

Paul Cohen

Vintage Saxophones Revisited

The Royal Slide Saxophone



If it is true that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then there was a torrid love affair with the saxophone during the post World War I years through the Roaring Twenties. It seems that any new instrumental idea, adaptation, thought, or concoction by inventors, manufacturers, or players found its way onto a saxophone. Whether a prototype, such as the Loomis alto; a production model, such as the King Saxello; or a patent sketch, such as Bill Drew's device for playing three at once, the saxophone was the center of attention and at the mercy of thoughts both practical and fanciful.

The slide saxophone is one of the more unusual instruments that came out of this era. It is a saxophone with infinite pitch variation that can glide, much like a singer's voice, from one pitch through another. Like a trombone, there is no definite chromatic pitch for any note. Exact pitches are the domain of the

inner ear and physical dexterity of the player. There are several varieties of slide saxophones; what makes each a saxophone (more or less) is the single reed mouthpiece (usually a soprano size) attached to a conical bore tubing. Acoustically the instruments overblow the octave, lending a saxophone-like sound. Some instruments even have octave keys. One of the challenges with this concept was designing a slide

mechanism that worked with the conical bore of the instrument. Different inventors solved this problem in many ingenious ways.

The idea of the slide saxophone arose from several sources. It had, of course, a novelty appeal for sound effects and churlish noises.

These were the toys that

cashed in on the popularity of the saxophone by promoting its (distant) similarity and touting its extra-musical effects. Others considered the slide saxophone for the possible new sounds that were becoming a part of the expanded sonorities heard in jazz and popular ensembles. There was a particular interest in the sounds of other cultures, particularly the Middle East and the Orient, and these sounds often found their way into popular music-making, including show music, popular music concerts, dance music, vaudeville, and other touring circuits. And, of course, the emergence of jazz often included a wealth of new sounds never before heard by most of America.

There were those who considered the slide saxophone as a new, contemporary musical instrument that could explore, with some degree of seriousness, new sounds and effects that would dignify, not vitiate, a new listening experience. And why not? There were slide trombones and trumpets, stringed instruments (including the guitar and ukelele) and a host of tuneful percussion with movable tones. Experiments with the slide saxophone were conducted within

THE SLIDE SAXOPHONE

The Latest Sensation in the Musical Field

If You Can Sing a Melody You Can Play This Instrument



Price \$60.00
in Brass.
In Silver
\$70.00

Space will not permit us to publish the many articles that have appeared in well-known magazines, calling attention to the wonder instrument of modern orchestras, the new Royal Slide Saxophone. Orchestra leaders and musicians who are in close touch with the public taste in music say that the Slide Saxophone will be used as a solo instrument supported by the regular saxophone in the most up-to-date orchestras before long.

Its construction is such that it has no keys, no fingering to learn, no pads to be lathered with or get out of order. Scale is engraved on side of piston, and is always visible to player, making it easy to read and operate. It is a combination of saxophone, trombone and Fricco whistle, which gives its musical voice a cello effect. It has all the range of a saxophone, the sliding musical qualities of the trombone, and an additional individual musical voice not found in either the saxophone or trombone. It is specially adaptable to heretofore unknown jazz effects that are so much desired in modern dance music.

Advertisement for the Royal Slide Saxophone

Questions for Paul Cohen should be sent to: Paul Cohen, 43 Van Buskirk Rd., Teaneck, NJ 07666 USA

existing ensembles. The July 1928 issue of *True Tone*, the Buescher magazine, contained this article on the quarter-tone saxophone.

Specht on the Air

Probably the first demonstration of syncopated quarter-tone music ever played anywhere was presented during the program of dance and concert music by Paul Specht and His World Famous Orchestra over Station WOR and the Columbia Broadcasting Chain at 10:00 p.m. on the evening of April 25.

Specht played the following program, consisting of his Columbia recordings *One More Night*, *The Grass Grows Greener*, *Way Down Home*, *Let a Smile be Your Umbrella*, *We Ain't Got Nothing to Lose*, a novelty recording of Southern folk songs titled *Echoes of the South*, and a brand new Broadway waltz titled *Let's Remember Yesterday* featuring Johnny Morris, vocalist. The quarter-tone musical novelty will be included in another new Broadway tune titled, "Just a Little Different."

Specht uses a new invention of slide saxophones with slide comets, slide trombones, six string violins, string bass and tympani for his quarter-tone effects and a musical treat and innovation was served for the high-brows as well as the popular song fans!

Perhaps an additional inspiration for the slide saxophone comes from the saxophone's most treasured intrinsic quality, its inherent voice-like, lyrical tone. Despite the rise of new and vibrant musical mediums in the 1920s that included the saxophone, including that of jazz, the saxophone still maintained an essentially dark, smooth, and lyric tone quality sharing many qualities, both acoustically and stylistically, with the human voice. It is a characteristic that was constantly celebrated and sought out in many styles of music-making of the time. This is verified not only by the existing recordings of soloists and ensembles throughout the decade, but by examining and playing the instruments and mouthpieces of the period. The excavated chamber, high baffle, and close lay of these mouthpieces cannot help but offer a dark, lyric tone. It is possible that designers sought to combine this inherent lyricism with qualities most associated with the human voice, especially that of the portamento—the subtle slide between two notes so idiomatic of singing and emotional expression.

The Slide Saxophone **The Latest Sensation in the Musical Field** **If you can Sing a Melody You Can Play This Instrument**

Space will not permit us to publish the many articles that have appeared in well-known magazines calling attention to the wonder instrument of modern orchestras, the new Royal Slide Saxophone.

Orchestra leaders and musicians who are in close touch with the public taste in music say that the Slide Saxophone will be used as a solo instrument supported by the regular Saxophone in the most up-to-date orchestra before long.

Its construction is such that it has no keys, no fingering to learn, no pads to bother with or get out of order. Scale is engraved on side of piston, and always visible to players, making it easy to read and operate. It is a combination of Saxophone, trombone, and Frisco whistle which gives its musical voice a cello effect. It has all the range of a Saxophone, the sliding musical quality of a trombone, and an additional individual musical voice not found in either the Saxophone or trombone. It is specially adaptable to heretofore unknown jazz effects that are so much desired in modern dance music. Within a few minutes practice, you can get the vibrato or tremolo effect which takes years to get on the ordinary Saxophone. You can slur a whole octave on this instrument.

In addition, there are several other important advantages it possesses, any one of which in itself sufficient to warrant a leading place in all orchestras.

First, it is easy to play. Here a great objection that works against any other instrument is at once removed. No long courses are necessary, no endless hours of practice. Anyone who can whistle a tune can play the Royal Slide Saxophone.

Second: The cost of the Slide Saxophone is so moderate that it is within reach of everybody.

Price \$60 (brass) In Silver \$70.00.

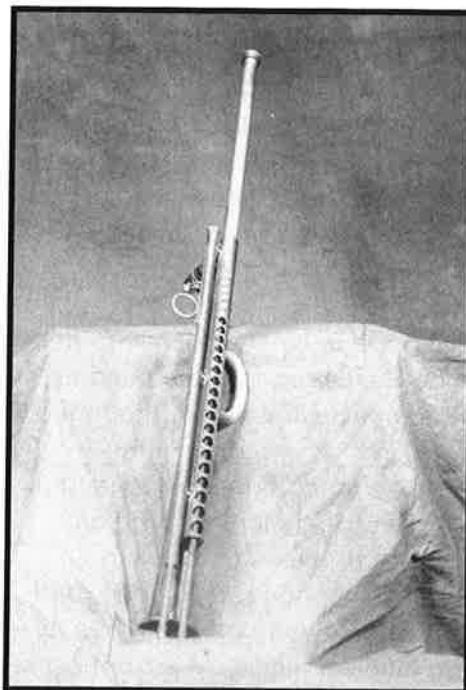
This column and my next one will explore the rarefied world of the slide saxophone. Part I examines the Royal Slide Saxophone, while Part II will conclude with the King C Saxoprano, English Swanee saxes, and a host of instruments that might have been.

ROYAL SLIDE SAXOPHONE

The firm that produced this unusual saxophone, Reiffel & Husted, began as a silversmith company in downtown Chicago, c. 1911. Besides manufacturing silver goods for home and industry, they repaired and refinished silver items of both domestic and commercial nature. The World War I demand for

military instruments, especially that of bugles, led Reiffel & Husted to the successful production first of bugles (c. 1918) and then to cornets and trumpets in different keys, as well as trombones and other brass instruments.

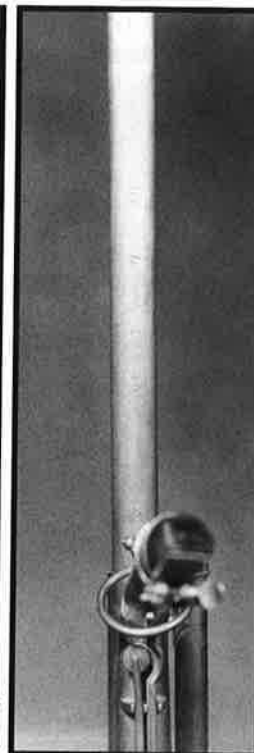
In 1922 Carl Reiffel contacted Lyon and Healy, also based in Chicago, about distributing his new invention, the slide saxophone. At the time Lyon and Healy was a huge musical merchandising firm. In addition to selling a full line of saxophones with the Lyon and Healy name (made by other manufacturers), they sold a novelty 1/2 curved soprano which they touted as being of perfect "balanced action." It



The Royal Slide Saxophone



The Royal Slide Saxophone with slide extended



Royal Slide Saxophone showing the note names on the piston. D, E, F, G, and A, are visible.

performances throughout his career. But other than Snub, no following seems to have developed. There is no record of how many were made, although I am aware of the existence (including the

was designed to compete with the King Saxello. The response from Lyon and Healy, from 1922, was just a little predatory and not encouraging. According to the article on Reiffel & Husted by Lloyd P. Farrar that appeared in the February 1991 issue of the AMIS Newsletter, the company wrote back:

If you succeed in making the slide saxophone work to our satisfaction, we are willing to authorize your firm to manufacture these instrument for us, any new features you embody in same to be exclusively our property; patent applications are to be assigned to us by you without charge.

In other words, Lyon and Healy wanted to completely own the instrument and patents outright, while not paying anything for the rights, research, or ideas. They would allow the inventor only the opportunity to supply the instruments as a wholesale manufacturer. Not surprisingly, Carl Reiffel immediately applied for his own patent, which was granted on June 24, 1924. By then the instrument was in production, advertised, and available for sale.

The ads of Reiffel & Husted extolled the many innovations and virtues of such an original instrument. It looks as if they expected it to be as popular as conventional saxophones! A typical

Reiffel & Husted ad c. 1922-23 from their catalogue gives an impassioned plea for the seriousness and viability of the instrument, despite misspelling "saxophone" nine of the ten times:

I have enjoyed the pleasure (if that's what one would call it) of playing the Royal Slide Saxophone from my collection. Although I have not yet used the instrument professionally, I am ready and waiting for the phone call. The instrument itself is solidly made and possesses a rich soprano saxophone sound. The oversize handle allows the horn to be held firmly, so the slide can be freely manipulated and at varied angles. The slide moves easily and the two octave keys allow for a smooth and consistent portamento from one end of the slide to the next. The engraved note letters (F, G, D, etc.) on the piston actually do come to eye level, which is useful for starting out on particular pitches (the rest is up to the schooled ear of the player). Crossing registers is more difficult and undoubtedly requires coaching from a trombonist. Despite attempts throughout the decade to popularize it with occasional concerts, recordings, articles, and advertising, its less practical nature relegated it strictly to novelty status. Snub Mosely, the famous jazz trombonist, used this instrument in his

one in my collection) of about ten.

My thanks to Lloyd Farrar of Baltimore, Maryland, and Dr. Peggy Banks and the Shrine to Music Museum in Vermillion South Dakota, for their invaluable assistance. And a special thanks to Dean of Hallmark Photographers, Teaneck, NJ, for the superb photos. There will be more on the other types of slide saxophones in my next column. §

Buy, Sell, Or Trade!

Saxophones!
Mark VI Saxes Available
Plus Other Vintage
Saxophones, Flutes, And
Clarinets!

Kellogg Johnson
P.O. Box 1276
Laurel, Maryland 20707
Phone (410) 792-4806