Search for Old Instruments: Grade School Project Expanded the Instrumental Program and Yielded Unexpected Treasure

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And Yielded Unexpected Treasure

How many grade school instrumentalists have had an opportunity to play or even to hold or see such instruments as a pomer or an eighteenth century one-keyed flute or a rotary valve E-flat cornet or a thirteen-keyed Albert System clarinet or any other predecessors of our modern wind instruments? Many of these instruments are still in existence today in the attics and closets of almost every community. With a little effort, many of these instruments could be procured for display and study.

The musical experience of a grade school instrumentalist is sometimes very limited or narrow with respect to the scope of material or information that is made available to him.

Often the grade school band director is so pressed for time that he feels it is impossible to do anything other than teach fingering, rhythm, and those things necessary for acceptable performing ability.

He probably would like to contribute a little more toward the broadening of his students’ background of general musical knowledge, but simply feels that the press of time will not allow it.

It would be to the benefit of the student as well as to his own, if he would take the time to deviate from this pattern and help his students to broaden their musical experiences through information and study about areas not directly related to the playing of an instrument.

The project undertaken by the grade school instrumental students in the Ottawa, Illinois, public schools evolved from a simple assignment given to a student on the history of the trumpet family. Being a little more enterprising than some, the student found two old cornets that differed in shape and pitch from the ones used today. This seemed to incite more interest among the students than an ordinary written assignment, and soon other youngsters told of instruments that were also different from those used in their band.

This was enough to begin a major project in the study of the history and development of the instruments of the band.

The assistance of the local newspaper was enlisted, particularly a column called “Around the Town” which seemed to be more widely read than any other. This column championed any worthwhile local endeavor and was exceedingly cooperative with this project.

A request was made through this column for unusual or antique instruments. The response was slow at first; however, succeeding articles and information brought very satisfying results.

The first of the many calls came from a man who owned and still played a thirteen-keyed Albert System clarinet in C. This instrument was carried by him throughout World War I. Being an infantryman, he was on the move a great deal, so he kept it strapped to his leg. This bit of information impressed the students with the fact that a talent once acquired can be used for their own satisfaction and enjoyment throughout life.

Information about this find and about the discovery of a fife used during the Civil War, was published immediately.

Before long a great number of instruments were located and the interest spread even to the small communities surrounding Ottawa.

Many of the discoveries were not easily identified. This, of course, was a good thing insofar as the students and their director were concerned.

The students were divided into groups for the purpose of studying and doing research about the various instruments or families of instruments.

Some of the more persevering students went to great lengths to find out all they could. There was conflicting information that had to be sifted and evaluated; and in some cases, a positive answer didn’t seem available.
For example, a trombone-shaped instrument with the bell facing the rear, was thought to be a pommer since, according to one source, this was the early German name given to a trombone-like instrument of this description of the sixteenth century. Then, of course, the name pommer came up as a member of, or predecessor of, the oboe family during the fifteenth century. One thing led to another and finally the students were able to establish at least that the instrument being studied was used by marching military bands of the late eighteenth century. The purpose for the rear facing bell was to send the music back to the army behind them. This instrument did not continue in use for very long. They also discovered through their research that the principle of the trombone has not changed since the early sixteen hundreds.

Many of the instruments discovered in this project were in playable condition and some of the more adept players were allowed to experiment enough to be able to demonstrate their mechanics and sound. The more mechanically inclined boys worked for some time repairing valves and filling cracks and bending keys to put the instruments in good enough repair to reproduce the proper sounds.

**INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR MUSIC EDUCATION**

**Tokyo, Japan • July 3-10, 1963**

For the first time the conference of the International Society for Music Education will hold its biennial meeting in the Orient. The program will present similarities, differences, and parallels in the world of music and music education in the Orient and the Occident.

The Board of Directors of the ISME selected Tokyo as its next conference location during the meeting of the international conference held in Vienna, Austria, in 1961.

Hosts to the 1963 meeting of ISME will be the government of Japan, the Municipality of Tokyo, the distinguished Musashino Academy Musical, and the music educators in Japan and the entire Orient. Naohiro Fukui, member of the ISME Board of Directors who is director of the Musashino Academy Musical, is the organizing chairman of the Japanese Preparatory Committee. The preliminary program draft was prepared by the ISME president Samuel Baud-Bovy, Director, Conservatory of Music, Geneva, Switzerland, in consultation with the ISME Board of Directors and the Japanese Preparatory Committee.

Inquiries concerning housing accommodations in Tokyo should be directed to ISME Preparatory Committee, Musashino Academia Musical, Nerima-ku, Tokyo, Japan. Inquiries concerning the program should be directed to ISME, 1201 Sixteenth Street N.W., Washington 6, D. C.

The Japanese Preparatory Commission is arranging a four-day Conference tour following the 1963 meeting in Tokyo. The tour will include Kyoto where visits will be made to Heian Shrine, Nijo Castle, Nishijin Textile Museum, Golden Pavilion—to Nara and Osaka where visits will include TODAI Temple with the great statue of Buddha, Kasuga Shrine, Deer Park. In Osaka the tour will include Osaka Castle, Nakanoshima Park.