

Vicki Stoten

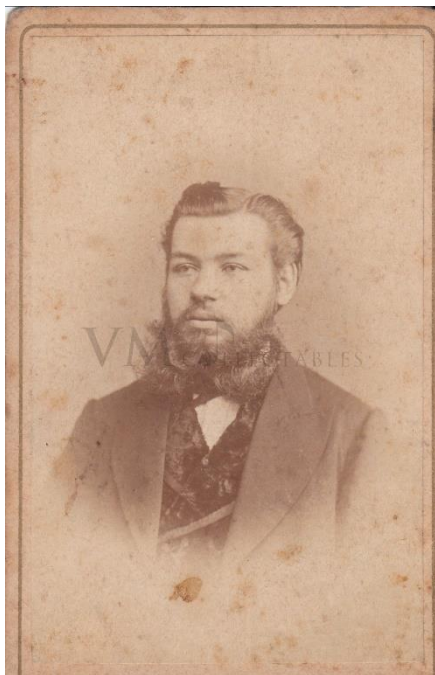
Heinrich Fiehn – the real man behind the ocarina

Anyone who plays or collects ocarinas knows the name Heinrich (or Henry) Fiehn. The internet is full of ads selling ocarinas in all shapes and sizes made by the Heinrich Fiehn factory in Vienna. It's clear from the popularity, international appeal and sheer sales volume of his products that he was a prolific entrepreneur. He seized a market opportunity at the exact right moment.

On the occasion of writing an article on ocarinas and Heinrich Fiehn for the website, a few gaps and some inconsistencies in his biography were found in all the relevant literature. One spring evening and an old marriage certificate led to the discovery of the wrong name of a bride, plus the inspiration to tell this, his story and set the record straight.

German beginnings

Karl Ernst Heinrich FIEHN was born on 4 October 1846 in Schildberg, Prussia, now



Heinrich Fiehn (Family photo archive)

Ostrzeszów in Poland. His father, Carl Friedrich FIEHN, was a master wagon maker and his mother's name was Wilhelmine HERMANN.¹ Heinrich, as we'll call him from now on, had at least one sister and one brother².

Heinrich moved south some 500 kilometres and first appeared in the Vienna directories in 1874, listed as a sculptor (in German, *Bildhauer*] at Karolinengasse 11 in the city's fourth district.³ What led him to move to Vienna is unclear, but perhaps it was in connection with the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871.



Friederike Wilhelmine RABALD (Family photo archive)

In 1873, he had married Friederike Wilhelmine RABALD on 27 April in Vienna. Friederike was born in Petersrode, Saxony 30 October 1844. Their first child, Martha Hedwig, had by that time been born on 8 December 1872.⁴

Three other interesting individuals who are important to this story also lived in Vienna at that time. Adolf Jakob KREN (1841-?) was a fellow sculptor at Mollardgasse 8.⁵ Thomas

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ZACH (1812-1892), residing at Operng. 16, sold musical items among other products.⁶ Then finally, Eduard August WITTE (1838-1910) an entrepreneur and successful glassware and porcelain dealer whose shop was on one of Vienna's most important streets... Kärntner Straße 59.⁷ But we'll come back to them later.

Ocarina mania

By this time, according to the literature⁸, the Italian 'Budrio' ocarina had been invented by Giuseppe DONATI (1836-1925). He built his clay ocarina in 1853 and would go on to experiment, making ocarinas in different shapes and sizes with various features. In 1863, he eventually succeeded in making a family of instruments that could play together in a quintet formation.

Donati formed the group 'Concerto delle Ocarine' which gave concerts nationally in Italy from around 1863 to 1869. It comprised Donati himself, Federico VIGNOLI, Ulisse AVONI, Giuseppe GROSSI and Cesare VICINELLI. The group was quite successful, but fell out with its manager and disbanded in 1870.



Donati ocarina - VM Collectables

Donati then decided to concentrate entirely on making ocarinas, so dropped out of the band. He constructed a sixth ocarina and the Montanari degli Appennini (1870-1880) group was formed.⁹ The group played at

Italian theatres as well as fairs and exhibitions, and was joined by a seventh ocarina...played by Cesare Vicinelli. A septet was born!

Then in 1873, the group began a tour abroad, which would involve travelling across Europe and even concerts in Algeria, the USA and South America. According to Alberto Mezzetti, the first stop was the Vienna World's Fair 1873. They were called the 'Ocarianer' in some Austrian newspapers and their performance in the capital must have caused quite a sensation. It is perhaps at this moment, following a concert, that Heinrich Fiehn was inspired to start experimenting and making this innovative, unusual instrument himself. As a sculptor he would have been capable of designing and constructing articles from earth and terracotta. There's no doubt that ocarina mania had definitely begun.

Nevertheless, Heinrich is still listed as a sculptor and based at Ziegelofengasse 37 in 1875.¹⁰ The year 1874 must have been such a terrible one for him and his wife Friederike, as their second daughter Augusta Ottilie was born on 19th February and died at only 10 months of age on 16 December.¹¹

The 1876 ocarina duels

An ocarina duel started in 1876 in Vienna. Thomas Zach, who may well have been the one and the same extremely successful and brilliant violin maker, moved to Vienna around that time. Thomas Zach had also taken part at the 1873 Vienna World's fair.¹² It could have been there that he came into contact with the Montanari degli Appennini. His name appears for the first time as an instrument maker with a patented ocarina in an advertisement on 28 June, 1876.¹³ The instrument was sold by M. Klingel's Comp. at Kärntnerstrasse 48. The M was for Michael;

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namely Michael Klingl, a Bavarian salesman who sold all sorts of items in Vienna. Thomas Zach claims to have started his ocarina making business in 1876. He prints sheet music and has an ocarina tutor. His model is suitable for ladies too.

In exactly the same newspaper, we see the first ad for real Italian ocarinas made by no other than Gius. Donati INVENT E FABR BUDRIO.¹⁴ The agent placing the ad and selling these *real* ocarinas was Eduard Witte. The successful entrepreneur Eduard Witte, whose company still exists today, was the agent for Donati, selling his ocarinas in Germany, Austria and Hungary with an ocarina depot. Eduard Witte seems to have been an extremely shrewd man indeed – wheeling and dealing in all sorts of wares. Born in Gera, Germany, he started importing goods in bulk from Germany and sold them through an extensive trading network across Austria.¹⁵ He even had his own mail order catalogue which he used to export his goods abroad. The ocarina was obviously another item to add to his product portfolio and the time was definitely right to make some serious money with the new instrument.

The two companies place ads throughout the year in various newspapers with claims that one is better than the other. In those days, it was of course acceptable to openly criticise and print negative comments about the competition.

It's important to note that 1876 is the same year that Heinrich Fiehn uses in all his promotional material to be the year his company was also founded. But there is no advertising or hint that he is officially making ocarinas...

What we do know is that Heinrich was a member of the Association for the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge in Vienna (Verein zur Verbreitung

naturwissenschaftlicher Kenntnisse in Wien) with the address of Weyringergasse 4 in 1876.¹⁶ His third daughter, Marie Friederike, was born there on 27 July 1876.¹⁷

1877– the mysterious M. DINARDO

In April 1877, Eduard Witte complains openly in the press that the Ocarianer didn't play concerts in Wien on original Donati instruments, which he is promoting and selling exclusively.¹⁸ He is furious! Suddenly, the newspaper Neue Freie Presse advertises in July 1877, the new Italian ocarina by a certain M. DINARDO, Bari, Italy and Vienna, sold by Eduard Witte to all countries.¹⁹ Eduard Witte has stopped selling Donati ocarinas. Later that year, in the same newspaper, the ad promotes the fact that M. DINARDO has received silver medals at the 1877 Linz and 1877 Ried trade exhibitions.²⁰ So, who was this mysterious M. DINARDO? It has not been possible to date to obtain any information about this person or company... nor the medal winners of these particular trade exhibitions.



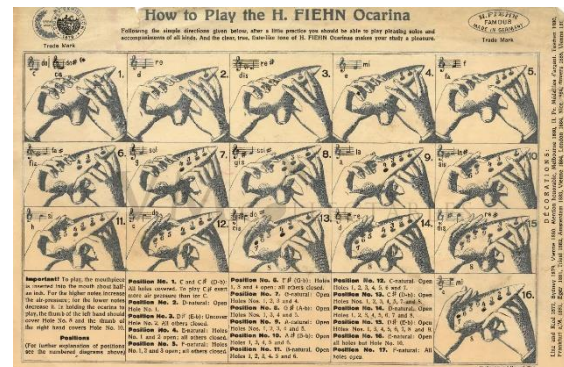
Heinrich's Fiehn's original prize medals

However, strangely enough, on 17 September 1877, Heinrich is granted a special privilege in Austria to produce a peculiar musical instrument called an 'Ocarinette-Ocarion' for a period of one year.²¹ On December 18, 1877, Heinrich is granted a fifteen-year patent in France for a special press to make ocarinas, represented by Dumas in Paris.²² Then a patent in Belgium on 30 April 1878.²³ Heinrich also went on to

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include the exact same silver medals at the 1877 Linz and Ried trade exhibitions in his future advertising. The ocarinas look very similar to the ones later produced officially by Heinrich. Dinardo sounds to some a lot like Donati... perhaps just a great marketing idea?

Maybe Eduard Witte had had enough of buying in instruments from Italy. He could have fallen out with Donati and had so many orders to fulfil with the demand he had created in the market. He needed a business partner to make the ocarinas for him... Perhaps this was a friend, an ex-army colleague, someone he knew through his porcelain and ceramic trade network...could that someone be Heinrich Fiehn? Heinrich had obviously already been experimenting and making ocarinas in the background with a view to mass producing ocarinas with a special press. So, did Heinrich and Eduard Witt start their business relationship right then? Were M. Dinardo and Heinrich Fiehn one and the same person? Eduard Witte continues with his advertising for these M. Dinardo ocarinas through 1878 and then all of a sudden, stops. Clear proof of their business relationship is that a certain Henry Fiehn, manufacturer of



How to Play the H. FIEHN Ocarina - original leaflet

musical instruments and Eduard Witte, merchant, both of Vienna, obtain a patent for a press to manufacture ocarinas on April 20, 1878 in England. ²⁴

Heinrich then begins advertising his own factory at Jahngasse 25 and brand as the first 'Erster Oesterreichster Ocarina Fabrik H. Fiehn in Wien'. ²⁵ First as in the first one or first as in the best – however you want to see it!

On the fifth day of that same September 1878, Heinrich's wife Friederike gave birth to their fourth child, Pauline. Pauline Fiehn (1878-1949) became famous in 1904 as one of the first women pharmacists permitted to work in the profession after a change in the law in 1901. She married Ludwig JAKSCH in 1907 and had no children. ²⁶

H. Fiehn in Wien

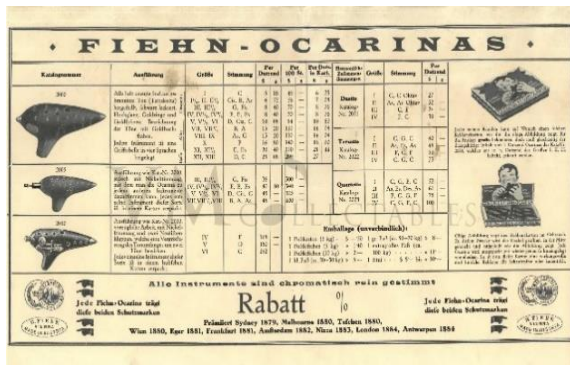
From 1878, the company H. Fiehn went from strength to strength. His product packages claimed a production of 150,000 ocarinas per year. Heinrich had not only found a way to mass produce ocarinas, but he had also won the support of the Austrian musician and Kapellmeister, Philipp FAHRBACH Sr. (1815-1885). In 1878, Philipp Fahrbach wrote the instruction manual or tutor for the ocarina *Anleitung zur Erlernung der Ocarina* and compositions for ensemble playing from the trio to the septet. The tutor assured readers



Heinrich Fiehn (Family photo archive)

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that it was possible to teach yourself to play the ocarina in just one hour! Another composer with quite a dubious name, Ernesto ERNESTINI, also composed some pieces for the ocarina, which were published by Fiehn & Co in the same year.



FIEHN OCARINAS – original advertising leaflet

Fiehn would develop his own range of up to 28 sizes of ocarina in many keys. The design for his terracotta ocarinas featured a stunning black glaze with gold lettering and decoration. The ocarinas were also produced in other colours such as red or green. This style of ocarina was described as the 'Viennese model'. What rocketed his business to success was his participation and prizes won at the World Exhibition in Sydney Australia in 1879. From that moment on, Fiehn ocarinas were all stamped with the exhibition logo, detailing the prizes.

Adolf Kren and Heinrich Fiehn – sculptors-in-arms

Another ocarina producing company is claimed to have been founded in that same 1876 in Vienna by our third interesting individual, Adolf Kren or Krehn. This historical detail would have no relevance in this story, were it not for a late-night stumble over Lehmann's Vienna directory for 1880.²⁷ We see that at the address of Obere Amtshausgasse 12, there is a porcelain doll's head factory registered under the names of

A. Kren and H. Fiehn. What is more, later in 1880, Fiehn is mentioned as an exhibitor with an ocarina concert at the 1880 Vienna exhibition.²⁸ His ocarina workshop is clearly mentioned with the same Obere Amtshausgasse 12 address. Adolf Kren and Heinrich Fiehn most likely worked together on making the dolls heads first to later design the Vienna model together. The address books provide us with no further information about this relationship before or after 1880.

All we know is that later that decade, Adolf Kren was working on his own and by 1883 had his own advertising as an ocarina producer.²⁹

Tuning slides and keys

In 1881, Heinrich registered a patent for a tuning slide for his ocarinas.³⁰ The tuning slide was a hollow metal tube 'used to adjust the tones up and down'. For example, the tuning slide was pulled outwards to increase the internal volume of the ocarina's resonating chamber. The pitch was therefore lowered. Tuning slides enabled the ocarinas to play in tune with other instruments like the piano. Heinrich also added two nickel silver keys to some of his ocarina models for playing high F# and G.



Fiehn tuning slide and keyed ocarinas – VM Collectables

By this time, Heinrich Fiehn's factory was at Spengergasse 23 where his fifth child and

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only son Heinrich Gustav Adolf was born on 6 January 1883.³¹ Heinrich Gustav Adolf Fiehn (1883-1936) never worked in his father's business, but instead moved out of his home city and worked south of Vienna for the postal service in Buckligen Welt and Burgenland. He married and had two children.

Home-grown competition

Heinrich's ocarina factory had moved to Hofgasse 4 by 1885³² where it stayed several years until the final move to what would be a colossal factory sometime around 1895 at Tivoligasse 48.³³ Sales were obviously booming and Heinrich racked up one award after another.³⁴ He had a branch in Frankfurt.³⁵ He even distributed his ocarinas via mail order in the Sears, Roebuch & Co and Montgomery Ward catalogues in the USA in the 1890s. But he wasn't the only one who wanted a piece of the ocarina action! Thomas Zach, Heinrich's strongest competitor sadly died in 1892. Other competitors sprouted up over the coming years in Vienna. Alongside his former colleague Adolf Krenn, were Anton PANKRATZ, Martin KRENN, Carl WUNDERLICH (with his EWA brand), Karl POIS and Eduard MÜLLER.



Charles MATHIEU metal ocarina - VM Collectables

There were also competitors in other countries, including Charles MATHIEU in France, Max Freyer & Co in Germany and of course the brothers Ercole & Alberto MEZZETTI in France and the UK.

Friederike Fiehn

Heinrich's work and success were of course shared by his wife Friederike. She worked extremely hard for the family and the business. She would go with the factory employees to the Wienerberg, a mountain ridge on the southern edge of Vienna, to obtain clay from the clay pits to make the ocarinas. These clay pits were several kilometres away from the factory. The clay would then be brought to the factory in baskets on their backs. It was an exhausting job. Her last publicised whereabouts was her name on the spa and tourist list of the spa town of Baden near Vienna on 26 August 1894 where she stayed at the Hotel Schwarzer Bock. We can only assume she was by then very sick and went there to take the waters. It is not known when she died; however, it is understood that she died of tuberculosis.

Second marriage - Berta

Heinrich married again on 20 November 1898. His bride was Bertha or Berta FREISINGER who was born in Vienna on 21 May 1871.



Berta Fiehn, Heinrich's second wife (Family photo archive)

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Berta Fiehn (daughter), Berta Fiehn (mother and Heinrich's second wife), Heinrich Fiehn, Pauline Fiehn (daughter from first marriage with Friederike), (Family photo archive)

She was a spinster and 25 years younger than Heinrich when they married.

Then, very quickly Berta Fiehn became pregnant. On 25 May 1901, their first and only child was born... Berta Maria Wilhelmina – she would be the second Berta FIEHN! ³⁶

The six series of success

Before the outbreak of WW1, the Heinrich Fiehn factory was making ocarinas in six different categories. According to the company's advertising, the first was very cheap, but with a full and clear chromatic tone. The second series had the same design as the first but comprised all accompaniment and bass instruments. The third series included ocarinas with tuning slides and/or keys which could be tuned to play with other instruments. The excellence already demonstrated by the fourth series made it perfect for concert players and artists. The

fifth and best model of the company had ivory mouth pieces enabling a more comfortable holding and easier embouchure. The sixth series included chromatically tuned ocarinas in different keys for playing the simplest duet to large orchestral pieces.



Fiehn ocarinas – VM Collectables

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Heinrich Fiehn's death and successors

From later family correspondence³⁷, it is clear that business was booming and everything was going well until one of Heinrich's workers turned against him. In 1913-14, after 30 years of employment, a young woodturner wanted more money and a cut of all finished ocarina sales. There were disputes and he resigned to go to work for the competition. Heinrich realised when the worker had left that several models and production articles were missing from the factory and so he sued him. But nothing was found during a search of the worker's house. These events and emotional repercussions caused Heinrich to suffer a stroke, which left him paralysed and confined to his armchair for seven years.

His wife Berta Fiehn was then left alone to take care of the business and her sick husband. Times were difficult since WWI had broken out and businesses were at a standstill, especially in terms of exports. She withdrew the claim against the worker.

Heinrich died at the age of 73 on 1st April 1920 in Vienna. He died of *Altersbrand*, or gangrena senilis, senile gangrene, which is a type of necrosis caused by cardiovascular changes that occurs in old people.³⁸ On his death, his widow Berta Fiehn continued the business. She was approached many times



Ocarina production at the ocarina factory Heinrich Fiehn, Tivoligasse 48, in the 1930s - Bezirksmuseum Meidling

by Eduard Muller, the trained harmonica maker, who had intentions on the Fiehn factory and house. Sadly, just two years later Berta Fiehn died on the same day of the same month (1st April 1922) of a cerebral haemorrhage.³⁹

Heinrich's daughter Berta Fiehn inherited the whole company, home and business premises. Heinrich's surviving children from his first marriage received some inheritance money. Berta Fiehn was approached by Eduard Muller. He was unsuccessful in his attempts to acquire the business and house. He then reported Berta Fiehn to the Cooperative of Musical Instrument Makers so it would initiate a lawsuit because she did not have the necessary permit to make ocarinas. The business was registered as a factory.



Ocarina production at the ocarina factory Heinrich Fiehn, Tivoligasse 48, in the 1930s - Bezirksmuseum Meidling

On 27 August 1922, Berta married the technician, Erich KROMBAS.⁴⁰ Erich Krombas had been working for her father for many years and knew how to make an ocarina from start to finish.

The pair continued on with the ocarina factory right up to the start of World War II. Then Erich Krombas was drafted into the army and spent five years on the battlefield before being held captive in Russia. Berta, now Krombas's, level of English was so high that at the end of the war, she was employed as an interpreter by the American War Department at the Headquarters Military

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Government Land Salzburg. In November 1947, Erich Krombas was back in Vienna in the hope of rescuing his marriage and the ocarina factory. In his absence, however; Berta Krombas had fallen in love with his cousin Homo Johann Wolfgang Ritter von Spaun. The ocarina factory had been plundered and almost all the tools had been taken. Furthermore, Berta Krombas was against continuing with the factory. So, in June 1948, they divorced and later that year in August, Berta Krombas married Homo Johann Wolfgang Ritter von Spaun.

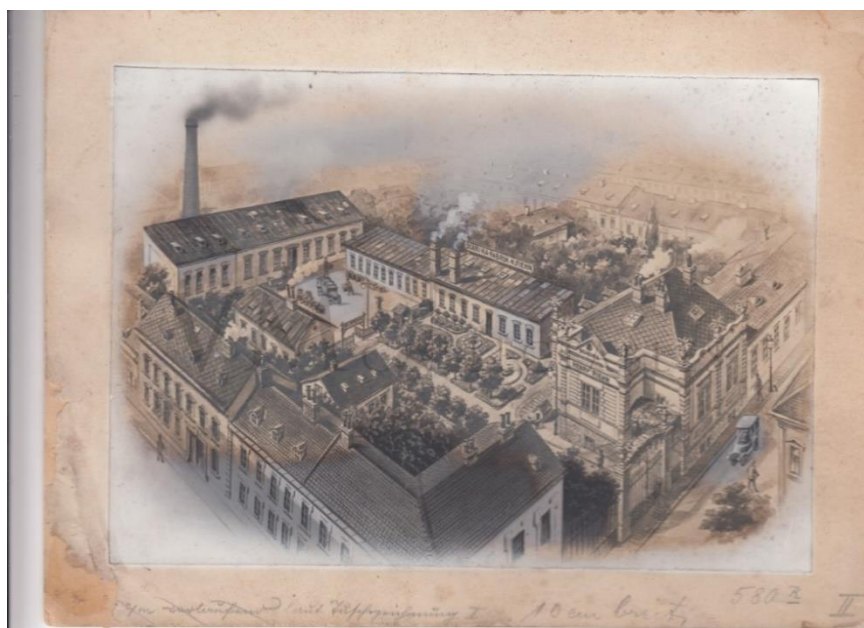
With that, the factory came to an abrupt end. The factory buildings were then used for some time by a construction materials company. Erich Krombas moved out of the Tivoligasse and worked as a transport worker, then married again and died in 1969. Berta died on 30 January 1975, followed by her husband Homo two years later.⁴¹

The legacy

The ocarina gained tremendous popularity in Austria, especially in middle-class Vienna, but also worldwide thanks to the work of Heinrich Fiehn and the success of his ocarina factory. It is a shame that the instrument lost popularity, partly due to the Second World War, and nearly fell into obscurity. What remains is the legacy of this innovative craftsman and shrewd businessman that is Heinrich or Henry Fiehn and now a truer account of his life.

Special thanks

Special thanks are due to many in Vienna for their help in writing this article. A big thank you goes to the staff at the Bezirksmuseum Meidling for the use of their photos. Also, worthy of many thanks for their patience and expertise are the team members at the Evangelische Pfarrgemeinde A.B. in Vienna. Günter Nikles is a star – thanks Günter! But finally, the biggest thanks go to the surviving family of Heinrich Fiehn to whom I dedicate this article.



OCARINA FABRIK H. FIEHN (Family photo archive)

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Notes

¹ Birth, marriage and death certificates held by the Evangelische Pfarrgemeinde A.B. (Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession) in Vienna.

² Also Ancestry.com.

³ Adolph Lehmann's *allgemeiner Wohnungs-Anzeiger: nebst Handels- u. Gewerbe-Adressbuch für d. k.k. Reichshaupt- u. Residenzstadt Wien u. Umgebung, 1874*, p.164.

⁴ Birth, marriage and death certificates held by the Evangelische Pfarrgemeinde A.B. (Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession) in Vienna.

⁵ Adolph Lehmann's *allgemeiner Wohnungs-Anzeiger: nebst Handels- u. Gewerbe-Adressbuch für d. k.k. Reichshaupt- u. Residenzstadt Wien u. Umgebung, 1874*, p.308.

⁶ *ibid.* p.792.

⁷ *ibid.* p.590.

⁸ Claudio Cedroni, *The Ocarina Septet History of an Italian Tradition*.

⁹ Led by Giuseppe Grossi, the members of the group were Alberto Mezzetti, Ercole Mezzeti, Ulisse Avoni, Federico Vignoli and Davide Mignani.

¹⁰ Adolph Lehmann's *allgemeiner Wohnungs-Anzeiger: nebst Handels- u. Gewerbe-Adressbuch für d. k.k. Reichshaupt- u. Residenzstadt Wien u. Umgebung: (1875)*, p.159.

¹¹ Birth, marriage and death certificates held by the Evangelische Pfarrgemeinde A.B. (Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession) in Vienna.

¹² Willibald Leo Freiherr von Lütgendorff, *Die Geigen und Lautenmacher vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, p.569.

¹³ *Gemeinde-Zeitung: unabhängiges politisches Journal*, 28 June 1876, p.15.

¹⁴ *ibid.* p.20.

¹⁵ https://www.biographien.ac.at/oeb1/oeb1_W/Witte_Eduard-August_1838_1910.xml

¹⁶ *Schriften der Vereines zur Verbreitung Naturwissenschaftlicher Kenntnisse in Wien*, Volume 2, p. XIX

¹⁷ Birth, marriage and death certificates held by the Evangelische Pfarrgemeinde A.B. (Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession) in Vienna.

¹⁸ *Gemeinde-Zeitung: unabhängiges politisches Journal*, 26 April 1877, p.7.

¹⁹ *Neue Freie Presse*, 9 July 1877, p.4

²⁰ *Neue Freie Presse*, 13 October 1877, p.12.

²¹ *Wiener Zeitung*, 31 October 1877, p.15.

²² *Bulletin des lois de la République française*, Volume 18, 1879, p. 126.

²³ *The Commissioners of Patents' Journal*, 1878, p.1159.

²⁴ *The Commissioners of Patents' Journal*, 1878, p.1396.

²⁵ *Neuigkeits Welt-Blatt*, 12 September 1878, p. 8.

²⁶ Birth, marriage and death certificates held by the Evangelische Pfarrgemeinde A.B. (Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession) in Vienna.

²⁷ Adolph Lehmann's *allgemeiner Wohnungs-Anzeiger: nebst Handels- u. Gewerbe-Adressbuch für d. k.k. Reichshaupt- u. Residenzstadt Wien u. Umgebung, 1880*, p.1327.

²⁸ *Österreichisch-ungarische Cafe- und Gasthaus-Zeitung*, 1880, Vol. 16, p.3

²⁹ *Österreichische Kunst-Chronik*, 15 Dec 1883, p.20

³⁰ H. FIEHN in Wien, Patentschrift No 16668, Vienna, 15 Mar 1881.

³¹ Birth, marriage and death certificates held by the Evangelische Pfarrgemeinde A.B. (Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession) in Vienna.

³² Adolph Lehmann's *allgemeiner Wohnungs-Anzeiger: nebst Handels- u. Gewerbe-Adressbuch für d. k.k. Reichshaupt- u. Residenzstadt Wien u. Umgebung, 1885*, p.1419.

³³ Adolph Lehmann's *allgemeiner Wohnungs-Anzeiger: nebst Handels- u. Gewerbe-Adressbuch für d. k.k. Reichshaupt- u. Residenzstadt Wien u. Umgebung, 1895*, p.XXII.

³⁴ Linz & Ried 1877, Sydney 1879, Vienna 1880, Melbourne 1880, Teschen (Cieszyn) 1880, Frankfurt a/M 1881, Eger 1881, Triest 1882, Amsterdam 1883, Vienna 1884, London 1884, Nice 1884, Antwerp 1885, Vienna 1888, according to *Anleitung zur Erlernung der Ocarina*.

³⁵ Günter Dullat, *Verzeichnis der Holz- und Metallblasinstrumentenmacher auf deutschsprachigem Gebiet*, p.144.

³⁶ Birth, marriage and death certificates held by the Evangelische Pfarrgemeinde A.B. (Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession) in Vienna.

³⁷ A letter written to the local authorities by Berta Krombas 12.05.1923 explaining why Berta and her husband Erich Krombas should be allowed with a permit to build ocarinas.

³⁸ Birth, marriage and death certificates held by the Evangelische Pfarrgemeinde A.B. (Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession) in Vienna.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ According to surviving family members and personal correspondence.