American Musical Instrument Society Meeting

The annual meeting of the American Musical Instrument Society (AMIS) was held May 17-21 in Salt Lake City, Utah, with a day trip to Brigham Young University in Provo. Newly appointed Stearns Director Margo Halsted attended the meeting and met with other musical instrument enthusiasts. President Phillip Young (University of Victoria) completed five years of service and handed the gavel over to William Hettrick (Hofstra University). Harrison Powley, of BYU, was the conference host. Some of the other 72 members in attendance were Laurence Libin, music curator of New York City’s Metropolitan Museum; Stearns featured speaker for a Virginia Martin Howard Lecture last February, and Ann Arbor’s Glennis Stout, who spoke on "The Potter Flute Legacy." There were another ten lectures on a wide variety of subjects.

The meeting included visits to the various interesting sites on Temple Square, a violin school, an organ-building factory, and the BYU carillon.

The main reason for traveling to BYU was to view its special exhibit "Our Tuneful Heritage, American Musical Instruments from the Metropolitan Museum of Art." The beautifully displayed exhibit featured 61 instruments, that are also shown and described in a very professional catalogue compiled by Mr. Libin.

Next year's meeting will be held in May at the Shrine to Music in Vermillion, South Dakota.

Stearns Collection Case Studies

By William P. Malm
Director Emeritus

The Stearns Collection instruments are housed in a variety of display cases. This is the story of several cases and how we have learned to build better cases over the years.

How Not to Build a Case

When the Moore building was constructed in 1965, the plans called for three display cases, two in the main lobby and one in the Music Library. The lobby and library cases are panels of glass set in wide oak frames, with fluorescent lights installed behind cloudy overhead glass. Access to the lobby cases is through two framed panels of glass that serve as doors. The library case may be entered via cabinet doors that form the rear wall. At the time of construction, the walls of the lobby cases were all brick, matching the brick found throughout the building. Vertical metal bracket holders on back walls made it possible to install glass shelves as needed. Such a design was good for books or music on shelves with some light filtering though the glass above, but it really was better suited for visible storage than for display. Wherever one looked there was wood or brick. Something had to be done.

Continued on page 2

Photo 1, the display case near the School of Music entrance
Stearns Case Study

Continued from page 1

How to Change a Design

The first step was to call in the University Museum of Art staff for consultation. With their help, fiber boards covered with light colored fabric were used to blank out the brick walls and the shelf brackets. There are now a variety of boxes that create different angles and heights. Paula Survilla, a former Stearns assistant, designed these units by splitting rectangular boxes so that they may be combined or turned individually into various shapes (see photo 1). With new cloth facings and fish line, exhibits became more museum quality, though the problems of the thick oak frames and uncontrollable light remain. However, these two problems are solved in the Music Library case.

How to Create a New Design

Photo 2 shows the original library case design: three windows, a rectangular space and metal bracket holders. Following the collection director's ideas, Curt Taylor, a School of Art student in the Industrial Design Program, drew plans and constructed a cardboard model of a case. This case has only one piece of glass in front, and movable walls and ceiling. Three pieces of wood changed the shape of the display case in a manner that draws the viewer's eyes towards the center. All three units are hinged, making it possible to vary the depth of the case by moving the walls. The backs of the walls are lower than the front. Since the ceiling is also hinged, it can be adjusted to fit snugly on top of the walls. Whatever the height of the case, the walls and ceiling are never square. A hole near the front of the ceiling allows instruments to be suspended by wire without showing the fixtures. Behind the front wall is a light track for spotlights, and a dimmer switch is set behind the case.

Photo 3 shows the actual expanding/shrinking case. The case was made possible by the generous support of Virginia Martin Howard, seen smiling in front of her gift.

The Virginia Patton Moss case, located before the entrance to Blanche Anderson Moore Hall, is another milestone in our exhibiting ability. It has a single sheet of glass in front, flexible invisible lights, and a digital audio system that can provide audible explanations and the sounds of the instruments displayed. Photo 4 shows Virginia and Cruse Moss and the author (holding The Stearns logo) standing before the Moss' wonderful gift.

Through a combination of interdepartmental cooperation within the University and enlightened patronage, The Stearns continues to grow from a collection to a museum.
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**How Do I Get to The Stearns?**

The Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments is in the Margaret Dow Towsley wing at the south end of the School of Music's Earl V. Moore Building. It is located on Baits Drive on the North Campus of the University of Michigan. Enter through the doors off the lower level parking circle. (Once inside, the McIntosh Center is just across the way.) The galleries of The Stearns Collection are located on the entry level and on two lower floors. Both an elevator and stairs are available.

**ADMISSION:** Open to the public without charge.

**SUMMER GALLERY HOURS:**
Wednesdays-Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Sundays from 1:00 - 5:00 p.m.

**GROUP VISITS AND TOURS:** To arrange for a group visit and/or guided tour, call (313) 662-7790. The organization Around Town schedules tours. The suggested donation for a group visit and/or guided tour is $1 per person.

**PARKING:** Metered parking is available in the parking lot.

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Around Town Now in Charge of Stearns Tours

(313) 662-7790 — that is the telephone number of Around Town, the well-known Ann Arbor tour group now in charge of arranging Stearns tours. The business is owned by Linda Grekin and Sheila Dumont. Last fall, Around Town ran a three-night training session for interested volunteers. Twelve persons present at the sessions, which included information on how to adapt tour material to various age groups and time limits. At the end of the sessions, each docent presented a tour. Another training session will be held September 21 and 28. Interested persons may call Around Town for further information.

Some of the members of the fall 1994 docent training class, left to right, Joanne Boskey, Norman Schmaltz, Bill Dion, Nancy Goff, Linda Marshall, Sally Bowers. Two previous docents still serving are Peg Gilbert and Valerie Carey.

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 Virginia Martin Howard Lectures and announcements of upcoming exhibits and performances. Your tax deductible contribution will help support all activities of The Stearns Collection.

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

☐ Benefactor $1000  ☐ Patron $500  ☐ Sustaining $100  ☐ Friend $35  ☐ Student/Senior Citizen $15

☐ I would prefer my gift to be designated for Endowment.

☐ I am interested in naming The Stearns Collection in my estate plan. Please contact me with information about trust and bequest options.

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

I (We) enclose a/my/our check for $________ made payable to: The University of Michigan.

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Please circle title(s) and print your name above as you would like it to appear on donor lists.

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