Preparing the Stearns for the 21st Century

A new century is soon upon us. Like looking at the proverbial cup one must ask, "Is the 20th century nearly empty or full?" For the Stearns it seems filled with tasteful nourishment for those in the future who wish to catch a musical flavor of our generation's favorites. The picture below shows one of our steps in this direction. Feast your eyes upon the history of the latest official classification of musical instruments: electrophones. Thanks to a gift from the estate of Vera Robertson we have a theremin, the first commercially made electric instrument. The fact that our example was used as the sound of the Green Hornet on radio in the 1930s and 40s not only adds to its historical value but also reminds us of the importance of radio to music in the 20th century. In that context we have added one 1910 windup phonograph. It is complete with a listening horn with a label of the Victrola dog still listening to its master's voice. Stearns visitors under the age of 30 often find this instrument one of our most exotic. On guided tours we play it while young computer hackers look on with awe. The solovox attached to a keyboard nearby creates nostalgia to guests who recall its sound in every up-to date cocktail lounge in the 1940s (was it really 50 years ago?). The collection also owns a novachord, the first commercial model of the electric organ better known later as the Hammond. The piece de resistance, however, is a keyboard dominated by what looks like an old telephone operator's board. It is the first synthesizer that Robert Moog ever sold in 1965. We don't have a Strad violin but historically this Moog is more unique and valuable. An addition to its importance is the fact that it was originally bought by Alvin Nicholai and thus became the first synthesizer to be used in live theater. Next to it is a 1990 Casio digital guitar in which all the wonders of the Moog are miniaturized into one plastic box shaped to look like a guitar. We soon hope to add one more treasure to our collection, a 1966 Buchla synthesizer. Buchla was Moog's West Coast competitor. These two models then represent the technical elements that are driving us to a new century of highly electronic sounds! The sounds of traditional instruments are yet another goal for our modern museum. Our first step in that direction is the Virginia Patton Moss Case, recently built this October in the Palmer Christian lobby across from the Vesta Mills gallery. Thanks to the generous gift of Cruse and Virginia Moss you will now be able to view new exhibits any hour that the School of Music is open. The instruments are safely displayed behind 8 feet of unobstructed glass. Explanations of the exhibit along with their musical sounds can be heard on a special digital recording available to the viewer with the touch of a button. Our next modernization goal is to include video tape as part of the electrophone display. With this, you could see and hear the Theremin in performance or watch Mr. Moog explain his invention as he did in a 1989 Stearns 2 + 2 + 2 lecture/demonstration. An interactive video touch screen is part of our future plans. With this you will be able to enter into an educational adventure through photos and sounds of Stearns instruments. This program is linked to present designs for a computer catalogue of the entire collection. The Stearns is already in an "ancient" (i.e. 1965) computer program. If our long term goals are to be realized, the catalogue must be downloaded into a laser disk system that can produce photos and sounds as well as data concerning our holdings of over 2,000 instruments from all over the world.

However, as the futurist reader will immediately recognize, all these modern efforts may themselves become old fashioned by the time the 21st century arrives. To maximize the long term value of our late 20th century efforts, maintenance and updating are part of the design for each new plan.

Through all this electronic wonder and dreams we have not forgotten 20th century Americanana. An Arthur Godfrey plastic ukulele, electric pianos, digital saxophones and other musical fads are carefully stored in the Stearns for future historians. Our cup runneth over because Friends have joined us in the preservation of our decades. Its an exciting time to plan a museum for 21st century users. Join in the adventure.

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Sunday, January 13, 1991 at 2 p.m.
School of Music Recital Hall
"Trumpet Talk"
Professor Armando Ghitalla

On Sunday, January 13, 1991, at 2 p.m. in the School of Music Recital Hall, Professor Armando Ghitalla will cover 300 years in the evolution of the trumpet. This will be no ordinary lecture/demonstration—the "talking" will be done mostly by trumpets themselves!

Mr. Ghitalla will perform pieces that demonstrate the musical and sociological impact of makers, players and composers since the 18th century. He will use trumpets from his personal collection to lead us through not only the sounds but also the appearance of the instruments. The Ghitalla collection ranges from ancestors of today's instrument with no valves at all, to a unique modern trumpet with 5 valves. Equally rare and interesting brass instruments can be seen in the galleries of the Stearns Collection.

How do you recognize the sound of a natural trumpet? How can you get a chromatic scale from only 3 valves? Why were the composers Cesar Franck and Hector Berlioz reluctant to welcome the new valve technique? What were the greatest influences on performance practice in courts, churches, concert halls and jazz clubs? The answers to these questions and more are waiting for you at this 2 + 2 + 2 Stearns presentation.

Currently on the faculty of the University of Michigan, Professor Ghitalla previously taught trumpet at The New England Conservatory in Boston, and was, for 15 years, first trumpet with the Boston Pops Orchestra. He has been soloist with ensembles of the highest calibre throughout the United States and has premiered several new trumpet works in the past four decades but is equally well known for his commitment to trumpet music of the Baroque era. The pieces performed during his 2 + 2 + 2 presentation will begin with music from that period (Telemann) but will include music from the 19th century (Oskar Bohme) and contemporary America (Halsey Stevens). He will be accompanied by pianist, Bruce Patterson. There will be time for audience members to view the instruments and ask questions at the end of the presentation.

Sunday, February 10, 1991 at 2 p.m.
School of Music Recital Hall
"Cornus Ex Machina"
Professor Lowell Greer

When Gods appeared in 17th century opera, they arrived "Deus Ex Machina", cranked down from heaven to save the situation. The development of the French horn will arrive "Cornus Ex Machina" on Sunday, February 9, 1991, at 2 p.m. in the School of Music Recital Hall along with Lowell Greer, Associate Professor of Horn.

Of all brass instruments, the horn has perhaps the most colorful story to tell. An early common use was in sport when it was used by the nobility as a signalling instrument in the European hunt. For such a noisy outdoor sport, the volume of the horn was more important than its pitch, and its coiled shape made it possible to carry a long, loud horn on horseback. In addition, a rider could loop the horn over his head after sounding the signal and grab the reins to follow the hunt.

Mr. Greer will escort us from the hunt to the orchestra pit of the Baroque opera house where horn players had quite different needs. There, not volume but pitch was of the utmost importance. The ability to match pitch became increasingly difficult using the old hand-stopping techniques.

In order to trace the story effectively, Mr. Greer plans to use a lot of crooks—horn crooks that is! What is a horn crook? What difference does it make to the sound of a horn? How did players use their bag of crooks? Through the use of taped examples, Mr. Greer will answer these questions and more. To illustrate his lecture material, Mr. Greer will use instruments and crooks from his private collection as well as from the Stearns. The audience is welcome to view the instruments at the end of the hour when Mr. Greer will be happy to answer relevant questions.

Lowell Greer joined the faculty of the University of Michigan in 1988. He numbers among his own teachers some of the most eminent American hornists and has won every important horn competition throughout Europe and the United States. He has maintained an active performance career and has made a number of recordings of orchestral and chamber music. Of special note, however, is Professor Greer's commitment to education. Throughout his career, he has consistently combined important orchestral posts with teaching responsibilities.
Special Notice: Stearns Travels to Battle Creek

From December 5 through February over forty instruments from the Stearns can be seen at the Art Center of Battle Creek, Michigan. This special exhibit is entitled “Theme and Variations.” The Center’s four galleries are set geographically into Asian, African, European, and American examples. In these exhibits one can see not only the fascinating variations on the basic designs of winds, strings, and percussion within one area but also historical connections between different cultures as reflected in some of their musical instruments. The Stearns is enriching the exhibit with Southeast Asian shadow puppets and video tapes and the University of Michigan Japanese Music Group will perform at 7 on the opening evening. Other groups can be heard throughout the period of the exhibit. In addition, there are hands-on instruments that visitors can play.

Stearns Native American materials are on display as well at the Woodland Culture Centre in Brantford, Ontario, Canada. As you can see, the Stearns has grown not just in size but also in stature and in service to the world of musical instruments.

ROLL UP FOR MICHIGAN!!!

Michigan Songs
Roll in from
THE STEARNS
Collection of Musical Instruments

Famous Michigan songs and musicians are now to be found on a cassette tape recorded from rare piano rolls made between 1916 and 1990. The recorded pieces include: The Victors played by its composer, Bill Bolcom playing his piano roll compositions, and more! This cassette is available for $12.00 or only $6.00 for Friends of the Stearns.

Would you like to see and hear the pianola in action again? Mike Montgomery’s recent 2 + 2 + 2 presentation, “The Pianola Returns” is now available on videotape. Videotapes are available for $22.00 or only $16.00 for Members of the Friends of the Stearns. A list of available videotapes along with an order form for cassettes and videotapes is provided below.

_____ The Pianola Returns
_____ The Return of the Green Hornet
_____ Creating the Moog Synthesizer
_____ Vaudeville Revisited
_____ Computer Secrets of Musical Soundwaves

(Please indicate which video(s) you are ordering)

_____ Cassettes @ $12 reg./$6 members: $______
_____ Video tape(s) @ $22 reg./$16 members: $______

Friends of the Stearns earn discounts!

Doesn’t it make sense to become a Friend of the Stearns?

Become A Friend of The Stearns

With your help, additional instruments may be restored, played, displayed and appreciated by the musical public. Friends receive The Stearns Newsletter, invitations to the 2 + 2 + 2 lecture series and announcements of upcoming exhibits and performances. Your contribution will help support all activities of the Stearns Collection.

Membership in the Friends of the Stearns Collection is available in the following categories:

Benefactor $1,000____
Patron $ 500____

Sustaining $100____
Friends $ 30____

Student/Senior Citizen/ Beyond 200 miles $15____

I (We) want to support the Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments.

I enclose my check for $______________ made payable to The University of Michigan Stearns Collection.

Mr., Mrs., Dr., Miss, Ms., _______________ Please circle title(s) and print your name above as you would like it to appear on donor lists.

Spouse’s name if not given above Phone number

Street City State Zip Code

Please mail this form with your check to Friends of the Stearns Collection, The University of Michigan School of Music, Moore Building, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109.
Where did the Stearns logo come from?

Friends of Stearns first saw our logo in The Stearns Newsletter (Volume 1, Fall 1986). Here is the story of how it was created.

The rules of logo design are that it must be memorable and related to the item for which it stands. The photo below shows the source of our design. It is a tromba horn (Stearns No. 926) from Italy, made by Giovanni Pelitti in Milan. It was part of a set of twenty-five instruments in the Stearns Collection that were originally built for a festival held in Pompeii in 1883. They were apparently meant to represent a marching band in an ancient Roman army. Tour groups that have visited the Stearns Collection will attest that No. 926 plays loudly and well, its tongue adding a percussive clank as one marches along. To turn this truly memorable instrument into a logo the drawing left out the tongue and bent the tube into an S for Stearns. It seems to have worked since Stearns membership and event attendance have grown. Perhaps our next logical step should be T-shirts, jewelry, etc., but for now we keep our dragon leashed to the newsletter and stationery.