

Georg Rieger, Double-Reed Toolmaker par Excellence!

A Short Biography

By Nicola A. Adamo
Heidelberg, Germany

I first met Herr Rieger in August 1993, in his workshop/home in Gaggenau in the Black Forest region of southwestern Germany. It was a beautifully sunny, pleasant day. He ushered my wife and me through his workshop to his salesroom, a non-pretentious room with a table against the window, shelves in one corner and a computer in the other corner. He invited my wife and me to sit down. Soon Frau Rieger joined us and we all had a cordial discussion regarding just about anything that came to our minds by way of introduction. After this we settled down to technical matters and Herr Rieger and I went through virtually every aspect of reedmaking. On the table was one of his Bassoon Reed Tip Profiling Machines (Anspitzhobel). He showed me how it worked. I was flabbergasted at its simplicity and efficiency.

I had been away from reedmaking and playing for nearly thirty years. I felt like a little kid in a candy store. As I called out each item I needed he brought it to the table and laid it down. The absolutely superior quality of his workmanship stands out at first sight. I was beside myself with excitement, nonetheless, I held myself back and stuck to my list of needed items. But in the back of my mind, a seed germinated to the effect that I needed to spread the word so that fellow bassoon players in the United States could benefit from my discovery. So I wrote to Jack Spratt and told him all about my discovery, alas, only to learn that he was already carrying a number of Rieger products in his catalog. Nevertheless, and on behalf of fellow bassoon players across the country, I recommended and requested him to intensify his advertising of Rieger products, which he did and for which I am thankful because my deep-in-the-gut feeling is that you can pay more but you won't get a better quality tool. The only serious problem was that of delivery time. Since then delivery times have improved considerably. At present, delivery time of most machines runs around eight months but in a bona fide critical situation the Riegers will do their best to meet a pressing requirement. I should like to think that my prodding in this respect paid off in increased production to meet the ever increasing demand.

Hansjoerg (left) and his father Georg Rieger standing by their display case just outside the workshop.



Additionally, the quality of my own reeds since using Rieger tools has advanced by leaps and bounds. Finally, I should like to thank Herr Peter Mauruschat, solo bassoonist of the Philharmonic Orchestra of the City of Heidelberg, Germany, for having given me the name and address of the Rieger family.



Main tool room in the workshop with the computerized milling machine (right, center).

Herr and Frau Rieger married in 1953. Their first child, daughter Isabella was born in 1957. Walter was born in 1958. He learned instrument making and repair at the Puechner factory, completed his training at the Heckel factory whereupon he was certified as a Master Instrument Maker. His shop is located in



Workshop. Looking from the main tool room toward the cane preparation room (gouging, profiling and shaping operations).

Ruesselsheim and his schedule is so full that it sometimes takes months to get an appointment. Johann Georg, affectionately called Hansjoerg, was born in 1963, is the youngest of the Rieger children. He apprenticed as a tool and die maker and joined his father's firm upon reaching journeyman status in 1983.

He completed his training in 1990 and was thereupon awarded the Master Tool and Die Maker's Certificate. In the same year, Hansjoerg joined his father in the operation of the firm. Mother Rieger helps with the office work.

As a boy, Herr Rieger learned to play the accordion and participated in various musical events in and around Gaggenau. After finishing elementary school he apprenticed as a tool and die maker. Upon completion of his apprenticeship he went to work as a journeyman in the toolmaking section of the Daimler-Benz Company in Gaggenau. This is where the Unimog, a special vehicle used primarily in agricultural applications is built. At WW2's end he took up the clarinet and played in various bands.

In 1951 he took up the bassoon and soon after came up against the problem of reeds, just like the rest of us! (I must add that here in Germany one does not go to the nearest music store to purchase bassoon reeds. They may be ordered but one is confronted with long delivery times.)

There remains only the bassoon teacher who makes the reeds for his students or eventually teaches them how to make their own.

By 1953, he started toying with the idea of making the necessary machines for making

reeds and so the first gouging machine, made entirely by hand, was "born" and today is on display in the display case next to the entrance to his workshop. (Herr Rieger also owns an imposing collection of bassoons and other instruments of historical interest.) From this point on, it was only a matter of time until the Georg Rieger Company would come into existence, which it did in 1980. And so, out of the part-time undertaking developed a full-time one after completion of an addition between house and garage to provide the needed space for the necessary machines.

In 1985 Hansjoerg was engaged as a full-time employee because of the increasing demand for reedmaking machines and gouged cane blanks. A short time later another employee was hired.

In 1990 the Georg Rieger Companie was converted into Georg Rieger GmbH (Ltd).

During the nearly fifty years of existence of the Georg Rieger GmbH, Herr Rieger has been guided by three basic principles of technical development: *Quality, Longevity and Function*. These principles have asserted themselves time and again, as, indeed, a loyal and international clientele continues to confirm the efficacy of these principles. In this connection, it is appropriate to mention that the Rieger shop is equipped with the newest machines and uses the latest manufacturing techniques. Even a layman can appreciate the capabilities of the equipment used. But, even at its best, it is no match for the loving care one feels in observing father and son working the final file strokes or sensitive adjustments carried out by extremely well-trained hands and fingers dedicated to the highest quality available.

Truly, quality from the Black Forest-made in Germany! ❖

About the Author...

Nicola Adamo attended the Cleveland Institute of Music where he studied with George Goslee. He also studied with Oskar Rothensteiner of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. After a distinguished career as a musician, conductor, teacher and administrator in the US Army from 1947 to 1971, where he rose to the rank of major, he retired and now resides in Heidelberg, Germany.