

Kruspe Horns

Anton Horner introduced Kruspe horns to America in 1902, but the name has been associated with brass instrument making much longer. Friedrich (Franz) Carl Kruspe (1808-1885) was apprenticed to Heinrich Gottlieb Streitwolf in Göttingen and opened a workshop in Mühlhausen, Germany about 1829. His older son, Eduard (1831-1918), established his own shop in 1864, taking over the shop of Carl Christian Zielsdorf, to whom he may have been apprenticed. The business has carried his name, as Ed. Kruspe, to the present day.

In 1861 Eduard's younger brother, Friedrich Wilhelm Kruspe, took over the woodwind workshop of their father. Carl Kruspe was named Hofinstrumentenmacher (Instrument Maker to the Court) in 1865. The two brothers jointly issued a catalog of brass and woodwind instruments c. 1870; the instruments were apparently intended primarily for military bands. In the last decade of the 19th century, the business shifted from mass-produced instruments for the military to higher-quality instruments for orchestras and soloists.

Eduard's son Friedrich (Fritz, ca. 1862-1909) took over in 1893. His daughter, Ilse (1873-1949), married Georg Wendler. When Fritz Kruspe died in 1909, his widow oversaw the business until their son-in-law, Georg Wendler, who had played with the Boston Symphony Orchestra for 20 years, took over in 1920. Rudi Schneider took over in 1936. Obtaining materials became ever more difficult under the East German regime after 1945, and Schneider was the only master craftsman for 20 years. Peter Heldmann eventually apprenticed at Kruspe and took over the company in 1979, retiring in 2012.

IHS Founder and Honorary Member Anton Horner (1877-1971) played in the Philadelphia Orchestra (1902-1946) and taught at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia from its founding in 1924 to 1942. He played Kruspe horns, starting with the Gumpert double. From 1902 he had the Horner model made to his specification, which he imported and sold until World War II. The design was copied by other makers, notably the Conn 8D. A letter in 1956 from Horner to Osbourne MacConathy (a Boston Symphony Orchestra hornist) describes his involvement in the development of the Horner model.

To go a little farther with the development of the double horn, I must tell you that in 1900 I was engaged to go to the Paris Exposition, and to tour Europe with Sousa's Band... So even in Berlin, my reputation had spread, and Schmidt, the horn maker, who was first in Weimar, and now had his factory in Berlin, came to talk to me. He had invented a new B-flat valve for a double horn, but could not decide what kind of mouthpiece tube was best for his new instrument. He asked me to come to his factory to help him decide. I went to his place, and after long trials of several mouthpiece tubes, I approved of one which he used on his first instruments in F and B-flat. His B-flat valve was a piston, like on a cornet, which I found very awkward to operate with the thumb.

After the Sousa tour was over, I stayed in Europe for a month to visit ... my teacher, [Friedrich] Gumpert, in Leipzig. He was delighted to see me, and when I told him that I was playing one of his nephew's inventions, he told me that he had retired two years before. ... Then I went to Erfurt to see the man who made my double horn. Krüspe had heard of Schmidt's new patent, and since his two valve affair was rather temperamental in operation, he got busy and invented the valve that is on his horn today – with minor changes. Then I ordered a new horn with his new valve, and told him that I preferred a much longer bell, and also string valves. I liked this new horn.

Later, Krüspe wrote me that he was experimenting with an all-German silver metal horn; also gold brass metal horn – here we call it copper brass. He wanted to know whether I was interested. I ordered one of each, and the first German silver horn he sent me was the one I used until my last day in the [Philadelphia] Orchestra.

The copper brass horn was also a good instrument, but for my embouchure it lacked some brilliance; for a hard and harsh embouchure it was very good. For me, the German silver was best, and that horn with a large bell with small rim, and string valves became the Horner model, which Krüspe himself named, not I.

Tatehiko Sakaino studied horn in Japan with Richard Mackey and Kaoru Chiba and in Germany with Erich Penzel and played third horn in the orchestra in Hof, Germany. After retiring from professional hornplaying, Tatehiko exported instruments from Europe to Japan and his son Katsushi eventually trained as a brass instrument builder. Subsequently Katsushi apprenticed at Kruspe under the direction of Peter Heldmann.

In the mid-2000s, under their own label, Curia Bavaria brass instruments, the Sakainos began production of two double horn of their own design, natural horns, Vienna F-horns, and rotary-valve trumpets.

Kruspe folded due to a combination of the economic issues of transitioning to the new economy after German reunification and competition from subsidized brass instrument giants in Germany as well as multi-national conglomerates. The Sakainos, father and son, bought the Kruspe name, materials, and equipment. The company makes the Horner model, the Wendler compensating double, the Leipzig single-F model, and a B-flat/F-alto horn. In the early 20th century, the Horner and Wendler models were also known as the Philadelphia and Boston models. Kruspe horns are all made in nickel-silver, brass, and gold-brass.

The workshop is in a converted barn in the village of Prienbach, near Passau in Bavaria, Germany, now with modern-day precision machining. Katsushi Sakaino builds the instruments on order only.

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