

Holton, Leblanc, and the Trombones of Accession 2156

A Historical Compendium

TAMUCC Honors Program

Project of Excellence Proposal

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June 16th, 2014

The trombone is one of the oldest extant musical instruments of the Western repertoire. Originating from central Europe around the late 15th century, the “sackbut” as it was known in English speaking circles was preceded only by the natural trumpet, and it’s direct predecessor the slide trumpet.¹ Despite its prominent lineage in the development of brass instruments, extremely little published literature exists on the history of the trombone, the majority of which focuses on the antiquated instruments of the Renaissance and Baroque era, or exotic influences of non-Western musical genres.^{2, 3}

Within the last few decades there has been a notable increase in the interest shown in the construction of the trombone, as well as the “who, what, when, where and why” of its history and development over time. *The Trombone Forum*, a worldwide online informational exchange (although catering largely to those with English speaking capabilities) is a community approaching 15,000 members.⁴ Large sections of this website are devoted to discussing aspects of the history, construction, and playing technique of the instrument, along with areas focusing on the musical repertoire and performers that embrace the trombone. Clearly there is a strong interest within those who play the trombone, or otherwise possess a fascination with its existence, to obtain information pertaining to their instrument in an openly accessible format. That interest, with the current manuscripts and sources available on the subject, is largely left wanting.

¹ Guion, David M.. *A history of the trombone*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2010.

² Herbert, Trevor. *The trombone*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.

³ Guion, David M. Book Review: "The Trombone in the Renaissance: A History in Pictures and Documents," by Stewart Carter Notes - Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association 69.4 (Jun 2013): 744-746.

⁴ "The Trombone Forum - Index." . <http://tromboneforum.org/> (accessed June 11, 2014).

Through completion of the Project of Excellence I intend to create a document that will provide a substantial addition to the set of resources available to not only academic researchers and scholarly musicians, but also to the hobbyists, amateurs, and the self-trained who play the trombone or seek information on the Holton Company. While completing the Arne B. Larson Internship for the Study of American Instruments at the National Music Museum in Vermillion, SD., I will have access to the largest collection of archival materials related to the Frank Holton Corporation. For nearly a century after its conception in 1904, the Holton Corporation was the largest privately owned manufacturer of musical instruments in the world.⁵ Frank Holton ran and owned the company from 1897 through 1939, when he chose to retire and released his management position to a newly founded board, led by President Fred Kuhl.⁶ The company was run under the direction of Vice President Elliot Kehl through WWII and into the 60s until it was purchased in 1964 by Leblanc USA.⁷ In 2004, Holton and the other Leblanc subsidiaries owned by Leon Pascucci were sold to Conn-Selmer Industries (a subsidiary of the Steinway Musical Instruments), ending its reign and 99 years of privately owned business.⁸ Leon inherited control of the company when his father, Vito Pascucci, passed in 2003.⁹ Vito was president of Leblanc USA in 1964 and had purchased the company from Leon Leblanc, heir to the Leblanc Company, in 1989.¹⁰ Barely a year after his father's passing, Leon made the decision to incorporate with Conn-Selmer in order to secure the lasting future of the company and reduce internal

⁵ Bridges, Glenn D. . "The Frank Holton Story." *Music Journal* 33: 48-49.

⁶ Unknown. "Holton & Co. Reorganized." *The Music Trades* 1939.6: 21.

⁷ Pascucci, Vito. "Proposed mailing to active Leblanc dealers", *unpublished*, 1964

⁸ Anonymous, "Steinway to Acquire G. Leblanc" *The American Music Teacher*; Oct/Nov 2004; 54, 2; ProQuest pg. 6

⁹ *Passages: Vito Pascucci*, *American Music Teacher*; Dec 2003-Jan 2004; 53, 3; International Index to Music Periodicals Full Text pg. 18

¹⁰ Leblanc, Leon. "Homage to Leon Leblanc" *Harominques*, 4; 2000.

competition. In 2008 the decision was made to close the famed Kenosha/Elkhorn, WI plant which was opened by Frank Holton in 1918. The factory had been in continuous operation through the depression, wars, and economic crisis for 90 years.¹¹ Leblanc had a long standing relationship with the National Music Museum (NMM) - Pascucci having previously donated instruments to the museums founder, Arne B. Larson¹² - and upon the announcement of plans to close the Elkhorn facility, arrangements were made between Conn-Selmer and the NMM to transfer all historic holdings from the factory to the NMMs storage facilities.¹³ Included in this donation were dozens of trombones and trombone components from the Holton, Martin, and Courtois brands, as well as numerous other historic trombones from miscellaneous manufacturers. Many of these were prototype instruments, original productions, test models taken from full production runs, etc. that had been held in the Holton factory museum for preservation.¹⁴ The gift of these instruments to the NMM was recorded as "Accession 2156" within the museum database, and will henceforth be referred to as such. With unrestricted access to these instruments and historical documents, it is my intention to compile a complete historical analysis of the trombones donated by Conn-Selmer in 2008.

Through this analysis, my goal with the Project of Excellence is to create a publishable manuscript containing academic and photographic documentation of all trombones from this collection. During my thirteen week stay at the NMM it is my job to analyze, catalog, and photograph all of the trombones from this accession. In my proposed manuscript I will place

¹¹ Banks, Margaret. "Conn-Selmer's Donation from Kenosha to Vermillion." *Keynotes*, May 1, 2009.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Pillow, Byron. "NMM Catalog Sheet 13,852", *National Music Museum Archives*, May 28, 2014.

each instrument within the historical context of the Holton/Leblanc lineage, provide detailed information pertaining to the construction, condition, and individual historical ties of each instrument where possible, and integrate these specific instruments with information regarding the trombone production of the company as a whole. After establishing the specific time period represented by the instruments of Accession 2156, I will provide a brief analysis of the economic and social context of the company through that time span. Should publication not arise from the final product within the time frame of the Project of Excellence, the compendium will be added to the public access portion of the National Music Museum instrument checklist database so that it is available for any interested party. Copies will also be kept within the museums archival records so that the original manuscript and documentation can be utilized for future research efforts by the museum or others. I would still aspire to have the work published even outside the constraints of the PoE and will seek to do so, further editing the work and exploring publication outlets until that goal becomes a reality. Completion of this manuscript will rely largely on first hand analysis of the original records of the donation. Contained within are invoices, office memos, production records, technical drawings, factory orders, and countless other sources which have never before been publically available or analyzed for any sort of academic work. Each accessed instrument is cataloged following an industry standard cataloging format¹⁵ and then assigned a permanent storage location, all of which is stored in paper files as well as recorded in the NMM electronic archival system. The combination of generated catalog sheets, photographs, and original documents of Accession

¹⁵ Dickerson, Randy C., "A systematic approach to standardized documentation of musical instrument catalogues within the museum setting". [Ph. D diss. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1994]

2156 will form the brunt of the evidential material used to construct this manuscript, with reference to previously published economic and social analysis to place the company within a large context. The final text will include a series of consistent photographs for each individual instrument, allowing visual reference to the development and appearance of the instruments through the chronology of the collection.

The completion of this project serves multiple purposes – Firstly, to provide the given information in an accessible format for the general interested public. Second, to fulfill my own desires to vastly expand my knowledge base on the instrument I play and the world that surrounds it. Third, to combine my interests in music, organology, photography, history, and composition into a thorough, aesthetically stimulating volume that capitalizes upon the fantastic opportunity I secured through this internship. Finally, I would like to embark on a project that delivers a sense of accomplishment when completed – a project that generates a product that I can hold in my hand and be proud of having created. A book, I feel, suits this ideal beyond the capabilities of any other project format that holds viability in my current position.

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Project Timeline

Included but not explicitly stated in this timeline are bi-weekly meetings with faculty mentor.

- June 16th 2014 – Submit Final Proposal
- August 22nd 2014 – Complete primary research compilation at National Music Museum
- September 1st 2014 – Contact publishers with previous published works in trombone history, literature, pedagogy or imagery to determine requirements, interest, deadlines, etc.
- October 1st 2014 – Complete editing and proofing of photographs, images, and figures, complete primary historical/social research
- October 15th 2014 – Complete first draft of information pertaining to individual instruments in the collection
- November 15th 2014 – Complete first draft of historical context and company information
- December 15th 2014 – Determine final formatting style for manuscript and generate all non-content pages required for publication
- February 1st 2015 – Complete full second draft
- February 15th 2015 – Submit second draft to individuals for outside review
- March 1st 2015 – Create checklist for final revisions
- March 15th 2015 – Complete final revisions and begin final manuscript formatting
- April 1st 2015 – Complete final formatting and submit to mentor for review
- April 15th 2015 – Submit final manuscript to Honors Program, submit final manuscript for proof-printing to prepare for publication submission. Submit all files and text to NMM for webmaster approval and entry.
- April 20th-30th 2015 – As soon as proof copy is received and deemed satisfactory, submit to potential publishers.