

150 Years of Gebrüder Mönning in Markneukirchen Anniversary year with special exhibition—a new perspective on the company's history

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This year the Markneukirchen-based woodwind-instrument manufacturer Gebrüder Mönning is celebrating its 150th anniversary. Several events have been held to mark the occasion. The celebrations kicked off on March 22 with an employee concert, which impressively demonstrated the talents of many of the active musicians who work in the company's workshops and management. They know and appreciate the quality of the instruments they create. On June 21 employees and their families, customers, friends, business partners, and representatives of the local community were invited to a celebration at the company headquarters: the grounds of the Schuster Villa. There, under sunny skies and with excellent music and food, the festivities continued late into the evening.

With a tradition stretching back through the GDR era to at least the 1920s, the woodwind section of the Municipal Symphony Orchestra has been firmly in the hands of Mönning employees, and formerly also Adler employees. The designation "Orchestra of Instrument Makers" therefore continues to this day, and it was only natural that the gala concert on September 6 to mark 150 Years of Gebrüder Mönning was performed by the Municipal Orchestra together with prominent customers of the company. The soloists of the evening were the Norwegian Dag Jensen, Professor of Bassoon at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater München, the English hornist Laurent Decker of the Orchestre National de France, Sabine Kaselow from the Universität de Künste Berlin on bass oboe, and New York oboist James Austin Smith. The brilliant conclusion of the anniversary year was the opening concert of



Figure 1. The venerable Schuster Villa, the headquarters of Gebrüder Mönning since 2001.



Figure 2. The company's managing directors, Veit Schindler (left) and Christian Gander (second from right), performed at the employee concert with Sarah-Julia Klinnert (oboe) and Thomas Baudisch (bassoon).

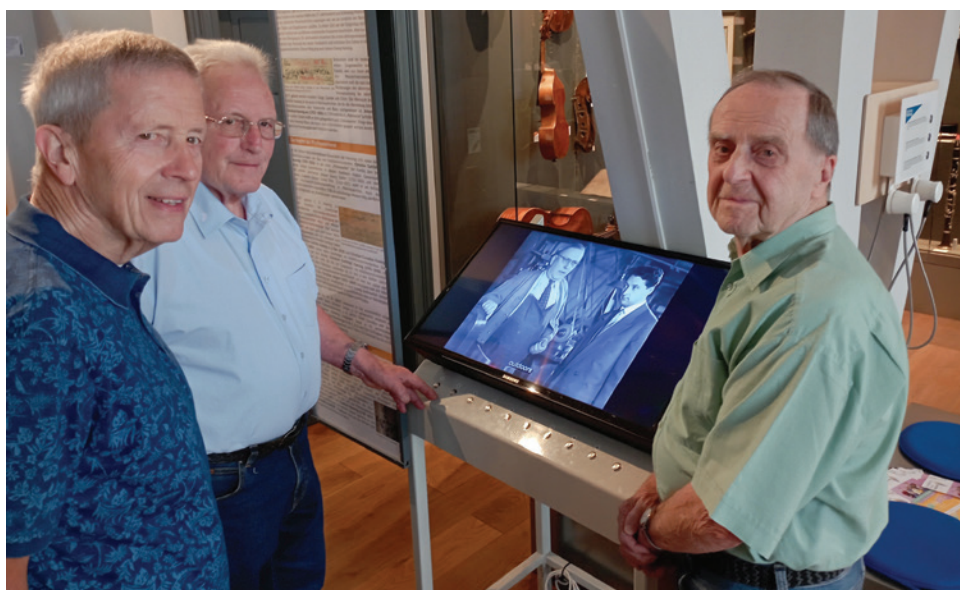


Figure 3. Historical film footage evokes memories during a visit to the special exhibition at the Markneukirchen Museum. L to R: Wilhelm, Friedrich, and Klaus Mönning, representatives of the sixth generation of wind instrument makers in the Mönning family and long-time employees and partners of the Gebrüder Mönning company.

the 25th Chursächsische Festspiele in Markneukirchen's neighboring town of Bad Elster on September 12, with Albrecht Mayer, Solo Oboe of the Berlin Philharmonic.

Another highlight, embedded in the supporting program of the International Instrumental Competition, took place on May 10. This was the opening of a special exhibition, which will be on display at the city's Museum of Musical Instruments until the end of March 2026. Entitled "Names of the Region," it marks the culmination of a project at the Markneukirchen Musical-Instrument Making program, which belongs to the Faculty of Applied Arts at the Westsächsische Hochschule, Zwickau. Under the acronym "I-Na-Reg," a research group studied the well-known names and brands of the Vogtland instrument-making region—companies and craftspeople who represent the area's excellence and, in many ways, have helped shape the very identity of Markneukirchen and its surroundings.

The exhibition showcases two remarkable family and company histories: 300 years of musical instrument making in the Hammig family and 150 years of Gebrüder Mönning. On display are 33 and 38 instruments, respectively, spanning from the 18th century to the present day. Supplementing these are original documents ranging from apprenticeship certificates to the Grand Prix at the World's Fair, as well as historical catalogues, photographs, and business records. Listening stations showcase instruments from the anniversary companies (see Fig. 3). Visitors can also explore historical and contemporary film footage, while computer-animated family trees bring the instrument-making dynasties to life. These visualizations strikingly illustrate the Hammig and Mönning families' legacies spanning ten and nine generations respectively, with more than 50 family members each devoted to the craft.

In preparation for the anniversary exhibition, the history of the Mönnig company, which has already been documented or recorded in numerous places, was revised and expanded.¹ The following is a summary of the exhibition script. An expanded version will appear in Volume 12 of the Markneukirchen Museum “Masterpieces” series under the title “Namen der Region: Hammig: Mönnig und weitere” (Names of the Region: Hammig, Mönnig and others). The exhibited instruments are illustrated in the catalogue appendix. (Information on the status of the series can be found at:

<https://www.verein-musikinstrumentenmuseum.de/online-shop/publikationen/index.php.>)

Many founding years: tracing the origins of the brothers

The current anniversary commemorates the year 1875, when Heinrich Wilhelm Mönnig, the father of the Mönnig Brothers, established his own business. The following years are also significant:

- 1781** the first “ancestor” is a founding member of the Markneukirchen String Makers’ Guild
- 1815** the “founding father” of all woodwind instrument makers in the family becomes a member of the Wind Instrument Makers’ Society, a kind of guild
- 1906** the brothers Hans and Fritz Mönnig establish their own workshop
- 1923** the name “Mönnig Brothers” is entered into the commercial register, with the founding year listed as that of their father’s workshop: 1875.

The Mönnig family of Markneukirchen descends from an old miller family that had previously settled in the surrounding area in Erlbach and Eubabrunn. In Markneukirchen the combination of miller and carpenter trades was still common until the beginning of the 19th century, but was increasingly replaced by musical instrument making. Prior to the Mönnig family’s later prominence as violin and bow makers, guitar and zither makers, merchants, and string manufacturers, historical records from 1781 mention two men, both bearing the name Johann Adam Mönch (or Mönnig), as founding members of the string makers’ guild, formally established in 1777. One of the two, the merchant Johann Adam Mönnig, regularly attended the Frankfurt Trade Fair with instruments from Markneukirchen. When he passed away in 1797, he left his descendants the Schlössel [little castle], built in 1784, which now houses the Musical Instrument Museum. Its popular name “Glier- or Paulusschlössel,” was given by later owners who bought it in 1815.

The progenitor of all Mönnig wind instrument makers is Johann Carl Friedrich (1789–1837). To this day, we count 20 descendants in Markneukirchen, Leipzig, and the USA, all working as woodwind instrument makers, as well as ten brass-instrument makers. He likely apprenticed with his brother-in-law, Christian Friedrich Paulus (1768–1825), and joined the Wind Instrument Makers’ Guild in 1815.

In later years, he came into conflict with his colleagues because he also took on apprentices from outside the city and from the farming community. In doing so, he seemed to be claiming for himself the freedom of trade that only came into effect in Saxony in 1862. The only known clarinet by him, bearing the signature “Moennich,” was unfortunately lost

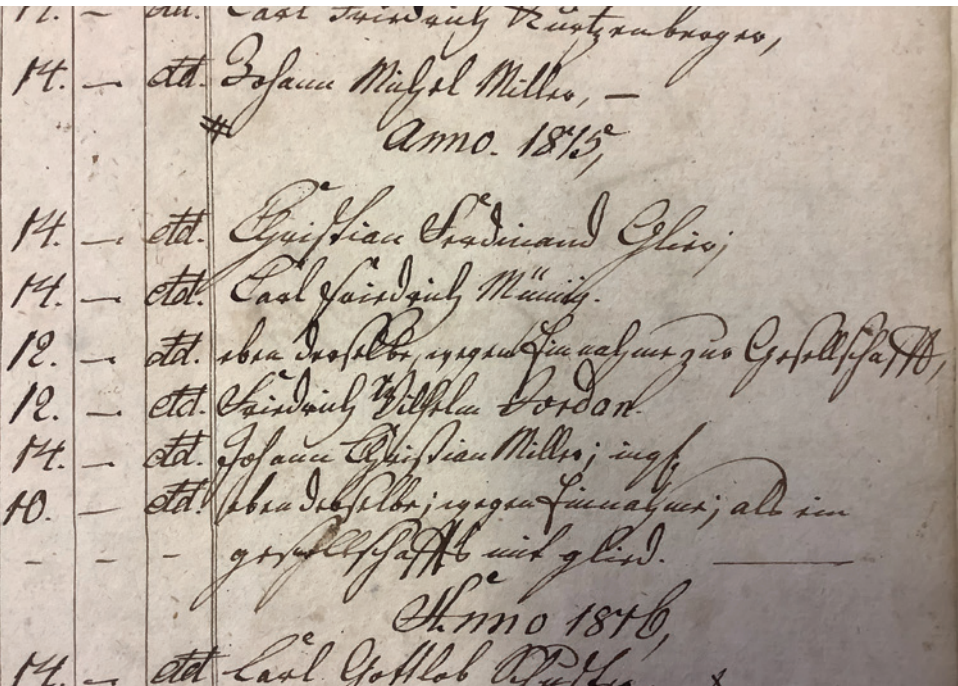


Figure 4. Entry of Johann Carl Friedrich Mönning as a self-established craftsman in the account book of the instrument makers' company 1797–1835 (MMM T 0021 pages unpaginated).



Figure 5. Letterhead of Wilhelm Mönning dated November 1, 1893.

for many years ago. While his two younger sons Franz August (1823–1912) and Friedrich Erdmann (1827–86) switched to the manufacture of brass instruments, his eldest son Friedrich Wilhelm Mönning (1810–52) continued the manufacture of woodwind instruments.

Pioneer of the Boehm system and restorer – the company founder

Friedrich Wilhelm’s son, Heinrich Wilhelm Mönning (1852–1934; see Fig. 6), became the true patriarch of the Gebrüder Mönning firm. He apprenticed with his older brother, August Mönning Sr. (1834–94), whose sons Otto Mönning (1862–1943) and Moritz Max Mönning (1875–1949), in turn established successful workshops in Leipzig in 1891 and 1904.

Heinrich Wilhelm Mönning married in 1875, became self-employed, and moved into the newly built house at Schützenstraße 42 in 1879. Very little information exists about his work,



Figure 6. Heinrich Wilhelm Mönnig in the 1920s, when he only worked as a home worker for his sons.



Figure 7. The owners of the company with the instruments for which they were responsible as technical consultants: L to R: Willy, Fritz, Hans, and Albert Mönnig.



Figure 8. The factory extension, completed in 1924 with the addition of a warehouse floor. This view of the company has been featured in catalogs and on letterheads ever since.

and no signed instruments have survived. Nevertheless, he built the first Markneukirchen clarinets in the Boehm system. He sold the model instrument, which he had acquired from Paris, to the Museum of Applied Arts (MMM Inv. No. 0901) in 1893, where it was immediately loaned to competitors as well. His workshop played a significant role in

introducing the Boehm flute to the Vogtland region—his apprentice, Ernst Robert Leibl (1871 in Adorf—1957 in Nuremberg), undertook a journeyman’s tour to work in Munich with Karl Mendler, Theobald Boehm’s successor. From there, he brought the new flute model back to his hometown in 1892.² Even in the 1920s, the Mönning brothers described Boehm-system clarinets and flutes as their specialty. Further impetus for the Boehm flute came earlier in 1883 at the home of his brother August Mönning Sr., following his son Otto’s journeyman years in England.

After more than 20 years in the trade, Heinrich Wilhelm Mönning sought a second source of income and opened the Zum Echo restaurant at Wernitzgrüner Straße 81 in 1898. He continued to have his workshop below the dining room and kitchen.

Boom in the Roaring Twenties

Two of Heinrich Wilhelm’s sons—Hans (1878–1942) and Fritz (1881–1967)—remained true to their father’s craft. As early as 1903 Hans Mönning had advertised his services as a “practical instrument maker and former military musician.” In 1906 the Mönning brothers took over the workshop and the next year moved it to their new house at Wernitzgrüner Straße 57. With approximately six journeymen and two apprentices, they initially produced clarinets and flutes. Following the interruption of the First World War, the 1920s saw a remarkable rise in business.

In 1920, the residential building received its first two-story workshop extension, which was significantly expanded in 1923/24. The term “workshops” was no longer used. Instead, the company referred to a machine hall and a precision mechanics hall. There was a separate tuning room and an office for the necessary commercial operations. Letterheads replaced “manufacturing” with “woodwind instrument factory,” and advertisements touted the “best-equipped factory in all of Germany, with the latest machinery and our own proven methods,” putting Mönning on par with Oscar Adler & Co., the city’s first woodwind instrument manufacturer. Simultaneously, the company was entered in the official commercial register in 1923. The founding year referenced the beginnings of the business by the father, allowing for a highly publicized 50th anniversary celebration in 1925.

Important decisions were made for the next generation. To gain insight into the foreign market and the competition, Hans and Horst Mönning, the two eldest sons of the brothers, went in the early 1920s to the USA, where they then settled permanently. The two younger sons of the company founders, Willy (son of Fritz) and Albert Mönning (son of Hans), had been apprenticed as woodwind-instrument makers since 1920. In 1925/26, both continued their training at the renowned Heckel company in Biebrich and, upon their return, focused on the production of double-reed instruments.

By 1927 the path to a full product range had reached its culmination with the availability of alto and bass clarinets, contrabassoon, oboe d’amore, English horn, alto and bass flutes, and ultimately also saxophone. Additionally, serial numbers were assigned, and catalogs showcasing the comprehensive product range were published regularly starting in 1925.

Plexiglass for a Grand Prix

In the early 1920s Mönnig employed approximately 40. After its expansion, the factory employed 70 people on-site and another 20 working from home. Business contacts in the United States played a crucial role in the company's growth and its independence from local distributors. In 1926 the first major contract, renewed annually until 1939, was secured with Simson & Frey, who assumed exclusive distribution rights in the USA. Instead of the brand Gebrüder Mönnig Markneukirchen, the U.S. distribution was signed "Moennig Bros." and in the case of some instruments with the added designation "Artist." The emigrated sons, Horst and Hans Mönnig, retained special rights to distribute instruments from their father's company.

At the suggestion of American customers, mass production of metal clarinets (including alto and bass clarinets) began in 1926. The boom in this sector continued until around 1935. In 1931 the 6,000th metal Boehm clarinet was shipped, and by then a total of 20,000 clarinets had already been manufactured. This included the double-bodied Stein clarinet patented in 1928/32, which now survives only in specimens in museums in Bern (inventory no. 972) and Markneukirchen (no. 4458). Another Mönnig specialty was metal oboes, and a particular variant with saxophone fingerings—the "saxoboe."³

The Mönnig company achieved international renown as the first manufacturer of all woodwind instruments made of Plexiglas. The proposal came from the patent holder of the new material, the Darmstadt-based company Röhm & Haas.

In 1936 a Plexiglas piccolo and flute were initially produced. In preparation for the 1937 World's International Exposition in Paris an oboe, a pair of A/B-flat clarinets, and a bassoon were also created (see Figs. 9, 10 and 12).

The company was the only German musical instrument exhibitor to receive the Grand Prix for wooden and plexiglass instruments presented in Paris. Following this, other woodwind instrument manufacturers turned to the new material.⁴ Until around 1960, clarinets were also produced using a colored, grained, high-quality resin plastic known as "Extralit."

In 1932, the Gebrüder Mönnig company exhibited for the first time at the Leipzig Trade Fair in the Petershof. The Great Depression had shown that a strong export orientation



Figure 9. For the film *Zwischen Front und Heimat* (Between Front and Home), Markneukirchen master craftsmen and journeymen perform on Plexiglas instruments of their own manufacture in the Mönnig premises in 1940. L to R: Kurt Jacob, and Fritz Mönnig, Helmut Hager, and Alfred Meyer.



Figure 10. The Plexiglas instruments from the Paris World's Fair and the Grand Prix awarded for them are featured in the current special exhibition.



Figure 11. Catalogue published on the occasion of the company's 80th anniversary in 1956.



Figure 12. Willy Mönning 1993 with Plexiglas bassoon.

towards the USA could also be a disadvantage. Through Leipzig it was possible to reach the markets of other countries, and representatives were soon found in Australia, Bulgaria, Denmark, England, The Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, and Spain.

System change: private companies in the German Democratic Republic

The outbreak of World War II led to a reduction in the workforce at Mönning Brothers. The situation was worsened by difficulties in the supply of materials, and resulted in a decline in production. Following the deaths of Hans and Albert Mönning, the latter of whom was killed in a bombing raid in 1944, the management of the company fell to Fritz and Willy Mönning. In 1947 the company still employed 40 people. Despite a strong generation of apprentices after the war, by 1964 the number of employees had dwindled to only 30. This remained constant until the 1980s. The sons of Albert and Willy Mönning began their apprenticeships or joined the company. Klaus Mönning joined in 1952, and later took over oboe production; Friedrich Mönning began his apprenticeship in 1955 and specialized primarily in flute making; and Wilhelm Mönning joined the company in 1971 and was responsible for all prefabrication.

Despite the patronizing attitude of the state towards private companies, successes were still achieved:

1951 Honorary Diploma at the International Competition in The Hague, The Netherlands

- 1964** Gold Medal at the Leipzig Trade Fair for a Mönning oboe
- 1984** Klaus Mönning received the Honorary Prize for Outstanding Achievements in Musical Instrument Making of the GDR – 3rd Class.

Nevertheless, the GDR-era did not pass the long-established company by without leaving its mark. From the mid-1950s onward the higher economic authorities prohibited the production of saxophones; clarinet production also had to be discontinued in 1968.

On January 1, 1970, the Gebrüder Mönning company was transformed into a limited partnership with the addition of a state-owned partner. In addition to the family, the state-owned brass and signal-instrument factory VEB Blechblas- und Signalinstrumentenfabrik (B&S) also held shares in the company. Expropriation followed in 1972. Until its complete takeover by VEB B&S, the company was subsumed in 1974 as part of its division IV/2, and called VEB Spezial-Holzblasinstrumente (Volkseigener Betrieb/State-Owned Special Woodwind Instruments). Willy Mönning continued to serve as director until 1975, after which members of the Mönning family assumed positions of responsibility in the master craftsman departments. The distribution of the instruments was already being handled by the state-owned foreign trade company DEMUSA. When Willy Mönning looked back on this period in a company chronicle in 1993, he summarized the production figures for 1923 and 1993 as follows:

Flutes	from 1924:	17,845
Clarinets	1924–1968:	72,000
Oboes	from 1924:	5,960
Bassoons	from 1925:	15,857
Saxophones	1927–1958:	5,824 ⁵

Paths to the future: craftsmanship in an old factory owner's villa

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification, the Mönning company, together with its former local competitor Oscar Adler & Co., was able to return to the private sector and since October 1990 has operated as Holzblasinstrumentenbau GmbH Markneukirchen. Under this name, the company first attended the Frankfurt Music Fair in 1991 and exhibited at the NAMM (National Association of Music Merchants) Show in Los Angeles between 1992 and 1999. During this transitional period, the company was managed by Günter Schuster and Kurt Beyer.

In 2000 Ludwig Frank, Frank Meyer, and Veit Schindler, took over the management of the company as majority shareholders.⁶

Because the Mönning family is now the only remaining member of the original group of shareholders, the company name was changed in 2013 to Gebrüder Mönning Holzblasinstrumente GmbH (Mönning Brothers Woodwind Instruments Ltd.).

Christian Gander joined Veit Schindler as the second managing director in 2021, while Frank Meyer and Matthias Müller, as authorized signatories, complete the current management team. The traditional brand “Oscar Adler & Co.,” under which clarinet manufacturing experienced a renaissance in 1991, continues to be produced. At Mönning, both instrument lines,



Figure 13. Some of the employees in front of the headquarters Schuster-Villa.

with all their specific features, continue to be manufactured and further developed. Instruments under the Oscar Adler label are primarily aimed at the amateur and semi-professional sectors, while Mönnig instruments are used increasingly by professional musicians and soloists worldwide.

The two divisions, the former Mönnig and Adler factories, have now merged at a new and attractive location. Since 2001 the company has been located in the Schuster Villa on Pestalozzistraße in Markneukirchen.⁷ This stately property was built in 1905 by Albert Schuster, co-owner of the Gebrüder Schuster company, founded in 1862, which around 1900 was one of the most important musical instrument exporters in the Vogtland region. In this historic setting the Mönnig Brothers' manufacturing concept is realized as a union of individual workshops under one roof. The reception hall also serves as the venue for the final concerts and masterclasses for

oboe or bassoon held in cooperation with the Markneukirchen International Instrumental Competition Association.

The company currently employs 55 people, including members of the 7th and 8th generations of the Mönnig family. Annual production ranges between 1,000 and 1,200 instruments that find customers in nearly 60 countries worldwide.

The following range of models is offered:

- 5 oboes
- 2 oboes d'amore
- 5 English horns and one bass oboe
- 9 bassoons
- 3 contrabassoons
- 11 German or Oehler clarinets in E-flat, C, B-flat, and A
- 3 Boehm clarinets in B-flat
- 4 bass clarinets

The solo instruments are often developed in collaboration with renowned musicians such as Albrecht Mayer, principal oboist of the Berlin Philharmonic. Instruments from the company have twice received the German Musical Instrument Award: in 2008, the Oscar Adler model 510 bass clarinet, and 10 years later, the Gebrüder Mönnig model 155 AM oboe.

The development of the Gebrüder Mönning company has been shaped by changing and often difficult political systems with various, and in some cases imposed, forms of ownership. It reflects evolving musical demands, which at Mönning are primarily manifested in new materials and ultimately in the specialization in high-quality oboes and bassoons and their related instruments. The history of the Mönning Brothers company is both a family history and a part of Markneukirchen's industrial history. A regionally rooted name has become an internationally renowned brand. Within the context of regional instrument making, the company has become an undeniable part of Markneukirchen's economic and cultural history.



Figure 14. Gala concert in Markneukirchen on September 6, 2025:
Bassoonist Dag Jensen in a quartet with Mönning employees.



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Endnotes

- 1 See Günter Dullat, *Verzeichnis der Holz- und Metallblasinstrumentenmacher auf deutschsprachigem Gebiet von 1500 bis Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Directory of woodwind and brass instrument makers in German-speaking regions from 1500 to the mid-20th century) (Tutzing: H. Schneider, 2010), 328–32; Gunther Joppig, “Mönnig, Gebr. und Adler, Oscar & Co. (Instrumentenbau),“ in *Lexikon der Holzblasinstrumente*, ed. A. Hofer, U. Kramer, U. Sirker (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2018), 387f; Janet Dickey Lein, “Mönnig, Gebrüder,” in *The Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*, 2nd ed., ed. L. Libin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); William Waterhouse, *The New Langwill Index: A dictionary of musical wind-instrument makers and inventors* (London: T. Bingham, 1993), 267f. Enrico Weller, “Der Blasinstrumentenbau im Vogtland von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts: Untersuchungen und Dokumentationen zur Geschichte eines Gewerbebezuges der Musikinstrumentenindustrie,” (Wind-instrument Making in the Vogtland region from its beginnings to the start of the 20th century: Investigations and documentation on the history of a branch of the musical-instrument industry) diss., Chemnitz, 2002, published by the Verein der Freunde und Förderer des Musikinstrumenten-Museums Markneukirchen (Horb am Neckar: Geiger, 2004), 223–5, 281 (family tree).
- 2 See Klaus Dapper, “Querflötenkauf V. Welt-Übersicht Querflötenhersteller: Boehmflötenbau in Deutschland,” (Buying a Flute: A world overview of flute manufacturers: Boehm flute making in Germany) *Flöte aktuell* 1.2004: 17–28; Enrico Weller, “120 Jahre Boehmflötenbau in Markneukirchen. Otto Mönnig führte 1883 das neue Flötenmodell im Vogtland ein: eine Bekanntschaft auf Umwegen,” (120 Years of Boehm Flute Making in Markneukirchen. Otto Mönnig introduced the new flute model in Vogtland in 1883: An encounter by a roundabout route) *Instrumentenbau-Zeitschrift*, 58/ 1–2 (2004): 52–57.
- 3 See Andreas van Zoelen, “Die Saxoboe,” *Rohrblatt* 32 (2017): 155–9.
- 4 See Enrico Weller, “Plexiglas im Holzblasinstrumentenbau. Plexiglas: vor 60 Jahren ein neuer Werkstoff im Holzblasinstrumentenbau” (Plexiglas in woodwind instrument making. Plexiglas: a new material in woodwind-instrument making 60 years ago,” *Instrumentenbau-Zeitschrift* 51/1–2 (1997): 85–91.
- 5 See Willy Mönnig “Eine kurze Schilderung vom Werbegang der Firma Gebrüder Mönnig, Markneukirchen, Holzblasinstrumente” (A brief description of the advertising campaign of the woodwind-instrument manufacturer Gebrüder Mönnig, Markneukirchen), typescript, Markneukirchen, 1994. Mönnig’s production in the last decade of the GDR is discussed, among other places, in Gunther Joppig, “Gebrüder Mönnig – ein Begriff im Musikinstrumentenbau” (Gebrüder Mönnig: A name in musical instrument making) *Das Musikinstrument* 35/11 (1986): 48–51.
- 6 See Ludwig Frank, *Auf den Bühnen der Welt. Die Macht des Schicksals* (On the World’s Stages: The power of destiny) (Dresden: Ultraviolett Verlag, 2024). Frank’s autobiography not only provides an interesting insight into his life and thoughts, but also follows the Mönnig company from his apprenticeship in 1979 to his entry into management and the subsequent successful realignment of the company.
- 7 See Enrico Weller, “Traditionsreicher Hersteller mit neuem Konzept: Markneukirchner Mönnig-Adler Holzblasinstrumentenbau GmbH bezieht neues Firmengebäude,” (Traditional manufacturer with a new concept: Markneukirchner Mönnig-Adler-Holzblasinstrumentenbau GmbH moves into new company building,” *Instrumentenbau-Zeitschrift* 55. 5/6 (2001): 33–36.