

Richard Jacob and the "Weissgerber Guitar Workshop"

Richard Jacob was born in Markneukirchen on February 11th, 1877, son of the guitar-maker Karl August Jacob. As a child he was fascinated by his father's crafting of valuable and richly decorated instruments. Because of the difficult business conditions at the end of the 19th century under which the guitar-makers in Markneukirchen were working and the dependence on publishers (only the local wholesalers, called *Fortschicker*, were supplied), Richard apprenticed himself as a zither-maker (1891-1894), a branch which was then expanding and seemed to offer a good future. After some years as an assistant and in military service (1897-1899) he changed to guitar-making. At first assisting in Wilhelm Voigt's workshop, Richard Jacob became an independent guitar-maker in 1905. He worked with his father in the latter's workshop until the year of his marriage with Maria Magdalena Wächter in 1911. We know of only one instrument from his hand during the time before World War 1, but one may presume that he built all the popular models, but mostly Viennese. All his instruments were marketed by publishers, as was usual in Markneukirchen.

After returning from the Front in 1916 the experienced but still young craftsman began to design a new model-series which from then on he constantly developed. His instruments, unusual in form and decoration and with exquisite finish, soon made him stand out from the competition in Markneukirchen. The uniqueness of his products made it possible for Richard Jacob to introduce his private label in 1921 without fear of repressions from the powerful wholesalers. His sobriquet "Weissgerber" (the tower - in Markneukirchen it was and still is customary to add extra names to common surnames) remembers the work carried out for centuries by his forefathers. This stands for tradition, uniqueness and fine workmanship.

In the same year Miguel Llobet came to Markneukirchen for the first time, his second visit in 1924 brought with him the young Andrés Segovia. In particular the second appearance of the Spanish guitar-virtuoso in this town of instrument-makers, with several concerts and personal meetings, made a lasting impression upon the guitar-maker. The experience of new types of guitar and instrumental virtuosity as yet unheard in Germany led to radical re-thinking and redirected guitar-making in that country. In the mid-1920's Richard Jacob became aware that the future lay with the possibilities of different construction-techniques and abandoned the Viennese tradition completely, from about 1926 dedicating himself purely to Spanish instruments after Antonio de Torres (1817-1892). He remained faithful to this type of instrument until the end of the 1930's, although often developing and altering constructional elements and decoration.

Production of models in the classical spanish style ended around 1940. Richard Jacob spent the last two decades of his life researching new possibilities in guitar-making, using experimental and specialised construction-methods as well as borrowing historical elements in order to develop the guitar further as a concert-instrument. The most important step in the search for improvement was the introduction of fluting around the circumference of the top, and, soon after that, of the back, an idea taken from makers of bowed string-instruments by the Markneukirchen builders and adapted to the construction of concert guitars. This development peaked after 1950 in the creation of a wholly - from a constructional point of view - individual model: one which united the 60 plus years of creative experience with the tradition-aware renewal which were Jacob's. The "Grand Concert Solo" is finale and crowning achievement of a richly productive life.

Richard Jacob made guitars to the end of his life, even producing three in his last year, at the age of 83. The Master guitar maker of Markneukirchen died on July 17th 1960. His eldest son Martin (1911-1991) ran the "Weissgerber Guitar Workshop", following his father's precepts, until 1990.

The instruments of the CD.

Terzguitar Nr. 27.7.3, Brazilian rosewood/Spruce, Scale 56cm

Made in 1927

Terzguitar Nr. 029.6/7, Maple/Spruce, Scale 54cm

Made in 1927 (according to the label - probably 1929)

Attempts to extend the range of the guitar for chamber-music (e.g. for guitar-duos) are known from the early 19th century. Terz guitars from that period are found from the Stauffer-Workshops and other Viennese makers. During the 1920's a large number of orchestras of plucked instruments and chamber-groups were formed, a result of the *Wandervogelbewegung* (a youth-movement favouring social and folk music-making) and the development of amateur guitar playing in Germany. This in turn resulted in increased demand for ensemble-instruments with extended range.

Both the terz guitars and the quint bass guitar used for these recordings were built between 1927 and 1929. The fact that Richard Jacob was already making instruments for the market in orchestral and chamber groups shows that he was aware of the practical side of prevailing fashions.

Both "Weissgerber" terz guitars here presented are - typically for their date - not built in the Viennese way but in form and construction based on modern spanish

constructions. Besides the radially braced top, the deep body and the slighter back-arching, the *Knüpfsteg* (tie bridge) is a sign of that. Jacob referred to the construction of his spanish style guitars of this period "my newest, highly resonant construction", making the distinction clear between this and the rigid Viennese type. With these instruments as well, made slighter in the body relative to the overall scale, the master was aiming for the best possible sound, the required tone being noble and carrying and fit for both ensemble and the concert-hall.

Both terz guitars from 1927 and 1929 show typical signs of the great Spanish "Weissgerber" guitars of those years and are good examples of the continuous development of this series at the end of the 1920's.

Quint Bass Guitar Nr. 28.8/5, Maple/Spruce, Scale 70cm

Made in 1928

Viennese folk-music guitars (*Schrammel-Gitarren*) with extended bass-range made possible by extra strings became popular towards the end of the 19th century. Richard Jacob too built such guitars in various forms with additional freely vibrating bass strings, mostly Viennese, after 1920 the "Munich Model" and in the mid 1920's an individual creation called the *Konzert-Kontra-Gitarre*. The quint bass guitar, developed for ensemble playing at the beginning of the 20th century, made playing possible over all the strings and thus over the complete tonal range (tuning a fifth lower than the prim guitar A¹-D-G-c-e-a), in contrast to instruments with freely-vibrating bass strings. This instrument became popular in Germany after Franz Halbmeier built one in 1911 for Heinrich Albert and the Munich Guitar Quartet. In the 1920's it became the custom to add a freely-vibrating seventh string tuned to the key of the piece being played.

The quint bass guitar presented here is the only instrument known with this tuning by Richard Jacobs. The outline is that of a larger spanish model, the construction however Viennese. In 1928 the Weissgerber-Workshop had taken over the spanish method, the exception here to produce this particular type (lateral bracing, strongly arched back and *Steckersteg*) possibly caused by constructional pragmatism. The master-builder possibly found the less delicate and more solid construction better for the high string-tension and the production of powerful bass notes.

“Torres”-Model Nr. 029.6/5, Brazilian rosewood, Scale 65cm

Made in 1929

The first high-point in the evolution of spanish concert guitars in the "Weissgerber Guitar Workshop" was in 1928 the introduction of the Torres-model. From 1926 Richard Jacob had worked almost exclusively on spanish guitar-types. Two years later the instruments of this type had developed a quality of sound which came so close to that of the original that he called them after that father of modern concert-guitars, a name which during the 1920's became in Germany a synonym for spanish concert-guitars. The instrument heard here is in construction and design a typical example of "Weissgerber-Torres-Model" from around 1930.

Richard Jacob writes in his 1935 "Weissgerber"-Guitar catalogue:

TORRES-GUITAR: perfection in concert and solo-guitars.

Unbeatable for beauty and clarity of tone, with ease of playing and good tonal delivery, a typically Spanish timbre.

It is every guitarist's wish to own a TORRES-guitar. Torres, the Spanish master-craftsman, for the guitar-world comparable to Staduarius for that of the violin. The Torres-guitar is universally accepted as the most perfect. It combines all the qualities a player could require, and is played by the most famous virtuosi such as Llobet, Segovia, Pujol, Luise Walker, Mühlhölzl etc.. To make a guitar modelled on Torres, being true not only to outward appearances but also to sound-quality, construction and finish, requires a master luthier who undertakes personally every step in the construction and who understands acoustics. Understanding, patience, love and absolute dedication to his calling should be expected. Use only of the very finest materials. Large store of first-quality woods, year-long care of these with wind and sun. Co-operation with performing musicians brings success. The luthier must be able to play his instruments himself. Years of observation and development of the half, three-quarters and full sized instruments allow the luthier fully to guarantee the quality of these fine instruments. All these advantages are found in myself and in the instruments I produce, and in this field I am beyond competition. In order to make Torres-guitars available also to less financially endowed persons I produce these in several different models.

"Simplicio"-Model Nr. 34.1/2, Rio-Palisander/Spruce, Scale 65cm

Made in 1939

At the beginning of the 1930's Richard Jacob came into contact with instruments of the Catalan master-builder Francisco Simplicio (1874-1932), imported by Erwin

Schwarz-Reiflingen from Berlin. Inspired by the perfect craftsmanship, tone and overall design of these, he developed his own Spanish series further. The "Simplicio" model with head-form after Simplicios' designs became the figurehead model for that period. Richard Jacob describes the model in his guitar catalogue as follows: *My latest concert and solo-guitar Nr. 123 is the very best that German or foreign guitar-making can offer. It has in perfect measure all the qualities which a soloist could require.*

The head-stock carved by Paul Uhlemann (1906-1994) and the inlaid mother-of-pearl triangles on the bridge are the only obvious decorations. It is exactly this spareness, the darkly-stained top, the absence of a rosette and the wonderful shellac polish which give the "Simplicio" model its instantly recognisable appearance.

The instrument presented here is in all details representative of Richard Jacobs' flagship model at the end of the 1930's. In contrast to the more usual construction with German heel (dovetail) it has, like many models of the time, a Spanish heel. Interesting that the bridge has not a movable bridge saddle. Instead, the saddle on the front of the bridge is worked out of the material of the bridge.

This instrument-type marks a temporary end-point in the development of Spanish guitar-making in the "Weissgerber"-Workshops; from 1940 Richard Jacob took new roads to *"bring the concert guitar forwards"* again.

„Torres“-Model Nr. 36.4/9, Maple/Spruce, Scale 65cm

Made in 1948/51

The large Spanish model comes from a series of guitars made by Richard Jacob at the end of the 1940's. The beginning of this decade saw him already developing the guitar as a concert instrument; besides many experiments he dedicated himself from 1943 mostly to the construction of guitars with fluting top and back. An exception to this is the present instrument, a last look back at traditional Spanish construction, just before the 70-year-old master builder began designing his "Grand Solo Model".

Richard Jacob wrote in September 1951 in the "genealogy" for the guitar presented here (excerpt): *This wonderful "Weissgerber", built after the Spanish manner, with my own methods, experience and as an idealist. I began building in 1948, with pauses, but only worked on it by myself, then it was hung in air and light in my well-known art and pattern-collection, then in this year completed.*

No off-the-peg work, this, it is pure German master-craftsman's artistry, where

every part has been made with extreme care by myself and acoustically worked in. The construction is lightly resonant, in the neatest and most unusual finish, perfect beauty and stability, all the acoustical laws being exploited for ease of playing and beauty of tone.

Grand Concert Solo Nr. 36.9/5, Brazilian rosewood/Spruce, Scale 65cm

Built in 1957

>From 1950 Richard Jacob worked on the development of a new, absolutely individual concert-model, into which he poured the experience of a 60-year-career and all his knowledge. The "Grand Concert Solo" brings together traditional elements (veneered neck) and personal construction-principles (fluting, bracing, oval soundhole, proud purflings). The construction with very large but light and tension-free glued body allowed an unusually low bass resonance; instruments of this series are remarkable for a deeply singing bass, clear, silvery descant, balance and notable selectivity.

Martin Jacob describes in the "Works description" from September 9th 1988 an exactly similar guitar Nr. 37.0/5 built in 1960 (excerpt): *Because he [Richard Jacob] still thinks in traditional ways, this guitar can become a legacy. It is made after the grand Spanish concert model beginning with Torres and has a scale of 65cm. Back and body are of best Jacaranda wood and polished in natural colours. The first class top of Rumanian Spruce is also treated thus. Back and top are arched and have a low black celluloid edging, then white celluloid turnings on back, body and top, on the last a narrow black wood decoration. The edging of the lateral oval soundhole is treated like that of the top.*

Both Torres-models and the Quint Bass - previous owner of this instrument was the Leipzig guitar-teacher and publisher Walter Götze (1885-1965) - come from the estate of the Berlin guitar-didact and composer Bruno Henze (1900-1978). The "Grand Concert Solo Model" played here was first instrument of the Weimar guitarrist and teacher Roland Zimmer (1933-1993).