

THE FIRST MILITARY BANDS

The development of the 18th Century military band

The British military band of brass and reed instruments has its origins in a number of diverse sources. These include the oboe and bassoon consorts of the 17th Century, the hunting horn ensembles adopted from the German tradition and the Royal Trumpets of the late medieval period. These components have far earlier histories, but they were finally brought together in the late 1750s with the introduction of the new classical 'wind harmony' ensemble.

The 18th Century was a time of dynamic change in musical instrument development and, equally, in musical style. The early part of the century comprised the late 'Baroque' style of music characterised by the compositions of Handel, Purcell and the French composer Jean-Baptiste Lully. Along with these artistic changes were the design developments coming as a result of the new technology of the industrial revolution. All these influences resulted in the standardisation of materials and design and raised standards of musicianship. It is arguable that without any one of these components the development of the military ensemble would have taken a very different course.

The King's Haubois

The woodwind, reed component of the nascent band-of-music pre-existed the 18th Century wind harmony band by several decades. The King's Haubois, a consort of oboes and bassoons, was introduced to Britain by Charles II on his return from exile in the 1660s. It was an idea he borrowed from the French Royal household of Louis XIV 'The Sun King' who, surrounding himself with spectacle, had set the standard for other European royal households.

The King's Haubois became firmly established with the accession of William and Mary in 1689, playing at their joint coronation in April of that year. The musicians and instruments were of the highest quality and were found from the very best sources of continental Europe. One such was the French musician and instrument maker, Pierre Jaillard, also known as 'The Bressan', who was held in the same esteem as the great violin makers of the time. The importance of these suppliers only becomes clear when it is understood that, at this time, there was no standard pitch or temperament for wind instruments. It was very much up to local conditions as regards what pitch an instrument should be in, so a key task of the band-master was to source instruments that could blend together 'harmoniously'.

The wind harmony band

The origins of the wind harmony band can be found in Austria and Germany where, from about 1756 onwards, the Holy Roman Emperor and Austrian nobles kept house bands called *Harmonien*. Usually made of pairs of oboes, horns, bassoons and, after about 1770, clarinets, these wind groups formed part of the household musical staff providing serenades for banquets and garden parties.

It was during the Seven Years War that the British Army became enthused by *Harmonie* and its off-shoot, *Feldharmonie*, bands that performed at hunting parties and other outdoor entertainments. In 1762 officers of the Royal Artillery serving in Hanover subscribed to retain a regimental

Feldharmonie. It was this group that became the origins of Britain's wind harmony military bands.

The oboe and the bassoon

The haubois, literally 'high wood', and the oboe are essentially the same instrument, but these early oboes had a much larger and thicker reed which gave them a very loud, powerful, and penetrating tone. The greater size and strength of the reed required muscular power in the lip of the player to produce the required compression, but at best the tone was coarse in quality.

The bassoon of the time was more akin to the modern French instrument than the all-conquering German model of today with its powerful tone and high-precision chromatic intonation. The early bassoon had up to nine keys, thin walls, a larger bore and a broad heavy reed. While retaining its individual colour, it could blend with clarinets or horns and its powerful bottom notes formed the bass in the wind harmony band.

The horn and the trumpet

The horn originated as a hunting instrument in the German and French traditions. It was only when composers like G F Handel scored for the instrument in the early 18th Century in pieces such as the *Water Music* that it became accepted as a mainstream instrument. Horns were incorporated as part of the wind harmony ensemble in the latter part of the 1700s. Famously, Haydn scored for them in his *Marches for the Derbyshire Cavalry*.

Early types of horn, known as 'natural horns', did not have the necessary valves to enable them to achieve anything more than the harmonic series of notes and the musicians had to rely on hand-stopping techniques to fill in the missing parts of the scale. The 'cor solo', developed in France, was designed with a series of extra crooks to extend the playing length of the instrument. These enabled the musician to play in the keys of D, E, Eb, F and G, by tradition the soloists' preferred keys, hence the name 'cor solo', or 'solo horn'.

The trumpets in the British wind harmony ensembles were English cavalry trumpets in D. Musically, the natural trumpet was limited to the notes of the harmonic series, which meant that any compositions had to take this into account. It became the practice during the late 17th and early 18th Centuries to play in the higher 'clarino' register to fill in some of the gaps in the chromatic scale, resulting in what became known as 'the golden age of the natural trumpet'.

With both horns and trumpets, though, the pitch was variable according to the source of the instruments. There were a number of brass instrument makers in London at the time but there was little consistency in brass metal production, so instrument makers were heavily dependent on particular suppliers for suitable material.

Conclusion

Today these wind harmony bands are a footnote in the development of our military bands, but much music was composed for them during the 18th and early 19th Centuries by noted composers including Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Several of these early compositions have gone into the British

Army repertoire and can still be heard at events such as Trooping the Colour. Famous examples include the march from the 1719 opera *Scipione* by G F Handel, now used as the regimental slow march of the Grenadier Guards and the march *Non piu andrai* from Mozart's 1786 opera *The Marriage of Figaro*, used as the regimental slow march of the Coldstream Guards. Perhaps the most famous wind-harmony march of the period, dated about 1785, is *The Duke Of York*

slow march by Christopher Frederick Eley, Music-Major of The Band of the Coldstream Guards from 1785 to c1800.

Andy Lamb

A former soldier, Andy Lamb is the Curator of The Bate Collection at the Faculty of Music, University of Oxford. He is a Trustee of the Kneller Hall Museum, Secretary of the Musical Instrument Collections Subject Specialist Network and a member of the Institute of Conservation.



Bassoon by Cahusac, London, 1769; Horn by John Christopher Hofmaster, London, 1750; Trumpet by Rodenbostel, London, 1760; Oboe by Stanesby Junior, London, 1750. All instruments and photos from The Bate Collection, University of Oxford.

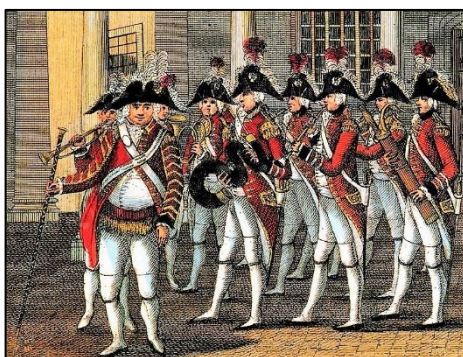
The military band in the later 18th Century

Towards the end of the 18th Century the success of the eight-man wind harmony military bands led to their being enlarged. As we learned in the book review of *Pomp and Circumstance* in the last edition of the Journal, The Coldstream Regiment of Foot Guards provide an early example when, in 1785, Frederick, Duke of York, engaged German musicians to form a new Regimental Band. Replacing the previous civilian wind harmony band, Music-Major Christopher Frederick Eley and eleven other German musicians were enrolled as members of the regiment.

The instrumentation of this new band was two oboes, four clarinets, one trumpet, two horns, two bassoons and a serpent. The serpent, a bass lip-reed instrument with side holes, is played like a trumpet but with fingering similar to the flutes of the time. Its unusual double 'S' curve shape results from the need to bring the finger holes within reach of the player.

A form of this Coldstream band exists today in The Duke of York's Band of the Coldstream Guards. Its musicians do use a natural trumpet, two 'core solo' horns and a serpent, though

this is a modern fibre-glass example, and the oboe, clarinet and bassoon are modern instruments. Percussion is added in the shape of a deep rope-tensioned side-drum and a replica Turkish Crescent or 'Jingling Johnny'. This band can be heard on the Royal Heritage Collection's 2007 Bandleader CD *The Music of Christopher Eley*.



A British Foot Guards Band at St James's Palace c1792. Artist unknown.

Using historic instruments from the Bate Collection, The Bate Military Ensemble made a recording in 2016 in the later 18th Century military band configuration. Using two each of: clarinets, oboes, flutes/fifes, bassoons, serpents, horns, trombones, keyed bugles and a side-drum. They combine to give us the engagingly 'rustic' sound of a band of this period.

This CD, *Music of the Allies From the Peninsula to Waterloo*, was reviewed in the Summer 2017 UK Journal, No. 112. It can be ordered from the Bate Collection of Musical Instruments, Faculty of Music, St Aldgate's, OXFORD OX1 1DB or can be bought on-line from the Oxford University stores website. Cost, inclusive of postage and packaging is £13.50.

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