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Instruments, collections of, §4: Since 1800

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The French Revolution sounded the death-knell of aristocratic hoarding. From then on middle-class utilitarian ideals underlay the evolution of public collections, first shown by the ambitious 'collection of antique or foreign instruments and also for those in present use which by virtue of their perfection may serve as models' proposed for the new Paris Conservatoire by the 1795 National Convention. Regrettably, most of the treasures inventoried for the *Commission temporaire des arts* perished as firewood during the winter of 1816, and it was not until 1864 that the Conservatoire's museum began with the acquisition of 230 instruments from Louis Clapisson. In Edinburgh John Donaldson, holder of the University Chair of Music, assembled a collection of old and unusual instruments and acoustical apparatus (perhaps the first to be brought together for scholarly study and academic teaching) and built a museum (1859) still in use for this purpose. This was followed in the 1870s by the creation of the Brussels Conservatory's museum from the private collections of F.-J. Fétis, Victor-Charles Mahillon and others; then in 1888 came the acquisition of Paul de Wit's first collection by the Berlin Königlische Hochschule für Musik. Perhaps the oldest institutional collection still thriving is that of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna, begun in 1824 with the acquisition of F.X. Glöggl's instruments and administered in trust since 1938 by the Kunsthistorisches Museum; this repository holds both the Ambras and Obizzi collections, combined by Julius Schlosser in 1916 to form the Sammlung alter Musikinstrumente.

By the 18th century the notion of musical progress had become tied to technical improvement in instrumental manufacture. Growing concern with design standards for mass-produced goods led in the 19th century to the founding of museums of decorative arts in which old instruments occupied an honoured place; London's Victoria and Albert Museum is an example. Loan exhibitions encouraged competition among makers and confirmed the importance of exposing foreign models; one instance is the gamelan that so impressed Debussy at the 1889 Paris Exhibition. Temporary loan exhibitions enjoyed much popularity in England, where an important pioneering display took place in 1872 at the South Kensington (now the Victoria and Albert) Museum. Others followed, some producing useful catalogues: Milan (1881), London (Royal Albert Hall, 1885), Bologna and Brussels (1888), Vienna (1892), Chicago (1893), London (Crystal Palace, 1900), Boston (Horticultural Hall, 1902), and again London (Fishmongers' Hall, 1904). The Fishmongers' Hall catalogue explained the motive for such exhibitions: 'to enable all interested in music under its various aspects to contrast, as a fruitful means of instruction, its past with its present condition – to estimate its growth and development, and to observe what progress has been made in the work of the instrument maker'.

Darwinian theories of evolution, scientific interest in acoustics, easy contact with colonial areas and abundant funds encouraged 19th-century collectors whose holdings became the nuclei of many museum collections. Some museums emphasized educational objectives while catering for middle-class tourists with a taste for the exotic; others became archival, veritable Noah's arks of primary source material for research. Many institutions inherited problems as well as benefits from the acquisition of instrument hoards offered by amateurs whose wealth and enthusiasm usually offset their understandable lack of discernment. Most private collectors were rich

dilettantes with little musical knowledge; others were professional performers or instrument manufacturers; only a few were music scholars of the first rank. Yet so readily available were fine antiques during the 'golden age' of collecting (up to World War I) that, whether through careful search or mere luck, collectors of every level of sophistication accumulated and eventually gave to museums many significant instruments (as well as many fakes).

By the early 20th century the pace of acquisition had slowed, and museums did not always have clear objectives. Some important public collections were established, for instance in Leipzig, when thanks to the magnificence of with Henri Hinrichsen the state of Saxony was able to purchase the collection of Wilhelm Heyer of Cologne to create the Leipzig University Musikinstrumenten-Museum in 1926. In Berlin Curt Sachs (Director of the Collection at the Hochschule für Musik from 1920 to 1933) exploited the collection in his pioneering organological work. On the other hand, the cleric, collector and scholar Francis Galpin could find no museum in Britain that would accept his collection of 560 instruments – one of the first truly systematic organological collections – and it was acquired in 1917 by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA. Some museum collections stagnated, or in some cases added haphazardly to their holdings.

After World War II collections public and private found a new sense of direction, fostered by the early music movement hand-in-hand with flourishing research and publication in organology. The discovery of the novel sounds of period instruments in early music gave collections a new and vital purpose, either by directly providing instruments for performance, or indirectly by supplying the information needed by players and instrument makers to reconstruct new instruments giving the sounds it was believed the old would have produced. Measurements, drawings and organological publications now found a growing market.

The Galpin Society was formed in 1946, followed by the Gesellschaft der Freunde alter Musikinstrumente, the American Musical Instrument Society, the Association des Collectionneurs d'Instruments de Musique à Vent, and other societies. The impetus for these was provided by collectors; the main activity of the largest of these has been the production of scholarly journals.

In the second half of the 20th century private collections sprang up and flourished, held in check only by increased prices for historic instruments. As time passed, instruments of later periods were considered to be collectable, reflecting the fact that instrument designs have continued to evolve. Some private collections have since been dispersed at auction, some taken over by institutions. The better managed private collections have standards of care and documentation quite up to professional museum standards, and some private collections have been of outstanding importance, assembled with well-informed connoisseurship.

Public collections of instruments (as with other museum sectors post-World War II) placed a new importance on communication with wider audiences using improved display techniques and, latterly, the Internet. The emphasis on interpretation led to thematic rather than taxonomic displays. Towards the end of the 20th century, museums installed sound or multimedia systems, and exploited computer interactive techniques.

At the same time, there was more thorough documentation, with catalogues becoming more analytical, seeking to distinguish between original material and design and later repairs and adaptations, and considering the cultural and social contexts of the original production of instruments, rather than just the technical means. Museum documentation increasingly recorded knowledge about provenance, former use, and the circumstances surrounding the making of instruments. Recognizing the importance of research and of reliable provenance data, some museum staff undertook field trips, acquiring sound recordings and information of kinds often lost when instruments are purchased through dealers or at auction.

Collectors, especially museums with a mission to preserve artefacts for posterity, became increasingly aware that the actual use of historic instruments in performance is not sustainable. In many cases playing and restoration resulted in damage or other loss of integrity. It was also realized that historic instruments as they have come down to us are not in the condition their makers left them, wood having shrunk and warped and metal having corroded and undergone changes in structure, and that the best contribution of early instruments is to serve as models for copying or to contribute data for new instruments based on the study of many originals. Specialist museums and some private collectors made instruments available for study by makers or published technical drawings.

The establishment of the formal teaching of organology and academic research at university collections in Edinburgh, Yale, Leipzig, South Dakota (Shrine to Music Museum, Vermillion) and Oxford (Ashmolean Museum, Bate Collection, Pitt Rivers Collection) took place in the second half of the 20th century. Some of the more important collections which were originally attached to conservatories have become state museums. In these cases new buildings were often provided, including the impressive new museums in Berlin (1984), Paris (1997) and Brussels (2000).

The second half of the 20th century also saw a significant increase in co-operation, not only in exhibitions but also in professional activities. The Comité international des musées et collections d'instruments de musique (CIMCIM) was formed with members from 14 countries in 1960, becoming part of the International Council of Museums. In 1971 CIMCIM gave birth to the International Association of Instrument Collections, reabsorbed in an enlarged CIMCIM in 1975. The organization provides a forum for the exchange of professional experience and has produced publications of value to public and private collectors of instruments alike.

See also [INSTRUMENTS](#), [CONSERVATION](#), [RESTORATION](#), [COPYING OF](#).

Laurence Libin, Arnold Myers