

Saxophone History

The saxophone is known as a reed musical instrument that is a staple in jazz bands. Considered to be newer than other musical instruments in terms of its music history, the saxophone was invented by Antoine-Joseph (Adolphe) Sax. Adolphe Sax was born on Nov. 6, 1814 in Dinant, Belgium. His father, Charles, was a maker of musical instruments. During his youth, Adolphe studied the clarinet and flute at Brussel's Conservatory. His father's passion for creating musical instruments influenced him greatly and he began plans of improving the tone of the bass clarinet. What he came up with was a single-reed instrument constructed from metal that has a conical bore and overblows at the octave.

1841 - Adolphe Sax first showed his creation (a C bass saxophone) to the composer Hector Berlioz. The great composer was impressed by the uniqueness and versatility of the instrument.

1842 - Adolphe Sax went to Paris. On June 12, Hector Berlioz published an article in the Paris magazine "Journal des Debats" describing the saxophone.

1844 - Adolphe Sax reveals his creation to the public through the Paris Industrial Exhibition. On February 3 of that same year, Adolphe's good friend Hector Berlioz conducts a concert featuring his choral work. Hector's choral work arrangement is called Chant Sacre and it featured the saxophone. In December, the saxophone had its orchestral debut at the Paris Conservatory through the opera "Last King of Juda" by Georges Kastner.

1845 - French military bands during this time used oboes, bassoons, and french horns, but Adolphe replaced these with the Bb and Eb saxhorns.

1846 - Adolphe Sax obtained patent for his saxophones that had 14 variations. Among them are: E flat sopranino, F sopranino, B flat soprano, C soprano, E flat alto, F alto, B flat tenor, C tenor, E flat baritone, B flat bass, C bass, E flat contrabass and F contrabass.

1847 - On February 14 in Paris, a saxophone school was created. It was set up at "Gymnase Musical", a military band school.

1858 - Adolphe Sax became a professor at the Paris Conservatory.

1866 - The patent for the saxophone expired and the Millereau Co. patents the saxophone featuring a forked F# key.

1875 - Goumas patented the saxophone with a fingering similar to the clarinet's Boehm system.

1881 - Adolphe extends his original patent for the saxophone. He also made changes to the instrument such as lengthening the bell to include Bb and A and extending the instrument's range to F# and G using the fourth octave key.

1885 - The first saxophone was built in the US by Gus Buesher.

1886 - The saxophone underwent changes again, the right hand C trill key was devised and half-hole system for the first fingers of both hands.

1887 - The predecessor of the articulated G# Evette and Schaeffer and tuning ring was invented by the Association Des Ouvriers.

1888 - The single octave key for the saxophone was invented and rollers for low Eb and C was added.

1894 - Adolphe Sax died. His son, Adolphe Edouard, took over the business.

After Adolphe's death, the saxophone proceeded to undergo changes, books for the saxophone were published and composers/musicians continued to include the sax in their performances. In 1914 the saxophone entered the world of jazz bands. In 1928 the Sax factory was sold to the Henri Selmer Company. To this day many manufacturers of musical instruments create their own line of saxophones and it continues to enjoy a prominent position in jazz bands.