

## **A History of Drums Made in Germany And the Companies Behind Them**

By Fritz Steger

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## The History of Drums Made In Germany

### *Around the year 2005*

I found myself in the old part of the city of Marburg eating dinner alone at an Indian restaurant. During my meal, I started thinking about why there are many books about American manufacturers with German origins, such as Ludwig or Gretsch, etc., but that German manufacturers are in danger of sinking completely into oblivion. So I took a paper napkin and sketched the outline for this book and started researching. My quest for information ended up taking me all over Germany making interviews with the descendants of company founders, former employees, and collectors. When available, I was able to make use of information from company archives and the German patent office.

In the following year, Heinz Kronberger gave me the opportunity of creating a series about German manufacturers for Germany's Drums & Percussion magazine. The idea of a book was still following me around, but it didn't really get off the ground until I hooked up with the author of the book "Trix on Trixon", Ingo Winterberg, who agreed to take over the book's coordination and layout.

But it would still be a long way to go. It turned out to be much more difficult than expected to find a suitable publisher. Time passed, changes were made and then rejected. In 2019 I wrote to Rob Cook the author of various books on the history of drums asking if he saw an opportunity to publish my book. I didn't hear from him back and in the spring of 2023, I decided to finally bury this project. At exactly that moment and at the right time, Rob's answer came, and now you are holding the final result in your hands.

Nevertheless, the puzzle is far from being finished and I am a long way from being able to claim that every detail is complete or correct. Here as well, I can only provide a general profile of the numerous German manufacturers. My hope is that as many drum enthusiasts all over the world keep drums made in Germany and companies behind them in their heart and mind.

Fritz Steger October 2023

## The History of Drums Made In Germany

The history of American drum manufacturers has been well-documented in numerous publications. To date, though, almost no one has shown much interest in the German manufacturers. However, the history of drum manufacture in America is also partly German, as Theobald and William Ludwig or Friedrich Gretsch, for example, were all German immigrants who brought the art of German drum manufacturing with them to their new homeland. A huge problem arises when trying to tell the story of the German manufacturers because so many drawings and catalogues were destroyed during the two world wars.

For this reason, even tradition-rich companies like Sonor have gaps in their archives. During the research about the manufacturers, it was still possible to speak with first-hand witnesses about the years following World War II. But the years prior to it remain partially a puzzle that, unfortunately, has many important missing pieces.

The history of drums is also the history of human beings. A false assumption often connects the drum exclusively with Africa, but there is hardly any culture in which the drum has not played some sort of role. Over the ages, percussion instruments have been, among other things, a means of communication, cult objects, used to set the pace for marching and in various forms of therapy.

The snare drum originated in the military and can be traced back to the tambour in the Middle Ages that was normally played to accompany a flute.

Around the middle of the 19th century, the snare drum was increasingly included in symphony orchestras. It was most often made of metal that was bent into form by brass instrument makers. That's why up until the not so distant past, those practicing this trade were also allowed to use the professional designation of "drum maker".

73

*Johannes Adler, Markneukirchen*



**Wirbel-  
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für Jazz**

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204 **Kleine Jazz-Solo-Trommel, ganz vernickelt, 6 Flügelschrauben (Größe 33x11 cm), abstellbarer Stimmbock, mit Stöcken, zu dem erstaunlich niedrigen Preis von nur . . . 36.-**

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Nr. 361/6



Catalog shot mid 1920s

## CONSTRUCTION OF DRUMS BEFORE WW II

The bass drum arrived in Europe by way of Turkish Janissary music. These bass drums were - and still are - constructed of wood, and in rural areas were often made by carpenters or coopers.

Cymbals got their start in Asia and also came to Central Europe through Janissary music. They were incorporated first into military, and then later into symphony orchestras. Cymbals play an important role in military music as they are used with the bass drum to set the beat.

The drum set, which is the subject of this book, appeared relatively late in the history of drums in the middle of the 19th century.

Numerous publications credit New Orleans as being the birth place of the drum set.

This, however, is not really correct. The truth is that experiments with various apparatuses that allowed one person to play on several drums at the same time were being conducted on various continents simultaneously.

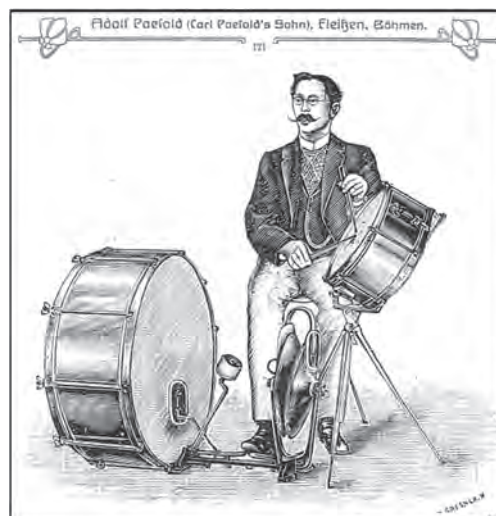


*Lefima »Low Boy«  
Charleston machine*

At this time, German catalogs depicted a device with a pedal used to operate a bass drum and cymbals. The snare drum, though, was at a sort of stand-still and played whilst seated. It was later joined by the "Low Boy", a predecessor of the Hi-hat.

Further developments led to additional percussion instruments being attached to the bass drum, and then later, to a movable console.

The tom-tom, which originated in China, was used to supplement the drums and appeared more and more often.



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Nr. 725/40-51 a	

*Catalogue shots 1920s*



## The History of Drums Made In Germany

The pre-war drum manufacturers that remain well-known today are:

**Lefima** in Markneukirchen (founded in 1861, it is the oldest of known drum manufacturers); **Sonor** in Weißenfels/Saale (founded in 1875); the Dresdner Trommel-und Apparatebau - **Spenke & Metz**, **GPL** (Gustav Pouchard Leipzig) and **Walter Pelzner** (Hanover). Most likely, though, every larger city had workshops where drums and/or other instruments were made.

Meinel & Herold, Musikinstrumente-, Sprechapparate-, Harmonikafabrik und -Versand, Klingenthal i. Sa

### Schlagzeuge für Jazzband

Nr. 870 Große Trommel, 62 cm Durchmesser, 6 Flügelschrauben, hochfein vernickelt, oben 1 Messingbecken und 1 Klingel (Tiroler Glocke), 2 Tambourins ohne Schellen, Holz-Tom-Tom, 4 Kuhglocken, Schlagapparat mit Becken, gern gekauft und vielseitig zu verwendende Zusammenstellung

Nr. 871 Dasselbe Schlagzeug, jedoch 3 Becken oben auf der Trommel, wovon das oberste mit Klingel ausgestattet ist, 6 Kuhglocken, 2 Holz-Tom-Tom, Ratsche, 2 Tambourins ohne Cinellen, Schlagapparat mit Becken

Nr. 872 Dasselbe Schlagzeug kleineren Formats, große Trommel ca. 50 cm Durchmesser, 1 Becken oben auf der Trommel und Klingel, 3 Kuhglocken, 1 Holz-Tom-Tom, Schlagapparat mit Becken

Nr. 877 Große Trommel ganz von Messing, 65 cm Durchmesser, 34 cm Höhe, 3 Schrauben, Messingbecken oben auf der Trommel, 2 indische Holz-Tom-Toms mit verschiedenen Tönen, auf beiden Seiten je 1 Kesselpauke, ganz von Messing, 27 und 31 cm Durchmesser, Schlagapparat

Nr. 1774 Einfache Ausstattung, große Trommel, 62 cm, 6 vernickelte Flügelschrauben, 1 Holz-Tom-Tom, 1 Fell-Tom-Tom, obenauf 1 Becken, Schlagapparat

Nr. 1775 Miniaturschlagzeug, große Trommel 46x15 cm, 6 amerikanische hochfein vernickelte Flügelschrauben, 1 Messingbecken, Palisander-Tom-Tom, vernickelte Wirbeltrommel 29x11 cm, kompletter Schlagapparat

Schlagzeug Nr. 877 ist allen denen zu empfehlen, die Wert auf sehr elegantes Aussehen und vorzügliche Klangwirkung legen.

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Nr. 877 Nr. 1775

Hunderte von uns bezogene und mit bestem Erfolg verwandte Jazzschlagzeuge beweisen unsere Leistungsfähigkeit dieses Artikels.

Catalogue shot 1920s

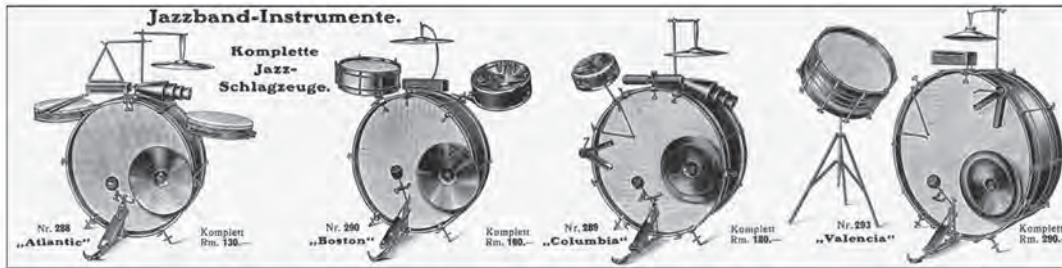
As already mentioned, the making of drums in rural areas was carried out by practitioners of other trades and many examples of their instruments can still be found today. Unfortunately, these do not bear any type of trade mark which makes it impossible to assign them to a particular manufacturer.

Many of these workshops only produced the shell and used the services of specialty suppliers for mechanics and hardware.

Quite a few of these suppliers had settled in Germany's so-called "Musikwinkel" [music triangle] (Markneukirchen/ Klingenthal) in the Saxon Vogtland. The separation between instrument manufacturing and distribution got an early start here and by the middle of the 19th century, was quite wide-spread.

## CONSTRUCTION OF DRUMS BEFORE WW II

Specialization and manufacturers increasingly using division of labor were typical in this region. At that time, the music city of Markneukirchen had 61 wholesalers and 35 retailers. These businesses purchased goods by the dozen from independent instrument makers and then sent them on throughout the German Empire. The wholesalers who shipped the instruments were called "Fortschicker" (which translates loosely as "consigner") and they brought prosperity to the region. By 1945, up to 21 millionaires were said to be living in the region.



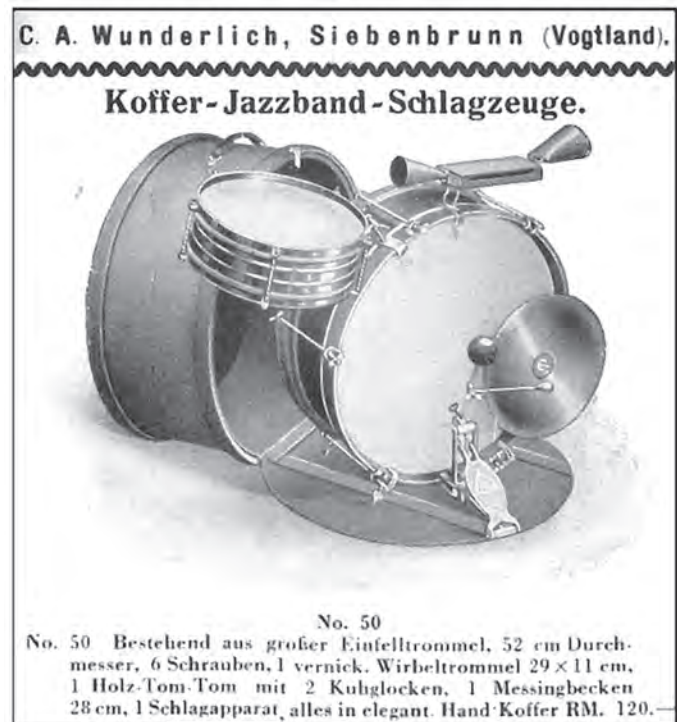
*The Schuster Brothers  
(Markneukirchen)  
Catalogue shot late 1920s*



*Catalogue shot early 1920s*

Markneukirchen was temporarily home to the second largest number of taxpayers (per head) in Saxon. Famous consignors from those days were: Adler; Kruse; Scherzer; Schuster & Co. in Markneukirchen; Gewa (Georg Walter, today the importer of, i.e., DW, Remo, Gibraltar, Gretsch, LP, Toca and Paiste) in Adorf; Wunderlich in Siebenbrunn; Dunger in Erlbach; Meinel & Herold and Hess in Klingenthal (Saxon).

In all likelihood, it will no longer be possible to discover the manufacturers of all the producers of superb German drums.



*Catalogue shot late 1930s*