

## REVIEWS

*Adolphe Sax, his life, his creative genius, his saxophones, a musical revolution.* Jean-Pierre Rorive (Thionville, Luxembourg: Gerard Klopp, 2014). 225 pages, 328 illustrations. ISBN 2-911992-86-5. 48 Euros.

Jean-Pierre Rorive's 2004 *Adolphe Sax, Inventeur de genie*,<sup>1</sup> the first new biography of Sax since 1980, was a valuable addition to the literature on Sax, notably for its thoughtful use of nineteenth-century sources. *Adolphe Sax, his life, his creative genius, his saxophones, a musical revolution* is an updated version of the 2004 book, published in French and English.<sup>2</sup> Rorive is the perfect author for such a book, being both a professional historian and a classical saxophonist. To create this edition the text was updated, innumerable illustrations added, and an English translation made. The anonymous translation, while generally correct, has the stilted feel of being written by a non-native Anglophone.

The book is enormous, with dimensions of 24 x 32 cm and a mass of almost five pounds. This "luxury edition" is not convenient to set on a desk or to read on a table; it is a coffee table book. This is a pity, because the thoroughness of the text makes this book very useful.

The 2004 book was part of the explosion in our understanding of Sax and his inventions that occurred in the early twenty-first century. Laudably, Rorive has extended his research and citations to include much of this new material; his bibliography of 139 items includes twenty-six published between 2004 and 2012. The forty-six citations from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries add to the utility of this valuable list. The only important papers overlooked are two by Eugenia Mitroulia regarding Sax's brass instruments<sup>3</sup> and another on the early saxophone,<sup>4</sup> all from English-language journals.

In this book, Sax's biography is followed by digressions on the saxophone and on Sax's universality. Thus we have eight chapters: The Belgian Years; Darkness and Light, the First Years in Paris; Military Victories and Other Successes; Tenacity in the Face of Adversity; Honours and Dishonours; Other Inventions, Improvements and Projects; The Saxophone; and Adolphe Sax, Citizen of the World.

The text is very detailed. There is, for example, an entire page devoted to the 1841 Brussels exhibit at which Sax won a silver medal, receipt of which is said to have spurred his move to Paris. Three pages are devoted to the melanoma that affected his right upper lip and seven pages to the "battle of the bands" between Sax and Carafa in 1846. In each case much more information is given than in earlier biographies. Presentation of the Sax family history, of the military and musical background of Sax's times, of the personalities who were part of his history are all revealing and insightful. I enjoyed these discussions and learned much from them.

The illustrations are the crown of this book. Virtually every person in the text is pictured, including all the portraits of Sax with which I am familiar. There are photos

of every instrument and of most of the important locales in Sax's career, some of them occupying full pages; albeit most of these are larger than they need to be. Many of the iconic satirical illustrations from Haine<sup>5</sup> and Horwood<sup>6</sup> are also reprinted. There are newly printed images from the Sax-fils workshop in the 1920s. Perhaps there are too many images; do we need to see a nautical painting by a friend of Sax?

Despite this there are some surprising absences. One searches in vain for the 1843 saxhorn and 1845 saxotromba patents, which are mentioned primarily in regard to their being contested in court by five of Sax's opponents. This is most unfortunate as half of the roughly 500 surviving Sax specimens are brasses, 125 of these being instruments that he invented (saxotrombas, saxtubas, saxhorns, and independent piston-valve instruments).<sup>7</sup> There is no discussion of the acoustic basis of the families of Sax instruments, the rule of identical proportions yielding similar timbres. There is no distinction between saxhorns, saxotrombas, and similar instruments by other makers. The saxtubas are noted, but the fact that they were created as a large family covering the orchestral gamut is overlooked. These are serious deficiencies in a book dedicated to the entire career of Sax, whose work in brass-instrument design was as important as his invention of the saxophone, even if less obvious to modern musicians.

The later saxophone patents and several Sax handbills reprinted in the earlier biographies are also absent. Any of these would have been more valuable than the two-page color illustrations of marching soldiers or crammed exhibition halls, which add nothing to one's understanding of Sax.

One is surprised by Rorive's uncertainty in describing the first saxophones and their development from a bass instrument in 1842 into the family displayed in 1849 and 1855, a process clearly described in one of the cited articles.<sup>8</sup> Stephen Cottrell's 2012 book, which was probably not available to Rorive, gets this right.<sup>9</sup> Rorive incorrectly describes the first operatic use of saxophones as being a quartet in Kastner's opera *Le dernier roi du Juda*, when in fact the composer used only a single bass saxophone. The Kastner score is not published but can be obtained (with some difficulty) from the Bibliotheque nationale in Paris.

I was delighted to find illustrations and a brief description of a previously unknown instrument, the Georgeophone, which is a sort of baritone or bass saxophone in upright form for use while marching or on horseback. As a forthcoming article will show,<sup>10</sup> this instrument was developed around 1875 from the baritone saxophone, not from Sax's 1846 saxophone patent. The prominence Rorive gives to this rarity suggests that it had a meaningful role in the saxophone's history, which it did not; it was produced by only two makers and died out quickly, leaving only one known specimen.

There is prominent display of modern saxophones, some of them gorgeous to behold, by Selmer of Paris. The title-page illustration of Selmer's 2014 limited-edition alto saxophone, created in homage to Sax on his bicentennial, introduces a bit of braggadocio. Since Selmer, the successor to Sax (having bought La Société Adolphe Sax et Cie in 1929), is the world's leading maker of professional saxophones and contributed many illustrations to the book, this is understandable.

The finest overall work today on Sax's brasses is Géry Dumoulin's catalog of the Sax200 exhibit held at the Musical Instruments Museum in Brussels last year,<sup>11</sup> although a more thorough review of this topic is Eugenia Mitroulia's 2011 PhD dissertation,<sup>12</sup> while the best history of the saxophone's early years is Cottrell's. My quibbles notwithstanding, Rorive has written the finest biography of Sax the man. Pair it with Dumoulin and/or Cottrell, depending on your interest, and you will know all that you wish to know about his life and work.

Who should buy this book? Certainly, any aficionado of the saxophone who wishes to have a lavishly beautiful reference on Sax. Some *HBSJ* readers will find that the relative exclusion of Sax's brasses makes this an unsatisfying volume, but for many, the wealth of biography and history will make up for this.

*Robert Howe*

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Pierre Rorive, *Adolphe Sax 1814-1894. Inventeur de génie*, (Brussels: Racine Lannoo, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> The French edition is ISBN 2-911992-76-8.

<sup>3</sup> Eugenia Mitroulia, "The Saxotromba: Fact or Fiction," *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society* 35 (2009): 123–49; Eugenia Mitroulia, "Adolphe Sax's Bigger Brasses," *ITEA Journal* 38, no. 3 (2011): 76–80.

<sup>4</sup> Albert R. Rice, "Making and Improving the Nineteenth-Century Saxophone," *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society* 39 (2009): 81–122.

<sup>5</sup> Malou Haine, *Adolphe Sax. Sa vie, son œuvre, ses instruments de musique*, (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> Wally Horwood, *Adolphe Sax 1818-1894. His Life and Legacy*, 2nd edn. (London: Egon Publishers, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Eugenia Mitroulia, Arnold Myers, *List of Adolphe Sax Instruments*, Edinburgh University Collection of Historic Musical Instruments. <http://www.music.ed.ac.uk/euchmi/galpin/gdsl.html> (accessed 9 February 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Robert Howe, "The Invention and Early Development of the Saxophone, 1840–55," *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society* 29 (2003): 97–180.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Cottrell, *The Saxophone*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Robert Howe, "Adolphe Sax, His Influence and Legacy: Myths Noted and Debunked," *Revue belge de Musicologie* (2015), in press.

<sup>11</sup> Géry Dumoulin, *Catalogue Published on the Occasion of the Exhibition Organized by the Musical Instruments Museum in Brussels from 8 February 2014 to 11 January 2015*. (Brussels: Musical Instruments Museum, 2014) (also in French and Dutch).

<sup>12</sup> "Adolphe Sax's Brasswind Production with a Focus on his Saxhorn's and Related Instruments" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 2011).



## GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

The Historic Brass Society invites submissions of articles for its annual *HBS Newsletter* and annual *HBS Journal*.

1. The HBS publishes articles based on any aspect of brass instruments of the past—from Antiquity through the twentieth century and representing cultivated, vernacular, and non-western traditions. The *Journal* also publishes English translations of significant primary sources that shed light on brass instruments and their use, and it includes in-depth bibliographies and reviews. Most articles in the *Journal* are between 4000 and 6000 words long; shorter submissions (including brief reports of discoveries) are always encouraged, and longer ones may be considered as the subject and treatment warrant. Articles submitted to the *Journal* will be read by at least two expert referees who will advise the Editor and Editorial Board on acceptance or rejection. Contributors should aim for a concise, fluid style of English presentation that will be accessible to a broad audience of academics, performers, and interested amateurs. The HBS reserves the right to edit submissions for style and may return them to the author for extensive revision or retranslation.

2. Authors submitting articles for the *Historic Brass Society Journal* should send a CD in Microsoft Word for Macintosh or Windows or in “rich text” format to Historic Brass Society, 148 W. 23rd St., #5E, New York, NY 10011, USA (FAX/TEL 212-627-3820). Alternatively, authors may submit articles in Microsoft Word as attachments to e-mail, sent to the Editor at [carter@wfu.edu](mailto:carter@wfu.edu), with copies to Howard Weiner at [h.weiner@online.de](mailto:h.weiner@online.de) and Jeffrey Nussbaum at [president@historicbrass.org](mailto:president@historicbrass.org). The deadline for submitting articles for the *Journal* is 1 October, for publication during the following calendar year. Authors submitting material for the *Historic Brass Society Newsletter* should send a CD in one of the formats listed above to Jeffrey Nussbaum at [president@historicbrass.org](mailto:president@historicbrass.org).

3. Accompanying graphics such as photographs, line drawings, etc., must be submitted as camera-ready artwork or graphics files on CDs; TIF format (at least 300 dpi) is preferred for graphics files. Musical examples must be either computer-typeset, engraved, or submitted as Finale© files on a CD or as attachments to e-mail, sent to the addresses given in item 2 above. Authors are responsible for any costs associated with obtaining and/or reproducing illustrations, and are further required to furnish proof of permission to reprint for illustrations that are the property of an institution or another individual. The number and size of graphics will be limited by our space requirements.

4. Authors are requested to place only one character space after every sentence and punctuation mark. Endnotes and bibliographic formats should conform to the guidelines given in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

5. Musical pitch names and designations should conform to the system given in the *New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 640.

6. Upon acceptance of the article, the author will be asked to sign an agreement, stipulating that the material in the article has not previously been published, that it will not be submitted to another publication in the future without permission of the Editors of the Historic Brass Society Journal, and that the author will work with the Editors in a timely manner to prepare the article for publication. The author will further be asked to agree that while *s/he* retains copyright to her/his article, *s/he* grants permission to the Historic Brass Society to reprint the article in print or digital format. The author will be assigned an editor who may suggest revisions based in part on the referees' reports and in part on consideration of style. All revisions and changes should result from the ensuing dialogue between author and editor. When they have reached agreement on all revisions, the editor will send the author a revised version of the article. At this time any last-minute corrections should be made in consultation with the editor. Later the author will receive proofs in type, but the only changes allowable at this point will be corrections of any mistakes made during the typesetting process itself.

7. Submissions must include (as a separate file) an abstract of the article. If the article is accepted this abstract will be used in the major international bibliographical/abstract catalogues such as RILM. The abstract should be in English and be of no more than 350 words. It should summarize the content of the article and mention any major primary sources that are prominently interrogated. It should be written in such a way that readers will easily grasp the focus of the article and what its distinctive and original contribution to the subject is. It is worth taking into account that those who use abstract databases are not all historic brass scholars.