



## **Brass Instruments**

*Survival of the fittest*

### **Trevor**

What is it that caused some instruments to survive and become common right through the 20<sup>th</sup> century and others to just fall by the wayside?

### **Arnold**

Well some instruments have survived because they meet an outstanding need, such as the saxhorns. Adolphe Sax produced the whole family of instruments, from very small to very large, all having the same fingering system, which meant that they were very useful in bands where players could be moved from one instrument to another.

So the saxhorns actually became very popular and were an outstanding commercial success. They have survived, whereas the clavicore, which provided a rather similar tone quality was never quite of the same ease of playing as the slightly later saxhorns.

Other instruments, one feels, have been the victim of fashion. The cornaphone, a perfectly good instrument, but they weren't invented until the 1880s and by the time the people who were organising military bands and brass bands tended to be happy with what they had.

### **Trevor**

Isn't it interesting the spirit of invention that I'm always taken when I go to an instrument museum to see all these 19<sup>th</sup> century instruments of different shapes and sizes none of which have really survived in any, with any level of importance one wonders what's going on with all these instruments being invented.

### **Murray**

Yes that's right, the 19<sup>th</sup> century was such an amazing period of technological invention all over wasn't it, that I often think that the musical instrument area is one of the most striking illustrations of that. There seem to be many people with this obsessive interest in finding some new way of producing sound from a brass instrument.

### **Arnold**

The cornet with an echo bell was produced in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There's a fourth valve here and when that's pressed the whole instrument sounds with this constricted bell rather than with the normal bell.

### **Murray**

And all sorts of inventions, like the echo cornet for example in which you have two different bells or the omnitonic horn with umpteen different bells. It's clear that many of these things were much too complicated to really be economically sensible but the inventors just couldn't resist following this path which often led to some kind of rather ridiculous conclusion

### **Trevor**

It's no surprise to me that, that many of these inventors died in poverty because they had spent a happy life in pursuit of their own dreams but they never had the necessary pecuniary awards...

### **Murray**

That's right it's a little sad isn't it, that the ones who really managed to make a successful business career were probably not the inventors or the musicians but just people who could

take a hard headed business view and say this instrument will sell, all these others won't so we throw them into the museum and that's where we find them now.