

Art Marshall interviews a remarkable clarinet builder

# WOLFGANG DIETZ

I have always played German system clarinets professionally and also German bass clarinets. I became the proud owner of a set of superb Herbert Wurlitzer clarinets that were built in 1972 by Mr. Herbert himself. Since my retirement in 2008 I live in the Dutch West Indies and I still teach and perform actively. That's why I felt the need for an extra Bb clarinet, without the thumb key on the bell. A Dutch colleague, who now works in Switzerland, advised me to try the Dietz clarinets. So I did in 2010 and I ordered a Bb clarinet, Orchestra model, from Wolfgang Dietz and I have been very satisfied with it, even to the point that I sold my set of H. Wurlitzers in 2011 to a Berlin clarinetist of the Light Opera and switched over to Dietz clarinets. I even bought a C clarinet which turned out to be a beautiful instrument.

My (Fritz Wurlitzer) bass clarinets ended up in Switzerland; when you're retired there is no need to keep two bass clarinets (US \$12,000) under the bed. In Curacao I was donated a much cheaper Selmer Boehm system bass clarinet to use with my students. I did some repairing on it and I must say I have learned to appreciate its performance; it's a very good instrument.

In the contacts that I had with Wolfgang Dietz he struck me by his friendliness and willingness to build clarinets based on wishes of the customer. Mr. Dietz is extremely friendly and easy-going and he disclosed to me that he played in a clarinet quartet and that they had been playing the Art Marshall arrangements. I was invited for a workshop to Germany in

"Always a personal instrument, according to your wishes"

2011 and subsequent concerts with the group and a friendship developed. I have been to Germany for three consecutive years to play in Neustadt, the Mecca of clarinet building. For this coming October, I have been asked to give a workshop for clarinet choir at Die Rother KlarinettenTage and I will again be playing with the Scorzoner Clarinet Quartet for which I have adapted my arrangements to suit a clarinet ensemble of five (three Bb clarinets, one bassethorn/alto clarinet and one bass clarinet). So far the introduction.

Mr. Dietz also builds various types of excellent handmade Boehm system clarinets and I think in this respect he has much to offer to the Boehm system player.

I will now continue with the interview proper that I had with Wolfgang Dietz while I was in Germany.

**Mr. Dietz, could you please tell me what made you decide to open your own workshop for building clarinets?**

It went like this. From 1975 until 1978 I received my professional training for woodwind instrument builder at the Herbert Wurlitzer workshop in Neustadt an der Aisch. In 1988 I did my state exam

for Master Woodwind Instrument Builder and until May 1989 I was senior co-worker at the Herbert Wurlitzer Firm. In June 1989 I started my own workshop at my home in Neustadt. That's where my initial stage as builder, repairman and complete overhaul expert began. After all those years as co-worker of Herbert Wurlitzer I had wanted to exploit my acquired knowledge and apply it to building clarinets after my own design and ideas. I also wanted to be more in direct contact with my customers instead of being confined to the workshop floor only. In those days everybody in Germany, Holland and to some extent in Austria played Wurlitzer, either German system or Reform Boehm and I felt I could create an alternative for these instruments. Personally I prefer clarinets with a dark tone and that can be achieved with a wider bore. I set out to build that type and there was also the favourite circumstance that a lot of clarinetists were looking for something other than the Wurlitzer sound. In the beginning I had an order portfolio for four clarinets of orchestral clarinetists for the solo model, even before I had finished them. I was lucky to have both professional clarinetists and student clarinetists as my clients. In the beginning the focus was on the German system Bb and A clarinets, but later the requests for Reform Boehm started to come in. (On Reform Boehm see the informative article on the Internet by Luigi Magistrelli <http://wurlitzerclarinetsamerica.com/learn/magistrelli.pdf>). In the meantime my firm has grown and I have seven co-workers including my son Ludwig. Every

| German system                                                                                             | Boehm system                    | Low G clarinets for the Turkish market | Wood types                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Bb and A, Eb clarinets and C clarinets to be played with a Bb mouthpiece D clarinets and high G clarinets | Reform Boehm Bb and A clarinets | German system and Boehm system         | African Black wood                      |
| Basset horns, alto clarinet                                                                               | French Boehm Bb and A clarinets |                                        | Mopani                                  |
| Bass clarinets, to low C automatic or with double speaker key                                             | Hybrid Boehm Bb and A clarinets |                                        | Cocobolo                                |
| <b>BORE</b> Bb clarinets available in the bore 14.6 and in wider bores ranging to 14.9mm                  |                                 |                                        | Carbon reinforced. Without silver rings |

clarinet built in my workshop in Neustadt is custom-built and handmade. We take the utmost care that the best sound and intonation is achieved and that superb key work is delivered. We also take care that the instrument speaks and plays with ease.

### Which models and types of clarinet do you build?

Well as you will see that is quite a range of types. On our website [www.dietz-klarinetten.de](http://www.dietz-klarinetten.de) you can see the pictures and read more particulars in German and English.

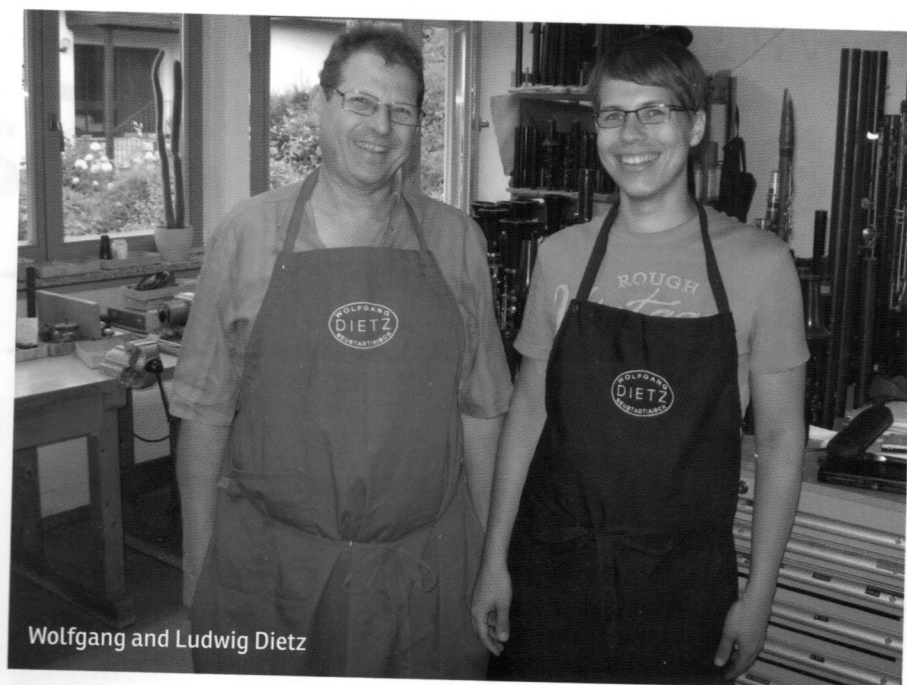
All clarinets can be equipped with a Bb correction and with thinner key work rings and, since we do exclusively handcrafted instruments, keys can be made to fit the hands and fingers of our clients.

### I heard you speak about the Hybrid Boehm system clarinet. Could you be more specific about that?

We developed the Hybrid Boehm clarinet from the regular French Boehm system clarinet and the Reform Boehm Clarinet. The Reform Boehm clarinet as you can read in the Magistrelli article is a complicated instrument that combines the German sound with the ease of the regular Boehm system. We adapted the bore and used fewer keys than the Reform Boehm and brought the Hybrid on the market with success. It is the natural link between Reform Boehm and French Boehm. It offers a surprising ease in playing. Check out our website and of course (and even much better) you are always welcome to try out the Hybrid at our workshop.

### What are the latest developments in clarinet building?

More and more one sees the carbon reinforced clarinets appearing. It means more wood and less metal on the body. It will be possible to have a wooden body with a carbon (ringless) barrel and bell. It reduces the weight of the instrument and it gives the instrument a great ease in blowing. These are very personal matters. Modern trends are in the beginning sometimes met with reluctance among clarinetists. There are advantages and disadvantages. It is however a well-known fact that



Wolfgang and Ludwig Dietz

mouthpiece and barrel can have a decisive influence on tone and pitch. It is also possible to use other kinds of wood than African Blackwood. Other kinds of wood were quite common in the past.

We also build Boehm system clarinets the way they are known, with the well-known French sound that can be heard in all countries other than Germany and Austria. Over the years the French Boehm clarinet sound has become darker; we say it has become 'Germanised'. We add an extra dimension by making the instruments and the key work handcrafted and custom-built. It is my pride to build an instrument in which my client has his own say. That's why all clients are welcome to discuss their special wishes. We will try to meet these wishes as much as possible, especially when it concerns the key work. Noteworthy here is that we even built an instrument for a person who played with right hand up!

### What future do you foresee for the German system clarinet?

The German Oehler system will remain popular in Germany and Austria. In Holland in classical music it shifted from German system to Reform Boehm with the German sound and even to some extent to French clarinet since even the world-famous Concertgebouw Orchestra became more liberal in their hiring policy. 20 years ago you were not hired with French clarinet, now that policy has been abandoned. I think mainly because of the darker tone quality that has become the fashion all over the world now combined with a certain artistic approach. There is also a tendency among specialists who play period instruments (or replicas) to turn back to the German system to extend their skills. There is of course the Reform Boehm clarinet that has bridged the gap

between the French and German sound. The rolls on the Eb/C key (in the chalumeau register G#/F) are a great help. There is also the difference in orchestra pitch to reckon with. In Germany, Austria and Holland A=442 and elsewhere 440. This phenomenon has slowed down the introduction of Reform Boehm in the USA and the UK.

Our clarinets can be built in 440 or 442 to order. Internationally I am fortunate as Dietz clarinets have found their way to: Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, USA, Mexico, Taiwan, Japan, Turkey, Holland and now also in Curacao.... by Art Marshall!

### Mr. Dietz, do you still play?

Well, yes! In fact I do and with a lot of pleasure. I started to play the clarinet in 1968 in a Youth Orchestra in Lindau am Bodensee. I studied later with Rudolph Pflaumer the famous German Apollo reed maker. After that I studied from 1975 until 1978 with Edmund Giebfried of The Nuremberg Symphony Orchestra and teacher at the Nuremberg Conservatory and later with Peter Reich of the Nuremberg Philharmonic. When I was drafted for the military I played in the Würzburg Wind Band of the Bundeswehr. Right now I play the bass clarinet/ Eb clarinet in the Scorzonera Quartet. I have started with the bassoon three years ago.

Well Mr. Dietz, or rather Wolfgang, I see there are no dull moments in your life. Thank you for the interview. I hope that many clarinetists in the UK will now have become curious to find out how a Dietz clarinet can change their lives! I advise them all to check out the website [www.dietz-klarinetten.de](http://www.dietz-klarinetten.de)