

## Friedrich Kulow (1853-1939), a Less Known Maker of Woodwinds

By Dr. Klaus Gillessen  
Heilbronn, Germany

### Introduction

My interest for Friedrich Kulow was awakened when an old bassoon with the stamp "Kulow / Magdeburg" was offered to me. The *New England Index*<sup>1</sup> contains just a three-line note about Kulow, and short sections devoted to him can be found in the book on the bassoon by Jansen<sup>2</sup> and in Heyde's book on the making of musical instruments in Prussia<sup>3</sup>. Subsequently, I have tried to gather as much additional information about Kulow as possible, by checking catalogues of museums, visiting libraries, contacting curators and archivists. Last but not least I succeeded in tracing his descendants who supplied a wealth of data about their ancestor. At least three persons are still alive who knew Friedrich Kulow personally. The following article presents a survey of what is now known about the life and work of Friedrich Kulow.

### Friedrich Kulow and his family

Friedrich Karl Herrmann Kulow (this is his full name) was born on October 13th, 1853 in Berlin, Germany and died on October 17th, 1939 in Magdeburg, Germany. His parents were August Alexander Ludwig Kulow who was a worker in Berlin and his wife Auguste Amalie née Schwarzios. In 1880 Friedrich Kulow married Elise Köhler, who was born in 1860 and died in 1922. The couple had nine children, two of which died already at an infant age. The remaining seven children were: Franz Walter (1881 to 1917), Leonhard (1883 to 1937), Wally (1885 to 1868), Felix (1887 to 1974), Walter (1889 to 1970), Elisabeth (1892 to 1945), and Fritz (1897 to 1971). Of the next generation (i.e. grandchildren of Friedrich Kulow) several are still alive of which at least three knew Friedrich Kulow personally. Today, the youngest members of the family belong to the fourth generation after Friedrich Kulow and are great-great-grandchildren of his.

### Friedrich Kulow as a woodwind instrument maker

Rather little is known about the professional career of Friedrich Kulow. He attended a school in Berlin, Philipp-Strasse 21 from 1860 to 1867,

his leaving certificate states that "his knowledge and achievements in the various subjects are rather good". He then learned the handicraft of a woodwind instrument maker in Berlin. During his journeyman's years of service he was also in Biebrich near Wiesbaden with the company Heckel which was at that time led by Wilhelm Hermann Heckel. Towards the end of the seventies he settled in Magdeburg, became assistant to Hermann Sauerhering<sup>4</sup>, and passed his trade examination. Afterwards he founded his own business in Magdeburg. The address given on the marriage certificate from 1880 is Grosse Marktstrasse No. 20. In 1881 he was enrolled into the register of citizens of Magdeburg. Already in 1879 he had brought the house Wallstrasse No. 1a where his workshop was first located in a barrack in the yard and later integrated into his home in the second floor. Figure 1 is a reproduction of a contemporary photograph showing this house.

Figure 1.

*The house Wallstrasse No. 1a in Magdeburg, containing home and workshop of Friedrich Kulow in the second floor (photograph of the end of the 19th century).*



Friedrich Kulow fabricated flutes, clarinets, oboes, and bassoons which must have been a good quality because of their demand. For example, in an advertisement for a second hand Kulow oboe a price of 26 M is asked, whereas that of a competitor is offered for 20 M. Unfortunately, no information is available about how many of the various woodwind instruments he produced. On an average Kulow employed

two assistants and one apprentice in his workshop<sup>3</sup>. He never had problems in finding customers, mainly in military bands, because Magdeburg was a large garrison-town in the years before World War I. After 1918 his instruments were bought by other organizations, for example the bands of "Stahlhelm" and "Reichsbanner", and for use in musical coffee-houses, in theatres, and in cinemas: it was the era of the silent film. Friedrich Kulow himself played clarinet in a private orchestral association and also sold clarinet reeds. In the early 1930's he ceased to fabricate instruments and concentrated on repairing them including saxophones. Figure 2 shows Friedrich Kulow in his later years working at his bench. After Kulow's death in the year 1939 the brass instrument maker Rudolf Kobert took over some remaining instruments from his workshop. Kobert's workshop was located in the ground floor of the same house, which was destroyed in the course of World War II in 1945.



**Figure 2** Friedrich Kulow at his workbench, around 1930.

Kulow's eldest son Franz Walter (born 1881) also learned the handicraft of making woodwind instruments, however, due to his early death in 1917 he could practice this craft for a short time only. It was also planned that Hans Kulow, the son of Franz Walter, should follow his father and grandfather. As a consequence of the premature death of Franz Walter Kulow this plan was not put into practice, and the tradition of making woodwind instruments unfortunately ceased in the family.

In 1937, two years before his death, Friedrich Kulow offered his last instrument, a bassoon, to Lisbeth, the wife of his grandson Hans. Because Hans and Lisbeth lived at that time on an island in the North Sea they refused the gift, as the instrument might be damaged by the humid climate there. Consequently the bassoon remained in Magdeburg where it was destroyed on January 16th, 1945, together with other instruments, when Magdeburg was heavily damaged by an air-raid. Today, only some tools and pieces of grenadilla wood are left of the workshop of Friedrich Kulow.

#### Existing instruments made by Friedrich Kulow

- 1 Piccolo in Eb, early 20th century, marked "6" / Lyra "KULOW / MAGDEBURG" / star, 7 keys, Edinburgh University Collection, UK, instrument No. 1547, see ref<sup>5</sup>.
- 2 Piccolo in C, early 20th century, marked "8" / Lyra / "KULOW ? MAGDEBURG" / star, 7 keys, Edinburgh University Collection, UK, instrument No. 1548, see ref<sup>6</sup>.
- 3 Flute, early 20th century, marked Lyra / "KULOW / MAGDEBURG" / star / "79", reform system, Edinburgh University collection, UK, instrument No. 1546, see ref<sup>7</sup>.
- 4 Oboe, around 1900, marked Lyra / "KULOW" / MAGDEBURG" / 3 resp. 1 star, boxwood, 11 German silver keys. Kölnisches Stadtmuseum, Germany, instrument No. RM 1942/183 / -I/63, see ref<sup>8</sup>.
- 5 Oboe, around 1895, marked Lyra / "KULOW" / "MAGDEBURG" / star, boxwood, 12 German silver keys, 2 rings, Musikinstrumenten-Museum Universität Leipzig, Inv.-NR. 3530, see ref<sup>9</sup>.
- 6 Clarinet in Eb, around 1900, 13 German silver keys, 2 rings. Württembergisches Landesmuseum Stuttgart, Germany, Inv.-NR. 1991-378, see ref<sup>10</sup>.
- 7 Clarinet in Eb, marked Lyra / "KULOW" / "MAGDEBURG" / star / "S", Grenadilla wood, 14 German silver keys, 2 rings, in private possession, Tespe, Germany, see ref<sup>11</sup>.
- 8 Clarinet in C, around 1890, marked Lyra / "KULOW" / "MAGDEBURG" / star, boxwood, 12 German silver keys, 4 rings, Musikinstrumenten-Museum Universität Leipzig, Inv.-Nr. 4896, see ref<sup>9</sup>.
- 9 Clarinet in Bb, marked Lyra / "KULOW" / "MAGDEBURG" / star / "A", Grenadilla wood, 18 German silver keys, 5 rings, in private possession, Landshut, Germany, see ref<sup>11</sup>.
- 10 Clarinet in A, marked Lyra / "KULOW" / "MAGDEBURG" / star / "A", Grenadilla wood, 18

- German silver keys, 5 rings, in private possession, Landshut, Germany, see ref<sup>11</sup>.
- 11 Clarinet in A, around 18990, marked Lyra / "KULOW" / "MAGDEBURG" / star, boxwood, 12 German silver keys, 4 rings, Musikinstrumenten-Museum Universität Leipzig, Inv. -Nr. 4897, see ref<sup>9</sup>.
- 12 Clarinet in A, around 1910, marked Lyra / "KULOW" / "MAGDEBURG" / star, ebony, 12 German silver keys, 2 rings, Musikinstrumenten-Museum Universität Leipzig, Inv. -Nr. 4469, see ref<sup>9</sup>.
- 13 Bassoon, around 1900, marked Lyra / "KULOW" / "MAGDEBURG" / 3 stars, palissander, 18 German silver keys. Staatliches Institut für Musikforschung / Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Germany, Kat.-Nr. 4926, see ref<sup>2</sup>.
- 14 Bassoon, marked Lyra / "KULOW" / "MAGDEBURG", 17 German silver keys, with bocal made by Heckel, high pitch (A4 = 458), in private possession.

#### Peculiarities of bassoons from Friedrich Kulow

Generally the arrangement of keys on the Kulow bassoons is very similar to that of Heckel bassoons that date from the middle of the 19th century. For example, instrument (14) of the preceding list features the following keys:

*Bell:* Bb, operated by a lever on the bass joint for LT

*Bass joint:* B (LT), C (LT, C# (L4), D (LT), D# (L4)

*Butt:* E (RT), F (R4), F# (R4, overlying F), F# (RT), G (R3, twin-headed) G# (R4), G# (RT), Bb (RT + R3 with pass-through pin, twin-headed)

*Wing:* c# (LT, a (LT, c (LT)

(LT, L1 to L4 and RT, R1 to R4 are thumb, 1st to 4th finger of left and right hand, respectively).

Instrument (13) of the list above has essentially the same key arrangement as instrument (14). There are only two minor differences: the F# key for RT is connected to the F key via a second pass-through pin, and a second c# key for R1 is provided on the butt.

The E key of the Kulow bassoons is fixed to a short lever with a touch for the right thumb, very much like as with a Heckel bassoon from 1845<sup>14</sup>. Also the twin-headed G key closing two holes kneading into the narrow and wide bores of the butt, respectively, is arranged in the same manner as shown in the reference<sup>14</sup>.

The concept of the twin-headed G key was invented by Almenraeder<sup>15</sup> who incorporated a longitudinal lever with two cups in line. J.A. Heckel applied this concept using keys fixed to a

rotating axle as shown in the reference<sup>14</sup>. There are many Heckel bassoons with twin-headed G keys preserved, for example in the collection of the Heckel company and other collections.<sup>16</sup> His son W. Heckel replaced the twin-headed key with a larger single key closing the two holes simultaneously<sup>17</sup>. This type of G key is now found on all Heckel type bassoons. Twin-headed G keys were also used by other contemporary makers, for example Berthold<sup>18</sup>, Geisler<sup>19</sup>, Jehring<sup>21</sup>, Knochenhauer<sup>22</sup>, Kruspe<sup>23</sup>, Lange<sup>24</sup>, and Sauerhering<sup>25</sup>, first employer and then competitor of Kulow in Magdeburg.

Most of these makers have also applied twin-headed keys for Bb on the butt, that is Berthold<sup>18</sup>, Haseneier<sup>26</sup>, Jehring<sup>27</sup>, Lange<sup>24</sup>, and again Sauerhering<sup>25</sup>. Similar to the arrangement of the twin-headed G key two holes leading into the parallel bores of the butt are opened for playing Bb. This feature is also present on Kulow's bassoons. In contrast to this, Heckel instruments from the 19th century have a single Bb key covering two holes simultaneously. The B key on the modern Heckel type bassoon closes a large hole to the narrow bore and two small holes leading into the wide bore.

Another less common feature of the bassoons made by F. Kulow is the slide drain ("Schieberabguss") where a half-circle of metal tube is soldered to a dovetail profiled piece of metal which slides into a fitting part on the lower end of the butt<sup>28</sup>. This arrangement was already introduced by Almenraeder and J.A. Heckel<sup>29</sup> and used by many other makers in the 19th century<sup>30</sup>. W. Heckel replaced it later by the flat seal which is found on the modern bassoon<sup>29</sup>.

#### References

The following abbreviations are used in the list of references:

*NLI* - William Waterhouse, The New Langwill Index, London: Tony Bingham, 1993.

*JTB* - Will Jansen, The Bassoon, Buren: Frits Knuf, 1978

*CHC* - Catalogue of the collection of the Heckel company, Wiesbaden, 1968 published in Renate Huber, Verzeichnis sämtlicher Musikinstrumente im Germanischen Nationalmuseum Nürnberg, Wilhelmshaven: Noetzel, Heinrichshofen-Bücher, 1989.

*GNM* - Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg, a complete inventory is published in Renate Huber, Verzeichnis Nürnberg, a complete inventory is published in Renate Huber, Verzeichnis sämtlicher Musikinstrumente im Germanischen National-

museum Nürnberg, Wilhelmshaven: Noetzel, Heinrichshofen-Bücher, 1989.

*HDF* - Wilhelm Heckel, *Der Fagott*, reprint of the 2nd edition, Leipzig: Merseburger, 1931.

*EUC* - Catalogue of the Edinburgh University Collection of Historic Musical Instruments, volume 2, part D, fascicle ii: transverse flutes, Edinburgh, 1992.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> NLI, p 219

<sup>2</sup> JTB, p. 420/421

<sup>3</sup> Herbert Heyde, *Musikinstrumentenbau in Preussen*, Hans Schneider, 1994, p. 439

<sup>4</sup> NLI, p. 346

<sup>5</sup> EUC, p. 15

<sup>6</sup> EUC, p. 22

<sup>7</sup> EUC, p. 75

<sup>8</sup> H. Hoyler, *Die Musikinstrumentensammlung des Kölnischen Stadtmuseums*, Köln, 1993, p. 188-189

<sup>9</sup> Descriptions of the Kulow instruments in the Musikinstrumenten-Museum of the Universität Leipzig were kindly provided by Mr. Bernd Wittenbrink.

<sup>13</sup> This instrument is in the possession of the author.

<sup>14</sup> JTB, fig. 239

<sup>15</sup> C. Almenraeder, published in *Caecilia* (1825), reproduced in Lyndesay G. Langwill, *The Bassoon and Contrabassoon*, London: Benn, 11971, plate 14

<sup>16</sup> CHC, instruments KF3, F/10A, F/26, F/27, F/27A, F/30, F/34, F/38, and *Wind Instruments of European Art Music*, Horniman Museum, London, 1974, instrument 14.5.47/52(C), and William Waterhouse, *The Proud Bassoon*, catalogue of an exhibition, Edinburgh, 1983, instruments 24 and 25

<sup>17</sup> HDF, p. 18

<sup>18</sup> CHC, instrument F/37

<sup>19</sup> GNM, instrument MIJ27

<sup>20</sup> CHC, instruments F/22 and F/25, and GNM, instrument MIJ25

<sup>21</sup> CHC, instruments F/35 and F/40, and GNM, instrument MIJ20

<sup>22</sup> JTB, fig. 660

<sup>23</sup> CHC, instrument F/33

<sup>24</sup> CHC, instruments F/43 and F/44, and JTB, fig. 461

<sup>25</sup> CHC, instrument F/32

<sup>26</sup> CHC, instrument F/25, and GNM, instrument MIJ25

<sup>27</sup> CHC, instruments F/35 and F/40

<sup>28</sup> JTB, fig. 691

<sup>29</sup> HDF, p. 15

<sup>30</sup> CHC, instruments F/12, F/13A, F/21A, F/22, F/25, F/29, F/32, F/33, F/37, F/41A, F/42A, F/43, F/44

The author would like to thank Mrs. Lisbeth Kulow, Mrs. Eva Kulow-Holtkamp, and Mr. Werner Tempelhoff who provided most of the new information about Friedrich Kulow. ❖

### IDRS PRINTING / PUBLISHING SCHEDULE

	SPRING ISSUE	JOURNAL	FALL ISSUE	WINTER ISSUE
Deadline for Articles submitted to Editors	JANUARY 1	APRIL 1	JULY 1	SEPTEMBER 1
All Copy sent to Falls Printing	JANUARY 15	APRIL 15	JULY 15	SEPTEMBER 15
Copy sent from Falls to Editors	FEBRUARY 10	MAY 10	AUGUST 10	OCTOBER 10
Corrected Copy returned to Falls Executive Secretary's copy sent to Falls Ads sent to Falls	FEBRUARY 15	MAY 15	AUGUST 15	OCTOBER 15
Complete Final Copy Proofs sent to Editors	FEBRUARY 22	MAY 22	AUGUST 22	OCTOBER 22
Final Proofs returned to Falls	FEBRUARY 27	MAY 27	AUGUST 27	OCTOBER 27
Print Date / To Falls	MARCH 1	JUNE 1	SEPTEMBER 1	NOVEMBER 1