

A few years after setting up this new working facility its founder Klaus Becker-Ehmck died. His wife who had contributed substantially during the development of the firm, carried on the traditions of the company. This family inheritance, a world-wide market and an all-encompassing program of instruments from early childhood music education to professional orchestras - is being carried on today by the second generation, the founder's son, Bernd Becker-Ehmck.



The challenge of capable hand-craftsmanship was present at the beginning, and many decades later - in spite of all the technical advances that have been made - still remains the basis for the finest quality of instrument.



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The beginning of STUDIO 49 actually goes back much further than one is led to suspect from its year of foundation in 1949. Carl Orff, who will always remain an inseparable part of the history of our firm, tells about his first experience with a xylophone in his speech given at the dedication ceremonies

for our new company. He describes how he received in 1928 a "Kaffir Piano" - at that time common language use - from some of his friends - delivered to him by a sailor from the Cameroons. It was a kind of xylophone built from a small rectangular box that still had the words "10000 Bretterstifte" (wooden pegs) printed on it.



The instrument had ten bars attached to the open side which were tied together with string. It was played with only one mallet and according to Carl Orff had an amazingly good sound. He had found the model for his own work.

It was still a long way from this so-called "Kaffir-Piano" to the xylophone, and even further to the development of other barred percussion instruments.



"Kaffir-Piano" Historic language use



Latest model xylophone AX 2000

Before the Second World War, Carl Orff and his friend Karl Maendler - a harpsichord maker - had built the first xylophone that became indispensable for teaching at the Güntherschule and for the development of Orff's Schulwerk. After 1948, the Schulwerk, with its foundations already laid way back in the 1920's, suddenly became popular. The Bavarian Broadcasting Company had aired some Schulwerk programs and started a deluge of questions about where to get these "Orff instruments". This is exactly what was missing, especially since Karl Maendler had retired from building instruments after the war. One of Orff's students, Paul Müller, introduced Orff to Klaus Becker-Ehmck, a young mechanical engineering student who actually felt more drawn toward the non-lucrative art of music - certainly no breadwinner as his carrier. This first meeting with the composer Carl Orff developed into a close personal friendship that became a long lasting partnership. Klaus Becker-Ehmck built, for example, a lithophone entirely from the ideas and wishes of Carl Orff, and also a chromatic xylophone shaped like a cradle for the premier of Orff's first Greek drama, "Antigone".

These instruments were made in the house of Klaus Becker-Ehmck's parents. A few months later our firm was founded.



The company's sign in 1949

Our first years were pressed with difficulties trying to find available and suitable materials with which to build the instruments, especially the barred percussion. A phase then followed in which the instrumentarium was expanded to comply with the ideas and wishes of Carl Orff. The demand for these instruments came very quickly and finally led to the laying of the cornerstone of our own factory in the autumn of 1956. We had departments and rooms for carpentry, metal work, lacquering, assembling, storage and business offices. Because of our experience making xylophones and other barred instruments, it was possible in 1961 for us to establish a department for the manufacture of professional orchestral instruments such as vibraphones, marimbas, concert xylophones and tubular chimes.

The continuing development of instruments, the growing variety of instruments plus a steadily climbing export business led us to a new building in 1968 in which we are housed today. In our original quarters located Am Kirchenhölzl with our 40 workers, we were pushed to the limits of our space.