

Musical String

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Manufacturers

Jenny Nex

In the days when any kind of waste meant a loss of income, it was crucial that all parts of any source were used to the full. In butchery, every component of the animal in question was turned into a different product, depending on the physical qualities of the tissue and what was wanted in the finished object. Guts, being strong but flexible, were very useful and were used for a variety of items including sausage skins, bow strings, tennis strings, surgical sutures and musical instrument strings. The science of musical gut string making is being researched and rediscovered in order to provide strings for musicians working with period instruments.¹ Although a number of sources tell us something about the manufacturing processes, the best known being the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot & D'Alembert,² little is known about the makers themselves.

Michael Fleming has discovered that there were string makers active in London in the seventeenth century, and has uncovered information concerning Orlando Gibbons and four other musicians who applied in 1622 for a monopoly on making strings for musical instruments.³ They were unsuccessful, and an attempt

in London in the 18th and
19th Centuries

was made in 1637 to form instead a corporation of string makers which would oversee and maintain the quality and workmanship in the trade. Again this did not come to pass, but this information indicates that there was indeed string making going on, and that at least some individuals felt it important enough to propose the formalisation of the trade.

Little evidence of activity has so far been found from the early eighteenth century but, in 1759, Henrietta Laroach wrote to the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (Royal Society of Arts), to ask them for support for her method of string manufacture. Laroach's first letter outlines her process:

it Being a Specimen of Sheeps Gutt Both weet and dry Clensd and preserved By a most Curious Art which makes them Dry a most Beautiful Amber and perfect Transparency and Being well Bound occations A Solid hardness which Renders them fitt for the Violin and all other String Musick which makes them Equal with the Best Roman String Ever Imported from Italie which takes at least