A Stearns Report from Japan

by Prof. William F. Malm, director

The Stearns is many things to many people; an education, a historical treasure, exotica. For some it is simply something to see on a Sunday afternoon. For the past decade it has been my new professional baby. Thanks to the nurturing care of its friends, the Stearns has grown in size and stature. As a proud parent I naturally wanted to show it off in my intellectual homeland, Japan. My opportunity came when the International Committee of Musical Instrument Museums and Collections met this May in Japan. Let me tell you about it.

ICIMIC, as it is known with its French acronym, is a subcommittee of the International Committee of Museums (ICOM). Thus its membership is worldwide. At the Japanese meeting there were music museum personnel from Sweden, Norway, Germany, Belgium, Italy, England, Scotland, Canada and the United States. Our colleagues from South America and China were on the program but could not attend. The meeting was held in Japan because some of the newest collections have been created there. In Osaka we saw not only the impressive collection at the Museum of Ethnology but also its high tech equipment for cataloguing and research. There is, after all, no lack of computer equipment in Japan. The collection of the Osaka College of Music was more like the Stearns in its world coverage except that, like most Japanese collections, everything is new. A group of Japanese girls playing their Balinese gamelan reminded me of the Javanese gamelan sounds that have filled Burton Tower for over twenty years. For me the greatest thrill of the many tours we took was a visit in Nara to the research laboratory of the Shosoin, a store house of goods from a ninth century imperial palace. We saw instruments from that rare collection, for me the first time in my 36 years of Japanese music research.

A very different instrumental world was seen at the major plant of the Yamaha Piano Company. High tech, robotic and individual workmanship were combined both here and at their wind manufacturing facility. We also saw the Yamaha Piano Tuning School. The actual meetings of ICIMIC were held in a Yamaha sports resort in Rakegawa. It had the exotic names of Kumagoe ("Love Your Wife") and Epicurian World. While other guests played golf, tennis or rode horseback (at very high prices) we presented papers and held working groups on topics of common concern such as cataloguing and conservation. Like a father with baby pictures, your director distributed Stearns Newsletters to every member and at every museum. At the meeting I read a paper entitled "Musical Instrument Collections in a University Setting" with specific references to our collection. The major point for discussion is seen in this excerpt from the presentation:

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica museums collect, preserve, study and exhibit objects (Vol. 12 p. 649). It sees museums as "institutions developed by modern society to stave off for as long as possible the deterioration and loss of objects treasured for their cultural value." It follows this with the statement, "Society does not save these things just to hoard them but to use them." It is perhaps the interpretation of this word "use" that is most controversial among music museums. It is the word we should talk about now. It is most appropriate that we do so in Japan for the goal of most Japanese dialogues is to come to some compromise in which no one loses face. The national and regional museums need be less bothered as they can maintain the status of preservation without debate. The problem for the university museum is that its educational functions are as great or larger than those of preserving the past. The problem compounds when the ob-jects are musical instruments. While research on construction of a piece of sculpture or a musical instrument can be pursued without meaningful damage there is always for the latter the problem of sound. The sound of an Instrument is not there if no one plays it. One solution is to record each instrument, played by an expert, and enter that sound into a computer catalogue after which the instrument is never touched again. Another is to allow qualified students to actually use historical instruments until such time as an instrument dies or loses original parts. Another is to have quality replicas for student use that provide an eratz sound and feel of the real thing. There is no "right" solution. A case by case decision seems more logical. "Let's talk about it."

A discussion at this meeting provided an ideal opportunity to move the problems and challenges of The Stearns Collection onto a more international level. As I heard of the problems in European collections and in the music divisions of large American museums, I began to appreciate how fortunate we are to be part of the University of Michigan system. The Japanese collections, such as the impressive new set at Kunitachi School of Music, tend to follow the same general balanced program of preservation and use as the Stearns. It's nice to know we are in step with the newer museum models. With continued efforts and support we may even lead the way. I'm proud of our child.

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The Chapins: Furniture Artisans, Tunesmiths, and Music Instrument Makers

By Frederick R. Selch, edited by Arlene Patterson

The name of Elphalet Chapin (1731-1807) of East Windsor, Connecticut, is well known as it relates to the development of fine furniture making. Shortly after Elphalet established himself in 1771, he took on a nephew, Aaron Chapin (1753-1838), as his apprentice. In turn, Aaron took on as apprentice his brother Amzi (1760-1838) and his own son Laertes (1778-1847). Each of these Chapin makers produced furniture of the highest quality and refinement. Besides the immediate Chapin family, close relatives, the Coltons, the Kings, the Goldthwaites, and the Peases, also have impressive reputations as makers of fine furniture.

These families also shared a deep involvement with and love of music. Some were leaders of choirs, some went west as intinerant singing masters. Laertes Chapin maintained a music store and Flavel Goldthwaite (trained by Laertes) was a famous singing master and founder of the first Oratorio Society in Hartford. In addition, Coltons and Chapins advertised musical instruments for sale: flutes, pitchpipes and tuning forks (essential tools for the singing master) and tenor and bass viols.

The family’s musical fame rests today with their compositions. The most famous member was Lucius (1760-1842). The older brother of Aaron and Amzi, Lucius was not a cabinet maker. He was a boy fifer in the Revolution, serving at Bunker Hill, Ticonderoga, Valley Forge and the defense of Hudson. After the war, he was trained as a clothier, but soon gave that up in favor of full time employment as an itinerant singing master. Like all such musical professionals, he was without formal musical training, having learned from older masters in their singing schools. Between 1791 and 1831, Lucius and Amzi taught innumerable singing schools, introducing the frontiersmen to the sacred music of New England. Although they did not issue their own publications, their work was so well known and thought of that it was included in many other publications. Tunes by the Chapins were included in almost every “shape note” psalm and hymnbook printed west of Philadelphia and in fact their tunes comprise the largest single body of American “folk” hymnody from a single source.

But who the Chapins were and where they came from was practically unknown to American musical historians before 1960 when Charles Hamm published his article, “The Chapins and Sacred Music in the South and West” in The Journal of Research in Music Education. Hamm’s work has subsequently been augmented by a dissertation on the Chapins by James Scholten (University of Michigan, 1972). Professor Richard Crawford of Michigan drew further information about the family from the Andrew Law Papers at the Clements Library in Ann Arbor when he wrote Andrew Law, American Psalmodist, (Evaston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

In the excitement of discovering the material relating to the singing schools and folk hymns, hardly any attention has been paid to the business of musical instrument making which involved several family members. As was mentioned above, almost all Chapin and Colton advertisements refer to the availability of musical instruments. However, we might not be sure that they were in fact the makers of these instruments had not Amzi’s journal referred over and over again to his employment in the making of bass viols. Since it is not a trade to teach oneself, it can be assumed that the Chapin/Colton canon of training involved some instruction in musical instrument making.

Further, there exists (in the collection of this author) a fine bass viol made and sold by Flavel Goldthwaite (1799-1836), Laertes’ cabinet-making apprentice and a Colton cousin. The Longmeadow, Massachusetts Historical Society owns a bass viol purchased for the Congregational Church by Deacon William Colton and supposed to have been made in Hartford around 1790. Could this have been made by one of the Chapins? Fortunately, in addition to the Journals, musical manuscripts and correspondence of Amzi Chapin, there also is preserved today a bass viol made by him. A study of that instrument and a comparison of its construction with the one in Longmeadow convinces me that they were made by the same maker. Comparison of the bow that is with the instrument and one in the collection of Lilian Caplin in New York brought another bass to our attention. All these instruments are full sized bass viols, cello-like instruments used to accompany congregational singing in eighteenth century New-England.

The making of bass viols in America was just beginning in the 1790’s. Thus the Chapins’ involvement in this trade is unusual. The lack of refinement in the construction of the suspected Amzi Chapin instruments suggests he worked without patterns and templates, and probably constructed his basses “in air” (without clamping forms). Remember that we are talking about a man who carried his work shop in his saddle-bags. His journal is filled with many references to the building of bass viols but he never mentions a workshop, and often he is working out on tour while living with someone else’s family. Nevertheless, he was able to build many instruments and much furniture. Eventually more work from this school will be discovered and at that time greater conclusions can be drawn. For the time being, however, we can only look for relationships with other New England activity and wonder if there was ever anyone else making these instruments on the other side of the Alleghenies before the middle of the nineteenth century.

N.B.: The surprising musical world of the Connecticut river valley is the topic of Mr. Selch’s presentation to be given at 2 p.m. on Sunday, September 8, 1991, in the Recital Hall of the School of Music as part of the Stearne’s 2 + 2 + 2 Fall lecture series. Also, don’t forget to reserve Sunday, October 13th, 1991 for the next lecture of the series which will take place at 2 p.m. in the Recital Hall of the School of Music.

PLEASE NOTE: The annual Friends of the Stearne’s business meeting will take place in the Recital Hall on Sunday, September 8 at 1:15 p.m., immediately before Mr. Selch’s presentation. Items on the agenda include the status of the Stearne’s collection and exciting future plans—what they are and how you may participate. The results of the election of Board members will be announced at this time. The Board generates much of the energy that helps the collection grow. Remember that it is elected by members of the Friends. If you are unable to attend the meeting please mail your ballot to arrive at The Stearne’s Collection before September 8.

2 + 2 + 2 = 2 p.m. on the 2nd Sunday of the first 2 months of each semester
EDUKIT—Stearns’ Outreach Program

by Paula Survilla

EDUKIT is an outreach program in which we develop a teaching aid for elementary through high school teachers on one particular culture. Visual and aural materials are included as well as a variety of activities designed to facilitate the exploration of the art, music, folklore and cultural traditions of given cultures. This pilot program should be available to the Ann Arbor school systems in the fall of 1991. There is no cost to the school except for mailing and transportation of boxed materials.

The first culture chosen for this project is Byelorussia (the third largest ethnic group of the Soviet Union).

In developing these EDUKITs the Stearns Collection will draw from the field work of its ethnomusicology students and faculty who, through their own research, have a wealth of their own unique material on diverse cultures. Most of this material has been collected during their dissertation research and is the result of first hand observation and study. School teachers will have access to slides, video and cassette tapes to enhance the learning experience that EDUKIT makes possible. The EDUKIT comes complete with instructions on how to use the materials provided as well as articulate and concise information sheets that lend themselves to ease of lesson planning.

Depending on interest and reception of this pilot program, subsequent kits may include African musical cultures as well as Native American, Japanese, and South East Asian groups.

Stearns Tours Information

Stearns tours can provide a memorable educational experience for visitors of all ages. Any person interested in scheduling a 1991-92 tour, should contact the Stearns (764-4389) in early September. If scheduling a tour for school children, let us know the age group, the reason for your visit (e.g., art, social studies topic), and how we can help enhance your curriculum. The cost for all groups, regardless of age, is $1.00 per person. This is a hands-on experience. Call ahead and we can plan a treasure hunt or help you design a questionnaire which can be completed during the tour to help reinforce the learning experience. For larger groups of children, please ensure that there is a minimum of 1 adult per 8 children.

The Stearns is also looking for tour guide volunteers. Training will be provided. If you are interested in assisting the youth program, or guiding adult tours, please let us know. We will be delighted to provide you with more detailed information.

May 23, 1991

Dear Paula,

Thank you for showing us around the museum. The instruments were very awesome. You were very nice to show and explain them to us. These are some of our favorite instruments: walking stick flute, glass flute, flowered violin, turtle shell drum, harp, pocket violin, Chinese gong.

Thanks again!

We had a great time.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

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 Sustaining $100 Student/Senior Citizen/
Patron $ 500 Friends $ 30 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.
How Do I Get to The Stearns?

The Stearns Collection of Musical instruments is located in the new Margaret Dow Towsley wing at the south end of the Earl V. Moore School of Music on Baits Drive in the University of Michigan North campus area. Enter through the doors nearest to the parking lot. The MacIntosh Vocal Arts Center is just across the hall and to the right of the entrance, and The Stearns galleries are down the stairs at the end of the hall to the right.

Admission: Free at all times.

Exhibit Hours: Thurs., Fri. 10-5 Sat., Sun. 1-8

Group Visits and Tours: To arrange for group visits or guided tours by members of The Stearns collection staff, please call (313) 763-4589.

Parking: Metered parking is available south of the entrance doors.

Magical Musical Dragons Lurk in School of Music

"I distinctly remember having seen in childhood an Austrian band which made a lasting impression on me. It had 5 or 6 serpents (basshorn, or basson russe) in the front rank, the bell of each being shaped like the open mouth of a huge serpent painted blood-red inside, with huge white teeth, and wagging tongue which moved up and down at every step. As to what or how the band played I remember nothing excepting those terrible open jaws!"

from J.A. Kappey, History of Military Music.
London: Boosey and Co., 1894

Subscribers to the newsletter will know how the Stearns logo was inspired by one of these dragon-headed horns (Vol. 5 No. 2) The magic of these eyecatching brass instruments lies in their colorful and ferocious looking appearance.

Today visitors to the Stearns can experience the same visual delight. Outside the music school library there stands a whole case of dragons!

Plan to linger awhile and enjoy even more new Stearns exhibits throughout the School of Music. A short walk from the dragons’ case into the music library takes the visitor to an exhibit of our most recent acquisition of instruments from Africa, while the main floor entrance lobby of the School of Music currently houses Made in the USA an exhibit featuring American instruments from the past and present. This display includes a flute made in 1850 for use on Jenny Lind's tour, a native American traditional flute made in 1990, an American made European-style violin and zither, and a rare American prototype of the modern saxophone. On display in the lower lobby of the Stearns Collection galleries is Indian Flights of Fancy, a rare display of birds and animals that festooned traditional and experimental 19th century instruments made in India.

Thanks to the generosity of Friends of Stearns, such fascinating and unique instruments will continue to delight future generations.