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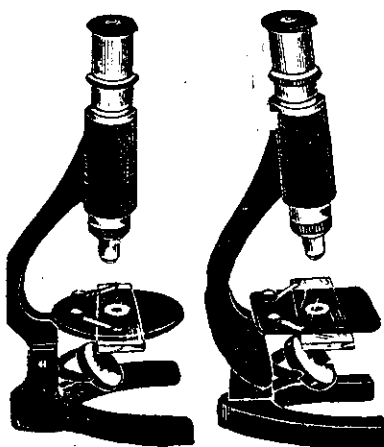
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# SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST? Centenary of the Saxophone

THERE is a tale told that W. S. Gilbert was once asked for a contribution towards the cost of the funeral expenses of a deceased saxophone player. The librettist asked how much was expected. "Oh, make it five bob," replied the collecting bandsman. "That's most reasonable," said Gilbert. "On second thoughts, here's £1; bury four of 'em while you're about it!"

But the saxophone is not the deadly instrument that some people imagine. Just the opposite. As lately as 1931, Freeman Sanborn, the first man in America to play the saxophone, died at the age of eighty-seven! He founded a family of saxophone players. His daughter, Mrs. Stephen B. Jacobs, toured the States as a soloist. Her son Howard Jacobs is a foremost saxophone soloist of our day.

So this year we celebrate the centenary of this instrument, or to be more accurate, we celebrate the perfection of the instrument.

Early in his life Adolphe Sax came into possession of an Ophiclide or Serpent. This instrument was of metal, had a cupped mouth-piece, and eleven keyed stops. It was used by players in military bands. It even figured at the battle of Waterloo, and was a major unit in military bands for almost fifty years.

But Sax was far from satisfied with the Ophiclide. He tinkered with it, giving it twenty keyed stops instead of eleven. He took off the cupped mouth-piece and replaced it with a clarinet mouthpiece. He turned a brass instrument into a reed instrument. In short, he produced the saxophone.

### First Use in Orchestra

Orchestral conductors soon realised the value of the saxophone—that its greatly amplified 'cello tone bridged the gap between reed and brass. It was first used in an orchestra by Kastner in 1844, and afterwards by Meyerbeer, Thomas, Saint-Saens, Bizet and D'Indy. Even Richard Strauss has featured a quartet of saxophones in his "Sinfonia Domestica."

In the Paris production of Wagner's "Tannhauser" in 1861, the full score called for an additional twelve horns in the first Act to illustrate the Landgrave's hunt. In the finale these were to be doubled. "As there were not enough horns in Paris, M. Sax was, by Wagner's instructions, asked to substitute some instruments of like tone of his own contrivance, perhaps saxophones." This was the first occasion on which Sax's new invention was used for opera.

The "Tannhauser" production was, however, not popular with the members of the exclusive "Jockey Club"—all powerful in the social world—who regarded the best seats, the second-act ballet, and the ladies of the opera as their peculiar preserves. The "Jockey Club" members arrived, as

usual, for the second act, equipped with silver whistles with which they drowned the singing! It is recorded that the only regret expressed by the "Jockey Club" was that its famous "rag" would immortalise the name of an otherwise obscure barbarian from Germany!

### Debussy Found it Irksome

In 1903 Debussy undertook the task of composing a work to order, namely a "Rhapsody for Saxophone and Or-

chestra," intended for Mrs. Elisa Hall, President of the Boston Orchestral Club. For the sake of her health, this lady had devoted herself to an instrument which had not yet achieved the popularity it has since acquired, thanks to the triumph of jazz; so she paid in advance for a work which Debussy found more and more irksome to turn out as time went on.

Debussy wrote to a friend: "Considering that this Fantaisie was ordered, and paid for, and eaten more than a year ago, I realise that I am behind with it . . . The saxophone is a reed instrument with whose habits I am not very well acquainted. I wonder whether it indulges in romantic tenderness like the clarinet?" Sixteen years after it was commissioned and paid for, and nearly two years after Debussy had died, the work was finished by another composer, Roger-Ducasse!



**THE SERPENT HATCHES AN EGG:** A special centenary programme entitled "From Serpent to Saxophone," celebrating the invention of the saxophone in 1840, will be heard from 2YA on Tuesday, October 15, at 9.20 p.m.

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### It Conquers the Dance Band

About this time the saxophone invaded the domain of the dance band, which for several reasons it was destined to dominate. For one thing, it has the most sustaining power, and is therefore most serviceable for emphasising melodies; and for another thing,

saxophone was featured. Then nine or more years later, in the hands of Negro "hot players" the saxophone was put properly on the "jazz map." This was the opportunity for a number of brilliant stars like Frankie Trumbauer, Jimmy Dorsey, Adrian Rollini, and Livingston.

In no time three or four saxophones were being featured in bands that had used only one before. Written parts brought out the tone and versatility of the instruments. Its use in Paul Whiteman's massive orchestra marked the apex of its popularity in dance bands.

To-day it has a place in symphony orchestras, military bands, and dance bands, and is a solo instrument that receives the attention of composers like Joseph Holbrooke, Eric Coates and Jacques Ibert.

It has even arrived in Scotland, if we may accept this lament of a Celtic bard:

"Dinna ye hear the gossip  
On ev'ry tongue to-day?  
The saxophone's in Scotland  
A favourite they say.  
Wi' a' its jazz and jingle  
Wi' a' its silly craze  
It's driven off the bagpipes  
Frae a' oor hills an' braes."