left their homeland during the Counter Reformation because of their Protestant faith, settled here. They brought the art of violin making to the city. In 1677, twelve masters in Markneukirchen joined together to form a guild. The article letter confirmed by the law firm at Moritzburg in Zeitz is considered the birth certificate of musical instrument making in Vogtland. Gradually, bow making and the associated string production settled in the city. At the same time, guitar and zither building also developed.

Violin making in Klingenthal began in 1659, and its most important representative was Caspar Hopf, who came from a family of exiles from Graslitz. Craftsmen who understood the art of making woodwind instruments and French horns also settled in the region at the turn of the 18th century. This meant that almost the entire range of classical orchestral instruments could be manufactured and sold at an early stage. Later, the art of instrument making also gained a foothold in neighboring towns, which is why Adorf and Bad Brambach are now also counted as part of the music region. The Klingenthal harmonica and accordion building business, which began in 1829, flourished thanks to the work of Johann Wilhelm Rudolph Glier.

After conflicts with the violin makers' guild, the Markneukirchen guitar maker Christian Friedrich Martin emigrated to New York in 1832, where he built Martin brand guitars. The Schöneck emigrant Rudolph Wurlitzer founded the Rudolph Wurlitzer Company in Cincinnati in 1853, after which music boxes and the Wurlitzer piano are named.

The concentration brought great wealth to the region over the course of the 19th century. At the turn of the 20th century, the instruments from the towns in the Vogtland music corner had a global market share of around 50 percent in some industries such as harmonica construction and string instrument production. From 1893 to 1916 there was a US consular agency in Markneukirchen. At that time, no fewer than 15 millionaires lived in the city, which was then the richest in Germany in terms of population. However, it was less the musical instrument makers who became rich than the traders, the so-called "fortschickers".

In 1884, Paul Otto Apian-Bennewitz founded the Vogtland Trade Museum in Markneukirchen, which is now called the Muskinstrument Museum. There has been a music and winter sports museum in Klingenthal since 1993, and a harmonica museum in the Zwota district since 1986. In Erlbach, the history of the trade is shown in the Upper Vogtland Village Museum.

As a result of the introduction of the planned economy in the Soviet occupation zone, manufacturers left the region for the Federal Republic (e.g. the guitar maker Hopf and the signal manufacturer Martin). During the GDR era, a high proportion of musical instruments were manufactured industrially in large-scale production in state-owned companies. In 1952 VEB Musima was founded in Markneukirchen. In 1949 the VEB Klingenthaler Harmonikawerke (Goldon, Triola, Weltmeister, Regent, Vermona, Bandmaster) was founded. The companies F. A. Rauner and Alfred Arnold in Carlsfeld in the Ore Mountains, the birthplace of the bandoneon, were founded. Vermona synthesizers have been manufactured in Erlbach since 2001.

The German word Martinshorn is derived from the company for hunting horns and cavalry trumpets called Deutsche Signal-Instrumenten-Fabrik Max B. Martin, which was founded in Markneukirchen in 1880.[5] Martin moved to Philippsburg in 1950. The VEB brass and signal instrument factory (chord, world sound, B&S, master Hans Hoyer) was founded in Markneukirchen in 1953. Gerhard A. Meinel from the Meinel-Langhammer family from Graslitz began privatization in 1991.

The Institute for Musical Instrument Making was founded in Zwota in 1951 and has been an affiliated institute of the Technical University of Dresden since 2004. From 1954 onwards, the magazine Kulturbote for the Musikwinkel appeared in Klingenthal, which was published in the Vogtland regional newspapers in 1981. The Leipzig City History Museum opened the special exhibition Sounding Vogtland in 1954.[9] In 1977, Vogtland instrument making was recognized as part of the GDR's musical culture in a set of stamps.

Most of the large companies stopped production after reunification. Not least because of this, small and medium-sized master businesses gained importance again. Some of the West German companies relocated production to the Musikwinkel, including GEWA (from Mittenwald to Adorf), Warwick (from Pretzfeld to Markneukirchen). Harmonicas are made by C. A. Seydel Söhne in Klingenthal, clarinets by F. Arthur Uebel in Markneukirchen.

The Musicon Valley brand (a reference to Silicon Valley) was introduced in Markneukirchen. Vogtland musical instrument making in Markneukirchen and the surrounding area was officially included in the nationwide register of intangible cultural heritage in December 2014 by the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs in accordance with the UNESCO Convention for the Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

West Bohemian part

Monument to the violin maker in Luby, Czech Republic, unveiled in 1927

A similar monument was unveiled after 1947 in Bubenreuth, Franconia

On the West Bohemian side, the historical centers of musical instrument making are Graslitz (today Kraslice) with the surrounding towns of Silberbach, Waltersgrün, Schwaderbach and Pechbach in the Graslitz district, and Schönbach (today Luby) with Abtsroth. The region belonged to Egerland (today Chebsko) and is now part of the Karlovarský kraj. There were also violin makers in Neukirchen (today Nový Kostel) and Fleißen (today Plesná) as well as accordion makers in Bleistadt.

After the Germans were expelled from Czechoslovakia, numerous companies from Graslitz and Schönbach settled in the Federal Republic. In Bubenreuth, Franconia, the violin making settlement was built in 1949 for violin and guitar makers from Schönbach. Historical aspects can be viewed in the local city museum ("Bubenreutheum"). The Schönbach founders of the companies Framus, Höfner and Klira, among others, settled there, as did the clarinet maker and son of the Erlbach clarinet maker Fritz Wurlitzer, Herbert Wurlitzer, who fled the GDR in 1959. Another center became Nauheim in southern Hesse (Schreiber and Keilwerth, Koestler). The exhibition "400 Years of Musical Instrument Making in Graslitz" opened in the local museum there in 2013.

The Amati cooperative was founded in Kraslice in 1945. The manufactories located there were brought together under the umbrella of the "Amati" company, those in Schönbach under the name "Cremona". The name goes back to the city's historical name as "Austria's Cremona". After the Velvet Revolution, companies were privatized. Cremona was transferred to the company Strunal (mixed abbreviation of Strunné nástroje Luby / String Instruments Luby), founded in 1991, which filed for bankruptcy in 2020. Amati filed for bankruptcy in 2019 but continued production.

In 1873, a music school for the construction of musical instruments was founded in Graslitz, which existed until 2009. The valuable collection of musical instruments that was exhibited there, including a rare sub-contrabass tuba, is now owned by Amati but is not open to the public. A musical instrument museum (Muzeum hudebních nástrojů) was planned in the early 2010s.

The Luby violin making school, founded in 1873, was moved to Cheb in 2005. In 2013, the exhibition "Egerland violin making" opened in the Egerland cultural center in Marktredwitz.[16] An exhibition of historical musical instruments, part of the Cheb Museum, was opened in Luby Town Hall in 2019.