

HISTORICAL INSTRUMENT SECTION

Craig Kridel and Clifford Bevan, Editors

Museums by Arnold Myers

In the world of musical museums, the event of the year—and probably of the decade—has been the opening of the Musée de la Musique, Paris in January 1997. The core of the collection, which dates back to 1793, has come from the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique, whose former museum closed its doors in 1990.

The new display, of one the finest collections of musical instruments anywhere, is in an extravagantly impressive building designed for it as part of the Cité de la Musique, itself is a statement about the importance attached to the music by the French government. The display clearly and very elegantly exploits state-of-the-art museum techniques—the sound system is particularly well implemented. The staff who have been working on this project since 1981, are to be congratulated on creating one of the world's foremost musical museums, and doing it in great style.

In the display of over 900 instruments, the low brass have a strong presence, reflecting the contribution France has made to the development of our family of instruments. One has only to think of the invention of the serpent, many of its derivatives, the ophicleide, the clavicorn, and compensating valves, all associated with France and all represented by one or more examples in the new galleries. The variations on the serpent theme are much in

evidence: the *basson russe*, the serpent *Forveille* and the serpent *militaire*, as well as other low brass that was widely used at one time. Also shown are numerous instruments from the Adolphe Sax workshop including various bass and contra-bass saxhorns. Curiously, however, the orchestral tuba in eight-foot C with six valves, at one time the standard model in France, is absent.

The commonly heard notion that the serpent is the bass of the cornett family is refuted by the presence here of a true bass cornett. This bears the much the same relation to the serpent as does a valve trombone to a euphonium.

As well as showing instruments that have fallen out of use, the display here as in many museums includes examples of instruments that are interesting as inventions, but that have seen relatively little actual use, such as the *sudrephones* and Sax's six-valve independent piston models. In fact, many museums do not

hesitate to show “unsuccessful” instruments alongside onetime mainstream instruments, sometimes without this difference being mentioned in the labeling. If failed inventions and curiosities are shown in museums, they need to be properly explained to visitors. The main reasons for failure are technical inadequacy and misjudgment of the market.

Of course, if something is sufficiently unusual, it cannot fail to make an attractive addition to a display. Alongside the many important historic brass instruments in the Musikinstrumentenmuseum of Markneukirchen in Vogtland, Germany, is their unique natural tuba. This will be familiar to tubists who attended the XXXI Internationaler Instrumentalwettbewerb (the horn and tuba competition) in Markneukirchen in May 1996.

This arresting instrument, the first item one sees on entering the museum, is the straight, valveless B-flat tuba made by



➤ Emil Köerner (centre) in his tuba-making workshop, 1913



◀ The Natural Tuba of Markneukirchen on the procession float of the Hornmakers' Guild in 1933

Ernst Emil Köerner (1885-1945). The bell was made as his masterpiece (and to win a bet) at the end of his apprenticeship in 1913. He finished the instrument in 1928, and gave it to the sportsmen of Markneukirchen for a festival of sports in Cologne that year—two athletes carried it

and another blew it—the original repertoire is unknown!

Its total length is adjustable from 4.65 to 5.2 metres (15 to 17 feet) and the bell diameter is 1020 mm (40 inches). Is this the largest bell ever made for any brass instrument? Certainly in its museum

home it is unlikely that members of the public will mistake this magnificent showpiece for a typical instrument of bygone days.

The Streitwieser Collection, formerly the Trumpet Museum in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, has now re-opened as the Instrumentenmuseum at Schloss Kremsegg in Kremsmünster, Upper Austria. So far, only a third of the brass instruments—totaling over 1000—are on display, but more will be shown in the future. The name *Trumpet Museum* was, from its beginning in 1980, a bit misleading, because brass instruments of all kinds were shown. In its new home, musical instruments of many kinds from all over the world have been added to the brasswind.

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