

Overview of Extant German Bass Viols
by Maker, Date, Place Made, and Current Location

Because there are more surviving viols made in Germany than in any other country, they will be discussed in two groups. This survey will consider only basses, with smaller and larger sizes treated separately.

The Database of Historical Viols contains information about 283 bass viols currently thought to have been made in Germany prior to the 20th century. Forty-seven are listed as anonymous, while the remaining 236 are assigned to a maker of the 16th, 17th, or 18th century, based on present knowledge and in some cases with an added question mark to indicate doubt. Of these, no fewer than 91 were made by Joachim Tielke in Hamburg, from whom more viols survive than by any other maker in any country. (His closest rivals in this regard are Louis Guersan in France, with more than 75 known specimens—all of them *pardessus de viole* or quintons—and Barak Norman in England, with more than 60, nearly all basses.) Tielke is thus responsible for almost a third of all German bass viols still in existence, while a further 26 (almost 10%) are the work of Martin Hoffmann and his son Johann Christian Hoffmann in Leipzig, or have been attributed to them.

This leaves 119 additional instruments made by, or attributed to, some 50 other known makers, among whom the following are credited with five or more surviving basses:

Gregor Karpp (Königsberg) – 10	Thomas Edlinger (Augsburg) – 5
Paul Alletsee (Munich) – 9	Johann Joseph Elsler (Mainz) – 5
Mathias Hummel (Nuremberg) – 9	Andreas Jais (Tölz) – 5
Ernst Busch (Nuremberg) – 6	Jacob Meinertzen (Berlin) – 5
Jacob Heinrich Goldt (Hamburg) – 6	Johann Heinrich Ruppert (Erfurt) – 5

Together, these ten makers account for more than half of all German basses not made by Tielke, the Hoffmanns, or persons currently unknown, leaving the remaining 54 instruments as the work of about 40 makers, most of whom are survived by only a single bass viol (though some also made viols in other sizes).

Chronologically, the earliest dated instrument in this entire group of 283 is a unique survivor made by Hans Pergette of Munich in 1599. Next comes the only known viol by Rudolf Bossart (Augsburg, 1625), followed by a handful of instruments made in the 1640s and 50s by Ernst Busch and his successor Paul Hiltz in Nuremberg, who also produced tenors and violones. The latest German bass viols come from the final quarter of the 18th century and the workshops of Lorenz Wachter (Bonn, 1775), Johann Casper Göbler (Breslau, 1784), Johann Stephan Thumhardt (Straubing, 1784), and Leopold Widhalm (Nuremberg, with a label bearing his name but dated 1789 and therefore probably the work of his sons, since Leopold himself died in 1776). There are no known examples from the 19th century, in contrast to the situation in England, France, and Italy.

Based on surviving instruments, the most important German centers of viol making were Hamburg (due to the extraordinary number produced by Tielke) and Leipzig (because of the Hoffmann family's prolific output). These two places are followed by Nuremberg and Munich, each with about 20 known examples by a handful of different makers over a period of approximately 150 years; no other city is currently credited with as many as ten.

The current location of about 10% of these German basses is unknown: some are documented only in the catalogues of auctions (whose results are usually confidential) or long-ago exhibitions, while others were lost from museums in Berlin and Leipzig during World War II. (The latter have been retained here for comparative purposes and on the off chance that they may one day come to light, as has repeatedly happened with musical manuscripts “lost” from important German libraries at around the same time.) Of the rest, a significant plurality (106) are still in Germany, while the next-largest group (29) is found in the United States; Switzerland is home to a further 18, with a dozen or fewer each in Denmark, England, the Netherlands, France, and Austria.

As for ownership, slightly more than a third belong to private individuals, with the rest residing in various museums. In neither category is a significantly large number of examples to be found in any one collection: only the museums in Copenhagen, Leipzig, and Nuremberg have more than ten. Among individuals the late Konrad Ruhland (who specialized in South German instruments) had eight, while the two largest private collections of viols, belonging to the late José Vázquez and Catharina Meints Caldwell, have seven and five, respectively.

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