

Organology Again: This Time, Ethno-Organology

Jeremy Montagu

We have had a fascinating series of articles on organology,¹ but it is important to remember that the subject does not apply only on our own doorstep. The interaction of “our” instruments with those of other cultures is also our concern.² Many such interactions can only be speculative or give rise to questions that as yet we cannot answer, but others can record not merely the sources of our own instruments but may note practices on such instruments that are still in active use today and which might suggest ideas of techniques in bygone days within “our” own use.

Nor are such interactions unidirectional. One would hardly think the conch trumpet to be one of “our” instruments, though it is still used by fishermen within what we might think of as “our” world, and one in my own collection was said to have been used to call the hands in for meals on a farm in central Iowa. But I was asked to assemble a chromatic scale of conches to form one part of the voice of the *Alien*. Other ingredients of that voice were serpents and alphorns (Christopher Monk, Alan Lumsden, and I had our own little encampment, surrounded by screens, within the orchestra). Jeff Nussbaum reminds me that Steve Torre plays superb jazz on the conch, hand-stopping and all.

Hand-stopping is a traditional feature on the conch in both Oceania and East Africa,³ and this technique is also widespread in West and Central Africa on side-blown horns, both instead of and in addition to the use of a fingerhole in the apex of the horn.⁴ It would seem improbable that so widespread a practice is peculiar to those areas, and could it be that this technique was used also in our own pre- and early history? Certainly there is one manuscript in the British Library that shows a pair of short, end-blown horns with each player’s left hand quite clearly occluding the bell.⁵ Could such a practice have survived in Central-European folk use, as we know from sources such as Bonanni that a number of medieval instruments did,⁶ or did Hampl reinvent the technique *ex novo* for the horn in the mid-eighteenth century? Might it be that some such surviving tradition led to Steve Torre’s use? Or did he also invent the style for himself?

It is well known that our long trumpet was acquired in the thirteenth century from the Saracens, as they were known, in the Holy Land, and from the Moors in Spain, even its name of *al nafir* becoming the Spanish *añafil*. The instrument survives today both in Morocco and elsewhere in the Maghreb and among the Muslim communities of West Africa, such as the Hausa of Nigeria, among whom it is known as the *kakaki*. The equation of the *kakaki* with “our” medieval instrument was confirmed by the discovery of the fourteenth-century Billingsgate trumpet.⁷ Can we suggest that the modern use of the *kakaki*, confined as it is to the second and third harmonics, is in any way evidential for “our” medieval use? Both the *kakaki* and the Billingsgate trumpet have a very similar wide cone as a mouthpiece, with no trace of backbore, which lends some support to such a hypothesis.

One aspect of a folk instrument still in use today could solve a conundrum of antiquity. We know from the fragments of the only Celtic carnyx ever found that its mouthpiece was the obliquely cut-off end of the tube.⁸ The well-known repoussé illustration of the three carnices in performance on the massive silver Gundestrop cauldron in the Copenhagen National Museum shows them being held vertically above the players' heads.⁹ Such a position would seem inherently improbable, requiring a physiognomy more simian than human, and I would suggest that the portrayal was due to the impossibility of showing depth or perspective in the Iron Age and that the instrument was more likely to have been held sideways. But why the obliquely cut mouthpiece? The Dutch *midwinterhoorn*, today like the Swiss alphorn a folkloric rather than a folk instrument, also has such a mouthpiece and, so far as records go back, always has had. Players told me that this was so that, with the point of the mouthpiece set into the side of the mouth, and the instrument held obliquely sideways and horizontally, one was in fact blowing straight down the tube rather than into its side.¹⁰ The sideways hold makes it much easier to support an instrument of such weight than with it projecting forward, as experiment will quickly reveal, but if one then has the mouthpiece in the center of the mouth so that one is blowing straight at the sidewall of the mouthpiece, a centimeter or less away from the lips, there is a strong feeling of blow-back. While I have experience only of the *midwinterhoorn happe*, I would suggest that blowing directly into the narrow, obliquely cut end of a carnyx would have very much the same effect. With the point of the obliquely cut mouthpiece set hard into the side of the mouth, on the other hand, one is blowing down the tube, which gives a far greater sense of freedom—there is a quite different feeling to the two approaches. It would seem very possible, therefore, that this is why the carnyx also has an oblique embouchure.

Two quite different Indian trumpets suggest the probability of European influence. One sees quite commonly in museum collections an indigenous, and today a recognized local instrument, looking like a rather loosely folded fanfare trumpet, with the typical ball halfway down the bell yard and often also on the middle yard, though in all other morphological details clearly an Indian instrument. The bell flare is characteristically Indian, as is the pattern of the mouthpiece and the tubing in general. The trumpet is Indian, but it would seem probable that it was folded, rather than straight, S-shaped, C-shaped, or snake-shaped (all normal Indian patterns), in imitation of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century natural trumpet used by the Portuguese and Dutch invaders.

The other is much rarer in collections and is almost invariably catalogued and labeled as a flute. Even the great Curt Sachs follows others in this respect.¹¹ This is the *buguri* of the Todas of the Nilgiri Hills.¹² It is easily recognizable because, made of bamboo, it always retains two short stubs of side shoots, one on each side, one immediately above and the other immediately below the five fingerholes. It often has a short bell, sometimes of horn, sometimes of metal. It is, however, not this that identifies it as a trumpet-type instrument, but the fact that the blowing end is chamfered, not on the outside like that of many end-blown flutes, but on the inside. It was this characteristic that made me suspect that it was a vernacular mute cornett, an identification which was confirmed by hearing one of Arnold Bake's cylinder recordings, and then by reference to his paper given to the Royal

Musical Association in 1937.¹³ The sound is low-pitched and buzzing, typical of any cylindrical-bore reed- or lip-blown instrument, again an immediate clue that it is a trumpet-type instrument. It raises an immediate and challenging question: did the Todas, alone so far as I know of the world's musicians, invent independently a cornett-type instrument, or did they hear, and copy, a player from a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century ship that visited Madras?

They would not have been alone in making a vernacular copy of a European "brass" instrument. Some of the Nagas radically redesigned their *phupphu* so as to imitate the bugle calls they had heard from the police camps in their area.¹⁴ The normal *phupphu* was a cylindrical tube of reed, sometimes with an added trumpet-shaped bell of gourd, and always an obliquely-cut mouthpiece end, just like that of the *carynx* and the *midwinterhoorn*. On this type of *phupphu* "a bellowing noise can be produced."¹⁵ The bugle-call variety is quite different. It is a tube expanding in steps, made by inserting short segments of bamboo or reed into each other, each slightly wider in bore than the preceding segment, retaining the traditional oblique mouthpiece at one end and the flared gourd bell at the other. Experiment shows that a stepped expanding tube behaves acoustically in exactly the same way as a smoothly expanding tube.

This instrument, we know from Hutton and Mills, was designed specifically to imitate the shape and sound of the bugle. Could it not be that the *buguri* was similarly based on the cornett? The fact that the Todas' music is very different from that of Renaissance Europe could well be the effect of a time lapse of three or four centuries—Hutton and Mills heard the *phupphu* when it was brand new.

These are just a few samples of connections that can be seen between "our" and others' instruments once we become aware of the wider horizons revealed by ethno-organology. There are, of course, as many or more examples among the other types of instruments. We all know that the long trumpet did not come unaccompanied from the Saracens and the Moors—the kettledrums came with them and remained with them in "our" practice also. A number of other instruments—shawms, lutes, rebabs, fiddles, and so forth—derived from the same source, but our concern here is with the "brass" instruments.

When ethnomusicology first began it was called comparative musicology. The term was abandoned because comparison between one music and another was frowned upon. But comparison is one thing; cross-cultural awareness is quite another, and one that is worth cultivating. Hence the importance of ethno-organology as this brief excursion may suggest.

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NOTES

¹ The four prior contributions to this series are Renato Meucci, "On 'Organology': A Position Paper," *HBSJ* 11 (1999): viii–x; Arnold Myers, "Organology: A Position Paper," *HBSJ* 12 (2000): viii–xi; Herbert Heyde, "Methods of Organology and Proportions in Brass Wind Instrument Making," *HBSJ* 13 (2001): 1–51; and Sabine K. Klaus, "More Thoughts on the Discipline of Organology," *HBSJ* 14 (2002): 1–10.

² "Our" instruments is not a very useful phrase but it is difficult to think of a better. "Western" is a meaningless adjective, with symphony orchestras and brass bands in use all around the globe, and anyway, "west" of where? Tokyo? "Ethnic" is undesirable, even though I follow the usage of ethnomusicology in my title, for we are all *ethne*. "Our" will have to serve until someone invents a better term.

³ Raymond Clausen recorded it in Malekula (on unpublished tapes now in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford) and taught me to emulate it, J.F. Peake noted it in the Solomon Islands (personal communication), and Kenneth Oakley in Kenya (personal communication).

⁴ David Rycroft, unpublished tape, of which there is a copy in my archive, thanks to his kindness.

⁵ London, BL, Cotton, Vespasian A.i, f. 30v, probably from Canterbury in the eighth century. Two other players have longer horns, held in more normal fashion, with both hands on the tubing, so that there is a clear contrast between two different playing techniques. Illustrated as plate 2 in my *The World of Medieval & Renaissance Musical Instruments* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1976) and elsewhere.

⁶ Filippo Bonanni, *Gabinetto Armonico* (Rome, 1723). All the engravings were reprinted, though much reduced in size, with new captions in English by Frank Ll. Harrison and Joan Rimmer, as *The Showcase of Musical Instruments* (New York: Dover, 1964).

⁷ John Webb, "The Billingsgate Trumpet," *Galpin Society Journal* 41 (1988): 59–62; Graeme Lawson and Geoff Egan, "Medieval Trumpet from the City of London," *ibid.*, 63–6; Graeme Lawson, "Medieval Trumpet from the City of London, II," *Galpin Society Journal* 44 (1991): 150–56.

⁸ Stuart Piggott, "The *Carnyx* in Early Iron Age Britain," *The Antiquaries Journal* 39 (1959): 19–32, plates vi–xi. An illustration from that article, a drawing of the instrument found at Tattershall Ferry in 1768, is reprinted in Anthony Baines' review of the article in *Galpin Society Journal* 13 (1960): 109.

⁹ See the cover of *Historic Brass Society Journal* 1 (1989).

¹⁰ Jeremy Montagu, "The Construction of the Midwinterhoorn," *Galpin Society Journal* 28 (1975): 71–80, specifically 76–77.

¹¹ Curt Sachs, *Die Musikinstrumente Indiens und Indonesiens—Handbücher der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin* (Berlin & Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1923), 144, Abb. 98. The previously mentioned instrument is also illustrated there, p. 171, Abb. 116, as is the snake-shaped form on the following page.

¹² Not the Kotars, as Sachs states; this is the Todas' only instrument; any others that they require they hire in from the Kotars, a neighboring tribe who play most of the normal Indian tribal instruments. See the following reference for further information.

¹³ Arnold Bake, "Indian Folk Music," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 63 (1936–37): 64–77, illustrated on p. 64. I owe the opportunity to hear a copy of the original recording to Professor Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy when he was at SOAS.

¹⁴ J.H. Hutton, *The Angami Nagas* (London: Macmillan, 1921), 68; J.P. Mills, *The Rengma Nagas* (London: Macmillan, 1937), 124.

¹⁵ J.P. Mills, *The Lhota Nagas* (London: Macmillan, 1922), 85.

