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Saxophone Aptitude Test (SAT) 19th-Century History and Development

by James Noyes

So, you think you know something about the saxophone, do you? Well, let's just see about that! It is safe to say that the vast majority of saxophonists (professional and amateur alike) know precious little about the early history and development of the saxophone. The general belief is that the saxophone lay relatively dormant throughout much of the 1800s and early 1900s, only to emerge in the 1920s craze as an integral part of jazz and popular music, as well as symphonic and concert hall performances. Saxophonists associated with the 1920s and early '30s included Bechet, Brown, Carney, Hawkins, Henton, Hodges, Leeson, Mule, Raschèr, Trumbauer, and Wiedoft, just to name a few. Composers who included saxophones in their scores at this time included Bartók, Berg, Copland, Gershwin, Hindemith, Kodaly, Milhaud, Prokofiev, Ravel, Villa-Lobos, and Weill. However, the notion that the only consequential and meaningful events in saxophone history occurred within the last 80 years must cease! The nineteenth century was a time of significant progress for the saxophone, providing a tradition and paving the way for twentieth-century prosperity.

Below are fifteen questions to test your nineteenth-century saxophone aptitude. A discussion of the correct answers and their significance will follow. My guess is that everyone who takes this test will learn something new. Good luck!

TEACHERS: Please feel free to reproduce this test for use with your private students or for the classroom. For further information, please consult the endnotes.

- 1. Adolphe Sax invented the saxophone in what year?**
- 1834
 - 1838
 - 1842
 - 1846

- 2. What was Sax's reasoning for inventing the saxophone?**
- to create a flexible and powerful bass instrument

- to replace the clarinet in the military band
- to create a hybrid between woodwinds and brasses
- Sax had no particular reason for inventing the saxophone

- 3. Which composer was enthusiastic about the saxophone?**
- Berlioz
 - Liszt
 - Rossini
 - all of the above

- 4. Who was the preeminent saxophonist of the 19th Century?**
- Edward A. Lefebre
 - Jean Moeremans
 - Monsieur Souallé
 - Henry Wuille

- 5. Which institution had saxophone instruction prior to 1900?**
- C. G. Conn Conservatory
 - New England Conservatory
 - Paris Conservatory
 - all of the above

- 6. Which company first manufactured saxophones in America?**
- Buescher
 - Conn
 - King
 - Martin

- 7. These were characteristics of early saxophone mouthpieces:**
- barrel-shaped chamber
 - cylindrical chamber
 - square chamber
 - all of the above

- 8. Which of the following was not a 19th-Century innovation?**
- extended range down to written low B-flat
 - "Bis" B-flat fingering
 - "articulated" G-sharp mechanism
 - automatic single octave-key mechanism

- 9. Who was America's first woman concert soloist on the saxophone?**
- Elise Hall
 - Louise Linden
 - Bessie Mecklem
 - Kathryne Thompson

- 10. Who was the first saxophonist to record on Edison cylinders?**
- Eugene Coffin
 - Edward Lefebre
 - Bessie Mecklem
 - Rudy Wiedoft

- 11. Prior to 1900, France's Garde Républicaine had how many saxophones?**
- 4
 - 6
 - 8
 - 10

- 12. First American bandleader to feature four saxophones (SATB):**
- Carlos A. Cappa
 - Harvey B. Dodworth
 - Patrick S. Gilmore
 - John Philip Sousa

- 13. Who was the first American saxophone quartet?**
- California Saxophone Quartette
 - The First Saxophone Quartette
 - New York Saxophone Quartette Club
 - Saint Louis Saxophone Quartette

- 14. Which composer did not score for saxophone?**
- Georges Bizet
 - Claude Debussy
 - Richard Strauss
 - Richard Wagner

- 15. The first 23-piece saxophone band was organized in what city?**
- Boston, Massachusetts
 - Chicago, Illinois
 - Rock Springs, Wyoming
 - Los Angeles, California

Answers and discussion inside

SAT Answers and discussion

1. Answer: b, [circa] 1838. According to Fred Hemke: "One observation which recurs throughout many sources places Sax in Belgium, i.e. prior to his Paris move, when the conception of the saxophone became clear in his mind. Maurice Hamel, in a series of handwritten recollections, indicated his father Henry Hamel, a very close friend of Adolphe Sax, had related that Sax created the saxophone in 1838." The famous story of the first appearance of the saxophone at the Belgium Industrial Exhibition of 1841 (January) was recalled by the composer, Georges Kastner. Wrapped in cloth and waiting to be unveiled by its inventor, the first-known saxophone was kicked by an unknown person and rendered unplayable. Considering it took C. G. Conn two years to develop its first line of saxophones (c.1890-92), it is reasonable to conclude that for Sax to have brought the saxophone to this exhibition in January 1841 meant he likely had begun the developmental process by 1838. Sax was granted a French patent for "a system of wind instruments called saxophones" in June of 1846.

2. Answer: a, to create a flexible and powerful bass instrument. The following are Sax's own words as presented in his patent application:

"Explanation – We know that in general, wind instruments are either too harsh or too weak in sonority; one or the other of these faults is most especially perceptible in the basses. The Ophecleide, for example, which reinforces the trombones, produces a sound so disagreeable that it must be kept out of resonant halls because of its inability to be played softly. The bassoon, on the contrary, has such a weak sound that it can only be used for accompanying and filling parts; yet for specific forte effects in orchestration it is absolutely useless. One should note that the bassoon is the only instrument of this type which blends well with string instruments... Only brass wind instruments produce a satisfying effect in outside performances... Struck by these different drawbacks, I have looked for a means of remedying these situations by creating an instrument, which by the character of its voice can be reconciled with the stringed instruments, but which possesses more force and intensity than the strings. This instrument is the Saxophone."

3. Answer: d, all of the above. Berlioz's support of Sax and his instruments, including saxophones, is well documented. However, most are unaware that Liszt was also enthusiastic. He stated: "...alto and tenor saxophones will be exceedingly useful, even in our regular orchestras and the ensemble has a really magnificent effect." Rossini allegedly claimed that the saxophone "was the most beautiful sound he had ever heard." Nevertheless, Rossini did convince those at the Conservatory in Bologna to adopt the instruments of Adolphe Sax. Rossini included saxophones in his *La Corona d'Italia*, written for military band in 1868.

4. Answer: a, Edward A. Lefebvre. Lefebvre was born in The Hague, Holland in 1834. After having met Adolphe Sax (c.1850s), Lefebvre embarked on a life-long mission to popularize the saxophone and to "bring his instrument into favor." This mission took him to South Africa in 1859, England in 1869, and the United States and Canada from 1871-1911. In 1878 he made a solo tour of Germany and Scandinavia. He was the saxophone soloist with Patrick S. Gilmore's 22nd Regiment Band from 1873-92, and with John Philip Sousa's Band from 1893-94. Lefebvre was the leader of the New York Saxophone Quartette Club (1873-1885), the Wonder Saxophone Quartette (1897-1900), and the Lefebvre Saxophone Quartette (1901-1909). He published nearly 100 transcriptions and arrangements with Carl Fischer and worked for C. G. Conn and the Conn

Conservatory from 1895-1900. He also promoted original saxophone music of Caryl Florio, Jean-Baptiste Singelée, and Jean-Nicholas Savari. A conservative estimate has Lefebvre performing over 20,000 engagements over 50 years on three continents. Jean Moermanns was Lefebvre's successor in the Sousa band from (1894-99, 1902-5). Monsieur Souallé and Henry Wuille were two of the earliest saxophonists in history, performing with Louis Antoine Jullien's famous touring orchestra in the 1850s.

5. Answer: d, all of the above. Adolphe Sax was the saxophone instructor at the Paris Conservatory from 1857 to 1870, at which time all military music classes (including saxophone) were abolished after Germany defeated France in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. The New England Conservatory offered classes in saxophone between the years of 1882-89, taught by William Rietzel and Eustach Strasser. Edward Lefebvre taught at the Conn Conservatory in Elkhart, Indiana from 1896-1900. Numerous other institutions in Europe and America also offered saxophone at one time or another prior to 1900.

6. Answer: b, Conn. Conn was the first company to manufacture saxophones in America. These became publicly available in the spring of 1892. It is interesting to note, however, the man credited with building the first saxophone for Conn (c.1890) was Ferdinand August Buescher, a foreman at the Conn plant in Elkhart. Buescher, a Conn employee since 1875, left Conn in 1893 and founded the Buescher Manufacturing Company in 1894, which was reorganized in 1904 as the Buescher Band Instrument Company. Conn catalogues mention saxophones as early as 1892, while Buescher catalogues don't list saxophones until c.1910.

7. Answer: a, barrel-shaped chamber. Sax's patent included a sketch of a bass saxophone mouthpiece, which permits a large, excavated chamber, with no flat sides, much greater in dimension than the opening at the neck of the saxophone. This type of mouthpiece was the standard for the first 100 years. Jazz, rock, and popular styles of music have paved the way for a great variety of mouthpiece designs. The square chamber is a recent development, roughly 25 years old, and has perhaps no counterpart among any other brass or woodwind instruments.

8. Answer: c, "articulated" G-sharp mechanism. Sax held the exclusive rights to produce saxophones from 1846-66, and thus, when this patent expired, other instrument manufacturers began producing saxophones with new and (often) improved designs. In 1887, the Evette and Schaeffer Society patented a saxophone keyed to written low B-flat (low B was the original range), which also incorporated the "bis" key for the first time. A. Lecomte and Co. patented the automatic single octave key in 1888. The "articulated" G-sharp mechanism which allows G-sharp to be fingered with any of the left-hand spatula keys (low C-sharp, B, and B-flat) was advertised by Couesnon of Paris c.1908 (when it was actually added is unknown). The first American company to add an articulated G-sharp key was C. G. Conn in 1931. Note: the "front F" key was added to Conn alto saxophones in 1903! It is unknown when European makers did the same.

9. Answer: b, Louise Linden (it is perhaps more accurate to say she is the "first-known" American woman concert soloist on the saxophone. Future research may provide even earlier accounts). Louise's uncle, Johann Gottlieb Friederich "Fred" ter Linden was, by some accounts, "the first to play saxophone in America."

SAT answers and discussion, continued

Certainly, he was one of the first, performing in Maine as early as the 1860s. He taught his niece, Louise, to play saxophone, and she “made an early sensation as the first woman saxophonist [saxophone soloist] in the United States” as early as 1878. Miss Linden performed as a soloist with Adolphe Neuendorff’s orchestra in 1881 on a program that also featured the renowned Walter Emerson on cornet. Mecklem’s solo career spanned from 1890 to 1895 (see answer for question 10 below). Elise Hall, of the Boston Orchestral Club fame, performed from 1900 to 1920, and commissioned over 22 works for saxophone, including compositions by Debussy, d’Indy, and Schmitt. Kathyrene Thompson’s solo career began c.1911, with the Navassar Ladies Band of San Diego. She later went on to found the Thompson-D’Ippolito School of Saxophone in Los Angeles in the 1920s.

10. Answer: c, Bessie Mecklem. Mecklem, a student of E. A. Lefebre, began her performing career in 1890 (at the age of fourteen) and appeared on numerous programs on the entertainment-bureau circuit with her father, Henry Clay Mecklem, a harpist. In 1892, Bessie recorded twelve Edison cylinders (cylinder recordings were invented in 1889); unfortunately, all have been lost. Lefebre never produced any recordings under his own name, although he probably was present at Gilmore Band recording sessions in 1891 and 1892; these, too, have been lost. Thus, the earliest extant recordings of a saxophonist are cylinders made by Eugene Coffin in 1896. Coffin was a virtuoso tenor saxophonist, who dazzled listeners with his “marvelous triple-tongue execution.” He performed at President William McKinley’s first inauguration in 1897. Rudy Wiedoft, of course, was one of the most popular recording artists of the 1920s.

11. Answer: c, eight. In 1856, the Garde Républicaine had a section of SSAATTBB, while in 1889, the configuration had changed slightly to SAATTTBB. The Mexican National Band of 1885 had nine saxophones (configuration unknown) and Gilmore’s “Famous 100 Men” of 1892 had ten saxophones (SSAATTBB plus soprano and bass)!

12. Answer: c, Patrick S. Gilmore. While Harvey Dodworth is considered to be the first to use a saxophone in his band, just after the Civil War (c.1865), Gilmore is credited as the first American bandleader to incorporate an entire SATB quartet of saxophones into the instrumentation of the military band (1873). It wasn’t until after the European tour of 1903, that Sousa felt it necessary to have four saxophones (AATB) in his band. Nineteenth-century bandmaster Carlos A. Cappa was an opponent of adding new instruments to the wind band.

13. Answer: b, The First Saxophone Quartette. This group, under the leadership of Eustach Strasser, was formed in 1869 in Philadelphia. Strasser first played saxophone with the Mendelsohn Quintet in Philadelphia in 1868 and toured with Gilmore during the European tour of 1878. The New York Saxophone Quartette Club was comprised of the four saxophonists in Gilmore’s Twenty-second Regiment Band from 1873-1885. Gilmore presented the saxophone quartet for the first time on a program from 15 January 1874, where they performed “Andante and Allegro” by Jean Baptiste Singelée. The Saint Louis Saxophone Quartette was organized in the 1870s and performed regularly as “an agreeable feature in the concerts of the Knights of Pythias Band at Schnaider’s Garden.” They disbanded in 1880, but were performing once again by 1892. The California Saxophone Quartette was organized in 1896 by

Frank Willard Kimball of San Luis Obispo, California. Kimball, a saxophone soloist since 1883, planned a concert tour of “mammoth proportions” throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico. It is unknown if such a tour ever took place.

14. Answer: d, Richard Wagner. The most famous 19th-century saxophone solo excerpts come from Bizet’s *L’Arlésienne* (1872). This music was reworked into orchestral Suites No. 1 and No. 2, both of which are still in the modern orchestral repertoire. Madame Elise Hall commissioned Debussy to write his *Rapsodie pour Orchestre et Saxophone* in 1901. The orchestral score has been authenticated in the hand of Debussy, structurally complete and dated 1903. The music was “prepared for printing” in 1919 by Jean Roger-Ducasse. Note: Contrary to popular belief, Ducasse did not finish composing *Rapsodie*; it was completed in 1903 by Debussy himself. Strauss scored for four saxophones (C soprano, F alto, F baritone, and C bass) in his *Sinfonia Domestica* written in 1903. However, the saxophone parts simply double other instruments within the orchestra, and thus, it can be heard performed with or without saxophones. While Wagner never scored for saxophone (he referred to Sax as a “terrible person”), the saxophone can today be heard in performances of *Tristan und Isolde*. In act III, Wagner suggests a “powerful, even rough, folk instrument, of a natural naivete” for the shepherd’s call signifying the arrival of the ship carrying Isolde. The soprano saxophone was used for this shepherd’s call in the 1999 performances at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. The Vienna Opera and English National Opera used the saxophone in *Tristan* in the early 1980s (and presumably still do).

15. Answer: c, Rock Springs, Wyoming. O. P. Thayer’s Saxophone Band was touted as “The Most Unique Band of Wind Instruments in America.” Comprised of 18 saxophonists (SSSSAAAAATTTTBBBBs), two clarinetists, two drummers and one drum major this band was perhaps the first of its kind in North America, dating from 1902. The first bass saxophone manufactured by C. G. Conn was made for Thayer’s Saxophone Band and delivered in 1902.

Comments or Questions:

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