

A little essay

About the music instrument

C~L~A~R~I~N~E~T

March 2015

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BR *Essay about the clarinet* March 2015

Introduction

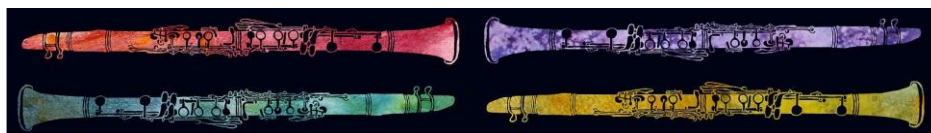
In this essay, I want to briefly outline what a clarinet is, when it was invented, what the history of this instrument is, and which role it plays in different styles of music.



Maybe this sounds like a plain & straightforward endeavour? It's not! True, the clarinet is a reasonably new instrument - the first serious kind was designed in 1710, just 300 years ago. Yet the technology, the music written for it, the way how and where it's played, all this is immense ...



So, I can not and will not write something like an encyclopaedia! Yet I'll try to describe the features of clarinets, and outline its enormous vividness in many music styles, from classics to folk to jazz ... And in case I am short in words, pictures pictures pictures shall show how things are ...



Yes, clarinets are mostly black



but depicting them may be colourful.

Images of early clarinet-like instruments

The clarinet as we know it is a relatively 'young' music instrument within all the "woodwind" devices - its invention began about 300 years ago. Yet there were quite a few precursors! Using a mild definition for "clarinet-like", music anthropologists found out that double clarinets and hornpipes are the earliest ones because of their melody pipe with finger holes and because they are played with a reed.

The oldest images of these instruments go back to the Egypt empire at least 3000 years ago.



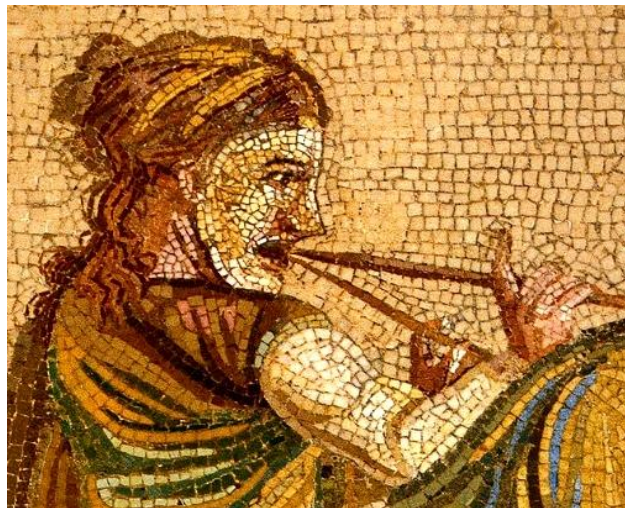
From the Hittite empire (in nowadays Turkey) sculptures survived which seem to show hornpipe players (14th century BC).



From antique Greece, many images of double clarinets exist, quite a few showing a satyr, a semi deity.



Hornpipe players or double clarinet musicians were also depicted during the Roman empire.



Regarding the old images of the double clarinet, it is not always certain whether the shown instrument actually is a clarinet, or rather some kind of flute.



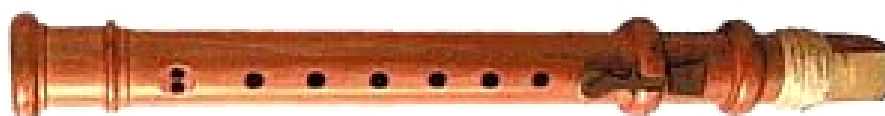
Later in time various double clarinets were created, including the unique alboka in the Basque region, cultivated in the 13th century. It is assumed that this was influenced by an arabian instrument in Morocco.



The immediate predecessor of the modern clarinet is the chalumeau, which became common in Europe in the 17th century. -- see next section.

The invention of the modern clarinet

In the 15th and 16th century, in France a new instrument was developed, called chalumeau. It is a single-pipe instrument with cylindrical bore. There are eight tone holes, seven in front and one in back for the thumb. On the mouthpiece at its top end, a single reed made of cane is mounted.



The chalumeau became common in Germany as well. Around 1700. it was an established instrument in the European music environment. In its early evolution, it got one key to steer the top hole.

It got further developed in Germany by an established instrument maker in Nuernberg, Johann Denner.

The instrument was produced in several sizes



The used wood an important quality feature. Eventually black-coloured versions were also made. Given the importance of the chalumeau, high-class varieties soon turned up.

Then J. Denner equipped the chalumeau with two keys, which cover tone holes out of reach for the fingers. This innovation happened in 1710 - - it was the creation of the clarinet!



In the next 150 years many more clarinets were devised, and then the current one was alive.



The history from 1710 to 1900 is summarized here:



Hundert years after J Denner, I Mueller (half German, half Russian) came up with an amazing clarinet. It had 12 grossly improved keys, and was near to modern clarinets.

A few decades later the still 'ruling' clarinets were developed. All holes either have an open metal ring, or a closing felt pad. All holes out of reach for the musician's fingers are handled by keys. Two different systems were established, one is labeled "Boehm" and one "Albert"



The "Boem" system was created in 1839. It was designed and built by H. Klosé and L. Buffet in France, based on German T. Boehm's essential tone hole model for first flutes and then clarinets, and his invention of the ring key - therefore "Boehm" became the name of this clarinet technology.

While the "Boehm" technique became dominating, in Germany several clarinet builders - C. Baermann, E. Albert and later O. Oehler - extended the facilities of Mueller's creation. They used a slightly different hole setup, and especially introduced different keys for the little finger: Where the Boehm system has four levers, the German system has two rather flat, half-round key ends that both have a small wooden roll for sliding. The common name is "Albert". It was and still is leading in oriental music (Turkish, Klezmer), early jazz, and some kinds of classical orchestras.

Alltogether a clarinet is certainly a rather demanding instrument, because of its key system.- it looks complicated and this is in fact the case. A crucial outcome is the extreme sound range: nearly four octaves.

How to play a clarinet? Obvious one need all ten fingers, and they have to deal with the holes in the instruments body as well with the very many keys. Here are some pertinent pic's of famous clarinetists.



The majority of clarinetists are professional musicians, especially in symphony orchestras or chamber groups and in jazz big bands.



Nevertheless, there are also many amateurs who learn to play this both difficult and delightful instrument, and they do so as part of private music groups.

History of the name "clarinet"

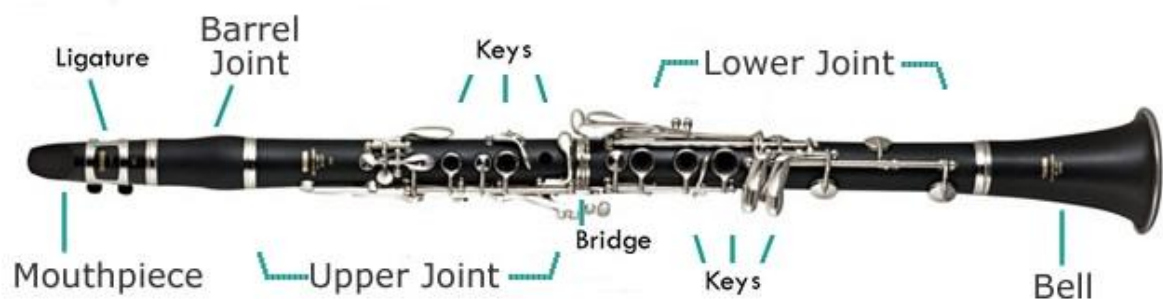
The word *clarinet* seems to come from the French *clarinette*, a feminine word for a diminutive clarion. Alternatively, it may be a diminutive of *clarino*, the initial Italian word for trumpet. The Italian *clarinetto* is the source of the name in many other languages. One reason is that a strong clarinet can almost sound like a trumpet.



The present-day names in main languages are: French: *clarinette*; English: *clarinet*; German: *Klarinette*; Spanish: *clarinete*; Italian: *clarinetto*; Russian: *clarnet* (latinized); Turkey: *Klarnet* (latinized).

The parts of a clarinet

Contrary to, for example, a trumpet or a guitar or a saxophone, a clarinet is not a "one-piece" instrument - rather, it consists of five separate pieces, as shown below, which get mounted.



Furthermore, the reed is a separate piece, a crucial one for creating sound. It has to be attached to the mouthpiece with the ligature. Before I. Mueller invented this, the reed was fixed with a cord. Some folk musicians in eastern Europe and Orient countries still do that.



Reeds are made of a plant called *Arundo Donax* (similar to bamboo yet less hard). It is placed against the lower lip. In earlier times, when playing predecessors of the clarinet, the reed was positioned at the upper lip. Reeds need to be stored in protective holders.



A clarinet principally needs serious care; various brushes and cloths are used, and the complex mechanics of the keys and pads have to be looked after regularly.

Variety of clarinets

There is a wide range of differently pitched clarinet types. The dominating one is the soprano clarinet (as shown in most sections of this essay); key: B \flat . Above is the piccolo clarinet. Deeper in sound: Alto clarinet, bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet.

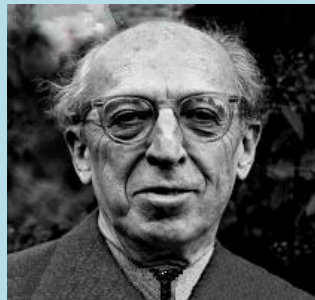
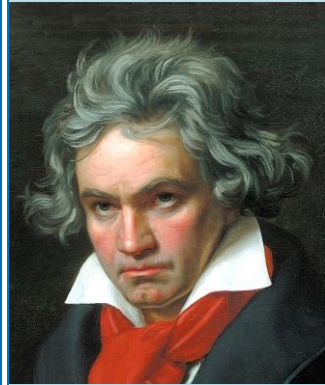
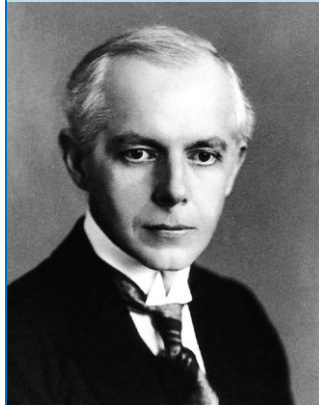
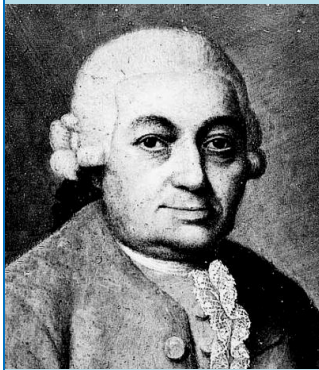


Except of the soprano clarinet, they are mainly linked to classical music for sinfonie orchestras.

Composers re classical clarinet music

The first composer to create clarinet music on a large scale was Mozart. This includes two pinnacles, the Clarinet Quintett (1789) and the Clarinet Concerto (1791). He thought that the sound of a clarinet can get similar to human voice.

Further important composers who included significant clarinet pieces in their work were Bach (Carl), Bartok, Beethoven, Brahms, Copland, Gershwin, Tchaikovsky and Weber.



Below is the sheet (partly) for one of the earliest compositions for clarinet, 1770, by Carl Bach (the son of J.S. Bach).

Ludwig van Beethoven -- for numerous historians the most important composer of classical music -- produced many compositions featuring the clarinet, like the one below from 1810.

Duett für zwei Klarinetten

(Wq 142 [H 636])

Adagio e sostenuto



C. Ph. E. Bach
(komponiert ca. 1770)

DREI DUOS für Clarinette und Fagott

L. van BEETHOVEN.

N. 1.

Allegro commodo.



In 1924 George Gershwin published a very influential composition, "Rhapsody in Blue", which achieved a jazz~classics connection and contained a clarinet solo.



George Gershwin

Rhapsody in Blue

SOLO
CLARINET in Bb



Für Elise

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1827)

[Original version: for piano]



One of the most known single compositions of Beethoven is his Bagatelle No. 25 for solo piano, "Fuer Elise" (from 1810, yet published only after his death in 1827).

It is so popular that quite a few transcriptions for other instruments were written, including for clarinet. (In case you'd like to read an astounding novel about what's behind this "bagatelle", get Celeste Walter's book "A certain music").

Distinctive clarinet musicians: Classical

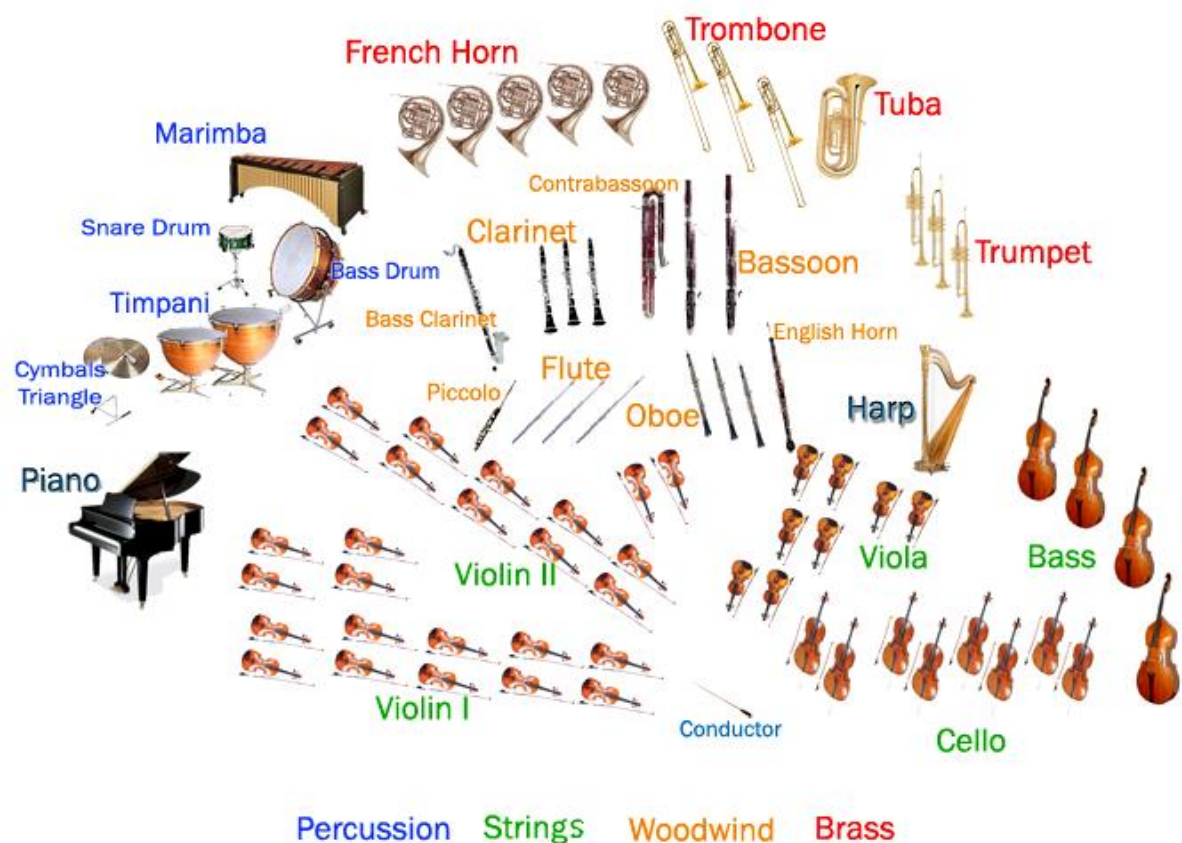
From 1700 onwards, some paintings of baroque music events showed a focal clarinet player



Once the clarinet was fully developed and replaced the chalumeau, it soon became a standard equipment for orchestras.

For example, in 1760 the famous (at that time foremost) Mannheim Orchestra already had two firm clarinet players.

The graph below demonstrates the typical set-up of a symphony orchestra. Beethoven had essential influence on this. The presented setting includes three clarinets and one bass clarinet.



This usually means that one of the clarinet players becomes the "principal" clarinetist.

On some photos of these very large orchestras -- which may include more than 100 musicians, and which have become a cultural norm in many countries -- the clarinet players are hard to see - yet certainly on this smaller one.



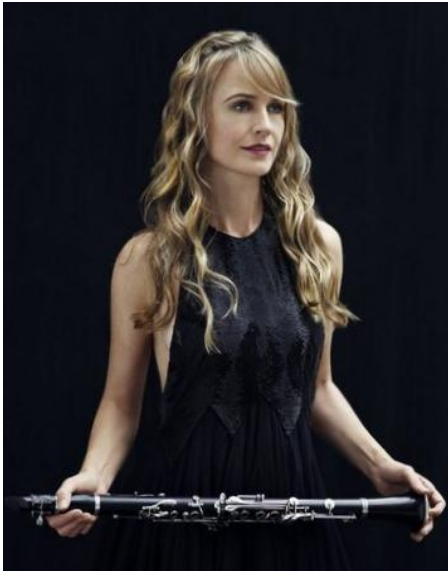
The so-called chamber orchestras are much smaller. Beside the common string quartet, any size from three to 30 may occur, and quite a few include one or two clarinet players.



So, who are the "distinctive" clarinet players within classical music? Of course there are very many, and of course it differs for chamber music and symphony orchestras. Many musicians perform in both contexts though.

I want to list (rather subjectively, I guess) these: Lidia Baich, Jack Brymer, Sharon Kam, Karl Leister, Sabine Meyers, and -- oops -- Benny Goodman.





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Sabine Meyers was the first female clarinetist to get hired for a high-core symphony orchestra, by Herbert von Karajan in 1982.

And why do I dare to include a jazz musician? Yes, he was a truly outstanding clarinet player, but that's not my reason. The reason is that he played more than jazz -- already 1938 he recorded Mozart's Clarinet Quintet, and in 1956 Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, plus, he ordered tunes from classics composers such as Bartok, Copland and Milhaud, and then performed them, together with classical chamber orchestras.

The role of the clarinet in jazz

The music later called "jazz" developed first in american cities such as New Orleans. It is an amalgamation of african and european music features. Around 1900, it got to life in two contexts, first marching orchestras at special events on the street, and soon entertainment bands in pubs, bars and brothels as well. Trumpets and drums were dominating, yet clarinets were part of it from the beginning.



The earliest bands which made recordings and thereby became well-known were the Original Dixieland Jass Band (1917), King Oliver Group (1923), Sidney Bechet (1923), Hot Five with Louis Armstrong and Johnny Dodds (1925).





Set up by King Oliver and then the Hot Five and Hot Seven under Armstrong, a jazz band usually consisted of trumpet, trombone, clarinet, piano (mostly), banjo, drums (or tuba in earlier times).

In traditional jazz the clarinet was an essential part of vivid music, and musicians such as Johnny Dodds, Jimmy Noone, Sidney Bechet and Omer Simeon contributed superb solos, on par with the leading trumpets.

Later, in the swing area, beginning around 1930, both big bands and small star groups flourished enormously. Three large big band were run by a clarinetist, Woody Herman, Benny Goodman, and Artie Shaw.

In modern jazz, from 1950 onwards, the role of the clarinet faded - instead, saxophones took over their significance. Nevertheless, clarinet players like Jimmy Giuffre, Tony Scott, and especially Buddy DeFranco, contributed considerably to modern jazz, as in more recent times Theo Joergensmann did. And the 'New Orleans Jazz Revival' -- whatsoever naïve -- also had consoling influence.

So, while the clarinet is not a luminary instrument anymore, and has almost no relevance in current pop music, it is still very alive in jazz.

Distinctive clarinet musicians: Jazz

As the case regarding classical music, it's very demanding for me to identify the clarinet 'stars' within jazz - there are so many musicians from early through to recent jazz whom I highly esteem.



Nevertheless, here is my (again heavily subjective) list of distinctive jazz clarinet players: George Lewis, Johnny Dodds, Jimmy Noone, Buster Baily, Barney Bigard, Omer Simeon, Benny Goodmann, Buddy DeFranco, Tony Scott.

Finally, there are three I have always admired: Johnny Dodds, Benny Goodman and Buddy DeFranco - they were technically and musically truly outstanding.



And if I would be asked this much-liked fun question "what will you take with you in case you have to live for a while on a lonely island", my answer shall be -- records by Goodman...



The clarinet in marching music

Marching orchestras exist for several thousand years - either as part of kingdom celebrations or as part of a military affair. And even nowadays they exist in about every larger country. Members of a marching band are always wearing an uniform.

In the last hundreds of years, they were originally dominated by "brass" - trumpets, trombones and tubas, plus percussion. However, soon after its invention clarinets became, like flutes, a notable part of marching bands, and later saxophones were added.



Meanwhile there are many female members in marching bands. And in some of these bands clarinets are a true feature - eight of them in the above picture!

The clarinet in Gypsy and in Klezmer music

Gypsy music is a general term for east-european folk music. The "gypsy" style is mainly based on Hungarian and Romanian music yet has many historical facets. It's now common and esteemed entertainment in Europe, and Australia as well.



Klezmer music is a musical tradition of Jew populations in south-eastern Europe and Turkey, and developed as music for Jewish celebrations, especially weddings.



For both types of music the clarinet is not part of its history -- yet meanwhile quite a few bands have taken it on board, and beside the violin and the accordion it has become an essential role in presenting these styles of music. That's even true for some bands in Melbourne!

The clarinet in Turkey

Turkey has always been a merger of Oriental and European music. Especially its former capital Istanbul was - and still is - a cosmopolitan and multi-cultural city. Various types of flutes and tarogato-like instruments were played for quite some times.



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From about 1820 onwards, in the late phase of the Ottoman empire, the clarinet was accepted as part of orchestras, and became an important instrument in Turkish music, first in military orchestras and then in general music. There was also a link to the folklore music culture.



Turkey also has a long tradition in manufacturing clarinets, mostly in the Albert system. They produce instruments using very fine wood, and also high-class metal ones.



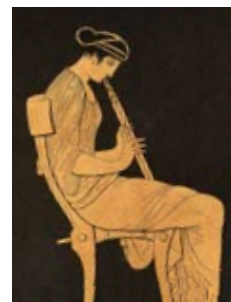
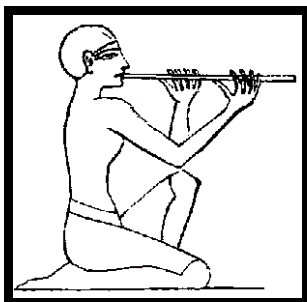
There are lots of well-known clarinet players in Turkey - from people based on traditional folk music to very professional musicians like Huesnue Şenlendirici, who merges traditional and classical music.

In this country, clarinet players belong to the most popular ones in the music scene.

Similar instruments

At least four kinds of music instruments are similar to the clarinet: Recorder, flute, tarogato and oboe.

Various types of **recorders** appear since at least 3000 years in many historic realms, for example Egypt, China and Greece.



Nowadays flutes are very common all over the world. They may be made from natural materials, such as bamboo, or manufactured, using wood or synthetic materials.



Playing recorders is rather easy to learn, as they are far less complicated than clarinets - thus they are common first music instruments for adolescents.

Flutes have also a far-reaching history, for some music historians they are the oldest woodwind instruments.



There are certainly lots of paintings from medieval times in Europe presenting a flute player.



Over time, the technology of flutes changed by using keys, thus increasing the sound range.

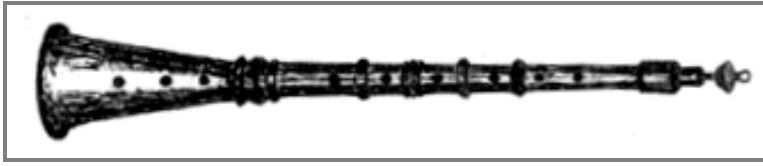


Current flutes are, regarding their key structure, almost as complex as clarinets.

The **oboe** was invented mid-17th century in France, then named *hautbois*. It is in many regards similar to a clarinet, both in development and use in classical music - yet the crucial difference is that oboes have two reeds, not one.



The **tarogato** is an Hungarian instrument, used in various East-Europe countries, including Romania; originally it was from Turkey.



It was devised with a double reed, and had no keys. It could be played so loudly that it also became a signalling instrument in battles! Yet the tarogato got out of use and eventually was almost forgotten ...



Around 1890 the tarogato was re-invented. It combines the key technology of clarinets (system Albert) and is equipped with one reed - however, it has a conical, not a cylindrical bore, like saxophones.

The collage below shows a flute, a clarinet and an oboe.



All started in classical music; the clarinet is used most, the oboe least in jazz or pop music.



Electronic clarinet

Up to now, the use of electronic tools for playing clarinets is pretty rare. However, some musicians+engineers have developed clarinet pickups, which follow the technique used for electronic guitars.



Such pickups can be mounted in the barrek joint or the ligature of a clarinet. The cable then connects to an amplifier/computer.

There are also clarinet-like electronic instruments, developed by Akai (ex-Singapore) and by Yamaha (Japan).



These instruments are quite ingenious, rich in musical options, and easier to learn than a clarinet - - they aren't really clarinets though, because they can also get configured to "be" a saxophone or a flute or an oboe. EWI stands for Electronic Wind Instrument.



The player of such a high-tech tool almost becomes an music instrument herself ...

Firebrigade music

Almost all cities have firebrigades, for quite some time. And many firebrigades have their own orchestra, which tends to play some kind of marching music.



At first they were brass bands, yet for close to 200 years clarinettes and flutes are part of it. Furthermore, both men and women are nowadays members of firebrigades.



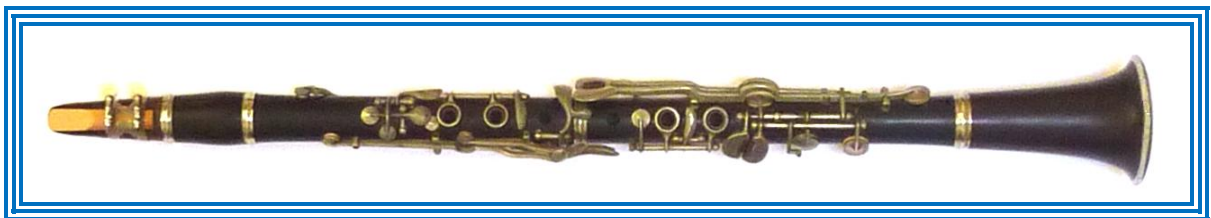
This cheerful photo shows all musicians beside or even in and on (above) the firefighting truck, including two saxophones and five clarinettes!

My own clarinet

Yes I do have a clarinet. I bought it, an 'aged' one, when I was 17 years old. And I had to work very very hard to learn to play it - which meant, at first I had to learn to read music notes, urghhhh ...



Here it is, now about 100 years old, perhaps looking a bit frail, and not shining silvery anymore - yet still alive!



I had a music teacher. He was very patient when training me, which certainly was a tough task. He then offered me to become a member of the local firebrigade orchestra - which was possibly the worst band on the planet, yet a truly social enterprise, almost a family. I felt honoured. This was 1957.

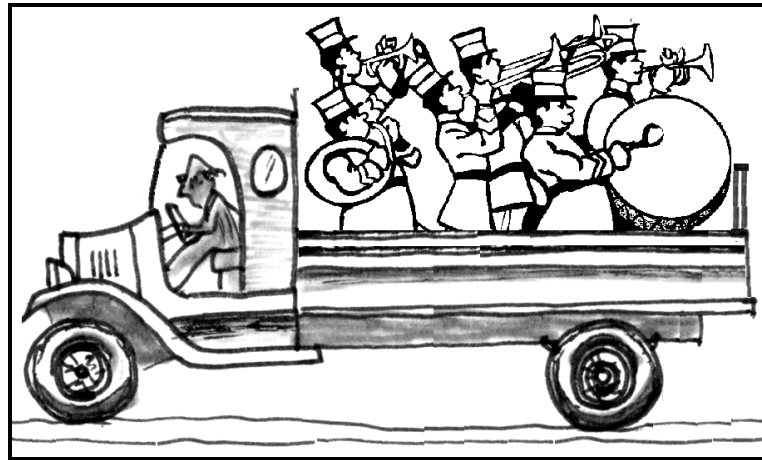


There are no photos left, but our small orchestra of about 20 musicians, all amateurs, looked roughly like this one here.

It became soon clear that I could hardly cope with the clarinet script - and then my kind music teacher decided that I should play the "trumpet-3" notes; fortunately this was feasible for me.

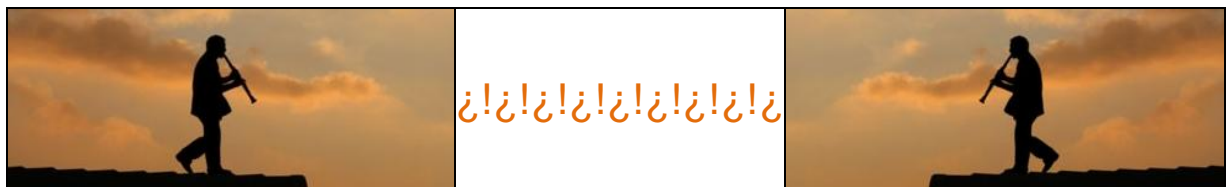
This truly inferior firebrigade band nevertheless participated in public events, being part of a parade, and we also played every now and then on community fiestas.

The most unique activity was the christmas social service (remember: in Europe december is winter time). The whole band was placed on the back of an old truck. Of course we put gloves on - but the glove fingers were cut off at the end, to be able to play the trumpet or the clarinet ...



We then visited hospitals and homes for the elderly and the mayor's residence and so on, played as softly as we could xmas songs, got a schnaps or two, and went on. All the visited people were genuinely pleased, regardless how bumpy our playing was ...

Unfortunately I did not reach any significant ability, in spite of my honest efforts. When I finished high school and began to study in a university city, playing clarinet somehow somewhere became tricky. Furthermore, having no financial support from my parents, I needed to earn lots of bucks, rather than to play lots of music. And when I finally left my hometown in 1961, all this came to an end ...



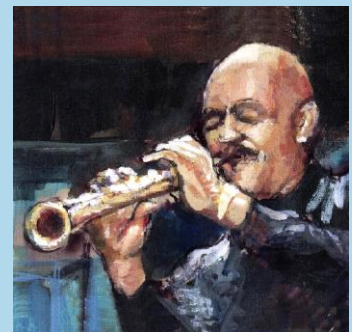
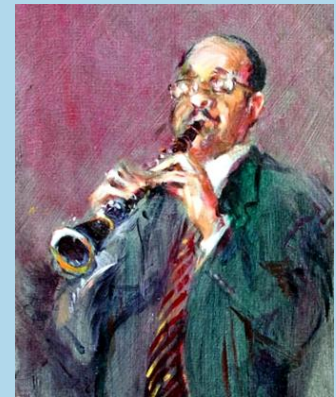
The clarinet in art

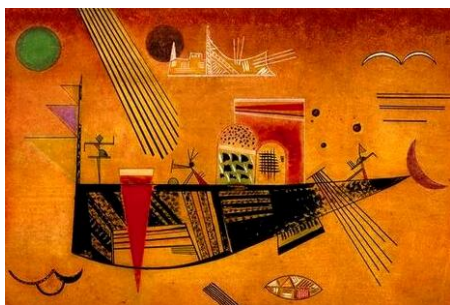
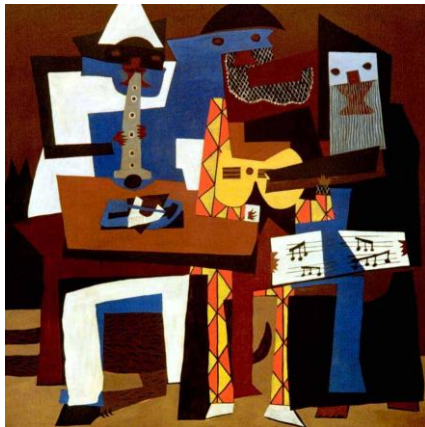
It is amazing how many artists have created paintings which show either the instrument clarinet or clarinet players.



See 12 musicians images below. And by the way, at least one famous composer is presented on a stamp!





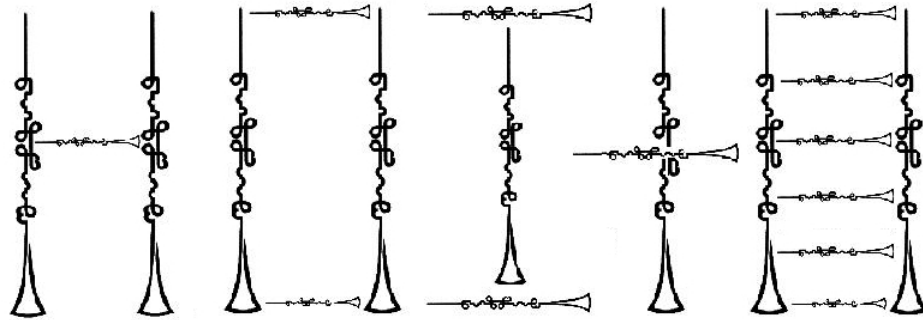


The 8 paintings which contains a clarinet (shown on the previous page) include works by Armitage, Gris, Kandinsky and Picasso.

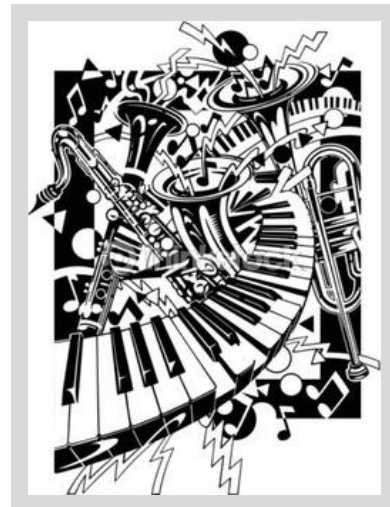


My final words ...

This essay was challenging & a tough task - the topic "clarinet" includes so very many facets!



The clarinet types, their history, the music played on them, the multiple links to other music! It seems that a handbook rather than a booklet is needed to cover cover cover all that ...



Yet, in spite of my at best modest expertise in 'clarinettise', I evidently did enjoy to outline all the facets as they are in my mind, plus, it amused me to remember how it began, almost sixty years ago ...

And yes, I still think that wonderful music is played on clarinets, be it classics or folk or jazz!

