

Introduction

When a saxophone is mentioned, it instinctively creates an imagination of a soothing sound commonly associated with jazz music. It is a unique instrument that has played a vital role in transforming the sound of music. The saxophone is also known as the sax to music lovers. Those who play the saxophone are called saxophonists. It belongs to the woodwind family among the numerous musical instruments. It is played using a single reed mouthpiece that is commonly confused with the one used in playing a clarinet. They are regularly made using brass (Jadassohn, 58).

This remarkable instrument was invented by a renowned Belgian musician who was also talented in making music instruments. He was called Adolphe Sax. Sax's father was an instrument maker by his own right and he is the reason why Sax got interested in music. He invented the instrument in 1841 (Jadassohn, 60).

The idea behind his invention was to come up with an instrument that could balance high power and vocal sensation of the woodwinds and at the same time to be the most flexible among the brass. This would fill the huge gap between the two parts. The string based instruments would normally be overpowered by those instruments which used wind. He obtained a two grouped patent in 20TH March 1846 that enclosed seven instruments each, with each cluster consisting different instruments of different sizes in random transposition (Jadassohn, 64).

Transition of the Saxophone

The Saxophone has a unique history on how it transformed from a simple novelty instrument to become one of the most recognized instruments in the world of music. As mentioned earlier in the study, it dates back to 160 years ago. In 1841 just shortly after its invention, a famous composer Hector Berlioz gave the C base a debut in a large stage filled with music lovers in Belgium. It got huge recognition because of the distinct tone it produced, its high flexibility, and an excellent control of dynamics. This instrument was proving to be phenomenal and it literally became too big to be restricted to Belgium alone. Sax decided to launch the instrument to other parts of the world and in 1842 he moved to Paris in France (Segell, 15).

After shifting to the new country, he created an entire saxophone family comprising of 14 different saxophones. The distinction was on pitch and dimension. The family consisted of: E flat sopranino, F sopranino, B flat soprano, C soprano, E flat alto, F alto, B flat tenor, C tenor, E flat baritone, B flat bass, C bass, E flat contrabass, and F contrabass. This was a large family and with time some proved to be outmoded since they produced very similar sounds (Segell, 22).

By the year 1845, the saxophones had become so popular no band was considered to be complete if it did not have a saxophone. Due to the Saxophone, 1845 became a famous year in music history and it is quoted even in history books as the year of the famous "battle of the bands" (Segell 35). During this period, the French army had not embraced the new music phenomenon and was still the more accustomed conventional instruments. Sax decided to take advantage of this situation so that he can popularize his instrument. He challenged the French army band to a contest where he would compete using a band that will exclusively use his saxophones, against the army band which used the old orchestral instruments (Segell, 88).

The army band accepted the challenge and on the fateful day, Sax's band comprising twenty eight men overpowered the French army band which had thirty five men. The two bands could not be compared at any level the soothing sound of the saxophones kept the gathered crowd on their feet. After that contest, the saxophone was authoritatively initiated in the French Army band. The use of the saxophone by the French Army created a platform to popularize the instrument and its use gradually stretched across Europe (Segell, 94).

For years a lot of composers wrote music that would blend well with the saxophone. This trend continued but around 1920, the trend changed and the instrument got a new role and it steadily became popular with dance music. This revolution could not take place without few alterations to the instrument. Since the instrument was invented to create smooth and mellow sound that is balanced to a perfected tone, it had to be altered so that it could be in the same league with strident drums and raucous trumpets that were used simultaneously to produce dance music (Segell, 99).

The first thing that was adjusted in the instrument was the mouth piece and it became smaller than the original version. It was also made to be parallel. These changes caused an overall transformation which resulted to loud and vile sound that was required for dance music and Jazz. Ever since this transformation took place, the saxophone has been regarded as a key Jazz instrument.

Nowadays, the saxophone cannot be mentioned without someone associating it with smooth music. The instrument is not only identified with Jazz but it is considered a key instrument in nearly all manners of music. Its unique sound can be found in different venues from huge baseball fields to classy night clubs. It is virtually impossible to listen to music without hearing a sound that is connected to the saxophone.

Conclusion

The saxophone has transformed from 1841 up to date to become one of the most significant instruments in music. Thanks to Adolphe Sax, the world will always have a chance to listen to the most soothing sound that can ever be produced. The saxophone will remain to be one of the greatest inventions in the world of music. Personally I never got the chance to listen to the initial instrument but based on my experience with the modern one, I believe it was a brilliant invention.

Works Cited

1. Jadassohn, Salomon. A Course of Instruction in Instrumentation. Chicago: BiblioBazaar, LLC, 2008.
2. Segell, Michael. The Devil's Horn: The Story of the Saxophone, from Noisy Novelty to King of Cool. New York: Picador, 2006.