

# Clarinet & Saxophone

Autumn 2014 Volume 39, No 3

TWO  
EVENTS  
IN  
ONE!



Period Pieces



Vintage Sax

## Haileybury

Full news of another  
great playday -  
Sunday, 19th October



Debussy *Première Rhapsodie* insight  
Playing to your strengths new syllabus  
Drums and rock'n'roll Adolphe Sax at 200

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Example 1 Mozart Clarinet Concerto 1st movement bars 57-64



Example 2A Mozart Clarinet Concerto 3rd movement bars 1-8



Example 2B Mozart Clarinet Concerto 3rd movement bars 16-23



piano (K. 498), you have to be very careful on modern instruments not to overwhelm the viola. On early instruments the problem is that the clarinet and viola players tend to kill the piano. These are the sorts of differences that are really fascinating."

So what happens when you play a programme comprising works from opposite ends of the period performance timeline – do you change clarinets? "I have done concerts where I've switched from one instrument to another", Pay tells me. "We played some Berlioz and Wagner, and I played a French instrument then a German instrument, but the difficulties in terms of warming up and using different reeds start to get large as soon as you're doing anything very complicated. On the whole I'll make a compromise, so if I'm playing Mozart followed by Beethoven I'll use an instrument with more keys on it than the five-key clarinet that would have been used in Mozart's time, and I simply won't use the extra keys. Some people are very purist about it, but I think the considerations about how you phrase things are more important and interesting than considerations about exactly what pieces of mechanism you are using in order to phrase them."

Phrasing is a subject on which Pay has given a great deal of thought, contributing articles to the *Cambridge Companion to the Clarinet* and the *Early Music* journal. "What I think about Classical music [that is music largely composed from around 1730-1810, rather than the generic term 'classical'] is that it is better played 'spoken' than 'sung'," Pay tells me. "It seems to me that we're brought up to think of music in a very *directional* way with the phrase always moving towards something. You look at a phrase and ask, 'Where does it go?' This is essentially what we mean nowadays when we talk about musicality, and playing from the heart. When we play Baroque and Classical music of course we still need to play from the heart, but we have to grow another heart and learn a new kind of musicality which is less destination orientated. What I mean by playing in a more spoken way is that the individual syllables of someone *speaking* never have an internal sense of forward direction – each syllable rather 'comes away'. Think of *saying*, 'louder, LOUDER, LOUDER!' Each 'er' is softer than the preceding 'loud'. Modern playing is much more likely to flatten out the jumps in dynamic and offer a continuous

crescendo *through the syllables*, whereas in Classical playing it's more stepped, as in speech. But it's quite a tricky subject for some people. You can read my *Early Music* article here:

<http://www.woodwind.org/clarinet/Study/Phrasing.html>."

Certainly Pay's recording of the Mozart Clarinet Concerto (K. 622) on Decca with Christopher Hogwood and the Academy of Ancient Music is characterised by a remarkable sense of clarity, incision and lightness of touch, but he is quick to stress that his is not the only way. "This isn't to say that all the Romantic performances of Mozart have been completely wrong-headed and not worth listening to", he says. "The music survives that, and they have other great qualities. I just think you gain more than you lose if you adopt a historical approach."

There are critics who think of period performance as like a straitjacket, concerned only with limiting rather than expanding musical possibilities, but Pay tells me that the early music mentality is still encouraging him to make new discoveries. "For example, I have always shaped my phrases using tone colour and

Kenneth Morris in conversation with Steve Crow

# WHAT IS IT ABOUT VINTAGE CONN SAXOPHONES?

**K.** Well here we are again Steve, talking vintage horns – this time the professional ranges produced by the C.G. Conn Company of Elkhart, Indiana, U.S.A.

**S.** I think we should start by defining 'vintage' because Conn, initially after 1947 and then again following saxophone manufacture transfer to Nogales, Arizona in 1958, made many student level and 'stencil' horns - a 'stencil' horn being the US term for a retailer's or other manufacturer's own brand. For example, several US makers produced saxophones for Sears Roebuck and other catalogue companies (similar to our Argos).

**K.** Indeed, the manufacturing history of the firm is both complex and in places a little uncertain, in the main due to changes of management and ownership during which records were mislaid or destroyed. My trawl through a number of specialist US websites (listed later) yielded varying dates of both model introduction and horn serial number start and finish points. So please treat our tabulated data as approximate! However Table A does summarise the five 'principal vintage eras' of the professional Conn range – New Wonder Series II, New Wonder Transitional, the 'Artist' or 'Standard' M Series, the 'Connquoror' and the 'Connstellation'.

**S.** What is Table B about?

**K.** It's just as full a list as I've been able to find of the -M (model) number allocations and which are more indelibly conspicuous than serial numbers. Between the two tables our readers should be able to identify the horns worthy of a professional pre-purchase assessment.

**S.** An excellent idea. Some examples will by now not be worth even minor restoration, let alone major overhaul or keywork modification. But with increasing numbers of professional musicians seeking out vintage 6M/10M/11M/12M and 18M saxophones, prices are escalating as players place an ever increasing value on the extraordinary sound quality these instruments deliver. However buyers must be aware that misaligned bodywork, overly worn tone holes and even poor re-lacquering jobs could indicate that a



*New Wonder Series II*

prospective buyer should walk away.

**K.** So a vintage Conn shopper should ideally: a) engage the services of a competent sax engineer to conduct a pre-purchase inspection; b) personally give it a good try-out (see below our comment on mouthpieces) and c) decide what modifications are desirable, or indeed possible/affordable. Again, a competent advisor should be to hand.

**S.** Correct! Additionally the matter of cosmetic appearance always comes up with vintage horns and is worthy of comment. Lacquered finishes tend to deteriorate and are best left alone regardless of appearance. Silver and gold plate (the latter very rare but expensive and long-lasting) are the very best finishes and are reflected in the current prices of good example vintage Conns in the US, astronomical! Raw brass is fine. Avoid

poor (i.e. touch-up) and decorative colour re-lacquering jobs. The latter were used by Show Bands.

**K.** Let's now take a brief look at each of the 'eras':

**New Wonder Series II** – erroneously christened the 'Chu Berry' model

Now, with most examples in their mid-eighties, these horns with rolled tone holes and in playing order, surprisingly command good prices in the States. Good examples with a front top F are worth buying and altos with a micro-tuner are serviceable in the right hands.

**New Wonder Transitional**, also sometimes called **Series III** - a model from this era was actually used by Chu Berry.

The 'Transitional' refers to between New Wonder and Artist (or 'Naked Lady') series. These 1931-34 horns now fetch even better prices than the New Wonder Series II. Progressively introducing (starting with the alto): an underslung octave key, adjustable thumb rest and valuable keywork modifications (more direct mechanical action, low C#, B and Bb keys opening the G# permitting a low C# to G# jump). Most modifications eventually appear on the tenor and baritone with the latter keyed to top F.

**'Artist' (or 'Standard') -M** (christened 'Naked Lady') Series

This long running, progressively modified, series of saxophones was made from 1934 until the early 1960s. Current US dealer opinion rates the '34-'47 rolled tonehole models as the very best for big band work applauding 'their big fat sound' and quoting eye-watering price tickets (\$2000+ for a 6M, \$3300+ for a 10M and \$3600+ for a 12M). Remember rolled toneholes were dropped around 1947, the 6M on UK imports lost its micro-tuner in the 1930s, the 10M got an underslung octave key also in the 1950's and all models got nickel keywork hence post-1947 the previously quoted second-hand prices can be almost halved (and for pre-1947 silver plated add \$1000!).