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By Arnold Myers
Museums

Historical Instrument Section

The Mystery of the Missing Tuba

Adolphe Sax is credited with bringing order to the diverse sprawl of intermediate-bore brasswinds by inventing the saxhorns as a "homogenous family" of instruments. In fact, the saxhorns form two distinct families, the narrow-bore (sur-aigu, soprano, contralto, tenor and baritone) and the wide-bore (bass, contrabasses):

Saxhorn sur-aigu	2-ft C or 2 1/4 ft B-flat
Saxhorn soprano	3-ft F or 3 3/4 ft E-flat
Saxhorn contralto	4-ft C or 4 1/2 ft B-flat
Saxhorn ténor	6-ft F or 6 1/2 ft E-flat
Saxhorn baryton	8-ft C or 9-ft B-flat
Saxhorn basse	8-ft C or 9-ft B-flat
Saxhorn contrebasse	12-ft F or 13-ft E-flat
Saxhorn contrebasse	16-ft C or 18-ft B-flat

The baritone and the bass are the same pitch, distinguished only by bore calibre.

Of these, the tenor and baritone saxhorns are currently in use with these names, and the bass and contrabasses are in use but known as euphonium and tubas. Looking at surviving museum instruments, there are numerous examples of most of these, though the very smallest is rare. There are also small instruments of wide bore profile, known as flugelhorns.

The mystery is the lack of a wide-bore instrument at 6-ft F or 6 1/2-ft E-flat tenor pitch. Sax and other makers such as Cervený must surely have experimented with these, and rejected them for some reason. It is significant that this gap occurs at a medium-sized tube length, with successful family members above and below. The very highest and lowest members of any family of instruments are always of doubtful viability for a variety of reasons, but to have a gap in the middle is unusual!

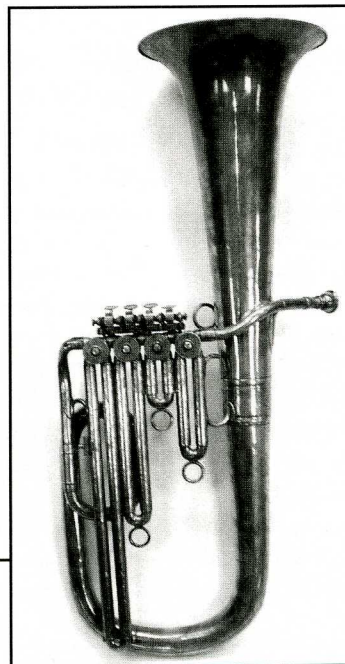
One could argue that the need for distinct voices in the brasswind of this tessitura was satisfied by the ready availability of tenor saxhorns and french horns. However, tenor and baritone saxhorns are perceived as rather weak instruments. As a solo voice, the bass saxhorn (or

euphonium) has always been preferred to the baritone. Why did the wide-bore tenor not survive amongst the fittest?

Recent studies in the museum collection of Boosey & Hawkes have identified what may be the sole survivor of this extinct species. It is an instrument of tenor horn size but with a much wider bore profile: the bore at the valves is

13.2mm (the usual tenor saxhorn bore is c 11.5mm at the valves). It was made by Henry Distin in London, circa 1860. The Distin family were at one time agents

Instrument in 6 1/2 ft E-flat by Henry Distin, circa 1860 (Museum of Boosey & Hawkes)



for Sax in Britain, but lost the agency when they started making their own instruments. From this time, they ceased using the word "saxhorn" in their advertising materials. The factory records of Henry Distin do not survive, but from 1868 (when Henry Distin's business was bought by Boosey & Co) complete records of all instruments from this

factory survive.

Boosey operated this business for six years as Distin & Co before stamping their own name and numbers on instruments. These archival records show that in the period from June 1868 to 1917, fourteen instruments of a kind described as "E-flat Tenor Euphonium" were made (see Table 1 on next page).

None of these fourteen is known to survive – unless one of our readers out there is harbouring one. Could they have

been a comparable model to the earlier Henry Distin instrument in the Boosey & Hawkes museum collection? At present we do not know if the "Tenor Euphonium" was invented by Distin or copied from one of Adolphe Sax's designs. If the latter, we do not know what Sax called this model but, if it had been some variety of "saxhorn," then Distin would certainly have found a different name for his copy.

As a museum object, there was no interest in the Distin tenor euphonium until recently when it was measured and found to be of unusually wide bore profile for a tenor horn (its catalogue description). It may be that many further museum instruments are not recognised for what they truly are.

Table 1.

Completed 13 Mar 1869	D & Co serial number 20539	sold 16 Mar 1869 to 100th Regt
Completed 31 Jul 1869	D & Co serial number 20629	sold 23 Jul 1870 to 77th Regiment
	B & Co stock number 12540 26 Jul 1870	
Started 1 Aug 1870	D & Co serial number 22014	sold 9 Aug 1871 to 33rd Regiment
	B & Co stock number 12540 9 Aug 1871	
Completed 19 Sep 1871	B & Co serial number 12950	sold 30 Sep 1871 to HH The Guicoar of Baurdk [?]
Completed 19 Sep 1871	B & Co serial number 12951	sold 30 Sep 1871 to HH The Guicoar of Baurdk [?]
Started 12 Sep 1870	D & Co serial number 22140	(unsold by 31 Dec 1885, no mention at 31 Dec 1895)
	B & Co stock number 14062 2 Apr 1874	
Started 12 Sep 1870	D & Co serial number 22408	Completed 25 Oct 1870; sold 25 Oct 1870 to Royal Marines
Started 4 Oct 1870	D & Co serial number 23781	sold 11 Nov 1871 to 50th Regiment
	B & Co stock number 13045 9 Nov 1871	
Started 14 Dec 1874	B & Co serial number 15393	Completed 18 Dec 1874; sold 19 Dec 1874 to 1st Aberdeen R.V. [?]
Started 26 Jun 1876	B & Co serial number 17964	Completed 30 Jun 1876 (sold by 31 Dec 1881)
Started 4 Dec 1876	B & Co serial number 18612	Completed 14 Dec 1876 (sold by 31 Dec 1881)
Started 11 Mar 1881	B & Co serial number 25875	Completed 22 Mar 1881 (sold by 31 Dec 1881)
Started 21 Aug 1902	B & Co serial number 63211	Completed 27 Aug 1902
Started 13 Jun 1917	B & Co serial number 101740	Completed 10 Jul 1917

Museum News: The most important event in the musical museum world in the last year has been the opening of the new Music Gallery at the Horniman Museum, London. Many brass instruments are on display amongst 1,500 musical instruments of all places and periods. The most dazzling are perhaps the low and high karnai acquired in Uzbekistan in 1999: long brass trumpets with large whorled bosses which are featured in the bands

that announce important public events ranging from village weddings to performances by troupes of travelling acrobats. A collection of over 100 European brass instruments is displayed in accordance with the intentions of the donor, Adam Carse. The gallery incorporates interactive stations, featuring recordings of music that is contemporary with the instruments in the showcases. Most of the recordings demonstrate the

sounds of historic instruments. Visitors in some cases have the opportunity to contrast the old with the new: they are invited to compare the sound of the ophicleide playing the "Dies irae" theme from the last movement of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* performed on period instruments, with the tuba used in a recording of the work by the LSO. ♪

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