

*Journal of the
American Musical
Instrument Society*

VOLUME XX • 1994



Copyright by the [American Musical Instrument Society](#).
Content may be used in accordance with the principles of fair
use under [Section 107 of the United States Copyright Act](#).
Content may not be reproduced for commercial purposes.

Josef and Reiner Hammerl, eds. *Geigenlacke: Wissenwertes über Harze und Grundstoffe für Geigenlacke sowie Ratschläge zur Lackierung*. Fachbuchreihe *Das Musikinstrument*, no. 47. Frankfurt am Main: Edwin Bochinsky, 1988. 127 pp. ISBN: 3-923639-76-7. DM 58.

This is not just another dream discourse on the “secrets” of old Italian varnish. *Geigenlacke* discusses in a straightforward way varnishes and finishes that are available to the string instrument maker of today. The material is based on the Hammerls’ formidable practical experience in this area.

Chapters one to four of the book discuss raw materials, each of which is presented under its own subheading. Altogether there are listed some five dozen substances, averaging less than one page each. There is a certain clarity in this method of organization, but the telegraphic writing style and the frequent single-sentence paragraphs hinder the flow of the text. Much of the information is important, such as the descriptions of the dissolving properties of the substances. Unfortunately, this importance is often obscured by tidbits of little practical value.

It is in the second section of the book that the authors are most at home in their presentation. The text here runs smoothly as they describe the various stages of the varnish application process, beginning with the initial treatment of the wood and ending with a discussion of polishing. An apprentice maker would do well to consult this section often; it is both informative and a pleasure for the curious browser. For those who do not already have a fair knowledge of varnishes and finishes, the many German technical terms may prove difficult.

Geigenlacke has deficiencies as a reference book; for example, the inadequate index gives the page numbers of only the book’s subheadings. The large type, the relatively small number of lines per page, the subheading format, and the short paragraph length spread the text over many more pages than necessary, some ninety-seven in all. At fifty-eight deutsche Marks the book may therefore prove too expensive for many readers. There is no doubt that the authors are experts on their subject. I know of no source containing more raw data on varnishes and finishes than are presented here. How much more valuable this book would have been if the data had been more effectively transformed for reference or browsing. *Geigenlacke* has much valuable information, but the reader must work to extract it.

LEE BRENTLINGER

GRADUATE CENTER OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK