

German rotary valve trumpets

Report by Holger Mück

Rotary valve trumpets in Bb and C by Alexander Weimann

A very promising classic

The successful work of Alexander Weimann's enterprise is based on expertise, competence and creativity of all members of staff. High technical qualification, fine feeling and accuracy of work have made the enterprise a well-known address for brass instrument players far beyond the borders of the federal state of Thuringia. Today, the brass instrument maker Weimann can already look back at 14 years of independent and successful craftsmanship.

Alexander Weimann has found his way to brass instrument making via his love for playing the French horn. He grew up in an exceptionally musical environment. His father was a solo singer at the concert hall "Gewandhaus" in Leipzig, his sister is a bassoon player, and his brother an organ builder. He was given lessons by a musician of the concert hall Leipzig, before he started his vocational training with the highly appreciated master Syhre in 1984. Between 1989 and 1990 he was commuting between Leipzig and Markneukirchen, the stronghold of musical instrument making, and he made his master piece: a descant horn. During his three-year-distant studies as a conservator he gained specialist knowledge and experience with the restoration and replicas of historical brass instruments. For his diploma thesis he worked closely with the Museum for musical instruments in Leipzig, and he built and restored a French natural horn. A little later he went to Switzerland, in order to make new instruments and to manage a music store specialized on wind instruments.

After returning to Germany, Alexander Weimann opened a workshop for brass instruments in Frankendorf. As he wished to expand his workshop, and to create a special atmosphere for his work and sales, Weimann moved to the idyllic village of Kapellendorf (near Weimar) in May 2005. Meeting the numerous requirements of the German monument protection authorities, he restored an old farm house which he now uses as his workshop and showroom. The flair of the house wonderfully matches the artistic work, the making of high-quality brass instruments and the presentation of the instruments. In addition to his own instruments, he also displays instruments by renowned manufacturers and also small manufactures (e.g. Lechner, Austria and Spiri, Switzerland), who can hardly be found in other music shops. Here you can take your time

and try and test the instruments unhurriedly. For his sales Herr Weimann puts a high value on especially competent and sensitive consulting, individual wishes are taken very seriously. Whether it be musicians of orchestras, academies, music schools, theatres, associations, trombone choirs or private persons – they all come to his shop and they are more than welcome. With a view of the water castle, new trumpets are built here, too - very accurately and with lots of experience. Besides that, trumpets are made to individual specifications of customers, they are repaired and restored. All in all, Alexander Weimann has two employees and an apprentice.

German Bb Trumpet

For the test we were provided with a range of the most popular bells (bell diameters 130 mm and 140 mm) and three lead pipes. The heart of the trumpet is the proven Meinschmidt rotary valve with the drop-shaped touch pieces, although without the patent-registered lubricant groove. To be on the safe side, Weimann has relied on established technology. According to the managing director, in the future the machines will be equipped with grooves! Many instrument makers and musicians from all over the world favour the Meinschmidt rotary valve of nickel-silver with bronze rotors. On the one hand, it is because of its reliability, on the other hand because of its long life expectancy due to high-quality materials. Inner and outer slides consist of corrosion-resistant and saliva-resistant nickel-silver. All bells are made as one piece, and they are made of rose brass. Weimann uses the same material for his lead pipes. These are placed in a cylindrical nickel-silver tube, which is then simply put into the trumpet and can be removed with the help of the mouth piece. Similar to the lead pipe, also the bell of our test model is changeable. However, it does not work as a tuning bell construction, but it can only be used for a change between the different bells. On the lead pipe tube and the opposed outlet of the third valve, the bell can be fixed with one screw brace each, so that the bell is fixed in its place, and the player is given the feeling of having a “solidly soldered instrument”. And there is more to it – these braces have been made a hundred percent accurately, so that changing between the bells is a child’s play. All provided bells fit on the corpus without any problems. This changing device is especially interesting for the musician who wants to be flexible within his orchestra or his other fields of musical activities. The playing behaviour and the sound character of the instrument can be completely varied with a flick of the wrist.

With our test instrument, a moderate bore hole of 11.25 mm has been opted for – not too big and not too small. It goes without saying that a trigger mechanism for the 3rd slide and a water key on the crook belong to the standard equipment of this orchestral instrument. By the way, the trigger mechanism is redirected by means of MINIBAL-ball joints, which is a standard in this class. There is a slide pull knob on the first valve slide,

which can also be used for the tone regulation. On the trigger, and both, the water key and the overblow key, round cork pads have been attached in order to soften the touch. Almost a standard with German Bb-Trumpets: the overblow key for the C3. The action has been placed user-friendly and works faultlessly. Upon request all the other overblow keys (A-key, H-key) can be provided. All these accessories and also the braces are hand-forged, of course. This instrument clearly shows Alexander Weimann's enthusiasm for his profession. This instrument has been made with meticulous precision, and it is really beautiful. Even if it is just the smallest details – all of them together make a harmonic and very attractive overall picture. Perfect quality of the purchased parts, that is the machine stem and the bell, are very important to Weimann. The bells are made by Bernd Martin Sandner, a bell-manufacturer in the Vogtland district, according to Weimann's own chasing block and cut. Then they are bent and provided with the "Weimann" engraving in the workshop in Kapellendorf. All slides run exactly parallel and show excellent compression. The whole instrument is very light and feels comfortable in your hand. The trumpet leaves a perfect overall impression – best makings, first-class workmanship together with an aesthetic look without any scrollwork make this trumpet a first-class instrument.

Test of musical features

When trying out the trumpet, we limited ourselves to using the three changeable bells that have especially been designed for it. First, the 140mm bell. Alexander Weimann calls this bell "UL". The expansive shape of this bell promises the dark and rich sound that is typical for German trumpets. And that's what it is. The instrument responds very easily, and reveals its mature character of sound: big, free, centred and very rich.

From the very beginning you feel good with this trumpet and the set-up. The air flows freely through the instrument, which reacts wonderfully to the player's demands. The sound is typical for a German orchestra model, and definitely competitive with renowned manufacturers. The big bell, however, requires a certain blowing pressure, which does not get lost but converts into a big, orchestral sound. The precise response supports the musician when playing technically demanding orchestral parts, and facilitates the exact and powerful articulation of signals. The Weimann-model convinces with its outstanding playing quality when playing both, *piano* and *forte*. Neither singing passages nor bright signals in orchestral literature cause any problems. With these acoustic conditions it can easily blend with the whole orchestral sound, and totally convince in *tutti*. Its sound is well-balanced in the low and high registers, and so is the intonation. There are no so-called problem tones with this trumpet. In the basic pitch of 440 Hz the crook needs to be pulled out just less than 18mm, and still offers enough reserves for higher pitches. I am very pleased with the dark and rich sound, and so we take the second bell. With a diameter of 130mm it has the same measure as its big brother, only the bell diameter is

smaller. “UM” has been punched into the shank. Thus, the sound of the trumpet is not that big, but the tone is more orchestral, and “air consumption” is fairly much lower. “Especially students prefer this bell version”, tells us Alexander Weimann, “for the stronger blower the 140mm bell is, of course, much more interesting”. In my opinion, the trumpet is in combination with this bell particularly suitable for smaller brass ensembles or chamber music. A bigger mouth piece cup does not do any harm to the bell of the trumpet, and it compensates the sound volume a bit. For a big orchestra the 140mm bell is much better, due to its sound volume. The third bell (“BM”) has a diameter of 130mm too, but the measure is a bit narrower, and gets wider only near to the end. The behaviour of the trumpet when blowing it remains good. It responds easily and intonates without any problems. With the smaller measure its sound is richer in the overtones, and the trumpet is a bit more agile and lively. The instrument sounds more compact and centred and – if you like – a bit “more like a trumpet”.

The functionality of the Weimann model is just great: the thumb automatically finds its way to the touch piece of the lever plate for the third slide, which is easy and comfortable to use, and it provides the necessary length for the adjustment of the pitch. I would wish to have another possibility on the tuning slide to drain out the water, because if you have to be quick, removing and replacing the tuning slide might take too much time. But this is a matter of taste, and could probably be realized without problems. Designing the third slide as a so-called double slide would be recommendable, so it can be emptied without removing the trigger and the water key. The machine runs as smoothly and reliably as we expected.

Changing the lead pipe

For this test, we were provided with three lead pipes. All of them can easily be told apart because at the end of the lead pipe there is a thin stamping. Alexander Weimann chose the following labelling: “B”, “BW” and “D”. Lead pipe “D” was on the trumpet when we started the test, and it goes along with the character of the trumpet as described above. The conical lead pipe “B” makes the sound a bit wider and softer. So the tone is less centred, and that’s why this lead pipe could not really convince me. The last lead pipe of this test series, candidate “B”, centres a bit better, and the sound is a bit brighter. Here you cannot help trying it! My personal favourite was the big bell in combination with lead pipe “D” (for the test a JK mouth piece 4C was used). Mouth pieces from other manufacturers might be different in terms of response, blowing feel, and intonation. So I would just recommend that you try with your own mouth piece, and choose your favourite one from the available lead pipes.

Price

The basic price of 2,380.00 EUR for the silver-plated version includes a lead pipe and a bell of your choice. For a gold-plated bell, as we used it for the test, you will have to add 420.00 EUR. Additional lead pipes are available for 60 EUR each, an additional changeable bell for another 430.00 EUR. At the end I would like to point out one peculiarity. The lead pipe is placed in the lead pipe tube without being fixed. When removing the mouth piece it was stuck in the lead pipe, so that I could remove the mouth piece only together with the lead pipe. Alexander Weimann explains: "The lead pipes have been made accurately fitting the JK mouth pieces, so that they actually adhere to them. That is the desired effect, because when removing the mouth piece the lead pipe is automatically moved too, and will not stay in its position. From time to time, trumpet players come to my workshop because of stuck mouth pipes. If that is something annoying, the lead pipe can be fixed to the trumpet with a nut and thread."

Conclusion

It is Weimann's aim to provide each musician with an instrument that allows them to realize their individual ideas of the sound. He could definitely prove that with his trumpet model. You can actually hear the love and passion when making them. The available combinations of bells and lead pipes make it possible for you to choose and assemble your own trumpet. The workmanship of our test model is exemplary, and its musical features fulfil the highest requirements and expectations regarding the sound and playing technique. You will hardly find another music shop where they welcome you and advise you as friendly as at Alexander Weimann's place.

For a long time now, the young entrepreneur has earned an excellent reputation for his expertise and competence, particularly in the area of Thuringia, North Bavaria and Saxony. His German rotary valve trumpets are a real insider tip, and they do not have to hide behind the great names of our manufacturers – more the opposite! Weimann's instruments are already played and appreciated in renowned German orchestras and academies, and our test proved it is for good reason.

- + Best workmanship
- + Excellent intonation
- + Traditional, full-bodied concert trumpet sound
- + Excellent response
- + Wide range of lead pipes and bells

- Lead pipe should better be fixed

Product information

Manufacturer:

Musikinstrumentenbau Alexander Weimann

Model:

German Bb-Trumpet

Technical Data:

Rotary valve machine by Meinlschmidt with a patent-registered lubricant groove (Bronze/Brass),

Bore hole: 11.25 mm,

Three one-piece rose brass bells (130 mm, 140 mm),

Removable lead pipes (rose brass in nickel-silver casing),

3rd slide trigger,

Water key on the crook,

C-over blow key

Price: 2,380.00 EUR

Options:

Gold-plated bell 420.00 EUR,

Additional bell 430.00 EUR,

Additional lead pipe 60.00 EUR

www.a-weimann.de