

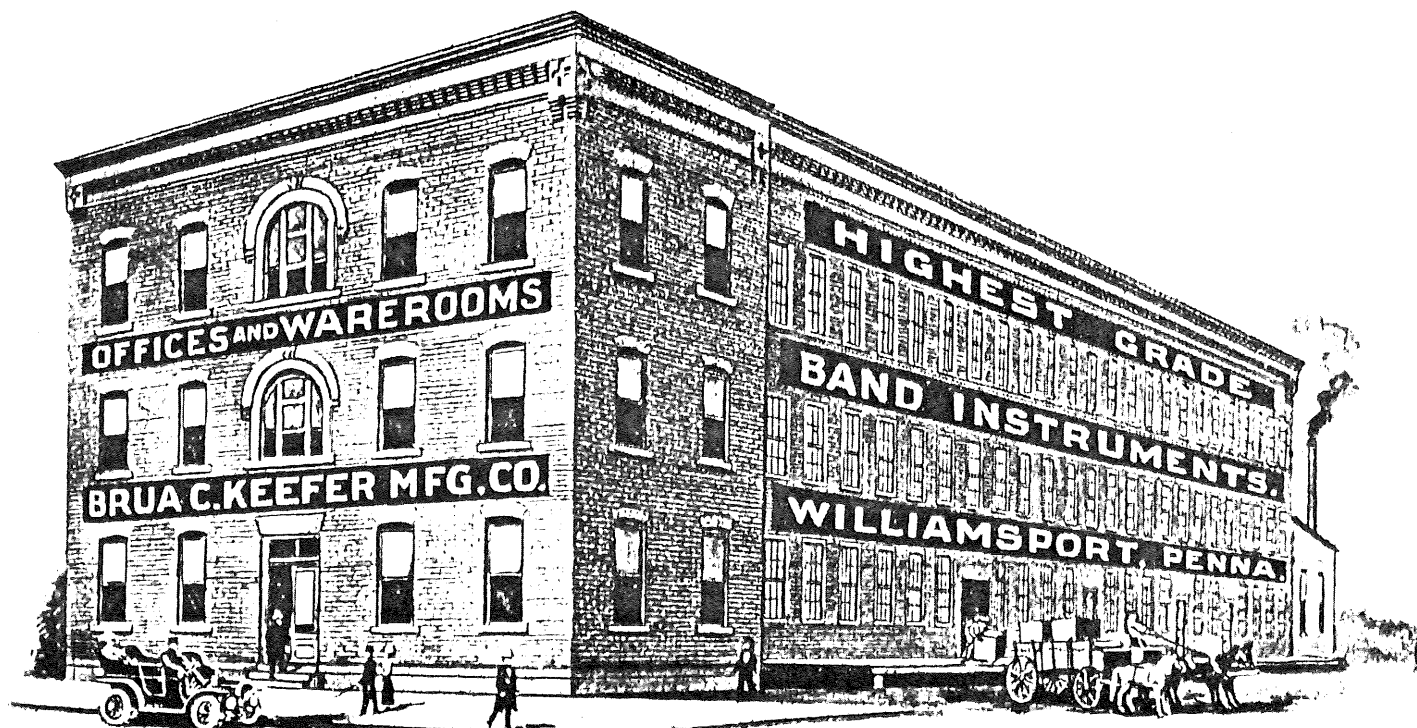
NEWSLETTER

Of The

American Musical Instrument Society

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An artist's conception of the Brua C. Keefer factory at the corner of Walnut and Louisa in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, ca.1910.

KEEPING-UP WITH KEEFER: DISTINLAND NOT SO DISTANT

By Lloyd P. Farrar

The city of Williamsport, Pennsylvania, is a concentration of vintage Americana covering the broad opposing slopes of hills that meet rather abruptly as they touch the opposite banks of the Susquehanna River. Once an iron, coal, and lumber center, served by three railroads and boasting more millionaires than any other American community of its size, it remains a comfortable city with about 35,000 residents, located somewhat near the center of the

state about 65 miles south of the border with New York.

Baseball bats built into the woodwork of a fast-food outlet signal that Williamsport is Little League City, site of the annual World's Series, but there is nothing at the intersection of Walnut Street and Rural (once Louisa) Avenue, now the site of a hospital, to indicate that what advertising bills described as "The Largest Building in the World Devoted Exclusively to the Manufacture of Highest Grade Band Instruments" once stood there.

Because of rising interest among collectors in instruments from the Henry Distin and the Brua C. Keefer (Distin's successor) companies, a

visit to Williamsport was made in August 1981 to find remaining evidences of former activities, including an interview with Brua C. Keefer III, a vibrant man who is a treasure trove of remembrances of the Keefer business. Now 58 and semi-retired, Keefer is a lifelong resident of the city who worked in the plating and repair departments of the factory and knew the second generation of workmen. It was largely the financial support of his great-grandfather, state senator Luther R. Keefer, and the urging of a Williamsport bandsman, George M. Repasz, that brought the Henry Distin firm to Williamsport from Cressona, located in coal-rich

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NEWSLETTER OF THE
AMERICAN MUSICAL
INSTRUMENT SOCIETY

André P. Larson, Editor

The Newsletter is published in March, June, and October for the members of the American Musical Instrument Society (AMIS). News items, photos, reviews, and short monographs are invited, as well as any other information of interest to AMIS members. Address all correspondence to the Editor, AMIS Newsletter, USD Box 194, Vermillion, SD 57069. Requests for back issues and all correspondence regarding membership (\$18.00 per year) should be directed to the Membership Office, American Musical Instrument Society, USD Box 194, Vermillion, SD 57069.

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Schuylkill County north of Philadelphia, where reportedly it had begun operations in 1875-77.

Records in the courthouse of Lycoming County (Williamsport) show that an application to form the Henry Distin Manufacturing Company was entered on March 12, 1886, and amended December 2, 1889. The company reportedly began operations in its new place (a converted racing grandstand!) in 1888. One would have expected Henry J. Distin (1819-1903) to be the controlling personality; an early exponent of the saxhorn, Distin had completed 30 years of business in England before coming to the United States to initiate a new career in the Philadelphia area. However, evidence suggests that his involvement with the Williamsport enterprise was minimal; his name appears as a resident of the city only in the directory for 1890, when he lived at 303 Pine as "superintendent" of the firm bearing his name.

Brua Keefer III is certain that the firm's name was changed as early as 1905 by his grandfather, Brua Cameron Keefer, Senior, who, trained in law, had been secretary/treasurer of the new company. Apparently, the company was put into his full control, about 15 years after large-scale operations had begun, for the purpose of clearing a financial obligation. Be that as it may, the records show that a receiver was appointed in December 1908 to manage the corporation, and, two months later, the firm was placed on auction. Bidding successfully, Brua Keefer became sole owner and president on March 1, 1909.

When Keefer died in 1927, ownership passed to his son, Brua C. Keefer, Jr. (1892-1973). He retained his father's approach to the business, employing a conservatively small cadre of workmen, most of whom were European-trained and worked alone on a single kind of instrument or a single process. He did, however, bring diversification by attaching a service station to the property, and, in 1927, opening a School of Music in the factory. He guided the business through its peak years. It was wartime restrictions on strategic metals after 1940 that brought production to a halt. And it was a massive fire in 1960 that destroyed the building and its contents, including business records. The last

circumstance is very troublesome to collectors because no cumulative list of serial numbers exists, nor is one likely to be found.

What does remain for collectors is a dwindling supply of Distin and Keefer brasses, although Keefer asserts that the attics and closets of many Pennsylvania homes still hold a considerable number of them. It would be helpful, if AMIS members and others reading the Newsletter would contribute information about instruments they have. Keefer, himself, retains only a fine pocket cornet. The Lycoming County Historical Society Museum has two souvenir, straight valveless signal horns by Distin. They are of the 6,200 series of serial numbers and are inscribed July 4, 1890. This leads one to estimate that production was about 3,000 horns annually in the early years, leading to a total of 50,000 by 1905. The earliest Distin-Williamsport instruments, then, should be dated after 1887 and the last certainly no later than 1908. The Keefer series may begin in 1905, certainly by 1909, and ceases sometime around the beginning of World War II. With the help of readers who may have dated "presentation" horns, it may be possible to give greater specificity to these estimates.

According to Keefer, some of the famous virtuosi of earlier days helped in the designing of Keefer instruments, including Ernest Williams, W. Paris Chambers, and Gardell Simons. Some of the designs have been continued in instruments still being made by other manufacturers. Photographs of many of the early factory workers can be found in the library of The Williamsport Grit newspaper, which published stories about the company in 1903, 1927, and 1937, as well as a reminiscence just last year (1980). There remains a splendid set of photos of the work areas in the factory, most of which were printed with the 1922 article. These show unassuming workmen in bib coveralls in large, uncluttered rooms. Lathes, plating tank, and other equipment are rather basic, without apparent modernity. Also shown is the "bending table" on which all of the curved tubing manufactured in Williamsport had been worked. There is a photo of Mr. Otto, engraver, and another of George Freidel, bass maker, both at work. Credit for the popular acceptance of Keefer tubas and sousaphones, still prized by performers, is ascribed to German-trained Freidel and his son.

Materials relating to the several publishing houses that have sent music out from Williamsport have also been found; one from Keefer offered various instructional and promotional items, including **Band World** commencing in 1892. A friend of the Keefer's was the cornettist, John Hazel, who, after gaining celebrity as soloist with Sousa, became a popular composer in the city and the leader of the Repasz Band. There is considerable memorabilia to be found from this band; tracing its origin to 1831, it was, until disbanding a few years ago, the oldest in the United States. Files of clippings, folders of prints, and newspaper archives all await scholars interested in the musical history of Williamsport.

The foregoing amplifies the information given about Distin in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Vol. 5, p. 497), but leaves unanswered the question of how the joining of Brua C. Keefer and Henry Distin in Williamsport first came about. In

fact, Distin's activities for the entire first decade of his American career have yet to be traced.

A check of directories for Philadelphia shows Distin residing there continuously from 1886 (first entry!) until his death. There were three successive addresses, which were shared, beginning in 1887, with his son, William H. Distin. The one exception to this is the year 1890, when there is no listing anywhere for William, although Henry is shown residing in both Philadelphia and Williamsport! William's profession is given first as a clerk, then as a musical instrument maker, in 1892 only, and, finally, as a musician for the years following.

The *New Grove* article alludes to a connection between Distin and J. W. Pepper of Philadelphia. James W. Pepper was an engraver and a member of a veritable clan of printers, engravers, and composers in that city. After many years of non-musical employment, he left the following signs of incipient musical activity: 1879, music at 832 Filbert; 1880, music teacher on Spruce; several years again as engraver; then, beginning in 1886, musical instruments at 234 S. 8th (Eighth and Locust is the traditional address).

Distin's first business address was 114 S. 2nd in 1886, offering musical instruments. The next year he was a musical instrument maker at 917 Filbert (a block from Pepper's early work locale), and, from 1888-90, he used the Henry Distin Mfg. Co. title at the same address. After this there were no more commercial listings, Distin having observed his 71st birthday.

The coincidence of significant activity in 1886 by Keefer, Pepper, and Distin suggests that there was indeed some "pepper" in the closing years of Distin's long career. But statements made by Brua C. Keefer III, and the repeated references in Pepper literature to an extensive manufacturing facility in Philadelphia, make it certain that the relationship between Mr. Keefer's grandfather and J. W. Pepper would have been one only of competitors. Pepper advertised his instruments as "perfected." Is it possible that Keefer's phrase, "highest grade band instruments," contains greater piquancy than typically is found in the florid rhetoric of 19th-century businessmen?

(Individuals wishing to correspond with Mr. Farrar may do so at his home, 14416 Marine Drive, Silver Spring, MD 20904. -Ed.)

METROPOLITAN OFFERS FELLOWSHIPS

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City offers several fellowships for individuals planning to do research which utilizes the Museum's collections. Individuals interested in applying for fellowships beginning in 1982 should write immediately to Laurence Libin, Curator, Department of Musical Instruments, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Avenue at 82nd Street, New York, NY 10028.

ARE YOU MOVING?

Are you moving? If so, please be certain that you notify the Society of your new address, as soon as possible. Write to the AMIS Membership Office, USD Box 194, Vermillion, SD 57069, USA.

USD DEDICATES NEW GALLERY



South Dakota Lieutenant-Governor Lowell Hansen II (left), Dr. Arne B. Larson, founder of The Shrine to Music Museum at The University of South Dakota, and his wife, Jeanne, cut the ribbon dedicating the Music Museum's second permanent gallery for American musical instruments. Looking on are USD President Charles D. Lein; William J. Srstka, Jr., President of the South Dakota Board of Regents; and USD Vice-President Wayne S. Knutson.

More than 300 invited guests from as far away as California, New York, and Pennsylvania attended the gala occasion.

Exhibits included in the new, 1200-square-foot gallery are Musical Instruments of the Indian Peoples of North and South America, Early 19th-Century Winds, The American Civil War Era 1855-65, The Golden Age of Bands 1865-1915, Bowed Folk Instruments, Turn-of-the-Century Plucked Stringed Instruments, Appalachian Instruments, Musical Instruments of the Midwestern Pioneers, Early Recording Equipment, 19th-Century Parlor Music, and a Violin Maker's Workshop.

ALFRED G. BADGER RESEARCH UNDERWAY

Anyone having flutes, clarinets, or other instruments made by Alfred G. Badger are encouraged to write to Mary Jean Simpson, 3501-G Toledo Terrace, Hyattsville, MD 20782. Ms. Simpson is writing a dissertation in which she will trace the development of Badger's key systems and attempt to establish a dating method. She will present a paper concerning her research at the April 15-18, 1982 AMIS meeting at Oberlin College.

LE TIC-TOC-CHOC

Le Tic-Toc-Choc, the only French-language periodical in the Americas devoted to the study of early music, is published in Canada by the Studio de Musique Ancienne de Montréal. Borrowing its name from the 18th set of pieces for harpsichord by Francois Couperin, *Le Tic-Toc-Choc* is issued quarterly (October, January, April, and June), and contains, in each 24-page issue, short but informative articles, as well as a calendar of early music activities in the Montreal area. Recent articles have included "Observations sur la theorie des doigts anciens selon le systeme de Diruta" by Lucien Poirier, "La musique dans le quotidien au XVIII^e siècle" by Dujka Smoje, an article concerning tempo in 17th and 18th-century music by Isolde Lagacé, and a report about the Musée Instrumental of the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique of Paris by Florence Abondance.

Along with Toronto's *Continuo* and Vancouver's *Musick* (see AMIS Newsletters, October 1980 and March 1981), *Le Tic-Toc-Choc* completes the trilogy of Canadian early music periodicals which reflect current interest and activity throughout Canada for the historic recreation of Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque music.

Subscriptions for the 1981-82 year are Can. \$6.00. Write: Studio de Musique Ancienne de Montréal, 412 est, boulevard St-Joseph, app. 1, Montréal H2J 1J5, Canada.

-Margaret Downie

HENRY FORD MUSEUM ACQUIRES HALL LETTERS

About 400 letters, plus a variety of programs, cards, handbills, and so on relating to the musical career of Rhodolph and David (D. C.) Hall have been acquired by the Henry Ford Museum, according to Dr. Robert E. Eliason, Curator of Musical Instruments. The material had been preserved by Mr. Frank O. Spinney, who found it in a New Haven, Connecticut, stamp collector's shop.

Rhodolph and D. C. Hall were outstanding keyed bugle and cornet soloists throughout the mid-19th century, and D. C. became leader of the Boston Brass Band, in addition to being a well-known maker of brass instruments.

The letters were written to Lucy Hall, a twin sister of Rhodolph, who lived in New Haven. They describe performances, salaries, travel, and instruments; they also mention contemporary musicians, instrument makers, and major and minor historical and social events from the 1840's to the 1870's. Glimpses of more personal matters, such as love, health, religion, politics, and family affairs, are also fascinating.

In addition to the letters, the Henry Ford Museum's collections also contain 14 instruments made by D. C. Hall and various partners; a number of instruments used in the Boston Brass Band, including the big bass drum; a gold, presentation keyed bugle given to D. C. Hall in 1850; and, a gold presentation cornet given to Rhodolph in 1866. The letters provide a marvelous background to these holdings, and, according to Eliason, will be the subject of a number of forthcoming articles.

CLASSIFIED COLUMN

Advertisements of interest to AMIS members may be placed in this space. Each 20 words or less cost \$5.00 for each issue. Checks, made payable to AMIS, must be included with your copy to the Editor (USD Box 194, Vermillion, SD 57069, USA).

FOR SALE: Collection of period Viennese grand pianos in concert condition by Rosenberger (1830), Boesendorfer (1835), Brodmann (1815), J.B. Streicher (1854), and Fritz (1815). Also, a luxury English Stodart (1808) and a Hitchcock bent-side spinet (1710). Address inquiries in writing to: G. Gosen c/o McMahon, 230 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10025.

INFORMATION NEEDED: Anyone knowing about Benjamin Philbrick, cello maker, or his instruments, please contact Edw. Wall, Cedar Hill, Salem, MA 01970.

FOR SALE: Buescher alto saxophone in E-flat (C melody?). Best offer. Contact James E. Perkins, 109 Bellwood Courts, Mars, PA 16046.

STOLEN: Left-handed flute by J. M. Camp, Litchfield, Connecticut, rosewood (?) with four silver keys, ivory rings and head screw. Cracks repaired; playable. Contact Ralph Sweet, 32 South Maple Street, Enfield, CT 06082.

FOR SALE: Fortepiano, 1980 copy of 1784 Stein Viennese grand. Superb instrument. \$8,500. C. J. Wheeler, 215 Granite Street, Rockport, MA 01966.

FOR SALE: Volume I of the *Catalog of the Collections*, The Shrine to Music Museum. Send \$6.50 (includes U.S. postage) per copy to USD Box 194, Vermillion, SD 57069, USA.

SEEKS 17TH-CENTURY DUTCH INSTRUMENTS

Jonathan Couchman, a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles, is currently engaged in research about the role of music in the Dutch settlements along the Hudson River between 1624 and 1700. Anyone knowing of musical instruments (including their mention in inventories of estates and supply ships) of interest to Mr. Couchman are urged to write to him c/o Music Department, 405 Hilgard Avenue, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90024. He will deliver a paper at a symposium to be held at UCLA in spring 1982, "Politics, Economics, and the Arts: The Netherlands and the Foundation of the New World - The Colonies as a Dutch Sphere of Influence."

ARTICLES REQUESTED FOR AMIS JOURNAL

William E. Hettrick, Editor of the *AMIS Journal*, would be pleased to receive articles to be considered for publication in future issues of the *Journal*. Materials should be sent to him at the Music Department, Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY 11550.

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE STEARNS COLLECTION

With the retirement of Professor Robert Warner from the University of Michigan Stearns Collection, this major collection of musical instruments lost its long-time director and advocate (see *AMIS Newsletter*, Vol. IX, No. 1, March 1980). Professor William Malm was appointed the new director in July 1980, with Professor James Borders as associate director. These appointments were made to balance the collection's program in non-Western and Euro-American instruments.

Working from the solid base created by Professor Warner, the collection has moved in several directions.

The first thrust was to go public. New hours (Wednesday-Sunday, 2-5 p.m.) increased the collection's use. Each term there have been three weekend lectures or performances to encourage more participation. Exhibits in the School of Music building are changed frequently and professional museum help has enhanced the quality of the displays. Finally, an "Instrument of the Month" display has been arranged in the Music Library where donors to the collection's funds will be allowed to mount one display from the instruments in storage.

The second move continues Professor Warner's efforts towards a new catalog. The Musinst Computer data bank has been reprogrammed into a better data base system. With a matching fund from NEA, actual work towards a new catalog is scheduled to begin this fall. In addition, the Wenner-Gren Foundation was to hold a conference in September about organological cataloging. A small group of concerned persons from music, art, historical, and ethnological museums were to meet to seek common goals in instrument cataloging and in publications. Hopefully, there will be a resultant monograph from the conference that will be of service to instrument collectors.

The directors of the Stearns collection continue to dream of other new ideas and will keep the AMIS membership apprised of any that come true. In that context, the collection is pleased to announce that the Environmental Institute of Michigan (ERIM) has supported the completion of a hologram reader for the display of the Stearns' unique set of total visual representations of seven of its instruments. This unit will be seen in the Jaap Kunst Room of the collection, as well as in various exhibits nationally. AMIS members will learn via this Newsletter whenever it goes on the road.

1982 AMIS DUES REQUESTED

It is asked that AMIS dues for 1982 (the Society operates on a calendar year basis) be paid before January 31, 1982. The dues are \$18.00 for regular and institutional members and \$10.00 for student members. Payment must be made in U.S. dollars through a U.S. bank. Student members must include proof of current enrollment.

Because printing and mailing costs continue to escalate while dues remain the same, prompt response to this call for 1982 dues will be appreciated. A pre-addressed dues envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

NEW BOOKS RECEIVED

Building a Treble Viola da Gamba by Wolfgang Bottenberg. Montreal: Concordia University, 1980 (65 pp., ring-bound, plus a separate, full-size pattern with stencils; \$7.00). Bottenberg presents a detailed, step-by-step guide for the construction of a treble viola da gamba, aimed primarily at the person without previous experience in building such an instrument. Made with modern machines, tools, materials, and methods, the resultant instrument, while not based upon an historical model, is intended to be "a well-crafted, but simple instrument with an aesthetic appeal of its own," and well-suited for students and amateur players. Numerous carefully-drawn and clearly-identified diagrams supplement the text. Available from the author, Music Section, Concordia University, 7141 Sherbrooke Ave. W., Montreal, Quebec H4B 1R6, Canada.

The Clarinet: Excellence and Artistry by Rosario Mazzeo. Sherman Oaks, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 1981 (205 pp., \$14.95). A new book for clarinet pedagogues which is based upon more than a decade's-worth of articles published in the Selmer *Bandwagon* series, "The Clarinet Master Class," by AMIS member Rosario Mazzeo. Topics covered in *The Clarinet* include basic musical concepts, acoustics, technique, scales and studies, teaching materials, reed-making, and fingering for the modern Boehm clarinet, as well as for some pre-Boehm instruments. Two appendices offer a chronological listing of Mazzeo's articles published in "The Clarinet Master Class" series and a bibliography of books concerning reed-making. May be ordered directly from the publisher at 15335 Morrison Street, Sherman Oaks, CA 91403.

- Margaret Downie

YALE COLLECTION ANNOUNCES CONCERTS

The Yale University Collection of Musical Instruments has announced its series of concerts for 1981-82. All of the performances will take place at 8:00 p.m. in the gallery of keyboard instruments at the Collection, 15 Hillhouse Avenue, New Haven, Connecticut.

September 27. Richard Rephann, harpsichord.

November 1. Duo Geminiani. Stanley Ritchie, violin; Elisabeth Wright, fortepiano.

December 6. Carnatic Music Ensemble. Frank Bennett, Director.

January 17. Yale Pro Musica Antiqua. Richard Rephann, Director.

April 4. Jaap Schroeder, violin; Richard Rephann, harpsichord.

April 25. Howard Bass, lutenist; James Bowman, countertenor.

In addition, the Collection is presenting an exhibition, "Musical Instruments in the Viennese Tradition, 1750-1850," from October 18, 1981 to June 20, 1982. It will be accompanied by a separate series of concerts.

November 12. The Amade Trio, 8:30 p.m.

February 7. Dorothy and Nicholas Renouf, piano, 4-hands, 2:30 p.m.

March 2. Paul Badura-Skoda, piano, 4:30 p.m.

March 29. Blake Stern, tenor; Virginia Pleasants, fortepiano, 8:30 p.m.

BOOK REVIEW

A Catalogue of the Pedro Traversari Collection of Musical Instruments by Richard Rephann. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 1978. (138 pp., 5 color plates, n.p.)

Although most individuals interested in musical instruments are familiar with some of the major collections located in various world capitals, the recognized lack of adequate catalogs has meant that most such collections have remained relatively inaccessible to all but a few individuals with the resources to support long-term visitations. In addition, it has become apparent during the past few years that there are additional collections around the world which, until now, have remained in virtual obscurity.

The Pedro Traversari (b. 1874) Collection of Musical Instruments, owned, since May 1, 1951, by *La Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana* in Quito, Ecuador, was one such collection. Except for a brief entry in the *International Directory of Musical Instrument Collections* by Jean Jenkins, which referred to "ca. 4,000 instruments . . . mainly European . . ." little was known. Now that has changed. With the publication of this splendid catalog, written by Richard Rephann, Director of the Yale University Collection of Musical Instruments, the resources of the Traversari collection are immediately accessible. There are not "4,000 instruments," but nearly 900, still a major collection in anyone's frame of reference. They are not "mainly European," although there are such treasures as an 18th-century oboe by Grassi of Milan, a 18th-century recorder by Castel, and some interesting chitarra battente; instead, it is basically an ethnographic collection, rich in indigenous South American instruments.

Rephann did the cataloging in 1974, a project supported by the Organization of American States. He used a system of classification based on the Sachs-Hornbostel method, modified to meet the particular requirements of the Traversari collection. The catalog, with its entries given both in English and in Spanish, is straight-forward and easily understood. There are good-quality black and white photographs of representative instruments, and there are five color plates, as well. Highly recommended.

-André P. Larson

"CROWN" PIANO SOUGHT

Emanuel Oliveira, 2313 South Redwood Drive, Visalia, CA 93277, would like to hear from AMIS members who are familiar with the "Crown" orchestral pianos which were manufactured in Chicago, Illinois, by George P. Bent during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The "Crown" piano was a 4-pedal instrument which produced the sounds of a harp, banjo, mandolin, guitar, and so on.