

Karl Breslmair

Other interesting facts

Biography

Karl Breslmair sen. was born on the 4th of November in 1914 in Mannersdorf am Leithagebirge (Lower Austria). His technical talent and musicality became visible very soon. After receiving a technical education he worked in different industries as mechanical engineer and during the difficult years between the two World Wars he had never been without a job. He spent his scarce spare time playing instruments and he had a passion for violin and the fiddle. Karl Breslmair sen. played in various local orchestras and even began to produce fiddles later on. During the war he worked as a technician in an air craft factory in Wiener Neustadt, where he saw the heaviest air raids of the entire Second World War and where he lost all his possessions. In 1945 he founded his own company in Sommerein, where he worked as a self-employed craftsman (repair shop for agricultural machinery). In 1959 he took the job as a *Werkstättenleiter* (head of the workshop department) in the newly founded nuclear research centre Seibersdorf. The regular income of an employee and the economic revival in these years allowed him to spend all his spare time on producing instruments. He started to design and produce fiddles which astonished with big sound and high-quality lacquer. Over the years he became a kind of master in this field, concentrating himself also on repairing the most complicated damage on old instruments, when the production of mouthpieces became another field of activity. Despite the many fields of activities, he had always been a relaxed and poised family man. Respected by both seniors and colleagues he worked in the research centre Seibersdorf to the year 1974 when he retired. He went on to devote himself in a very innovative way to the production and development of mouthpieces, which brought him the *Ehrenring* (Ring of Honour) of the Vienna Symphonic Orchestra and a special award from the *Musikhochschule Graz* (university for music in Graz) for his achievements.

Until the last moments of his life, Karl Breslmair enjoyed spending time in his beloved workshop and passed away unexpectedly on the 17th of September, 1985, at the age of 71.

A coincident becomes an institution

The history of the "Breslmair mouthpieces"

The Breslmair mouthpiece production has its roots in a coincident in which my father was involved in the year 1968. The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra had an old trumpet mouthpiece in their archive which had been produced in a Viennese master workshop. The first trumpeters at the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra at this time, Prof. Levora and Prof. Wobisch, "shared" this excellent mouthpiece, which produced the perfect sound. One day Prof. Wobisch told one of his friends, Mr. Higatsberger, professor at the Vienna University of Technology and head of the nuclear research centre Seibersdorf, about this mouthpiece. Whenever the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra were on a concert tour they tried as hard as they could to find an instrument-maker who could reproduce this unique mouthpiece. But they never found an instrument-maker who was able to copy it. Mr. Higatsberger however, said to his friend that he could help him, because there had been hardly anything that the people in Seibersdorf could not manage. In this moment, perhaps he could already have had my father in mind, who had always been respected as an ingenious technician by all researchers in Seibersdorf. He could always offer a useful solution to technical problems that seemed to be almost unsolvable. He understood the problems of physicists, chemists and biologists quickly and managed to help them without any bureaucracy by offering a useful patent solution in many cases. Mr. Higatsberger regarded him as "the right man" for this job, not only because my father had been a founder member of the small orchestra at Seibersdorf, a fiddler and a violin-maker (his hobby since his early years), but also because he would know what to do with mouthpieces.

Until this moment, brass music had always been despised in our house. We had a passion for violins and regarded brass instruments as necessary accessory in an orchestra. The name "Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra" however, made the whole project more interesting to my father. He regarded it as a special and honourable task and accepted. He had to produce mouthpieces for the perhaps best musicians in the world of that time. No instrument-maker had managed to satisfy the wishes of those gentlemen before. No one had been able to copy this inconspicuous object, to create something equivalent to it.

It was now to my father, who was fully committed to this project.

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At the age of 14, I was given the opportunity to assist my father and his team occasionally. I had to interpolate sheer endless columns of figures and to draw co-ordinates on graph paper. Months later the first mouthpieces were produced.

My father brought these prototypes to the "Bühnentürl" (an old and very familiar expression for the artists' entrance) of the Vienna State Opera and left it there according to instruction. They were all called G1 as the first useful prototype series according to the gold-plated (G), old and nameless original (probably produced by Dehmal, a Viennese craftsman).

What would the soloists' opinion on that series be? The job was done. Was it?

Within a few weeks the mouthpieces were spread among a small number of top-musicians, the result was unanimous. My father had actually managed to design and produce a mouthpiece that could even meet the highest demands of the possibly best musicians in the world of that time. The message that there were mouthpieces, the "Seibersdorf" mouthpieces, that could at last live up to the Wiener Klangstil spread like wildfire.

From this moment on trumpet mouthpieces were produced in the research work shop of a nuclear research centre. The gained knowledge of the shapes of the cups and the dimensions of the bores was also successfully used for other brass instruments. Experiments with Viennese orchestra musicians became soon too time-consuming for my father to be carried out solely within the research centre. Consequently my father started to establish his own very-well equipped work shop in our house, which soon became a highly popular place for many soloists to come and have their problems solved.

At the time the Breslmair "Seibersdorf" mouthpieces were the ones that set the tone and are still seen as an important part in the Viennese classic music business.

Autobiography

I, Karl Breslmair jun., was born on the 3rd of September, 1954 in Sommerein am Leithagebirge (Lower Austria), where I went to primary school. Afterwards I attended secondary modern school in Bruck an der Leitha, and graduated in 1973. After a year of military service, I started my studies at the University of Vienna to become a teacher for Geography and Physical Education.

A successful entrance test for the *Akademie der bildenden Künste* (Academy of Fine Arts) gave me the opportunity to continue with my love of craftsmanship during my studies in Vienna. An injury forced me to suspend my studies. My parents gave me the opportunity to receive education for becoming a pilot. I passed all the tests and failed only in the final selection for the job of a pilot for Austrian Airlines. I had already been fascinated by aviation and decided to quit my studies. In 1978, I applied successfully for the job of a Radar Air Traffic Controller for Austrian Air Traffic Control.

After completing a 4-year special training course, I have been working as an air traffic controller since 1982.

When I was a teenager, I had already started to take great interest in my father's work, not only in his main profession but also in the projects he was working on in his spare time. He introduced me to the world of violin-making, in many cases the remarkably good quality of the instruments was the result of good teamwork between my father and me. I compensated my father's musicality and store of physical knowledge with meticulousness and an eye for beauty. Unfortunately time did not allow us to work co-ordinated and together with each other. Our aims and interests were too different, probably because of the difference in age. With my father's death (in 1985) however, I began to develop an interest for mouthpieces and decided to continue with what my father had built up in his last years. Many, many times I missed both his technical understanding and wealth of ideas. Is it true that you can only value what you have lost, and what you will never have again?

I personally regard him as a titan.

I followed in his large footsteps just as it had been his wish. A fascinating world, the combination of technology and music has caught me. Just like my father I will also try to serve the music and contribute to preserve the Wiener Klangstil. Since 1988 I have a trade licence for "the production of mouthpieces for brass instruments". A great challenge as a second profession which becomes more and more fascinating every day. In 1994, I acquired a NC (numeric –controlled) turning-lathe, which advantages will indirectly be of great value for the music business in the nearer future.

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Each and every mouthpiece that I produce is dedicated to my father Karl Breslmair, to who I owe everything.

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